



Wild Virginia Brings SYRCL's 2011 Wild and Scenic Film Festival to Central Virginia

For the second year in a row, Wild Virginia hosts the Wild and Scenic Film Festival in Charlottesville and Staunton. The festival tour brings together the best films of the festival in two 90-minute programs to inspire and motivate. Join us to witness the beauty and wildness of nature and to see creative, exciting ways folks are making a difference in their communities and around the world.

The festival spans two evenings in two cities: Wednesday, April 13, at the Paramount Theater in Charlottesville, and Thursday, April 14, at the Visulite Cinema, in Staunton. The film festival is part of the Earth Day/Earth Week celebrations in both cities. Screenings are at 7pm. There will be a different series of films at each venue. Bring the whole family!

Wild and Scenic On Tour brings together a selection of films from the annual festival held in Nevada City, California, organized by

the South Yuba River Citizen's League (SYRCL). The films tell stories about our planet, our beautiful and precious wildlands, and the people of the communities who love and defend them. They open our eyes and hearts to fantastic experiences in remarkable places. They beckon us towards action, highlight issues, and provide solutions.



Filmmaker Jeff Litton (and friend), creator of the 2011 film *The Sarcastic Fringehead Quarrell*.

After last year's near-sellout crowd in Charlottesville, we are excited to join with the Paramount Theater for Wednesday night's

shows. We are reprising our hugely successful Staunton screening at the downtown Visulite Cinema. A reception will follow each screening.

The Wild and Scenic Film Festival is made possible through its national sponsors Patagonia, Osprey Packs, Sierra Nevada Beer, Clif Bars, Klean Kanteen and Grist.org. Our thanks to Blue Ridge Mountain Sports for being our local co-host and to Union First Market Bank for being the presenting sponsor.

Advance tickets for the Charlottesville show may be purchased online at tickets.theparamount.net or at the Paramount Theater Box Office. Advance tickets for both shows will soon be available at Blue Ridge Mountains Sports in Charlottesville.

For information on the Wild and Scenic Film Festival, visit: www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org. To volunteer at either event, contact Wild Virginia at 434-971-1553 or dhannah@wildvirginia.org.

Updates from the George Washington National Forest

Forest Planning

It may seem hard to believe, but we are approaching the final steps in creating a new management plan for the GWNF. In December 2010, GWNF staff created a draft plan using components of the previously developed six plan alternatives. This draft plan, along with supporting data, analyses, and draft Environmental Impact State-

ment (EIS), were sent to the Regional Forester, Liz Agpaoa, in Atlanta. Ms. Agpaoa is expected to formally release the draft Forest Plan and EIS in April, followed by a 90-day formal comment period.

Along with our partners and many dedicated individuals, we have been actively involved in the planning process since it began in February 2007. We are striving to

make the new plan as ecologically sound as possible. We have raised the issues of drinking water protection and water quality as critical management concerns. We have also focused on protecting wild and special places in the forest (e.g., roadless areas, wilderness area candidates, old growth forest, Special Biological Areas), energy extraction issues (hydrofracking, woody bio-

(Continued on page 4)

Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Jennifer Johnson

It's a new year and Wild Virginia has new board officers!

Jennifer Johnson - President
Chris Bowlen - Vice President
Eric Gilchrist - Treasurer
Nathan VanHooser - Secretary

As the new president, I'm looking forward to leading Wild VA through this year's opportunities and challenges. The year began with big news - the Southern Environmental Law Center named the George Washington National Forest one of the Top Ten Most Endangered Places of 2011. Why? Because of the dangers posed by hydraulic fracturing or "hydrofracking."

Wild Virginia has been a champion of protecting the GWNF as a major drinking water source for Virginia. In 2009, Wild Virginia reported the results of our study on the importance of forested land to the drinking water of many western Virginia towns in "The State of Our Water." Hydrofracking is a controversial method of extracting oil and gas by drilling sink wells up to a mile deep, then drilling horizontally toward gas-filled cracks,

and finally pumping in millions of gallons of water mixed with sand and chemicals to fracture the rock and allow the gas to flow (as proprietary mixtures, the identities of the chemicals used do not have to be revealed). This obviously threatens the pristine streams flowing out of the mountains. Soon, the Forest Service will decide whether to open our public lands to hydrofracking corporations.

