

# Virginia Forest Watch News from the Woods

WINTER 2010

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## A Message from VAFW's President

Virginia Forest Watch has not been without its financial struggles in today's economic climate. With great reservation and regret, the public lands program position held by Sherman Bamford was terminated in mid-2010 due to continuing challenges to raise enough money to support a full time staff member in this position. Sherman worked hard over the years and most recently like the rest of the staff only part time, but the reality is that as much as our members love and appreciate our public forests, the funding to keep a public forest advocate employed at a decent salary is not within our grasp. We know our members appreciate Sherman's hard work and dedication to public forestlands advocacy and we do, too. The members of the board of Virginia Forest Watch are planning for the next phase of our public lands advocacy program to focus on volunteer public outreach and distribution of our new Virginia Mountain Treasures DVD presentation.

Seasons come and seasons go, but there is always a need for a dedicated group of people safeguarding Virginia's forests. We sincerely appreciate any investment you can make into forest protection work that will provide long-lasting returns for you and your children. Please take the time make a contribution. Tax-deductible checks can be made payable to **Virginia Organizing**, with **VAFW** written in the memo space. Send to 14031 Independence Road, Ashland, Va. 23005. Donations can also be made by credit card on the VAFW website: <http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org>. Thank you very much for your support!

*Jerry Gray, President*

## VAFW Promotes "Local Wood" in Floyd County

Using "local" rather than "imported" wood offers many advantages for local economies and the environment, particularly keeping the dollars from local logging and processing working locally, rather than being "exported," and reduced negative economic and environmental impacts from transporting forest products over long distances. Since October 2009, Bud Watson and Jason Woodfin have been conducting research on local wood entrepreneurs in the Floyd County area, contacting sawmills, furniture and cabinetmakers, artisans, builders and architects, landowners and other "stakeholders" in the "local wood" economy for our local wood pilot project database. We have also researched sustainable wood projects near and far: Appalachian Sustainable Development in Abingdon, Blue Ridge Forest Cooperative in Floyd County, Piedmont Sustainable Woods in Charlottesville (Jason has actually served on the Board of Piedmont Sustainable Woods), Catskill WoodNet, Vermont Woodnet, Vermont Family Forests, Land of Sky Regional Council (North Carolina), and Build Local Alliance (Oregon).



Pantry made with locally harvested maple. Courtesy of Natural Woodworking Company in Floyd.

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## Biomass Energy Growth Brings Added Pressure to Virginia's Forests

Biomass proponents tout energy production from woody biomass as a “green” form of energy. The argument made is that burning wood releases CO<sub>2</sub>, but the cut trees are replaced and the new trees reabsorb that CO<sub>2</sub> released through burning. A recent study by the Manomet Institute in Massachusetts sheds light on this issue and brings into question the assumption that biomass is carbon neutral.

There is no doubt that biomass speculation is on the rise. Several wood pellet production plants are in operation. Dominion Power's 80 megawatt tree-fueled power plant in Pittsylvania County is one of the largest biomass facilities on the east coast. While the plant sources from residual woody debris from logging jobs and sawmills, loggers are pushing to sell whole trees to the plant. With few paper mills in the area, another major log buyer would increase the price of pulpwood.

An important policy question is whether burning forests for electricity is a viable alternative to coal.

According to the Manomet study, commissioned by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources, significant drawbacks and misconceptions about biomass energy production remain. Burning wood releases more greenhouse gases than oil, coal or natural gas. While harvested trees can be replaced and those new trees absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, thus potentially offsetting emissions from burning wood, the deficit can take years to overcome.



Dominion's Hurt Power Plant in Pittsylvania County

The study raises concerns that biomass plants cannot sustain themselves burning only debris, but that additional harvesting from otherwise healthy forests is very likely. At the rate that the typical wood fired plant burns wood, reforestation would not be able to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> fast enough to fully offset the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Data suggests that it could take 30 years for a wood fired facility to show a net dividend in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in relation to a fossil fuel powered facility, even when factoring in absorption of CO<sub>2</sub> from reforested land.

