

George Washington National Forest Plan Revision Public Meeting

April 12, 2010 (During the Comment Period for the Notice of Intent)

Participants were asked two questions:

- 1) Are there any issues that we missed?**
- 2) How would you like to see different issues addressed in the Plan or EIS?**

MINERALS

1. Marcellus shale development for gas could occur on the NF. How are we going to handle requests for exploration and development?
2. Address development of Marcellus Shale- impact on water etc.
3. Hydrofracking (Marcellus Shale) particular concerns about drilling at Shenandoah Mountain and sensitive watersheds like Drinking water watersheds
4. FS has surface control for development?
5. Laurel Fork mineral rights, are they available for bid, development?
6. Do NOT allow oil and gas leasing in Laurel Fork.
7. All potential wilderness areas should not be leased for oil or gas, and should be designated unsuitable for wind energy development. There is concern about fracking techniques and negative effects on resources.
8. Leasing decisions should not be driven by oil and gas industries. The agency (BLM or FS?) should direct where federal leasing is acceptable, not industry.

WOODY BIOMASS

1. Woody Biomass harvests, where will it be available, how will we determine this? Some plants near the Forest are using woody biomass for fuel. What are the advantages to habitat and fuels from biomass removal?
2. Woody biomass removal has effects on soil productivity and carbon sequestration.
3. Biomass energy production
4. Biomass for small communities (e.g. fuelwood permits) is very different than providing mass quantities for energy generation. Forest prescriptions should focus on what is best for Forest Health and products can be used for whatever purchaser chooses. For example: Use thinned trees and leave large trees
5. Concern for what happens when Biomass competes with pulp, drives prices for pulpwood up.
6. Say no to biomass for the revised Forest plan: Major concern- pressure for energy may take precedence over forest health.
7. Say yes to biomass for revised Forest Plan: Overriding need for renewable energy production.
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TRAILS

1. Increase nonmotorized recreation and trail miles.
2. Multi use trails are impacting soil and water resources. There are physical limits to the trails regarding use.
3. Need trail networks and continuous trails that connect, important for all types of users and for events. Trails can go through wilderness but not events, especially in eastern Forests because of the intermingling of private land.
4. Need trail networks with trailheads closer to access roads that are near more populated centers.
5. We should adjust the boundaries of areas in the "Remote Alternative" to avoid cutting off multiple-use trail opportunities (e.g. horse or bike events). The proposed "Remote Alternative" needs refining.
6. Desire to see no net loss in trails. Desire long distance multi-user trails (bike, horse, hiking) to bring in tourism. Connect trails and "old roads" to create more diverse opportunities. More trails would spread the impact of use. Also need more and better maps of the trail systems.
7. Need more horse trailer parking : About 12 per districts would be a desired number. Strive to coordinate horse trailer pkg and ATV' s (ATV parking?) with timber sales. Biking and horseback riding work well together. Not ATVs
8. Appalachian trail- more mile markers and coordination of access for ability for search and rescue to do their job.
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MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS

1. More stacked loop trails with different difficulty levels. Trailheads, parking areas off paved state maintained roads where possible to reduce access maintenance.
2. Sustainable rolling contour alignment.
10. Low challenge and low elevation gain trails
11. Utilize low challenge trails for disabled hunter access
12. Stacked loop trails can offer easy access on lower elevations and more challenges at the higher elevations.

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE USE

1. Forest Service should not be providing places for off-road vehicle use, this competes with private industry. Every user group does not need a place to use their "toys" on FS. Can't provide for all uses.
2. Multiple use concept should include motorized use.

RECREATION

1. Separate areas of higher density recreation from areas for more solitary recreation.

GREAT EASTERN TRAIL

1. Protect the GET corridor so that the local benefits can be realized. For example, where wind energy is proposed on the same land base, choose “No wind energy development”. It is not compatible with the Trail.
2. Make available maps of the proposed trail corridor.
3. Concern was voiced that visuals and habitat management would be restricted along the trail and this is undesirable. The GET is proposed to go through the Gathright WMA. VDGIF is open to new trails in WMAs, but they will not restrict habitat management because of the presence of trails.