This leads me to the next big development Wild Virginia will be monitoring closely this year: the new Forest Plan. Revised every 15 years, the Forest Plan drives all activity in the GWNF, from timber sales to gas and oil drilling, road building to habitat management. The draft plan is scheduled to be released in March or April, followed by a formal comment period. This may be our only chance to protect the forests from the threat of corporate drilling and myriad other threats. See David Hannah's forest planning article on Page 1 for more information about the plan.

To raise awareness about the threats to the forest and to build a bigger constituency to fight them, Wild Virginia is hosting the second

annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival. You will not want to miss the night of films in Charlottesville at the beautiful Paramount Theater, and in Staunton at the Visulite Theater. For more details, read our cover story written by Ernie Reed.

We will also be pursuing our two ongoing projects: non-native invasive plants (NNIP) and road-decommissioning in the GWNF. In the survey of Ramsey's Draft Wilderness Area we completed last year, we discovered NNIP are indeed a significant presence. One way to stop the spread of these invasives might be to use herbicides in this delicate riparian environment. Wild Virginia wants to use elbow grease instead! We are organizing a small number of workdays in 2011 to go in and pull the plants by hand. Please email our Conservation Director David Hannah (dhannah@wildvirginia.org) if you would like to participate.

As always, we are excited to continue our monthly outings into the wild! Ron Fandetti, our fear-

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Volunteer Spotlight - Spencer Thompson, Board Member

Spencer Thompson joined Wild Virginia in August of 2010 as the newest member of the board.

She grew up in the Shenandoah Valley and her love of the outdoors started at a young age, hiking and camping with her parents in the local forests, including Ramsey's Draft Wilderness Area. She graduated from Virginia Commonwealth University with a B.S. in Parks and Recreation Management and a focus in Outdoor Recreation.

While in college she completed a National Outdoor Leadership School semester, in which she spent three months living in the forests and canyons of Wyoming and Utah. It was here she realized she could have a career sharing her passion for the outdoors with others.

In pursuing that dedication she has worked as an environmental education instructor, a conservation corps member, a park ranger for the Bureau of Land Management, and a watershed restoration specialist. She views this position on the board as

just another fulfillment of her commitment. She recently moved back home to the Shenandoah Valley to be closer to her family and the beautiful mountains in which she grew up.



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PLEASE BUY RECYCLED PAPER, OTHERWISE YOU ARE NOT COMPLETING THE CYCLE!

Wild Virginia Hikes and Outings

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

A Full Outings Calendar : COME JOIN US!

Sunday, February 27 Crabtree Falls

Crabtree Falls is arguably the most beautiful set of waterfalls in Virginia. The 3.5-mile round trip hike will take about 4 hours, including a lunch break. Contact Eric Gilchrist at ericgrv@gmail.com or (434) 882-3179 to reserve a spot and for carpooling information. Full hike details are available on our website.

Sunday, March 20 Whetstone Ridge

As its name suggests, the Whetstone Ridge trail travels along the crest of a high ridge. Hiking on the first day of spring will allow us to enjoy pre-leaf out views to both the east and west as we travel the ridge crest for approximately 4 miles before turning around for a total out-and-back hike distance of about 8 miles. The trail is relatively flat with only one very steep, but mercifully short, section.

Bring plenty of water, snacks, lunch and warm clothing as we'll be at higher elevations all day.

Please contact Bette Dzamba at bd4q@virginia.edu or (434) 295-5186 to reserve a spot and for more details such as starting time, directions to the trailhead and carpooling information.

Sunday, April 17 Rich Hole Wilderness

This hike, a little over 5.5 miles, will explore the southern half of the 6,450 acre Rich Hole Wilderness primarily along the North Branch of Simpson Creek. The area is a good example of an Appalachian Cove Forest containing a mature hardwood ecosystem. The well-protected watershed contains some remarka-

bly large trees of several species. The area is also reported to have a large black bear population.

After a steep elevation gain of 1000 ft. in the first mile from its northern trailhead, the trail descends gradually for the next 4.5 miles to its southern end. The difficulty rating of this hike is considered moderate. Due to many stream crossings, this hike can be a challenge depending on water levels.

Bring water, snacks and lunch. Sturdy trail shoes or boots are recommended. Be prepared to get your feet wet. So, an extra pair of socks may be in order.

