



George Washington National Forest Plan Draft: An Unclear and Inconsistent Step towards Forest Protection

On May 18th, after four years of starts and stops, the George Washington National Forest Draft Management Plan was released to the world. And while the seemingly endless cycles of meetings, comments, deliberations, explanations, presentations and confrontations is far from over, one thing is clear: the US Forest Service now recognizes and understands the issues and problems inherent to bad forest management far more than at any time in the past. The result is a draft plan that recognizes and acknowledges the role of conservation biology in forest management.

This is a huge step forward and the progress is something we would be remiss not to acknowledge. The extent, however, to which this progress is implemented in the draft plan is less successful and inconsistent in many aspects.

The draft plan recognizes the value of “wilderness of a size large enough to allow natural processes to dominate” and proposes additions to the existing Ramsey’s Draft, Rich Hole and St. Mary’s Wilderness Areas. But most disappointingly, it recommends only one new wilderness area, Little River, and, at 9,000 acres, limits it to less than one-third the area that qualifies as “potential wilderness.” Roughly 95% of all potential wilderness land in the forest

is excluded from wilderness recommendations for subjective reasons unsupported by either science or need.



View of Paddy Run, an important stream and watershed in the Lee Ranger District of the George Washington National Forest.

The plan does authorize a level of protection for existing Inventoried Roadless Areas but does not recommend much-needed protection for all newly identified roadless areas. Increases in Special Biological Areas and recognized old growth forest are offset by a significant increase in the areas suitable for timber production, which would include approximately 41% of the entire national forest.

The plan also sends mixed messages with respect to energy production. While stopping short of an outright ban on hydrofracking, the draft plan would prohibit the use of horizontal drilling, the most extensive

and dangerous example of hydrofracking for natural gas. The plan, however, opens the door for wind energy, biomass fuel logging and expanded conventional oil and gas leasing.

The plan claims a “need to restore fire in the ecosystems of the GWNF”, not through limiting fire suppression and allowing naturally occurring fires to occur, but instead by a huge increase in the number of prescribed burns. It also limits how many miles of road closures would be allowed in the forest even though the need for decommissioning roads is substantial and results in long-term cost savings.

Despite its numerous ecological shortcomings, the Draft Forest Plan creates a somewhat less cloudy and more workable framework from which to make decisions on projects in the GWNF. By putting the issues and range of options front and center, the public’s concerns have been acknowledged to some degree and their ability to participate in project decisions has not been diminished in any way.

We are now at the beginning of a 90-day comment period ending on September 1. Written comments can be submitted to the following ad-

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Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Jennifer Johnson

Do you have plans to visit a national park or national forest this summer? All across America the nation's public lands will be used by millions of citizens eager to leave their desks, laptops, and TVs behind to seek out the places where they can see bears and birds, listen to waterfalls and streams, and walk among the silent trees.

Our hectic lives can only be sustained for so long. Eventually it begins to feel unnatural, and we journey to America's quieter places, the places that seem natural to us – forests, meadows, oceans, and lakes. The pace of life is allowed to slow in these wild places. An 8-hour work day seems irrelevant when we are standing beside a 200-year-old oak tree. We walk into

nature with our heads full of the various pressures from our lives, and by the time we emerge, we have regained what it means to really live. These precious spaces exist because we recognize their necessity, not just to the wildlife and plants that live there, but also to us, the infrequent visitors, who could not live without them.

This year when you are vacationing in a relaxing spot, enjoying a break from the ever-present grind of production, growth, and progress, remember that in the eyes of some, every piece of land in the world has some sort of monetary value. And these people don't take breaks. Every day they are buying, selling, and planning new ways to make money. With economic pressures

growing, our federal government is also being pressured to find new sources of income. The very places we go to escape development may be viewed by some as perfect places to harvest natural resources.

As citizens of this country, we own every piece of public land and we have to make our voices heard when it comes to managing these lands. Right now the U.S. Forest Service is creating a forest plan for the George Washington National Forest, which will determine how the forest is managed for the next 10 to 15 years. For more information about how to share your vision for the forest, see the article on the first page of this newsletter.

