



Range after range
of mountains.
Year after year
after year.
I am still in love.
-Gary Snyder

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Protecting your favorite wild places

Fall 2009

The Future of our National Forests Some Cause for Optimism?

Is there reason to be optimistic about the future management of our national forests? Will there be less intensive management and resource extraction, and more emphasis on ecosystem services like clean air, clean water, and biological diversity that our forests provide? Will true restoration of forests and watersheds be a priority?

We would certainly like to think so. On August 14, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack gave his first speech about the direction of the USFS under his watch. He stated "*Our shared vision must begin with a complete commitment to restoration. Restoration, for me, means managing forest lands first and foremost to protect our water resources while making our forests far more resilient to climate change.*"

In a June 19 interview, the new Chief of the Forest Service, Tom Tidwell, also struck an encouraging note. "*The importance of our watershed is something that's very undervalued. We must make sure these watersheds are in the best condition they can be in . . . Water's been one of the foundations of this agency. One of the reasons many of our national forest lands were reserved in the first place was to maintain healthy watersheds.*"

These statements reflect what the management priorities should be in the forest. We hope these good words will be backed up by appropriate management actions in the very near future.

Water & Roads

The Forest Plan revision for the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) provides a great opportunity for the Forest Service to follow through on these impressive statements. With Wild Virginia's recent report on drinking water resources in the GWNF, *The State of Our Water*, there is greater public awareness of the important role the forest plays in supplying drinking water to local communities. As a result



Brown Mountain Creek, upstream of Pedlar Reservoir

of the report, 38 organizations have adopted resolutions calling for better management of drinking watersheds in the GWNF (see our website for the full list). Many of the organizations are local governments, and all the resolutions have been submitted to the Forest Service as input on the Forest Plan.

One very important tool in restoring forests and watersheds is the closing and decommissioning of unnecessary forest roads. Roads are an obvious source of sedimentation with negative affects on water quality and aquatic habitat. Roads also fragment the forest, often creating a number of significant problems: isolated wildlife populations, increased predation on forest-breeding birds, altered forest

structure and plant composition, and corridors for the spread of exotic plants. Roads tend to facilitate illegal use of ATVs, and are very costly to maintain properly.

The Forest Service periodically assesses their roads, and Wild Virginia will be doing the same in the coming months. We will evaluate forest roads in the Shenandoah Mountain area, identifying those that would provide the most ecological and management benefits if closed. We will keep you updated on this project as it progresses. We look forward to working with the Forest Service on the mutual goal of improving watershed health.

Fortunately, the GWNF received funding for watershed restoration through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (the federal stimulus package) earlier this year. This includes funding for road decommissioning. The Legacy Roads & Trails Remediation Initiative within the Forest Service is another avenue for funding.

Forest Plans & Roadless Areas

As reported in our Summer 2009 newsletter, forest planning for the GWNF remains "on hold" indefinitely. A U.S. District Court ruling in June struck down the 2008 planning regulations developed by the Bush administration. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack indicated that the Obama administration will develop new planning rules. Our hope and expectation is that these rules will (continued on pg.2)

Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Nathan VanHooser

Formal Wilderness designation is one of the key tools used to preserve the integrity of important ecosystems as well as provide the increasing rare opportunity for the public to experience nature in all its un-mechanized glory. This tool has also been a lightning rod for gross misunderstanding and outright deception. Environmentalists have struggled for years to shore up public understanding of Wilderness Areas as the pro-hunting, pro-camping, basically pro-outdoors bastions that they are. While this struggle has occurred across the country, Eastern lands have had an even tougher road to preservation.

The original Act of Congress in 1964 that defined formal Wilderness designation had lofty goals and criteria that better suited larger Western tracts of land. Indeed, a 1975 Act acknowledged a growing discrepancy between Wilderness designations in the Western versus Eastern US. The Eastern Wilder-

ness Areas Act affirmed the belief that Eastern lands with a history of large human disruption could still eventually be worthy of Wilderness designation. This dichotomy between realistic preservation across the US has allowed for some insidious deceptions. As an example some within the Forest Service have been accused of taking a Western-US-centric “core of solitude” concept into the East with the apparent intent of excluding as much land as possible from Eastern Wilderness candidate areas. Unofficial “improved” road buffers were applied when calculating potential Wilderness area. Indeed, the very definition of which roads counted in such land dismissal exercises was suspect.