Please contact Ron Fandetti at fanjet50@gmail.com or (401) 529-8025 by Wednesday, April 13th to reserve a spot and for additional details. As group size is limited in Wilderness Areas, please reserve early.



Bette Dzamba displaying her Hike Leader ice trophy (above), and a pair of hikers crossing the frozen White Rock Creek (below).



GWNF Updates (from page 1)

mass, wind energy), and addressing climate change in a substantive fashion.

The comment period following release of the draft plan represents our best, and perhaps only remaining opportunity to have meaningful impact on the new plan, which will likely be in place for 10-15 years.

Please stay involved and help us by expressing your opinions directly to the Forest Service. Our website and email messages in the coming weeks will provide ways in which you can tell the agency how our public lands should be managed.

Road Decommissioning Project

As the non-native invasive plants (NNIP) project draws to a close, we will be increasing our efforts on a road decommissioning project in the Shenandoah Mountain area. A forest-wide road system is obviously needed to allow adequate access for management and recreation purposes. However, the existing road system is much more extensive than is either necessary or can be adequately maintained.

Forest roads create a number of ecological problems and are a significant source of sedimentation, particularly when they are not well maintained. Among the widely recognized impacts of roads and other fragmenting features are the isolation of wildlife populations, changes to plant communities and structure,

and increased predation on forest-breeding birds. Recent research reveals that even small dirt roads in Virginia's national forests can fragment and negatively affect woodland salamander populations. Roads are also a common avenue for the spread of NNIP.

Closing and decommissioning roads is one of the best available tools for restoring the health of forests and watersheds. We will assess forest roads in the Shenandoah Mountain region of the GWNF and identify those that, if decommissioned, would provide the greatest watershed and ecological benefits. More information will be forthcoming later this year.

NNIP Findings

As reported in our previous newsletter, we surveyed the trails and streams in Ramsey's Draft Wilderness Area during the 2010 growing season to document the presence of NNIP. NNIP pose a serious ecological threat as they can decrease biodiversity, displace native plants, degrade or eliminate wildlife habitat, and threaten rare species.

In addition to the trails and streams in the wilderness area, we surveyed two trailhead areas – Mountain House and Confederate Breastworks. A total of 12 NNIP were detected in all the areas combined, though more NNIP species are undoubtedly present. In the wilder-

ness area, Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*) and coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*) were the most common NNIP. At least one NNIP was observed on 24.5% of the trail and stream sampling segments. The southern portion of Ramsey's Draft (both trail and stream) is the most heavily infested area. Of the 78 sampling segments here, all but two had at least one NNIP occurrence, and many had multiple NNIP presence.

A total of 11 NNIP were observed in the Mountain House area and 4 were observed near the Confederate Breastworks parking area. As the numbers indicate, NNIP infestation is a significant problem at Mountain House. Autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) and garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) were the most problematic species found there. We will be conducting a small number of work days in 2011, targeting specific areas and species for control. More information will follow as the work days are scheduled – we hope you will join us in manually removing some of these invaders!

A summary and full report of the project will be available very soon, both in print form and on our website. Funding from the National Forest Foundation, Agua Fund, and an anonymous foundation, and cooperation with the Forest Service made the project possible.

President's Letter (from page 2)

less outings coordinator, has lined up a bunch of new adventures this year! Our next three hikes are listed on Page 3. Note that there will be a very special May outing with faithful friend of Wild Virginia John Holden of Blue Ridge Mountain Sports. He is leading an overnight camping trip

in the beautiful Monongahela National Forest, so get your gear ready and sign up!

Winter is fading, and now spring is upon us. We are so lucky to live in this beautiful state with all of its lovely changes each season. I hope you find yourself in nature, enjoying

all it has to offer.

In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks.

~John Muir

Happy trails!

Jennifer Johnson

Species Spotlight - The Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*)

Article by Ron Fandetti

Author and environmental crusader Edward Abbey once wrote, “*Let us praise the noble turkey vulture; no one envies him; he harms nobody; and he contemplates our little world from a most serene and noble height.*” This quote comes to mind whenever I see a Turkey Vulture gliding ever so effortlessly in the sky as I gaze with wonder at how it must feel to soar like that.

The Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*, is considered a New World vulture inhabiting much of North, Central and South America. European, African, and Asian vultures are considered Old World vultures. There are 7 species of New World vultures and 15 species of Old World vultures.