Wild and Scenic Film Festival a Huge Success



Guests arriving early for the film festival screening at the Paramount Theater in Charlottesville (above), and prospective members learn more about Wild Virginia's goals (right).

If you missed our 2nd Annual Wild and Scenic Film Festival this year, then you really missed out on something fabulous! The films that filled the screen at the Paramount Theater in Charlottesville on April 13 and at Staunton's Visulite Cinema the following night were inspiring, awe-inducing and just plain fun. Over 400 people came to see the films and their enthusiastic responses made the event so gratifying! A special thanks to all of those who became new Wild Virginia members and to the volunteers who made it all happen.

A big "Thank you!" to Union First Market Bank for their major sponsorship of the Wild and Scenic Film Festival, to Blue Ridge Mountain Sports, Patagonia, Whole Foods,

Blue Ridge Outdoors Magazine, Southern Environmental Law Center, Local Energy Alliance Program and all of our local sponsors for making our festival so special and rewarding.

To see more pictures from the film festival, please go to page 4.



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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, July 17 St. Mary's Wilderness

In order to try to beat the summer heat we'll explore the St. Mary's Wilderness on an (almost) all downhill shuttle hike of 7 miles. Along the way we will see evidence of the area's manganese and iron mining past and take a break to enjoy the waters around St. Mary's Falls. The trail has a few rough rocky spots making it a moderately difficult hike.

Bring plenty of water, snacks, lunch and a change of footwear as we will need to cross the St. Mary's River to get to the falls.

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. Because the area is wilderness, we will need to keep our group size relatively small. Early registration is advised.

Sunday, August 21 Campbell Creek Gorge – Three Ridges Wilderness

Campbell Creek cuts a deep gorge of large boulders and waterfalls as it drains the northwest corner of the Three Ridges Wilderness. The highlight of the gorge may be the 40-foot Campbell Creek Falls, but the canyon's enchanting nature along with its many cascades and pools is the real reward.

Combining the Appalachian Trail with the Mau-Har Trail, this 6.5 mile one-way hike has a net elevation loss of about 1700 feet from Reeds Gap on the Blue Ridge Parkway to the Tye River at VA Route 56. Despite its downhill profile, the

steep and rugged terrain descending into and climbing out of the gorge adds some difficulty to an otherwise moderate hike.

Bring plenty of water (a minimum of 2 liters), snacks and lunch. Sturdy trail shoes or boots are recommended. Other gear and clothing suggestions due to trail conditions at the time will be provided by the hike leader.

Contact Ron Fandetti at fanjet50@gmail.com or (401) 529-8025 by Wednesday, August 17th to reserve a spot and for additional details, such as, start time, directions and car pool arrangements. Being a federally designated wilderness area with group size limits, early registration is advised.



Views of Doyles River Falls, our June hike site, (above) and Campbell Creek (below).



GWNF Plan Draft (from page 1)

dress:

George Washington Plan Revision
George Washington & Jefferson National Forests
5162 Valleypointe Parkway
Roanoke, VA 24019

or they can be submitted electronically at comments-southern-georgewashington-jefferson@fs.fed.us. Written comments can also be submitted at any of the public workshops scheduled for this June and July in Woodstock, Hot Springs, Verona, Lexington and Fairfax. Dates and locations for these meetings are available on the Wild Virginia website, www.wildvirginia.org, along with a

link to the entire draft forest plan and related documents. We hope you can attend at least one of these meetings.

Please visit our website regularly, as we will have current information available about the plan. We will also provide detailed information on specific issues, including drinking water resources, roadless and wilderness area protection, wood turtle protection, road decommissionings, and more. Wild Virginia endorsed the Conservation Alternative for the forest that was developed by Heartwood (available on our website), and believe many of its components should be incorporated in the Forest Plan.

Please make your voice heard. Nothing is more important in preserving the forests than speaking your mind and taking a stand!



Mountain stream view in GWNF.

Results of our Non-native Invasive Plant Survey, conducted in Ramsey's Draft Wilderness in 2010, are now available in report form on the Wild Virginia website. Stay informed of possible work days to help control these invasive plants.