In the end, perhaps the biggest obstacle to Wilderness on Eastern lands might be the inherently low management needs Wilderness designations imply. The idea is to leave the land alone and let humans interact at a fundamental personal level.

But as the name implies, the Forest Service is foremost a service organization specializing in management. For many in the profession, the old environmental mantra of “Love it or leave it alone” doesn’t compute.

One of Wild Virginia’s most challenging goals is to work with the Forest Service on different levels. We try to build positive relationships with joint Forest Service projects where intensive management is warranted. Non-native plant species control is a good example of work that requires a heavy hand for the good of the forest. Yet, we find ourselves in opposition with the same staff on many projects that propose to disturb potential Wilderness areas.

Wild Virginia will continue the tough work of shining the light of truth on the benefits of Wilderness protection while convincing the Forest Service to resist the bureaucratic pull to manage areas ripe for this important preservation tool.

The Future of our National Forests (continued from p.1)

strengthen environmental review and protection while maintaining an open and public process. Developing new rules will not be a speedy process though. Predicting when the GWNF planning process will resume, and whether under new or existing rules, is not possible right now.

As also reported last issue, due to a 9th U.S. District Court of Appeals ruling on August 5, the 2001 Roadless Area Rule is in place for all national forests except those in Idaho (which have their own roadless area policy) and the Tongass National Forest in Alaska (which is exempted from the rule). Future court rulings from the 10th District are possible though, which could alter the legal picture again.

On October 1, the Roadless Area Conservation Act was introduced in both houses of the U.S. Congress. Both Virginia Senators Jim Webb and Mark Warner cosponsored the bill in the Senate. Six members of Virginia’s House of Representatives delegation cosponsored the bill in the House: Glenn Nye-2nd District, Robert Scott-3rd, Tom Perriello-5th, Jim Moran-8th, Rick Boucher-9th, and Gerry Connelly-11th. Please thank each of these legislators and encourage them to continue working to protect these special places.

Realistically, it is unlikely that this legislation could pass in both houses of Congress, so will probably not be brought up for a vote. Introducing the bill is a way to keep the issue of roadless areas alive and encourage the Obama administration

to take concrete action. As an Illinois senator, President Obama supported roadless area legislation in 2007.

In May of this year, Secretary Tom Vilsack essentially called a year-long “timeout” on projects within roadless areas in our national forests (excluding those in Idaho). He must personally approve any new projects proposed in these vital areas, and we consider the timeout a positive step. In his August speech Secretary Vilsack took another positive step, restating the administration’s support of roadless area protection. Until there is full and permanent protection of roadless areas though, we must continue to let legislators and the administration know that their work is not done.

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NEW UPDATE on DONATIONS:

Wild Virginia is now an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We are no longer a partner of VOP. Please make checks payable to Wild Virginia and mail to PO Box 1065, Charlottesville, VA 22902. All donations are tax deductible to the extent of IRS law.

Ancient Mountain Sentinel is printed on 100% recycled, non-chlorine bleached paper. Your use of this or similar paper will prevent the destruction of native forests. **Recycle.... Pass this newsletter on to a friend!**

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OTHERWISE YOU ARE NOT COMPLETING THE CYCLE!**

Wild Virginia Hikes and Outings

All hike info also available on our website: <http://www.wildvirginia.org>

Sunday, November 22 Doyles River Trail

This rewarding hike in Shenandoah National Park along the eastern slope of the Blue Ridge was originally constructed by the CCC and features waterfalls along Doyles River and Jones Run. We will go through Browns Gap, which Stonewall Jackson's troops used during the Civil War to make raids into Shenandoah Valley, and we'll pass the grave of William H. Howard of the 44th Virginia Infantry.

It is a moderately difficult, 3 to 4 hour hike. Meet at the Jones Run Parking Area just south of milepost 84 on Skyline Drive at 11:30 a.m. Please bring lunch and water. To carpool from Charlottesville, meet at Shenandoah Joe's (2214 Ivy Road by Sneak Reviews) at 10:00 a.m. RSVP to Jennifer Johnson- jenn276@gmail.com. This hike will be cancelled if there is any inclement weather expected in the Park.

Sunday, December 13 Holiday at Blackrock

Come and celebrate part of your holiday season in Shenandoah National Park by visiting Blackrock Summit with Wild Virginia. Blackrock offers outstanding views and interesting geology. To warm our spirits, we'll bring the camping stoves and ingredients for hot chocolate and Glog, a traditional Scandinavian solstice drink. The trail distance will be an easy 3.5 mile hike without extreme elevation changes.