Both New World and Old World vultures were once thought to be in the same family as raptors, but it was recently determined that New World vultures are more closely related to storks than to the hawks or eagles. As New World vultures, such as the Turkey Vulture, feed on carrion, they are not birds of prey. They lack the strong grasping feet and talons that raptors need to lift and carry away their prey.

The typical adult Turkey Vulture is 25 to 32 inches in length with a wingspan of up to 6 feet. Healthy adults weigh up to 6 pounds. Their feathers are primarily dark brown in color, but the undersides of their flight feathers appear as silvery-gray. Both sexes have the same plumage and color, but the female is slightly larger. The beak of the Turkey Vulture is relatively short, hooked and ivory colored. Their vocal capabilities are limited to hisses and grunts. They typically hiss when threatened. Grunts are usually heard from the young when hungry and from adults during courtship.

The Turkey Vulture’s head is red and mostly bald except for a very thin covering of down. The bald head

avoids picking up bacteria when it sticks its head inside a carcass while feeding. The feet of Turkey Vultures are weak and resemble chicken feet. An elevated hind toe and blunt talons allow them to walk more easily and to hold their food in place as they eat. Long and broad wings allow the Turkey Vulture to glide almost effortlessly for hours.



Turkey Vultures (*Cathartes aura*)

The range of the Turkey Vulture is from southern Canada through North America and into South America. Those living from the southern United States to their southernmost range are permanent residents, but those in northern areas migrate as far south as South America. While the Turkey Vulture prefers open areas with nearby woods, it can be found almost anywhere.

The Turkey Vulture is one of the most skilled and graceful gliders among birds in North America. They can soar for hours without ever flapping their wings. After launching themselves from their perches after the morning air has warmed, vultures search for rising pockets of warm air called thermals. Once a thermal is found, they glide upwards in rising circles. Once at the top of the thermal, they dive across the sky at speeds of up to 60 miles per hour in search for another thermal. This rise and fall cycle is accomplished without a need to flap its wings.

Contrary to popular belief, Tur-

key Vultures do not circle a dying animal. Feeding mostly on carrion, it will also eat plant matter if necessary. It typically soars high above the ground during the day searching for food with its keen eyesight and highly developed sense of smell. Unaggressive and non-confrontational, Turkey Vultures do not feed on live prey. Instead, they prefer animal carcasses two to four days old. They are often seen along road ways cleaning up after road-kill or near rivers feasting on washed-up fish.

Turkey Vultures roost in community groups, but break away to search for food independently during the day. It is believed the purpose of the spread-winged stance that Turkey Vultures take help them to dry their wings, warm their body and bake off bacteria with the help of the Sun’s energy. Frequent urination on its legs allows for cooling during the summer as the urine evaporates. The urine also contains strong acids that kill remnant bacteria.

The Turkey Vulture typically nests on the ground or in caves, but nests are also found in abandoned outbuildings. Rather than building the traditional nest, they scratch large indentations in the ground. Only one brood is born per year from one to three mottled looking eggs. The young have pure white feathers all over with grey faces. Both parents share in the incubation period lasting about 40 days. The young Turkey Vultures then fledge 70 to 80 days after hatching.

Once you get beyond “a face only a mother would love”, the Turkey Vulture is quite an amazing and graceful animal that plays a very important role in nature’s recycling process. The next time you see one circling high above in the sky, perhaps you’ll think about Ed Abbey’s quote and better appreciate the noble Turkey Vulture.

Wild Virginia's Photo Contest!

The photos are in! View amazing scenes from the George Washington National Forest courtesy of area photographers! We have selected finalists from each category - Landscapes, Plants, Wildlife, and Humorous. Now it's up to you to vote for the best overall photo. The winner will receive a **free year-long membership** to Wild Virginia and two tickets to the **Wild & Scenic Film Fest on April 13 and 14.**

Look for our email announcement in your inbox to vote for your favorite!



Photo by U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Want to Ensure the Film Festival's Continued Success?

To help defray the costs of hosting SYRCL's 2011 Wild and Scenic Film Festival, Wild Virginia welcomes donations from the community. **Contributors will be personally recognized in the film festival's printed programs.** We thank you for your continual support! Please contact David Hannah at (434) 971-1553 or dhannah@wildvirginia.org to make a donation.



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