

# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

## PURPOSE OF THE LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the George Washington National Forest (hereafter referred to as the Forest Plan or Plan) provides for the ecological, social and economic sustainability of the natural resources on lands administered by the George Washington National Forest (GWNF). Desired conditions, land use allocations, suitable management practices, objectives, standards, and monitoring and evaluation requirements are the statements of the Plan's management direction for the next 10 to 15 years. The Plan is the implementing guide for fulfilling the mission of the Forest Service: "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations."

The Forest Plan is strategic in nature. Future projects will follow direction contained in this plan but actual activities accomplished will be determined by annual budgets and site-specific project analyses and decisions. Subsequent environmental analysis will be based on direction in the Council on Environmental Quality *Regulations for Implementing The Procedural Provisions of The National Environmental Policy Act* (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508) and the *Environmental Policy and Procedures Handbook* (FSH 1909.15). In addition to direction in this plan, projects will also be guided by Forest Service manuals, handbooks, and other directives.

The Forest Plan is adaptive, in that new knowledge and information can be analyzed and the Plan changed, if appropriate, at any time. Changes to management direction in the Forest Plan are made by a formal amendment process, with public notification and involvement opportunities.

This Forest Plan implements Alternative I as outlined in the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The Plan and FEIS have been prepared in accordance with the Code of Federal Regulations at 36 CFR 219 (1982 planning regulations, as allowed under the 2012 Planning Rule), the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

According to 36 CFR 219.1(a), Forest Plans "shall provide for multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services from the National Forest System in a way that maximizes long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner." More specifically, the key decisions made in this Forest Plan for the George Washington National Forest are:

- Forest multiple-use goals and objectives that include a description of the desired conditions of the forest and an identification of the quantities of goods and services that are expected to be produced or provided [36 CFR 219.11(b)]. These are identified as forestwide desired conditions in Chapter 2 and as objectives in Chapter 3.
- Establishment of multiple-use prescriptions for each management area, including proposed and probable management practices [36 CFR 219.11(c)]. All lands managed by the George Washington NF are allocated to one of 29 management prescription areas that reflect different desired conditions and suitable uses, or allowable activities. Management direction for these areas is in Chapter 4.
- Establishment of management requirements, including associated standards and guidelines that would apply to implementation of the Forest Plan [36 CFR 219.11(c), 219.13 to 219.27]. These are identified as forestwide standards and management prescription area standards in Chapter 4.
- Descriptions of lands suitable or not suitable for specific resource activities, including timber production [(16 USC 1604(k); 36 CFR 219.14)]. These are described as suitable uses in Chapter 3 and as standards in Chapter 4.

- Establishment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) of timber to ensure a sustained yield of wood products in perpetuity [16 USC 1611 and 36 CFR 219.16]. The ASQ is identified as an objective in Chapter 3.
- Identification of lands as preliminary administrative recommendations for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System [36 CFR 219.17; FSH 1909.12, Chapter 73.11]. These areas are allocated to Management Prescription Area 1B - Recommended Wilderness Study Areas in Chapter 4.
- Identification of Research Natural Areas (RNAs), which are examples of important forest, shrubland, grassland, alpine, aquatic, and geologic types that have special or unique characteristics of scientific interest and importance and that are needed to complete the national network of RNAs [36 CFR 219.25]. The Forest has two existing RNAs and is not identifying the need for any additional areas.
- Identification of river segments that are suitable for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System [PL 90-542; 36 CFR 219.2(a)]. These segments are allocated to Management Area Prescriptions 2C2 - Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers-Scenic and 2C3 – Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers-Recreational in Chapter 4.
- The monitoring and evaluation requirements needed to ensure that Forest Plan direction is carried out and to determine how well outputs and effects were predicted [36 CFR 219.11(d)]. These requirements are in Chapter 5.

A separate decision incorporated into this document is the determination of the national forest system lands in the GWNF that are administratively available for oil and gas leasing and the associated stipulations. The leasing availability decision, as described in the Record of Decision, makes National Forest System lands unavailable for federal oil and gas leasing. This decision does not affect existing oil and gas leases or privately owned oil and gas rights. Since this is a separate decision, new information could develop resulting in a new availability decision before the plan goes through another full revision. Therefore, this plan establishes a framework to guide any future availability decisions by including direction on the suitability of areas for leasing under various conditions and standards to direct drilling activities.

