

Virginia Forest Watch News from the Woods

April 2008

For more news, see our updated website, www.virginiaforestwatch.org

OUR TENTH ANNIVERSARY

The year 2008 marks our 10th anniversary as the leading organization in the Commonwealth promoting *both* sustainable forestry on private lands *and* solid protection on our national forests.

Some of our achievements over this decade include: helping pass Virginia's logger notification law in the General Assembly, sponsoring numerous sustainable forestry workshops, advocating for better forestry and water quality regulation through the Forest Issues Work Group, leading numerous Tour de Cut hikes, rallies, and other awareness events in Virginia's national forests, helping stop a proposed all-terrain vehicle trail in the Stock Creek watershed of the Clinch Ranger District, and tracking numerous timber sales, road projects, and mineral development projects with significant environmental impacts on national forests,

Join us in celebrating our tenth anniversary!



Photo taken after the first ever VAFW meeting in Wytheville, Va. Spring of 1998. From left to right, Eilene McIlvane (of Coalition for Jobs and the Environment), Tom Davenport, Donna Muhly, Shirl Parsons (of The Wilderness Society), and Steve Brooks (photo by Taylor Barnhill)

GEORGE WASHINGTON NF PLAN REVISION RESTARTING????

Ready for Launch

It's the question of the hour. When is the forest plan revision of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) going to resume? And what is it going to decide? The revision has been shelved for over one year. We know that the Forest Service cannot restart the plan revision process until the final approval of the agency's new nationwide planning rules. As we write this newsletter, that approval may come at any moment now. Once this happens, the Forest Service is free to resume the George Washington National Forest plan revision. We will have further updates on our website as we know more.

Traditionally, "forest plan revisions" have functioned like zoning documents that determined what could and couldn't be done in key areas of the forest like recreation areas, backcountry areas, unique biological areas, and remote habitat areas for wildlife. Ideally, planners looked at logging levels and logging practices to determine that logging is done only where suitable. And among other things, the plan revision made determinations regarding areas that could be recommended to Congress for possible wilderness designation and regarding areas that would be available for gas development and other mineral or energy development.

In practice, Forest Service planners often did not live up to their duties and haven't made these long-term stewardship decisions as carefully as we would have liked. That's why Virginia Forest Watch and others challenged the 2004 Jefferson National Forest Plan Revision for its deficiencies. Ironically, the new planning rules (see www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/2008_planning_rule.html) could weaken the planning process further, just as the GWNF Plan Revision begins.

Our role is not to nitpick or make sure every "t" is crossed and every "i" is dotted. With luck, the GWNF plan will incorporate the latest advances in the conservation biology field and the latest know-how among sustainable forest management practitioners – a marked improvement over the existing GWNF Plan for the next 15 years. But we know that, despite our strongest efforts, there is a good

likelihood that the GWNF Plan Revision may be a step backward, and may not deliver the kind of protection that is most urgently needed.

Adopt a Mountain Treasure initiative

So, as citizens, we should go into the process looking further down the trail than the immediate Plan Revision. Plan revisions provide us the opportunity to plant the seeds for even bigger things. At this stage, we can begin to enter diverse partnerships that will yield new friendships and ultimately, new progress on vexing issues. At this stage, we can begin the dialogue on Virginia Mountain Treasures, future Wild and Scenic Rivers, priority watersheds, old growth forests, unique biological areas, trails, and more. Building on this, we can work to ensure that important area receive permanent recognition as specially designated areas. That will take work on many different levels. Later on, together we can ensure that there will be follow-up as on-the-ground projects, both good and bad, emerge. Our true strength is our ability to build a stronger, more diverse community that is willing to speak out and win effective change on the great forest conservation issues of our day.

