

# Virginia Forest Watch

## News from the Woods

June 2007

For more news, see our updated website, [www.virginiaforestwatch.org](http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org)

### PRIVATE FORESTS OVERVIEW:

The year is not yet half over, but our private forests program has already achieved remarkable things. We completed two white papers for the 2007 legislative session, initiated collaborative planning for a forest certification conference, made presentations to civic organizations in the Valley of Virginia as well as the Virginia United Land Trusts coalition, convinced the Town of Big Stone Gap to hire foresters who practice sustainable forestry to manage their public water supply, and distributed a highly popular guide to sustainable forestry to landowners. We are also working with other groups to develop a forest landowner website that would feature an active electronic version of the landowner handbook and a landowner-driven forest-practitioner rating system. See insert after page 2 for more news and details.

### HORSE LOGGING DEMONSTRATION:



Horse-logging Demonstration sponsored by Virginia Forest Watch in Floyd County, March 2007.

Photo by Steve Brooks

Virginia Forest Watch was pleased to host a horse-logging demonstration by Jason Rutledge of the Healing Harvest Forest Foundation on March 24, 2007. The demonstration in rural Floyd County included an extensive talk on what it means to be a Biological Woodsman. Healing Harvest Foundation is a leader of a movement promoting restorative, sustainable forestry. The group advocates for and trains sustainable horselogging operations in the Appalachians.

### PUBLIC LANDS NEWS:

We have been quite busy in the public lands arena as well. At a Walking Jim Stoltz concert in October, we introduced dozens of people to the beauty of Virginia's wild places through a multimedia slide show. Other diverse outreach events included the Earth Day celebration at Grandin Gardens in Roanoke (April 2007) and a recent Tour de Cut hike, where we showed citizens the Little River roadless area, contrasted with even-aged logging at a 243 acre timber sale near Sours Run (May 2007).

As part of our active and growing monitoring program, we routinely go into the field and meet with interested citizens or the Forest Service at the sites of controversial projects. For example, in early 2007, we met with the Forest Service at the Olean timber sale north of Blacksburg and at the Great Little timber sale adjacent to the Big Schloss roadless area in Shenandoah County. As a result of our work, we joined with other conservation groups and convinced the Forest Service to drop construction of the longest segment of road planned in the Great Little timber sale project. Earlier this year, we also documented all terrain vehicle (ATV) damage to riparian areas and off-road areas at the site of an ATV trail network in the Jefferson National Forest. This officially sanctioned ATV playground has had a troubled history since its founding over a decade ago. We are presenting photos and other documentation of the damage to Forest Service law enforcement agents. And working in conjunction with the Clinch Coalition, a VAFW member group, we have inspected ongoing logging jobs at Rolling Ridge (Bark Camp), Jaybird Branch, and Kane Gap in far southwestern Virginia. See <http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org/news/TCC-LoggingJobsClosed.html> for photos.

There is much more work to do, though! Several new potentially destructive projects are coming up. Among these are-

- (A.) Fletcher Mountain – proposed logging near the Mt. Pleasant National Scenic Area and Appalachian Trail in the Pedlar Ranger District
- (B.) Back Valley – a 371 acre timber sale on steep slopes in the Dry Creek watershed in Scott County, Virginia, where two major floods have occurred in the last 15 years.
- (C.) Fry Hill – The first timber sale in the Mt. Rogers National Recreation Area in over five years. Logging the vicinity of Fry Hill, near the 7,320 acre Devils Den Virginia Mountain Treasure Area and the 4,722 acre Little Horse Heaven Inventoried Roadless Area.
- (D.) Big Run – a 350 acre logging project in the Hearthstone Lake area west of Staunton and Harrisonburg. Sixty-five percent (227 acres) of the cutting acreage is proposed in an area between the Little River roadless area and Tillman Road. The timber sale would impact popular mountain biking routes on Narrowback Mountain.
- (E.) Jackson Grouse #2 timber sale – A proposed 268 acre clearcut project in Alleghany County. This logging is proposed in older stands, some over 131 years old, near Potts Creek and the Jackson River. Over seven miles of logging roads, skid trails, and bulldozed firelines are proposed as part of the project.