The difficulty remains how to use biomass in a way that contributes to our energy needs without leading us down the slippery slope of deforesting more of our precious forests. For more information, visit <http://www.manomet.org>.





## Local Wood, Continued from Page 1

This Spring, Meghan Morse, a Virginia Tech graduate student, joined us as a volunteer. Meghan became acquainted with various stakeholders in local wood economies by conducting follow-up interviews and performed essential research to further our assessments. Look for Meghan's report at <http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org>.

Our first important finding regarding the Virginia local wood economy is obvious – the ongoing recession has impacted the forest products industry in all sectors. At this time, the stakeholders in the local wood economy in Floyd County could benefit most from some marketing assistance to raise awareness of the depth and breadth of locally produced forest products.

The local wood economy in Virginia has followed that of the nation. Appalachian Sustainable Development recently suspended its sustainable wood project, finding that its foundation-funded, grant-based business model was not working. Blue Ridge Forest Cooperative is dissolving to pay off its debts. Portland, Oregon-based Build Local Alliance, has shut down its sawmill operation. Catskill WoodNet, a local wood marketing organization we had been looking at as a model, has fallen on hard times since its founding director, Collin Miller, left to work on other projects in New England. He notes that a major failing with their approach was not enough “boots on the ground.” The WoodNet board preferred to do the necessary work through consultants rather than enlisting local stakeholders, which Miller reports simply does not work.

All eyes are on Land of Sky's sustainable forestry project in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, which received a \$1.5 million “feasibility” stimulus grant to promote the local wood economy.

Back in Floyd County, our stakeholder outreach identified a resource gap that could use plugging. The local wood economy, though local, is still multifaceted, and the stakeholders need a networking system. The concept of a “virtual wood mart,” patterned after the more successful elements of the New England organizations we studied, has been declared a potentially beneficial short-term need in the local wood economy.



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Bud Watson examines a White Oak marked for removal in a select cut harvest on the Weatherall Property in Powhatan, Virginia. Landowner Sally Taylor invited Virginia Forest Watch to provide input on the pending timber sale. The Forester was careful to mark trees for removal that left a healthy intact forest and will actually improve forest quality over time.

**Local Wood, Continued from Page 3****Where Do We Go from Here?**

VAFW is presently working with our Floyd County stakeholders to establish such a local wood mart. By mid-2011 we expect to have the woodmart database available to the stakeholders on a dedicated website. We also plan to continue to provide forest management plans for landowners in the local wood project area. Since late May, Jason has made three site visits with Floyd County forest landowners and has prepared very basic “local wood forest management plans” for them (we do not want to in any way displace the private consulting foresters, who are a vital element in the local wood economy) as models to show them what sustainable forestry management could accomplish on their property.

Solid forest management plans will connect landowners to the project goals much better than a workshop education. It takes local wood to make local wood products, and it takes a local wood products market to make the local wood economy successful for all stakeholders, including the forest landowners. It’s like the proverbial “chicken and egg” question, and in the case of a local wood economy there is a definite need for the demand for locally produced wood products to come first. In the meantime, we are bringing forest landowners on board.

We are developing field tours and the idea of a “local wood festival” as valuable means to showcase the local wood economy. We welcome the participation of our members as we explore and plan these components of our work. Please contact Jason Woodfin at [j.woodfin@yahoo.com](mailto:j.woodfin@yahoo.com) if you have a flare for event planning and want to help make these events a success.



A privately owned forest in Highland County, Virginia shortly after harvest. After a select-cut harvest and careful oversight by the Forester, signs of logging are virtually unnoticeable from the nearest road.

