



Forest Service

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News Release

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New George Washington National Forest Plan Balances Multiple Uses

Provides for Recreation, Wildlife and Water Quality, Sets Oil and Gas Availability

ROANOKE, Va., November 18, 2014 – Today, the U.S. Forest Service’s Southern Regional Forester released the Final Forest Plan that will direct management of the George Washington National Forest. The plan revises the 1993 plan, as required by the National Forest Management Act, and contains guidance for managing nearly 1.1 million acres of national forests in Virginia and West Virginia.

“This forest plan provides a balance of management direction that addresses both the long-term ecological sustainability of the George Washington National Forest, as well as the long-term social and economic needs of those that depend on or are impacted by the Forest,” said Southern Regional Forester Ken Arney.

The plan works to fulfill the Forest Service’s mission of managing national forests for multiple uses and reflects extensive input from many deeply committed individuals, organizations, and communities representing diverse interests and uses, who have worked closely together over six years. As a result of this collaborative input, implementation of this plan will:

- Assure water quality with increased streamside protections
- Improve wildlife habitat, healthy forests, and local economic opportunities with prescribed fire and timber harvest
- Enhance and protect recreation opportunities, including recommending for congressional designation a 90,000 acre National Scenic Area on Shenandoah Mountain located in Rockingham, Augusta, and Highland counties and 27,000 additional acres to the Wilderness Preservation System
- Provide a comprehensive, balanced strategy for energy development consistent with other resource values, including for wind and oil and gas.

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The plan reflects thousands of comments from the public, including local communities.

“Our work does not end with approval of this plan,” said Tom Speaks, forest supervisor of the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests. “The next step is to work together to develop and implement projects that move us toward the vision described in the plan. We are looking forward to furthering the relationships built during the plan revision process and continuing to work together to address complex social and environmental issues.”

The plan includes a decision that limits availability for new oil and gas leasing, while establishing a comprehensive framework for potential development on about 10,000 acres where there are existing valid leases, as well as on 167,200 acres with existing private mineral rights. Presently, none of the existing federal leases or existing privately owned mineral rights on the Forest are active. There is also no mineral development occurring on adjacent private lands. The decision does not prohibit any specific technology for developing oil and gas resources, including hydraulic fracturing. Any proposal to develop existing leases on the Forest would undergo additional environmental analysis and provide opportunities for public comment and engagement.

Approximately 2.7 million people in Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C. rely upon the George Washington National Forest for a portion of their water supply. The Forest is the largest federal landholding in the Chesapeake Bay watershed and is the direct source of drinking water for about 262,000 people in local communities in and around Virginia’s Shenandoah Valley.

The area also contains four of the top 10 agriculture producing counties in Virginia and, with over a million recreation site visits a year, the Forest contributes more than 10 million dollars to the local recreation and tourism economy.

To review the revised George Washington National Forest Plan, visit the Forest Website at www.fs.fed.us/r8/gwj. For additional information, contact the George Washington National Forest at (540) 265-5100.

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