As a catalyst for this, we are launching the Adopt a Virginia Mountain Treasure initiative. We are selecting a handful of the 63 wild areas across the GWNF in a new report (“Virginia Mountain Treasure areas”) to be “adopted” by ordinary citizens or citizens’ groups. The project will be a partnership between Virginia Forest Watch and citizen adopters. With our efforts, adopted areas are more likely to receive protection from logging, roadbuilding, and mineral development and more likely to receive permanent recognition as specially designated areas. We eventually hope to expand the program and build a network of adopters across western Virginia.

As part of this VAFW hopes to go to several small communities around the GWNF and begin a series of outreach presentations on these special places. VAFW is already in the process of recruiting an intern who will develop a multimedia DVD for the presentations. The DVD will also serve as a centerpiece for presentations about time-critical issues like Wilderness, Forest Planning, and protection of Virginia’s Mountain Treasures on the George Washington National Forest. It will be useful anytime we need to organize citizens to protect their forests and watersheds from logging and roadbuilding.

If you would like to help in this effort or want to know more, please contact Sherman Bamford, VAFW Public Lands Coordinator at bamford2@verizon.net, (540)343-6359.



Statons Creek Falls, Pedlar Ranger District.

Photo © Sherman Bamford, 2007

VIRGINIA PEOPLE AND PLACES

A look at what some Virginians are doing to sustain the land and to protect important places

1.) Private Lands focus - Piedmont Sustainable Woods

Piedmont Sustainable Woods (PSW) is a project headed by VAFW board member Eric Gilchrist that hopes to bring sustainably harvested, locally produced wood products to Central Virginia. The project is supported by the staff of, and uses the facilities of the Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission. The TJPDC encompasses the city of Charlottesville, and the counties of Greene, Louisa, Albemarle, Fluvanna, and Nelson. Much like the Appalachian Sustainable Development initiative in Southwest Virginia, PSW hopes to facilitate a system in which certified wood can be sustainably harvested within a 100 mile radius of Charlottesville, processed at a local center using renewable energy sources, employ local mill workers to make the finished wood products, and market the products both locally and regionally.

This far-sighted approach has the potential to improve the quality of our forests through careful use of its resources. Local markets can also benefit landowners by reducing processing costs, allowing the landowner to see more of the profits from the finished wood products. The plan also allows for use of recovered wood. One example is wood felled by local arborists. Forest Stewardship Council certification of wood supply is a possibility with the PSW project.

PSW's plan for a wood-processing facility is far from typical. While it will have a sawmill, log yard, drying and storing kilns, the operation will hopefully be powered by renewable resources. PSW anticipates little waste in its operation. By-products of the milling operation will be used for fuel, sawdust, or as a supply of firewood for low-income populations.

PSW is currently accepting proposals for business and operations plans for the wood products processing facility. Let's wish them luck in getting this exciting project up and running.



(L-R) Eric Gilchrist, VAFW board members Rachel Johnson and Jerry Gray, and forester Michael Lewis

2.) George Washington National Forest - Local landowners face nearby Marshall Run timber sale

Mary Ann Yarsinske and John Cunningham know what it's like to face a raging flood. These residents of the Yankeetown area in rural Rockingham County live adjacent to the Beech Lick Knob Virginia Mountain Treasure (VMT) area. According to Yarsinske, they have lived in the area for 34 years. The family and nearby neighbors have faced several sizable floods that did not put lives in danger but caused significant damage to roads and property.

Soon after they moved to the area, the Forest Service proposed a logging project on federal