Meeting place will be at the parking lot near Blackrock Gap between mileposts 87 and 88. From there we'll plan to move a few shuttle cars two miles further on Skyline Drive to meet us at our journey's end. Plan to meet at this

parking lot at 11AM. For those of you who would like to carpool from Charlottesville, meet us at Shenandoah Joe's Coffee Shop, just outside of UVA on Route 250 at 9:30am. Please bring food and water.

RVSP Eric Gilchrist at ericgrv@gmail.com. If the weather is wet or the chances for precipitation are greater than 40%, we'll celebrate the day in other ways.



Blackrock Summit

Sunday, January 17 Furnace Mountain

Winter is a good time to explore ridgelines and mountain tops. The bare trees and clear air provide views unattainable at other times of the year. Furnace Mountain, in Shenandoah National Park, provides great views of Madison Run and Furnace's sister sentinel to the north, Austin Mountain. The trail to Furnace begins at popular Blackrock near milepost 85 on Skyline Drive. An up-and-down jaunt with mild elevation changes leads to the summit of Furnace. Total round trip from Skyline Drive is about 6.7 miles. The trail is quite rocky so bring good hiking boots and water. Layers of warm clothes are a must.

To carpool from Charlottesville, meet at Shenandoah Joe's location on Ivy Road (next to Sneak Reviews) by 9:00am. For more information or to meet the group at the trailhead contact Nathan Van Hooser – 434-989-3929.

Timber Sale Proposed in a Potential Wilderness Area

A scoping notice for the proposed Rocky Spur Timber Sale was issued in July. The project area in Rockingham County includes a portion of the Beech Lick Knob area. Beech Lick Knob has been identified as a Potential Wilderness Area (PWA) in the forest planning process for the GWNF and as a Virginia Mountain Treasure in a 2008 publication by The Wilderness Society, which noted the need to protect the site.

The project would involve modified shelterwood logging of 245 acres in 13 cutting units and construction of 1.1 miles of temporary roads. Other activities could include prescribed burning, wildlife openings (in addition to the temporary roads, log landings, and skid trails created for harvesting), restoring the Blue Hole swimming hole, and constructing ponds as a water source for wildlife.

There are a number of ecological concerns with this project which Wild Virginia and several other organizations pointed out in comments submitted to the Forest Service (our comments are viewable on our website). The project area includes a segment of the North Fork of the Shenandoah River, a very important source of public drinking

water. The temporary roads and other ground disturbances associated with timber harvesting alone are a concern. The potential "daylighting" along forest roads to create wildlife openings represents another opportunity for excess sedimentation. The Blue Hole swimming hole is in the river itself, so restoration without undue disturbance and harm to water quality and aquatic habitat is problematic. Unfortunately, the scoping notice provides very few



Cutting unit 7 of Marshall Run Timber Sale

details on these or other activities (e.g., prescribed burning), which makes meaningful review and assessment of the project impossible.

Even more troubling and disheartening though is the location of the project within a PWA. Designation of Beech Lick Knob as a PWA by Forest Service staff indicates that it meets the

criteria for roadless areas. We therefore believe it (and all other PWAs) should be managed in accordance with the 2001 Roadless Area Rule, which prohibits logging and new roads. Just as important, we consider it totally inappropriate to create projects in PWAs while the Forest Plan is still being revised. The logging and associated disturbances will obviously impact the area, and could affect future decisions about a site's viability as wilderness. No projects within PWAs should be proposed until the new Forest Plan is completed.

Complicating this project is the proposed Marshall Run Timber Sale, which was first identified by the Forest Service in August 2007. The Marshall Run project also occurs in the Beech Lick Knob PWA, and potentially involves cutting some areas of old growth forest. The logging, new and temporary road construction, and large prescribed burn could also significantly impact decisions about Beech Lick Knob's potential future as wilderness. Wild Virginia and many other groups and individuals objected to this proposal. We will continue to closely monitor both of these proposed projects. As always, stay tuned.

Volunteer Spotlight - Carolyn Ettinger

Carolyn Ettinger is excited to have joined Wild Virginia as the volunteer newsletter editor.

Carolyn holds a BA in History from the University of Virginia and graduated from Vermont Law School's top-ranked environmental law program in 1999. Carolyn has held several positions and prestigious fellowships in the arenas of farmland preservation, sprawl reduction, renewable energy, watershed protection, and former hazardous site reuse. Her

other work experience ranges from nonprofit communications and volunteer recruitment to pet sitting and retail management.