WILDERNESS AND ROADLESS AREAS

2. No increase in wilderness.
3. Increase wilderness.
4. There are some unroaded areas that are not in the roadless area inventory or the potential wilderness area inventory and should be.
5. Have wilderness areas provide different levels of quality (experience).
6. Roadless areas - important to maintain under roadless rule.
7. Also manage PWA's as roadless areas
8. Look at areas individually
9. Roadless areas with good road access could be used for some projects, e.g. wildlife improvements.
10. Law enforcement presence already diminished, remote lands with little access would encourage illegal activities on the forest. In relation to creation of more areas with remote settings and law enforcement's inability to access these areas to deter illegal activities: Would prefer that law enforcement priorities focus on litter piles and meth labs as opposed to illegal access to remote settings (e.g. wilderness).
11. Support expansion of wilderness- desirable for horseback riding.
12. Much potential for wilderness: backcountry
13. Wilderness protection
 - a. Consider all roadless areas and Potential Wilderness Areas for recommendation
 - b. Reserve Wilderness designation for truly unique communities.
 - c. Wilderness provides multiple uses, water, wildlife habitat, recreation, economic benefits
 - d. Wilderness popularity degrades environment (heavy use)
 - e. Wilderness can provide uneven aged forest over time with natural processes
14. Roadless areas should be managed consistently with 2000 Road less Rule -off limits to oil and gas
15. Laurel Fork for should be wilderness; anything less will keep it vulnerable down the road for exploitation.

16. Don't overdo Wilderness areas. Recommendations should meet criteria and recognize that integrity is important. Large areas of wilderness are under used now; Ramsey's Draft is an example of good wilderness
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NATIONAL SCENIC AREAS

1. Increase and use National Scenic Areas designation.

ROADS

2. Make decommissioning roads esp. hard to maintain ones, a high priority
3. After deer season roads are closed, but would like them to remain open for small game seasons. Hunters would appreciate this and it might help local tourism.
 - a. Large backlog of road maintenance- look at decommissioning
 - b. Potential linear wildlife opening
4. Volunteers maintain roads- No where to park to turn around for horse trailers
5. Allow access to more trails and varieties of trail use including ATV's. Also off-road trucks.
6. Concern for trash associated with ATV/ 4WD use. Once peavine road was gated, trash stopped, but prefer open since hunting traffic. Consider seasonally opening many roads during hunting season. (This commentor was torn between a desire to reduce motorized access due to adverse impacts such as trash and soil impacts vs. the benefit of access for hunting. No good answer, just recognized the conflict. Seasonal closures were his response to how to address the issue.
7. Roads are expensive/ potential environmental impacts
8. Manage periphery near roads/ protect core areas
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PRESCRIBED FIRE

1. Rx burning, where will we be using it and how do we make those decisions? Need plan direction on size, location. Large burns cover numerous ecological conditions, do we need fire in all of those?
2. Repeated Rx burning will impact soil and water quality.
3. Long term effects of Rx burning need to be assessed, timber type changes and habitat communities change.
4. Do we have Rx burn monitoring results?
5. Improve fireline restoration when trails are used.

6. Trails and firelines need NNIS treatment and assessment.
7. Continue Rx burn research and monitoring regarding NNIS spread and introduction.
8. Use tools such as fire to the extent possible in ecological restoration.
9. More use of wildfire for resource benefits and more use of prescribed fire
 - Allow wildfires to expand to manageable boundaries
 - Avoid prescribed fire on sustainable timberland
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WILDLAND FIRE USE

1. Support for Wild Land Fire Use regarding fuels reduction in overloaded areas.

TIMBER HARVEST

1. Increase timber harvesting in the Plan.
2. Is local school funding affected by timber harvesting on FS?
3. Amount of timber harvest proposal is too low. Need higher harvest levels for forest health.
4. Bio-fuels, timber industry
5. ~ 1000 ac/yr is too low
6. Private land being managed for timber more intensively than FS. Not being done on a sustainable manner (on PVT).
7. FS forest will get old, decay; insects and diseases
8. More harvest
9. Low level of timber harvest causing decrease in deer population.
10. NFs are a place to decrease active management – work toward less timber harvest over time. Only place on landscape where that can occur.
11. Fire is a good management tool but should not replace timber management.
12. Increase timber allowable sale quantity (ASQ) to improve deer habitat and provide jobs for local loggers. When asked if the proposed action is enough or should it be more or less (approximately 50% of the forest in active management prescriptions), he replied that he needed to know what percent of that is truly suitable. He requests better maps (better scale?) be put on our website.
13. Increase the number of acres harvested for benefit of increased structural diversity which would lead to increased habitats and animal species.
14. Look for opportunities for uneven aged management and applying additional silvicultural methods. This could add diversity to the land area.
15. Leave more acres unmanaged and let natural processes create diversity. The forest will fix itself. This has multiple benefits and is cheap.
16. There is a lack of older successional habitat and forest has not reached “old growth” yet. Don’t lose sight of this in the Plan.