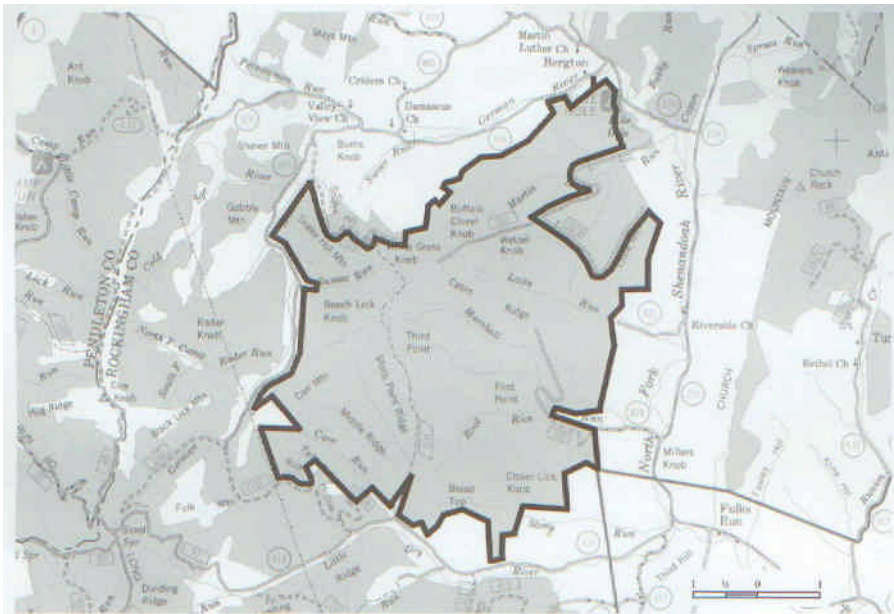
land nearby. Mary Ann and John believe that the Forest Service roads and even-aged logging projects have contributed to the floods' worsening severity. They have been on the agency's project notification list (called a "scoping list") ever since the first logging project was proposed. Another 200 acre logging project was proposed in 1986. Now, as part of the newly proposed the Marshall Run timber sale, 185 acres of new logging threaten the heart of the Root Run watershed on the southeastern end of the Beech Lick Knob VMT. The Forest Service proposes to upgrade and extend over 3 miles of Forest Service route 235A through the area, which is by all accounts, actually a rough trail. Each one of these encroachments threatens the integrity of the Beech Lick Knob VMT, an area that Yarsinske describes as "beautiful," a place like "few places in the world."

Yarsinske has done much historical research on the local area. She says the name Yankeetown comes a land development and logging company from the northeastern US that operated a settlement in the area beginning in the 1880s and the name Root Run comes from the name E.D. Root, president of the company. Eventually, approximately 17,000 acres of that company land here was sold to the Forest Service. Yarsinske says the area has a colorful history. Apparently a hermit named Leif Dove lived in cabin made of logging debris in the far reaches of the area.

Today the 17,152 acre area has reverted to a wilder condition and is one of the largest roadless tracts that the Forest Service omitted in the 1993 roadless inventory. Citizens hope the roadless area will finally be recognized and protected in the upcoming GWNF Plan Revision, as it deserves.

The Marshall Run timber sale would be a serious threat to the integrity of the area and its flood-prone watersheds if it is not averted. Yarsinske says she is glad there is more interest in stopping harmful timber sales today, both from conservation groups and from local neighbors. In the early years, she and her husband felt as if they had to take on the Forest Service alone.

Many recreationists use the national forests in this area for hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking, where the trails are cleared, she says. "The greatest number of recreationists are hunters, though. You can often see 40 or more vehicles parked at the gate [to Forest Service land] during hunting season. And you might be surprised, but a lot of them don't like to see the forest cut." Yarsinske says she has had numerous personal conversations with hunters recently, since the Marshall Run proposal came out.



Beech Lick Knob

Marshall Run Timber sale is proposed on the southeastern end of the 17,152 acre Beech Lick Knob area. Map from the upcoming book, Virginia Mountain Treasures: The Unprotected Wildlands of the George Washington National Forest

PRIVATE LANDS NEWS

New Website

Virginia Forest Watch will be launching a new website for private forest landowners in the coming weeks. The website will be targeted towards Virginia's private landowners who are looking for resources to help them manage their forests in a sustainable manner. The website will feature updated news and information pertaining to private forests in Virginia, links to resources for landowners, including the Forest Landowner Handbook online, a forum for landowners, resource professionals, and conservation minded people to connect and exchange ideas and ask questions. There will also be a rate your logger/forestry professional page, where you can rate the performance of your logger or forester and leave comments about your experience for others to read. This will allow other landowners to connect with loggers and foresters whose top priority is maintaining a healthy and diverse forest ecosystem. Check www.virginiaforestwatch.org in the coming weeks for a link to the new website. As always, www.virginiaforestwatch.org will still provide updated news and action alerts, as well as information on upcoming VAFW events.