Carolyn now enjoys writing full-time and recently released her first comprehensive writing guide *Pet Writing For Beginners*. In her spare time, Carolyn likes vegetarian cooking, hiking, walking her dog, and creative writing. Please feel free to contact Carolyn at:

carolynettinger@gmail.com.



Species Spotlight: Witch Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*)

by Chelsie Vandaveer, March 2004

The witch hazels refer to the five or six species in the genus, *Hamamelis*. These large shrub/small trees are native to eastern North America and eastern Asia. The 'witch' probably derived from the English, *wych*, meaning bend, a reference to the flexible branches. It also differentiated the trees from the hazels or filberts in the genus, *Corylus*. The 'witch' stuck to the name as the branches were used as divining or 'water-witching' wands.

Witch hazels are understory woodland trees. They appear to be out of kilter with the rest of the woods, blooming in late autumn, winter, or very early spring. The flowers have four long narrow petals, four stamens, and four staminodes which bear nectar. The flowers are borne in clusters along bare branches. According to Susan Post with the Center for Economic Entomology, the petals of *Hamamelis virginiana* curl when temperatures drop to protect the nectar and pollen and unfurl when temperatures warm on sunny winter days. The flowers offer food to any insects that venture forth when the rest of the woods lie dormant.

There is a delay between pollination (pollen placed on the stigma) and fertilization (when the pollen tube and sperm cells reach the ovules). In early spring, a two-chambered capsule forms, each chamber with a single seed. The capsule takes a year to mature; the seeds are ripe the following year when the witch hazel is once again in bloom (*Guide to Flowering Plant Families*, Wendy B. Zomlefer, University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

The dry mature capsule explodes flinging the two seeds up to thirty feet. The sharp sound of snapping seed capsules coming from a tree dressed in spidery yel-

low flowers certainly unnerved or "bewitched" anyone walking through the silent woods on a winter's day.

Even the seeds seem bewitched; they bide their time through the seasons. On a spring day, two years from the time they were flung from their parent, tiny witch hazels emerge from the forest floor. (*Hortus Third*, Staff of Liberty Hyde Bailey Horitorium, New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, Comell University, 1979)

The herbal lore of the witch hazel dates back to the Native Americans.



Charles F. Millspaugh (*American Medicinal Plants*, 1892) wrote "The many varied uses of a watery infusion of Witch-hazel bark were fully known to the aborigines, whose knowledge of our medicinal flora has been strangely correct as since proven."

Witch hazel was taken as a mild tea for its astringent action. According to William Cook, MD (*The Physiomedical Dispensatory*, 1869) the weak extracts were useful to treat intestinal and bladder hemorrhage and one of the major killers of the day, dysentery. "It soothes the bowels rather than excites them, as

many other astringents do...." For women whose labor had not gone well, "it is particularly effective in arresting uterine hemorrhage."

Witch hazel was most often used topically to treat inflammations like rashes and as a soothing liniment for the skin. Various witch hazel products for the skin have been available commercially since the 1800s. In a study by BJ Hughes-Formella, K. Bohnsack, F. Rippke, G. Benner, M. Rudolph, I. Tausch, and J. Gassmueller, an after sun exposure lotion with 10 percent *Hamamelis* extract had a marked effect decreasing the erythema associated with sunburn. ("Anti-inflammatory effect of *Hamamelis* lotion in a UVB erythema test", *Dermatology*, 196(3), 1998)

Witch hazel had a peculiar reputation and a special use among early settlers. The tree was considered a magical plant by those who practiced dowsing. A green forked branch, a Y, was removed from the tree and stripped of leaves and sometimes the bark. The arms of the Y were held with the palms upward and the base of the Y straight up. The dowser walked crisscrossing over fields. Legends state the dowser's branch would twist until it pointed to wherever water, ores, or valuable treasures were hidden under the soil.

The Forestry Department at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University has several great photographs of the leaves, bark flowers, and buds of witch hazel. To view their photographs, visit the following website and enter *Hamamelis virginiana*:

<http://www.cnr.vt.edu/DENDRO/DENDROLOGY/factsheets.cfm>



Mark your calendars!

Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival

March 24-25, 2010

Vinegar Hill Theater, Charlottesville

Visulite Cinema, Staunton

Hosted by Wild Virginia & Blue Ridge Mountain Sports

Films to feature nature's most awesome beauty,
challenging adventures, passionate activism and more...

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