17. The forest has some large intact tracts. Would like to see diversity of habitats and connect these together within the region. Location of designated wilderness and other protected areas is important as components of the “core”. These are generally on ridgetops.
18. Designate the “core” areas so that we can respond to threats and conduct ecological restoration projects.
19. Plan needs to be more specific and explicit about where specific activities will take place.
20. Don’t lump timber management into the Ecological Restoration “prescription”. Want to see where timber management is going to occur on the landscape, so keep timber emphasis areas separate.
21. Separate management areas 14, 15 16 with some emphasis on Ecological Restoration, but not just wildlife habitat management.
22. Concern for the aging forest resulting in widespread mortality/dying stands. Desire to see a “bell shaped curve” in the Forest’s age class distribution with 12-15% of the area of the forest in the “tails” of that curve. (This commentor later clarified to me that the 12-15% would be in the young age classes and recognized that we would not be able to achieve 12-15% in the older age classes).
23. Concern that the removal of small material (branches and tops) after harvesting to be used for woody biomass would lead to adverse soil impacts such as erosion on steep slopes.
24. Concern that the removal of all slash “clutter” (in connection with woody biomass removal) would also lead to detrimental impacts to wildlife species such as grouse.
25. Desire to see better management of areas that were harvested 10-40 years ago – more intermediate stand treatments.
26. Little timber volume available- meet objectives of plan.
 - a. Accomplish same habitat manipulation with timber harvest instead of prescribed burn.
 - b. Other benefits of burning- Savannah, etc.
 - c. Younger forest desired for habitat.
 - d. No tiers of age structure= fire hazard
27. Visual effects of timber management - Potential fire in harvest slash.
28. Timber harvest currently at 3,100 acres, increase to 5000 acres; early successional/ grouse
29. Increase timber harvesting will enhance WL habitat more than prescribed fire. Also expressed a concern for about big block (e.g. large percentage) of forest in mature age class; increased harvesting would reduce that.
30. Keep target rotation age closer to the plan objective. (Desire to move closer to a regulated forest – a concern for balanced age class distribution.)

SALVAGE

NONNATIVE INVASIVE SPECIES

1. What are the future plans for pest management regarding gypsy moth, hemlock wooly adelgid and plans for salvage sales?
2. Transfer Rx burn dollars into NNIS program until we understand the effects of rx burning better.
3. Where and when will we salvage trees? What parameters will we use? Where will pest treatments occur, criteria used? How will we attempt to make stands healthier and more resilient to pests? What are the priorities for reducing susceptibility to pests?
4. Is the FS going to do anything about the loss of hemlock in the riparian areas and decreased shading effects?
5. How will the plan address riparian effects from hemlock loss? Water temp, water quality, trout.
6. NNIS causing regeneration problems, etc.
7. Need active management for insect, disease, invasive plants.
8. Concern over lack of management by FS for invasive species such as Gypsy Moth, Hemlock Wooly Adelgid, and non-native invasive plant species. Especially concerned by the lack of FS response to gypsy moth defoliation. We've watched Gypsy Moth spread across the mountain with nothing to stop it. Would hate to lose our hemlocks.
9. A concern was expressed for the expansion of invasive species as a result of prescribed burning.
10. Concern that more restrictive management areas would adversely impact our ability to respond to forest health issues (e.g. gypsy moth, other Insects and diseases).
11. Edge and non- native invasives resulting from scattered small patches of early successional habitat.
 - a. Better/ larger and contiguous areas of interior habitat
 - b. Build habitat off existing edges
12. Survey NNIS Species, Use public assistance to accomplish survey- hikers, etc.
13. Improve forest management with timber management to improve Forest Health (concern for impacts of insects and disease on older forests). Economic benefit and result in a healthier Forest

WIND ENERGY DEVELOPMENT

1. Full assessment needs to be made regarding wind energy development.
2. Wind energy production is a viable use of FS land.
3. There are many reasons to keep wind power off of the ridgelines- trails, species, vistas, sense of community for local residents.
4. The local residents value the vistas and the beauty of the area.
 - a. Protect the beauty of the area;
 - b. Never despoil peace of the area;
 - c. Protect vistas.
5. Industrial scale energy projects, like wind power development, has a negative impact on scenery, vistas, and the peace of community.
6. Concern for Wind power direct effects on birds and bats, indirect effects on forest fragmentation. Could put wind energy on already degraded areas. (This in response to a question about where, if anywhere, would wind energy be suitable use.
7. Protect Ridge tops from wind development. Ridge tops have high species diversity; climate change may increase the importance and Ride tops as migration corridors.