PUBLIC LANDS PROJECTS IN THE NEWS

VAFW was able to fend off or slow several potentially harmful projects in 2007. But several worrisome projects are looming. Stay tuned to our website for the latest news on **Back Valley timber sale**, logging on steep slopes of a watershed that is within a couple miles of the biologically-important Clinch River; **Marshall Run timber sale**, a road and logging project in Rockingham County's scenic Beech Lick Knob Virginia Mountain Treasure area; **Laurel Run/Road timber sale**, yet another timber sale a short distance from Shenandoah County's legendary Big Schloss area; and the **Fry Hill timber sale**, on the east end of Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area.

In other news, **industrial wind facility developers** are contemplating **new wind facilities** on about 10 miles along the northern border of Rockingham County, and on over ten miles on Great North Mountain between Rt. 691 and Church Rock.



Proposed Back Valley timber sale,
Clinch Ranger District

RIDGE AND VALLEY LEGISLATION (Wilderness and National Scenic Area) NEWS

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act (H.R. 1101) would protect approximately 50,000 acres of the Jefferson National Forest as wilderness and national scenic areas. The bill is supported by a wide variety of groups, including business leaders, the International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA), hunting groups, hiking trail advocates, and a host of others.

Since our last newsletter, the bill has been on the move! On Oct. 23, 2007 the bill passed in the full House of Representatives. A day later, the bill was received in the U.S. Senate and was immediately referred to a subcommittee of Energy and Natural Resources Committee. A hearing is scheduled on Apr. 15 in this subcommittee. The bill has the support of Virginia's Senators John Warner (R) and Jim Webb (D).

Please send a note to thank the current Senate supporters and encourage those in the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests and the full Senate to support the bill. Subcommittee membership can be found by going to <http://energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm?FuseAction=About.Members> and looking up the Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests on the left side of the screen.

NEW STAFF AT VAFW - This year, VAFW is proud to welcome two new members of our staff. Bud Watson has recently joined as our new executive director. And Jason Woodfin has recently stepped on board as the director of VAFW's private forests program.

Bud Watson, our new executive director, is familiar to many at VAFW. He was a member of our board and served as research director for the Model Forest Policy Program. Before, from his home office in Virginia and Washington, DC, he consulted with clients on environmental regulatory issues. Bud has also worked with Dogwood Alliance, and served as counsel for the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Bud will be replacing Steve Brooks, VAFW's director for the last 10 years. Steve will still be with us in a consultant capacity, but is seeking more time to devote to his farm and woodlands in Scott County.

Jason Woodfin of Charlottesville, our new private forests director, has a wealth of experience in the private forestry arena. A practicing forester, Jason has a degree in Natural Resource Management from Virginia Tech, is a member of the Society of American Foresters and the Virginia Forestry Association, and is a Certified Tree Farm Inspector. He has worked in forest management for various companies including a large timber company, smaller consulting forestry firms, and most recently for his own company Woodfin Forestry. He is coming to VAFW because, as he says, he seeks "a greater outlet to promote healthy forestland use and management, which I believe is essential to enhance and protect the productive forestlands still present in Virginia."

THANKING OUR DONORS - Thanks to the Block Foundation, Patagonia, the Fund for Wild Nature, the Austin Family Foundation, the Munson Foundation, the West Wind Foundation, the Southern Partnership Fund, an anonymous foundation, our Fall 2007 house party donors, and other individual donors whose contributions at this critical time have enabled us to complete this valuable work.

*This April 2008 edition of "News from the Woods" was written by Sherman Bamford & Jason Woodfin.
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