Tour de Cut – May 2007.

Hikers visit even-aged logging site at Sours Supin, Lee Ranger District, GWNF

**Tour de Cut –**

Normally a once-a-year event, we will be conducting 2 to 3 Tours this year, in order to educate people about the theme, “Inspiring A Long Term Vision - the New George Washington National Forest (GWNF) Plan” (see below). The annual Tour de Cut is a hiking event highlighting the threats (logging, roadbuilding, etc.) to our Virginia National Forests and the amazing beauty of some of the more pristine locations of the Forest. It is a great opportunity to learn more about the GWNF and to meet other concerned citizens.

□ We are already off to a great start. About 15 citizens joined us for the **first Tour de Cut** on May 20, 2007. (See photos.) We visited the site of Sours Supin, a 243 acre even-aged timber sale. The day’s events included a drive by the site of the proposed Big Run timber sale and a hike on the Little River Trail, in the heart of the 27,000 acre Little River Roadless Area.

A **second Tour de Cut** is planned on July 14 and 15<sup>th</sup>. It will take place on the northern portion of the George Washington National Forest, close to northern Virginia, Washington DC, Winchester, and Harrisonburg. We will hike the Vances Cove Trail and portions of the long-distance Tuscarora Trail in the Great North Mountain Virginia Mountain Treasure area, just outside of Big Schloss Roadless Area. The 36,526 acre Big Schloss RARE II area in the GWNF was once the third largest roadless area on national forests. The area is part of a cluster of wild backcountry areas encompassing 71,000 acres – to be featured in the soon to be released book: “Virginia’s Mountain Treasures: The Unprotected Wildlands of the George Washington National Forest,” (The Wilderness Society et al.). Great North Mountain and other unroaded Virginia Mountain Treasure areas may not receive the protection they deserve unless citizens speak out for them.

Thanks to the Sierra Club, a group campsite at the Forest Service recreation area at Elizabeth Furnace has been reserved for the night of July 14<sup>th</sup> for participants in the Tour de Cut. Well-water (hand-pump), vault toilets, .....(continued after insert)..... fire grates, and picnic tables are provided. The campsite is located at the north end of Massanutten Mountain near a scenic trail to the top of Signal Knob. For more information, see

[http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/lee/recreation/camping/group\\_camping.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/lee/recreation/camping/group_camping.shtml)

Hikers should bring sturdy boots, raingear, water, a packable lunch, and other necessities. Campers should bring a tent, camping gear, cooking gear, food, and other necessities.

For directions and more details, see [www.virginiaforestwatch.org](http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org). If you are interested or have questions, please contact Sherman Bamford, VAFW Public Lands Coordinator ([bamford2@verizon.net](mailto:bamford2@verizon.net), ph. (540) 343-6359.)

### Wilderness:



A large contingent of Virginians came to a Congressional hearing on May 10, 2007 in support of wilderness and national scenic areas in southwest Virginia.

Photo by Sherman Bamford

A major milestone was reached when the U.S. House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands heard testimony on the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act (H.R. 1101) on May 10, 2007. The Act will create seven new Wilderness Areas, two new National Scenic Areas, and expand six existing Wilderness Areas in southwest Virginia. Gerald Gray, president of Virginia Forest Watch, spoke before the committee on behalf of trout fishermen and horseback enthusiasts. Tom Davenport, business manager of Mt. Rogers Outfitters, and John Muffo, member of the Board of Supervisors for Montgomery County, also spoke on behalf of the bill. See <http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org/alerts/RidgeValleyAct.html> for more information about the bills in both the House and Senate. See <http://resourcescommittee.house.gov/hearings/hearingdetail.aspx?NewsID=74> for hearing details.