## CONSISTENCY OF PROJECTS WITH THE FOREST PLAN

All projects and activities authorized by the Forest Service must be consistent with the Forest Plan [16 USC 1604(i)]. If a proposed project or activity is not consistent with the Forest Plan, the Responsible Official has the following options:

- modify the proposal so that the project or activity is consistent;
- reject the proposal; or
- amend the Forest Plan contemporaneously with the approval of the project or activity so that the project or activity is consistent with the Forest Plan, as amended. The amendment may be applicable only to the project or activity [36 CFR 219.10(f)].

## PLAN STRUCTURE

The Forest Plan is organized into several major parts: Chapter 1-Introduction; Chapter 2-Vision; Chapter 3-Strategy; Chapter 4-Design Criteria; Chapter 5-Implementation and Monitoring; and Appendices, including a Glossary.

**Chapter 1 – Introduction.** This chapter contains an introduction, the purpose and format of the Forest Plan, the context of the George Washington National Forest on local, regional and national levels and brief summaries of the Analysis of the Management Situation and significant issues.

**Chapter 2 - Vision.** This chapter describes the social, economic and ecological attributes (desired conditions) we would like to see in the future. Forestwide desired conditions apply across the entire forest's landscape, such as conditions for water quality or ecological systems.

**Chapter 3 - Strategy.** This chapter describes how we will move toward our desired conditions. Objectives describe specific outcomes that can measure progress toward achieving or maintaining desired conditions. Objectives may be accomplished by maintaining the desired condition or by implementing a project or activity designed to restore or achieve the desired condition. Objectives are linked to the Forest Monitoring Plan. Suitable uses are summarized from the standards and other plan direction into a table that describes some of the primary management activities that are compatible with desired conditions. This chapter also includes management approaches, which are strategies likely to be used for achieving desired conditions and objectives. Management approaches incorporate priorities, program emphases, budget trends, past program accomplishments, and partnership opportunities. The management approach is not a required, binding section of the plan but it provides a framework to describe the measures expected to be used within our current and expected levels of funding, staffing and partnership opportunities.

**Chapter 4 - Design Criteria.** This chapter describes the standards (design criteria) that guide our management activities. While desired conditions and objectives define where we are headed with management of the George Washington National Forest, standards define the rules we will follow in getting there. Standards are specific technical resource management directions and often preclude or impose limitations on management activities or resource uses, generally for environmental protection, public safety, or resolution of an issue. These design criteria are either forestwide or specific to a management prescription area. This section also references other existing guidance outside this Plan found in public laws, regulations, Forest Service manuals, and handbooks. Other existing guidance is generally not repeated in this Plan. These forestwide design criteria are then followed by desired conditions and design criteria that vary by management prescription area.

**Chapter 5 - Implementation and Monitoring.** This chapter provides guidance for putting the Forest Plan into practice, or implementation. Monitoring and evaluation provide information to determine whether programs and projects are meeting Forest Plan direction, and whether the Plan should be amended or revised. This chapter also establishes monitoring questions that are to be answered over the course of Forest Plan implementation.

**Appendix A - Definition of Riparian Corridor**

**Appendix B - Old Growth Strategy**

**Appendix C - Timber Analysis – Suitability, Sale Program, and Silvicultural Systems**

**Appendix D - Priority Watersheds**

**Appendix E - Summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation**

**Appendix F - Glossary**

**Appendix G - Research Needs**

**Appendix H - Monitoring Tasks**

**Appendix I - Maps of Areas with Additional Timber Harvest and Road Construction Limitations**

**Appendix J – Biological Opinion Incidental Take Statement**

**Management Prescription Area Map** - The map accompanying this Forest Plan displays the boundaries and allocations of the management prescription areas. This map was generated using a Geographic Information System accurate to a scale of ¾ inch to one mile. The boundaries displayed on this map can be assumed to vary on the ground up to 500 feet in any direction.

## RELATIONSHIP OF THE FOREST PLAN TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

The Forest Plan is the key document in a set of documents that integrates and displays information relevant to management of GWNF. Other documents that will form the administrative record for the Plan include the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), the Record of Decision (ROD), Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) report, public participation documentation and social, biological and economic analyses. Together these documents demonstrate comprehensive analyses, public involvement, and decision-making processes.

