



News Release

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Ginseng Collection Prohibited on Most Public Lands in Virginia

(June 8, 2016) Roanoke, Va. – The USDA Forest Service, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF), and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) are working to protect rare and threatened species on public lands in Virginia. Once abundant ginseng populations have declined over the last several decades in Virginia due to continued harvest of the plant for consumption and sale. In order to protect plant populations, ginseng collection is prohibited on most public lands in Virginia, including national forest land. Illegal collection of ginseng continues to be a problem.

Ginseng is a listed threatened species in the state of Virginia through the Endangered Plant and Insect Species Act. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) enforces state regulations on National Forest and Virginia state lands. VDGIF arrested 95 individuals in 2015 under ginseng-related charges, doubling the number of those charged in 2014.

Collecting any portion of the American ginseng plant for personal or commercial use from the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests is prohibited and comes with strict penalties, including a fine of up to \$5,000, six months in jail or both. Despite these prohibitions, illegal collection of ginseng on the forest continues to be a problem. In 2015, Forest Service Law enforcement charged 15 people with illegal harvest of ginseng.

Collecting ginseng, or any plant, is illegal on state natural area preserves by regulation of the Virginia Administrative Code. The only exception is for research purposes, and requires a research permit from the Department of Conservation and Recreation.

For generations people have harvested ginseng for profit and personal use in Virginia. Parts of the ginseng plant are used for consumption or for use as additives to food and cosmetic products. Some believe the ginseng plant to have special medicinal properties. In areas where collectors have been especially active for a long time or where entire plants are removed and seeds are not replanted, plant populations have diminished or disappeared altogether.

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Today ginseng collectors harvest roots for large profits, as made widely recognized by the History Channel's "Appalachian Outlaws." Much of the ginseng harvested in North America is exported to Asia for processing and resale where overharvesting of native Asian ginseng has caused populations to decline to the point that it no longer meets demand.

"It's difficult to get a clear picture of the extent of ginseng poaching in Virginia," said Capt. Clarke Greene acting chief of Law Enforcement, VDGIF. "DGIF takes the abuse of the state's wildlife and natural resources very seriously and any efforts to get around conservation regulations will be strictly enforced."

Prevention of illegal harvest is required to ensure that ginseng populations persist in Virginia for the benefit of future generations.

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