Little River Roadless Area

Photo © Sherman Bamford, 2007

### George Washington National Forest Plan Revision –

The Forest Service is now in the midst of revising its 15-year management plan for the George Washington National Forest. Initial drafts of the plan would give the Forest Service far greater leeway to log, build roads, and develop minerals on public lands (see [www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/forestplan/revision/plan-home.shtml](http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj/forestplan/revision/plan-home.shtml)). The current scheme also fails to protect special places that the public would like to see protected, like the Toms Knob area, the Great North Mountain area, Peters Mountain North special biological area, and Paddy special biological area.

The 1.1 million acre GWNF covers much of mountainous northwestern Virginia. It is a place with outstanding hiking trails, fishing streams, old growth forests, black bear habitat, and more. The GWNF is a remaining stronghold for southern Appalachian roadless areas – possessing 35% of all such areas on Forest Service lands.

The Forest Service has promised an intensive schedule of meetings and other opportunities for comment. The first set of meetings took place at locations near each of the ranger districts in early March 2007, and many from Virginia Forest Watch were there. But many other concerned voices are needed at future meetings! **You can learn more about future opportunities to get involved by going to [www.virginiaforestwatch.org](http://www.virginiaforestwatch.org) and reviewing “Our Land, Our Water, Our Home” a 50-page white paper on our long-term vision for the GWNF (and the accompanying short brochure, “Forests for the Future”). The website will also have updates on future meeting dates and comment opportunities. We expect a series of meetings on the fate of the GWNF’s roadless areas in the near future.**

The GWNF Plan Revision was launched under the Bush administration’s 2005 Planning Regulations. These regulations give the agency greater discretion to develop our public lands without oversight. Conservationists have long alleged that these regulations are illegal. Not surprisingly, in March 2007, a federal judge barred the Department of Agriculture from “implementation and utilization of the 2005 Rule” until the agency complies with NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, and other laws. Currently, the Forest Service is scrambling to achieve a semblance of compliance with this ruling; until they do so, the Forest Service cannot rely on this illegal planning regulation anywhere nationwide.

We can savor this brief victory, but we can be sure there will be many small victories and many difficult setbacks before the GWNF Plan Revision is finally complete many months from now. The trail may be a winding trail in the future, full of switchbacks, but it is important for all members of the public who care about national forests to keep focused on two major goals: protection of the wildlands of the GWNF and the restoration of lands degraded by past logging, roadbuilding, and extractive development.

**Legislation to protect 58.5 million acres of roadless areas reintroduced with stronger support than ever:** On May 24, 2007, 18 Senators and 141 Representatives introduced the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2007. Virginians supporting the bill include Senator Warner (a lead co-sponsor), Sen. Webb (a co-sponsor), Rep. Rick Boucher (a co-sponsor), and Rep. Jim Moran (a co-sponsor). The legislation will protect 58.5 million acres of roadless areas across the nation, including 260,000 acres in the GWNF and 154,000 acres in the Jefferson NF. Currently there are approx. 4200 miles of roads under Forest Service and state jurisdiction within the 1.8 million acres of the GW&JNFs, creating an extensive maintenance backlog outside of existing roadless areas. It makes sense to keep expensive roads out of pristine roadless areas. For more information, see <http://www.ourforests.org/press/pr2007-05-24.html>

**BUILDING OUR CAPACITY:** We are grateful for the support recently received from the Block Foundation and from the Unitarian Universalist Fund for a Just Society for our GWNF plan revision work, Forest Service monitoring programs, private forestland policy reform, education and outreach, and other activities. We are particularly pleased to receive continuing support from the Fund for Wild Nature for our public lands work, and Norcross Wildlife Foundation for essential forestry and mapping equipment. In March, the board and staff engaged in a strategic planning event with financial assistance from the Environmental Support Center. We are particularly honored for the grant of participation in a new fundraising development program in partnership with the Environmental Support Center that will help us achieve long term success.

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