### **George Washington National Forest Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)**

This Forest Plan represents the selected alternative, Alternative I, for managing the land and resources of the George Washington National Forest as described in the accompanying EIS. Documentation of the Forest Plan's environmental impacts is contained in the EIS, which is a result of thorough analysis and considerations using currently available science. The planning process, analysis procedures, and other alternatives considered in developing the Forest Plan are also described or referenced in the EIS. The Forest Plan provides general, program-level direction for projects and activities on the five ranger districts of the Forest. Activities and projects will be implemented to carry out the direction of the Plan. These site-specific projects will be tiered to the accompanying EIS as provided for in 40 CFR 1502.20.

### **Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Jefferson National Forest**

The George Washington National Forest and the Jefferson National Forest are two distinctively proclaimed administrative units that operate under two Forest Plans. However, the day-to-day management of the two forests was placed under one Forest Supervisor in 1995. The Forest Plan for the Jefferson was completed in 2004 in conjunction with several other Southern Appalachian Forests, following completion of the Southern Appalachian Assessment. This Plan for the GWNF has been designed to be compatible to the Jefferson's Plan, where feasible, to facilitate management of the combined forests.

### **USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan**

The USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2007-2012 established strategic goals and outcomes to guide the Forest Service in delivering its mission. These goals and outcomes include:

#### **Goal 1. Restore, Sustain, and Enhance the Nation's Forests and Grasslands**

Outcome: Forests and grasslands with the capacity to maintain their health, productivity, diversity, and resistance to unnaturally severe disturbance.

#### **Goal 2. Provide and Sustain Benefits to the American People**

Outcome: Forests and grasslands with sufficient long-term multiple socioeconomic benefits to meet the needs of society.

#### **Goal 3. Conserve Open Space**

Outcome: Forests and grasslands with sufficient long-term multiple socioeconomic benefits to meet the needs of society.

#### **Goal 4. Sustain and Enhance Outdoor Recreation Opportunities**

Outcome: A variety of high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities on the Nation's forests and grasslands are available to the public.

#### **Goal 5. Maintain Basic Management Capabilities of the Forest Service**

Outcome: Administrative facilities, information systems, and landownership management with the capacity to support a wide range of natural resource challenges.

#### **Goal 6. Engage Urban America with Forest Service Programs**

Outcome: Broader access by Americans to the long-term environmental, social, economic, and other types of benefits provided by the Forest Service.

**Goal 7. Provide Science-Based Applications and Tools for Sustainable Natural Resource Management**

Outcome: Management decisions are informed by the best available science-based knowledge and tools.

**Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Mussel and Fish Conservation Plan**

The George Washington and Jefferson National Forests worked closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in 2004 to develop the Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Mussel and Fish Conservation Plan for both forests. The conservation plan included the life history, threats, conservation needs and specific conservation measures for federally listed mussel and fish species that have potential to be affected by forest activities. This Forest Plan incorporates all of the specific conservation measures identified in the Federally Listed Threatened and Endangered Mussel and Fish Conservation Plan.

**PREVIOUS FOREST PLANS**

The *Coordinated Use and Resource Management Plan* covered management of the George Washington NF for the period of 1957 to 1967 and established the following use priorities to govern forest management: 1) water; 2) wildlife; 3) recreation; 4) timber; and 5) other uses. The order of the priorities was based on the largest number of users and importance to the overall welfare of the public. The plan established zones to protect roadsides, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Appalachian Trail from visual impacts, identified natural areas at Laurel Fork on the Warm Springs Ranger District and Ramseys Draft on the current North River Ranger District, established streamside management zones 100 feet from streambanks, recreation zones near major developments, non-commercial harvest zones on unproductive areas, and transportation plans to assure that roads would be multipurpose. The plan established that protection of soil and water was mandatory in all activities and provided for special damage prevention treatments in the municipal watersheds of Staunton, Harrisonburg, Lynchburg, Clifton Forge, Strasburg, Woodstock, Buena Vista and other watersheds.