## George Washington National Forest Plan Revision

At almost 1.1 million acres, the George Washington National Forest is the largest national forest in the eastern United States. It stretches along both sides of the Shenandoah Valley and portions of the central Blue Ridge, and can be reached in less than two hours from Washington, D.C. and Richmond. The George Washington is home to a vast array of wildlife and provides Virginians with exceptional opportunities for outdoor recreation—hiking, camping, horseback riding, birdwatching, fishing and hunting, to name a few. The Forest contains some of the largest remaining, intact native forests and ecosystems in the eastern United States, including more roadless acreage than any other national forest east of the Mississippi River. The forest provides drinking water directly to many nearby communities, and it lies entirely within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, sheltering the headwaters of the Shenandoah and James rivers.

The Forest Service has been engaged in the process of revising the forest management plan for the George Washington National Forest. The plan ultimately chosen will guide management activities—from areas available for natural gas drilling, logging, and road construction to water quality, fish and wildlife protection, and recreation—for the next 10-15 years. In October, the Forest Service held a public meeting to present the alternatives it is considering. The agency expects to release a proposed revised forest plan and a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which will analyze the agency's proposal and alternatives, in January 2011. There will be a 90-day public comment period. A final decision and revised plan are anticipated by September 2011.

Virginia Forest Watch will work with partner organizations to review and comment on the EIS, with the objectives of preserving roadless areas, expanding wilderness and other recreational resources.

For more information, go to <http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org/revisionplan.html>.



### Schedule For Plan Revision

Notice of Intent Issued: March 2010

Scoping: March 2010-May2010

Draft EIS: December 2010

90-Day Comment Period: December 2010  
-February 2011

Final EIS and Plan: September 2011

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### **Fifth Grade Student's Class Project Works to Preserve Virginia Forests**

At Norfolk Academy each Fifth Grade student is assigned an environmental project in which they are responsible for choosing an environmental issue or environmental cause and mapping out a plan of how he or she can make a difference. Madeleine King chose conservation, and did research to determine her support of Virginia Forest Watch. She mapped out a fund-raising effort throughout the school year until the project was due in March of 2010. She offered pet-sitting services, created valentines that she sold, offered trash roll-out and roll-back services, yard chores, and did some babysitting to raise funds for Virginia Forest Watch, and contributed a total of \$220. Her neighborhood in Virginia Beach was very supportive of her efforts, and we at Virginia Forest Watch are very pleased by the unexpected outpouring of support.

Sharra Kelly and Helen Somers, the Fifth Grade teachers who were responsible for creating and overseeing this project kept the class on task by performing monthly check-ins with each student. Madeleine truly learned a great deal not only from her own project but from those of all the students in her class, and most significantly, how each one of them can make a difference in numerous ways to protect our environment.

The King family will be making a trip to Charlottesville in the fall to check on their farm there, and Bud and Jason will meet them on site, walk the woods with them, suggest how sustainable forestry practices can result in timber stand and overall forest ecology improvement, and develop a forest management plan for the property if the Kings so desire. We are looking forward to meeting Madeleine and the King family and use this opportunity to thank them for her extremely thoughtful contribution to forest conservation advocacy in Virginia.

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### **Virginia Mountain Treasures DVD in Final Production Stage**

The Virginia Mountain Treasures DVD is in its final production phase and should be ready for public showings in 2011. The DVD emphasizes the ecosystem services (such as carbon sequestration, air quality, water quality, and water supply protection, and habitat protection) that these 130 unique areas within the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests provide, and how their addition to the existing Wilderness Areas with which they are associated can result in higher employment, better income growth, and increased economic diversity for nearby communities. The importance of recreation to these local economies in the region – 800,000 recreation-related jobs and over \$50 billion contributed each year – is stressed, along with the spiritual benefits we all experience from visiting and caring for the Treasure Areas.

We have produced the DVD with the assistance of a number of other conservation organizations, whose members appear in it, along with our own present board members Chris Bolgiano and Annie Malone, and former board member Shireen Parsons. We look forward to bringing a presentation to an organization near you in 2011. Please contact Bud Watson at [bmwatson3@aol.com](mailto:bmwatson3@aol.com) for additional information on the DVD, and to schedule a showing in 2011.



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