And thanks again to the National Forest Foundation, Agua Fund, and an anonymous foundation for funding this project.

More Photos from Film Festival



Board member Cynthia Hurst and Leonard Pittman of Union First Market Bank at the Visulite Cinema.



Staff and board members greeting attendees at the Paramount Theater.

Species Spotlight - The Eastern Wild Turkey

(*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*)

Article by Chris Bowlen

Hiking in the wooded areas in the Shenandoah Valley, including the GWNF, it is not at all hard to spot evidence of the Eastern Wild Turkey, either the birds themselves or through tracks or ground cover disruptions as they forage for food. The return of the Wild Turkey throughout much of its range is a very welcome occurrence.

The species was on the verge of extinction by the 1930's due to over-harvesting and loss of habitat through deforestation. Populations have increased from about 30,000 to over 7 million in 2010 largely due to restoration efforts of individual State's wildlife agencies and independent organizations such as the Wild Turkey Federation.

Of the 5 subspecies of the Wild Turkey, the Eastern Wild Turkey is the largest group. The range of *Meleagris gallopavo silvestris* covers the eastern half of the US, except Florida, into southern Canada. The subgroup name 'silvestris' means 'of the forest' and the Eastern Wild Turkey is known as the 'forest turkey'. Forests with mature mast (seeds valuable to wildlife) producing trees and shrubs such as oak, hickory, beech and hazelnut with a diversity of native understory provide everything to sustain flocks of turkeys. They are often seen foraging in agricultural areas but have not been implicated in crop damage.

Turkeys benefit from large contiguous forested areas. They require access to a good water source and adequately sized trees (at least 14 inches in diameter) for roosting, including pines for protection from winter winds. Turkeys are very social birds and tend to associate in flocks. Their flock home range requirement is 1-4 square miles.

Male turkeys, known as gobblers

and toms, or jakes if juveniles, are easily identified because they have a multicolored red, white and blue head, leg spurs, a beard (or dewlap) and black, shiny plumage. Females are smaller and have a more gray-blue head with gray-brown feathers.



The Eastern Wild Turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo silvestris*)

Photo by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Reproductive season starts late February through March. Nests are simple depressions found on the ground, usually at the base of a tree. Females lay 10-12 eggs over a 2-week period. Incubation lasts 28 days, and by the end of May usually all eggs have hatched. Young poults are able to fly for short distances by the time they are 2-weeks-old.

At 3 weeks of age, they are able to fly on to branches to roost at night. When they are able to roost in trees, their survival chances increase as their exposure to predators is much lower. At 14 weeks, it is easy to distinguish male from female poults. By fall they are fully grown. Adult turkeys have few predators. In Virginia, the Wild Turkey population is estimated at 155,000 and in 2010, 15,190 individuals were har-

vested. State-wide hunting season is early April through mid-May.

A typical turkey diet consists of 90% plant matter in the form of fruit, berries, nuts and seeds. The other 10% comes from an occasional reptile and insects-- usually when the bird is very young and requires a reliable source of good protein. A healthy, non-fragmented forest, rich in the native species the bird evolved with, is essential to the continued revival of this American iconic bird. Trees of mature size are required to provide the mast, the insects and protection need by the forest turkey.

Benjamin Franklin is often credited with endorsing the Wild Turkey as the national symbol of the United States. It seems he reacted to giving that honor to the Bald Eagle with characteristic humor. Here is an excerpt from a letter that Franklin wrote to his daughter, Sara Bache, dated January 26, 1784, containing the only written reference to Franklin's wish to name the Wild Turkey as the national symbol:

"For my own part I wish the Bald Eagle had not been chosen the Representative of our Country...

"I am on this account not displeas'd that the Figure is not known as a Bald Eagle, but looks more like a Turkey. For the Truth the Turkey is in Comparison a much more respectable Bird, and withal a true original Native of America . . . He is besides, though a little vain & silly, a Bird of Courage, and would not hesitate to attack a Grenadier of the British Guards who should presume to invade his Farm Yard with a red Coat on."

Special Thanks to Our Wild & Scenic Film Festival Sponsors



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