In 1972 the Forest prepared the *Direction for Managing the George Washington National Forest* as part of the Chief's Framework for the Future and the Regional Forester's Guide for Managing the National Forests in the Appalachians. This plan established objectives to:

1. Protect and perpetuate the GWNF by: a) preventing loss or deterioration of valuable forest products and productive resources; b) protecting and perpetuating unique flora, fauna, and geologic features; and c) correcting existing damage or pollution.
2. Develop and use the GWNF by: a) controlling public access and use; b) acquiring lands as authorized; c) providing a variety of game and non-game fish and wildlife; d) providing recreation facilities and opportunities; e) providing a permanent road and trail network, designed to insure limited public access; f) producing sawtimber and veneer products on the best sites and pulpwood on poorer sites; g) providing development space for major community projects; and h) permitting oil, gas, and mineral harvest.
3. Provide special social services by: a) enforcing laws and providing for public safety; b) keeping the public and their representatives informed and involved in Forest activities; c) helping local schools teach natural resource conservation; and d) training and employing disadvantaged persons.

The 1972 plan noted that the Forest could not produce "all things for all people at all times." Products or service objectives were prioritized as follows: 1) insure water, air, and soil purity; b) create a recreation environment; c) create a learning environment, d) produce timber products; e) produce minerals; f) provide public development space; and g) produce forage products.

The Forest prepared the first Land and Resource Management Plan under the Resource Planning Act and National Forest Management Act in 1986. This plan focused on the following issues: 1) minimizing the loss of unique or special areas including research natural areas, wilderness, roadless areas and special interest

areas; 2) responding to increases in recreation demand, both dispersed and developed; 3) fish and wildlife habitat management; 4) transportation access needs; 5) land ownership adjustment and boundary management; 6) management of soil and water resources; 7) meeting energy needs; 8) law enforcement; and 9) timber management.

The Land and Resource Management Plan was revised in 1993. The 1993 Forest Plan provided a variety of resource benefits, including wood, wildlife, fish, range, dispersed recreation, developed recreation, minerals, wilderness and special uses, in a manner that maintained the diversity, productivity and long-term sustainability of ecosystems. Conservation of biodiversity was an integral part of sustaining multiple uses of the Forest. The major issues addressed included: 1) maintaining biodiversity (including the issues of fragmentation of habitat, management of old growth vegetation, management of riparian areas, unique natural communities, threatened and endangered species); 2) timber management; 3) road and trail access; 4) management of roadless areas and special management areas; 5) visual resources; 6) vegetation management; 7) minerals management; 8) management of the gypsy moth; and 9) providing for the best mix of goods and services.

## THE GEORGE WASHINGTON NATIONAL FOREST'S NICHE

George Washington National Forest ownership totals over 1 million acres, with approximately 960,000 acres in Virginia and 106,000 acres in West Virginia. Of the gross 1.8 million acres within the Forest's proclamation boundaries, approximately 59% is National Forest System land. The Forest is divided into five ranger districts located in thirteen counties in Virginia and four counties in West Virginia (Figures 1 and 2).

In 1911, the Weeks Act provided the authorization for purchase of lands in States where enabling legislation was passed. Less than a month after the passage of the Weeks Law, purchases on the headwaters of the Potomac, along Massanutten Mountain, and in the Natural Bridge area were approved. Most of the largest purchases were from land companies. Subsequent additions brought the George Washington (originally called the Shenandoah) National Forest to its present size. The George Washington National Forest has played, and continues to play, some distinct roles within a regional or national context. The George Washington National Forest:

- Contains the headwaters of the Potomac and James Rivers and contributes to the drinking water supplies of at least 30 communities including Washington, DC and Richmond, VA.
- Is the largest federal landowner in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- Provides a diversity of recreation opportunities to local rural residents, nearby communities and towns, and to the highly urban areas of the mid-Atlantic. Facilities offer opportunities that range from highly developed campgrounds, swimming beaches and picnic shelters to minimally developed overnight and day use areas that serve primarily as access points to trails, creeks, rivers, lakes and general forest areas. Approximately 10.5 million people live within counties that are 75 miles from the Forest border.
- Contains some of the most extensive remote backcountry recreation opportunities east of the Mississippi River.
- Provides tremendous opportunities for frontcountry and backcountry hiking, horseback riding, and mountain biking on trails jointly maintained by the Forest Service and many partners.
- Provides motorized recreation for all-terrain vehicles on 60 miles of designated motorized trails and for off-highway vehicles on nearly 250 miles of high clearance roads. Contains a vast system of federal, state, county and Forest Service roads used for driving for pleasure.
- Contains the scenic backdrops to the Shenandoah Valley and many local communities. Provides access to outstanding scenic vistas across the Forest.

- The region surrounding the Forest is a mix of ownerships, ranging from the Monongahela National Forest on the west, the Jefferson National Forest on the south, the Shenandoah National Park (USDI National Park Service) on the east, a number of state parks and forests, and an extensive intermingling of private lands (over 3,000 miles of boundary). This highlights the unique niche that the GWNF fills in connecting biological habitat and resources for ecological and species diversity and in providing social and economic opportunities for a large and growing population base.
- Contains nationally significant areas designated by Congress, including six Wildernesses, Mount Pleasant National Scenic Area and the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.
- Contains one of the largest blocks of forested lands under federal management in the eastern U.S. where habitat for a wide diversity of species needing closed, open or interspersed habitat can be managed to meet long-term habitat objectives.
- Comprises approximately 5.5% of the 19.2 million acre timber products market area with a total standing volume of about 0.5 bcf (billion cubic feet) and growth estimated at 0.03 bcf per year. This resource provides a portion of the estimated demand of 0.3 bcf per year created by 217 sawmills, three paper/pulp mills, and three engineered wood product manufacturers in the area.
- Provides an important component for biological diversity in the landscape of the eastern U.S.
- Contains most of the known occurrences of the Cow Knob, Shenandoah Mountain and Big Levels salamanders in the world.
- Contains Laurel Fork, a unique area in the state of Virginia that has given rise to a forest of northern hardwoods and red spruce, unlike the Appalachian oak forest that dominates the rest of the George Washington National Forest. This area contains one of the finest examples of northern boreal natural community complexes in Virginia and is the only representative of the Alleghany Plateau Ecoregion within the Commonwealth.
- Had the first Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with any state agency in the nation on management of fish and wildlife, when it signed an MOU with the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries in 1938. This partnership plus a similar one established with West Virginia Division of Natural Resources have resulted in a long-term commitment to cooperative management of the wildlife and fisheries resources on the Forest.
- Provides access to public lands for hunting and fishing in areas enhanced by cooperative management between the Forest Service and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.
- Surrounds the Shenandoah Valley, which holds much of this nation's history. Native Americans lived and hunted this valley for several thousand years. Thomas Fairfax, George Washington, Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee all walked through this land. The George Washington National Forest contains land that was part of the "Breadbasket of the Confederacy" and housed numerous iron furnaces where cannon balls were made for the southern armies.
- Provides opportunities for nature-based education to a wide variety of local and area residents.
- Was the location of the first Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp in the nation, at Camp Roosevelt NF-1 in Edith Gap, Virginia. The CCC program was one of the most successful of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's (FDR) New Deal Programs during the Great Depression. The men employed under the CCC program at this camp and subsequent camps across the Forest and across the nation, built and maintained numerous roads, trails and facilities still enjoyed by forest visitors today.

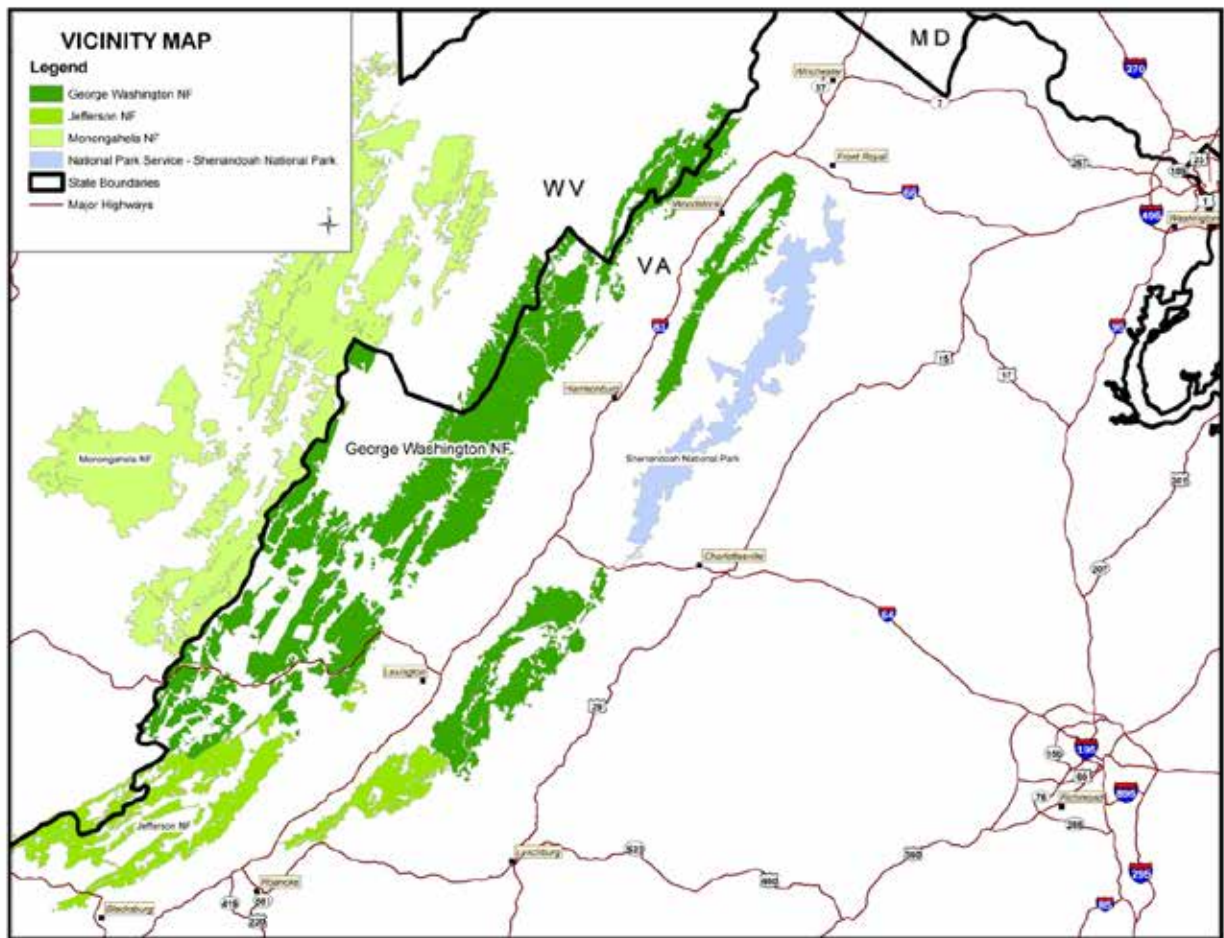


Figure 1-1. Vicinity Map of the George Washington National Forest



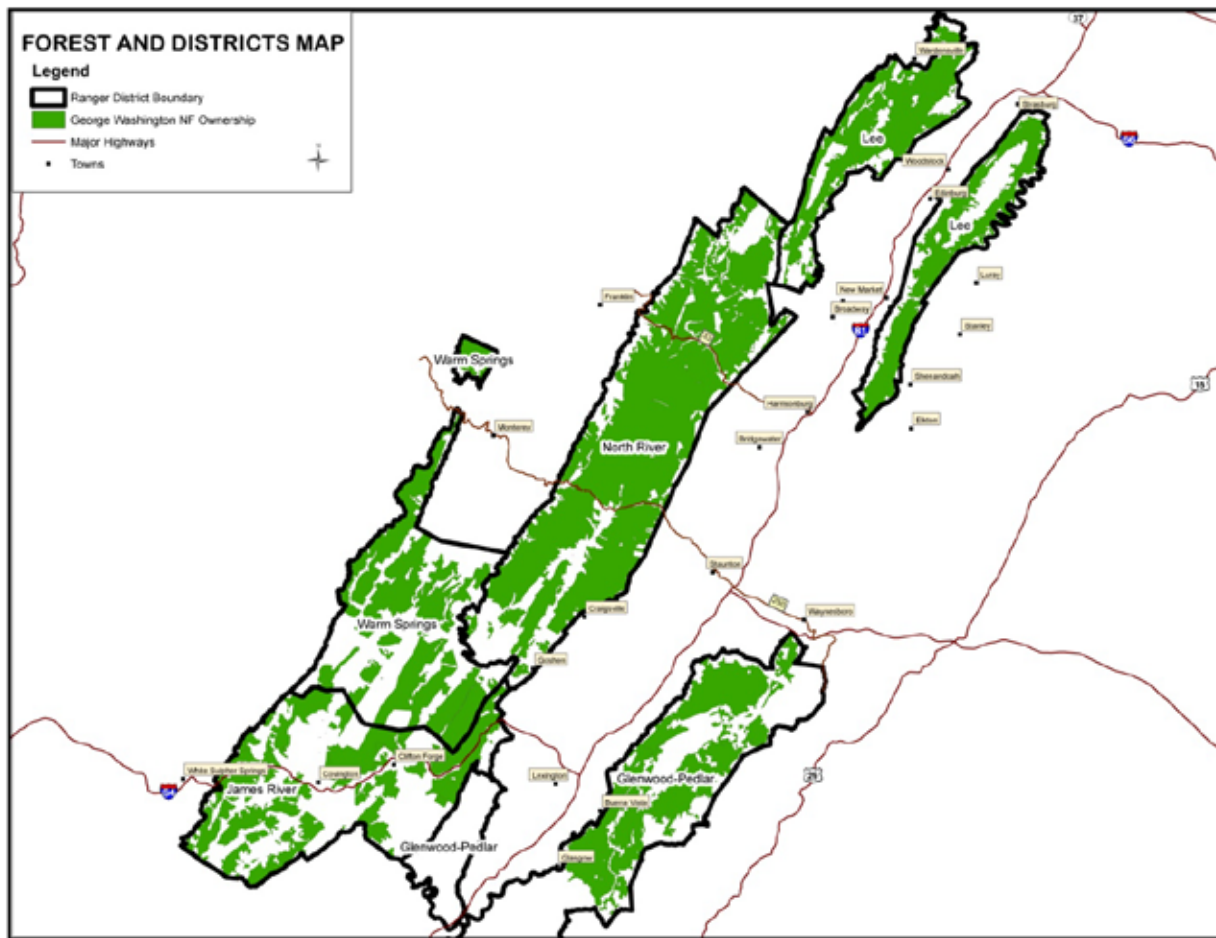


Figure 1-2. Ranger Districts of the George Washington National Forest

## PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND COLLABORATION

Public collaboration is a key part of the planning process. Our goals for public collaboration associated with this planning process were: to ensure that all individuals and groups interested in or affected by the management of the George Washington National Forest have the opportunity to be informed and participate in the revision process; to reach an informed understanding of the varying interests; and to consider these interests in developing this revised plan.

Public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities were used to identify what direction management of the forest should take in the future, including what goods and services would be provided and what the environmental conditions should be. Many opportunities were provided for people to get involved in the planning process and to provide comments. Issues submitted by the public, as well as from within the Forest Service, guided the need to change current management strategies. Significant issues are described in Appendix E.

The first public scoping period for revision began in 2007, under the 2004 planning regulations. The Notice of Intent for the plan revision process for the George Washington National Forest was provided in the Federal Register on February 15, 2007 under the planning procedures contained in the 2005 Forest Service planning rule. One series of public workshops at seven locations was held. On March 30, 2007, the federal district court

for the Northern District of California enjoined the Forest Service from implementing the 2005 planning rule and the revision was suspended. The Forest Service adopted a new planning rule and notification of adjustment for resuming the land management plan revision process was provided in the Federal Register on June 24, 2008. A series of five topical public workshops were held between July 2008 and February 2009. On June 30, 2009, the 2008 planning rule was enjoined by the United States District Court for the Northern District of California and the revision of the GWNF Forest Plan was again suspended. On March 10, 2010 a Notice of Intent to prepare an environmental impact statement and revised land management plan using the provisions of the 1982 National Forest System land and resource management planning regulations for the George Washington National Forest was published in the Federal Register. A series of public workshops were held at six locations during the scoping period. Two additional workshops were held in July and October of 2010 to discuss alternative development.

In June 2011 the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Draft Revised Forest Plan were released for public review and comment. Comments were accepted from the issuance of the Notice of Availability until October 17, 2011. Public workshops were held in June and July during this comment period at the following locations: Fairfax County Government Center, Fairfax, VA; Woodstock National Guard Armory, Woodstock, VA; Rockbridge County High School, Lexington, VA; East Hardy High School, Baker, WV; Augusta County Government Center, Verona, VA; and Valley Elementary School, Hot Springs, VA.