8. Wind power could be appropriate on easily accessible ridge top that are within the top 10 % of wind potential in the State. (This in response to a question about where, if anywhere, would wind energy be suitable use)
9. Plan future mountain top conditions before mountain top removal (strip mine) or for wind energy production.
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DRINKING WATER

1. Is demand for water by surrounding municipalities increasing and how does FS provide and protect that water?
2. Increase extent of Riparian areas
3. Aquatic habitat
4. Impaired waters on the forest
5. Brook trout important on forest
6. Public water from FS land
7. Wants increased protection for riparian (watershed level) areas.
8. Focus on the impaired watersheds: FS management could further stress aquatic systems.
9. VDGIF feels water quality is high on the forest
10. Encourage a watershed approach to analyses and recognize that headwater areas of watersheds are most important for groundwater recharge and aquatic organisms. Consider these factors especially as they relate to wind energy (does not want wind energy at all) and any or all drilling for minerals. Especially concerned with the potential impacts to headwater areas from Marcellus shale drilling and potential for radioactive waste (tailings?) to adversely impact the groundwater and aquatics.
- 11.

ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

1. Locate inventory and maintain intact natural communities
2. SBAs are important
3. Karst is very important
4. Internal drainage- protect water quality biodiversity of Karst systems.
5. Old growth and climate change: Climate change planning should include maintaining forest diversity to see what survives, including old growth.
6. Let riparian areas go to old growth Old growth can sometimes survive when younger cannot. Let old growth develop in a variety of areas, not just wilderness

WILDLIFE

1. Trapping on forest- VDGIIF regulates trapping conflicts with leg hold traps and dog, etc.
2. Concern for the loss of game diversity which has lead to a “homogenous” hunter use (primarily deer and turkey). Although hunter use has increased, it is focused on few species. Would prefer to have more diversity for wildlife viewing and hunting; diverse habitats lead to diverse species. Would prefer to see harvesting of 5,000 acres/year using diverse harvest methods to achieve this. Another desire was expressed for 12-15% of the forest in the 0-10 year age class in response to this same discussion.
3. Desire that timber harvest be concentrated in the winter to reduce impacts on any bats that roost in trees primarily in the spring-summer-fall period.
4. A desire was expressed to utilize stewardship contracting authorities to help increase early successional habitat and/or woodland savannah.
5. Desire to continue the good working relationship with WV DNR in active habitat management. Does not want to see more restrictive management areas. (Restrictive of habitat management activities).
6. Desire to see more harvest for more grouse habitat and increased opportunities for grouse hunting for present and future hunters. It is hard to find grouse on NFS lands now.
7. Protect large blacks/ areas of habitat to deal with climate change- allows movement of wildlife- less risk with less edge.
8. Desire for more Ruffed Grouse; need small openings- increase populations.
9. Early successional habitat happens naturally. Concern that naturally occurring ESH is not considered when discussing plan objectives. Natural regimes that create ESH are valuable; factor this into discussions.

TOURISM

4. Tourism is important to the economy of the area and Bath County wants to continue to collaborate with the Forest Service on recreation opportunities, events, etc., to promote tourism.
5. The types of amenities/activities that attract tourists include:
 - a. Trails
 - b. Family-based nature activities
6. Things that could be done to increase tourism:
 - a. Increase events staged on the Forest (Co. has a 2% transient occupancy tax, the proceeds of which can be used in marketing events or in making capital investments)
 - b. Develop more “aggressive” recreation opportunities (ATV trails and equestrian trails) to keep travelers in Allegheny County rather than having them pass through on their way to the Hatfield McCoy trail in WV. People pay quite a lot to use the WV trail, which is entirely (?) on private land.
 - c. Increase deer populations to attract hunters to the area.
 - d. Wilderness draws tourists.
 - e. Provide more diversity of habitats to attract birds and therefore more opportunities for birding and wildlife viewing.

- f. The Great Eastern Trail could enhance tourism. It will be similar to the Appalachian Trail except the GET is a multiple use trail that allows horses, hiking and bikes.
7. There is a great opportunity to use the trail to educate public about forest management, if such activities continue in the trail corridor.
8. Using NVUM (Recreation use surveys) (every 5 years – doing it next year) to relate to tourism and benefits to local communities.
9. Account for ecosystem services in addition to traditional economic values.
- 10.

BUDGET REALITIES

1. Need to have a realistic budget to enforce plan implementation and need to have access for FS.
2. Is the Plan tied to a realistic budget or is the budget driven by the plan? Objectives could be stated with the low end at where budget is now and have the high end at desired aspirational levels.
3. Can we prioritize within the objectives to deal with money realities?
4. Need to manage for timber to keep funds coming to communities since National Forest lands don't pay taxes
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Multiple use- what uses will dominate?

- NF's should focus on opportunities and services not available on other lands (private, etc.) such as large unfragmented habitat and migration corridors.
- -Believes there is an unreasonable preference for early successional habitat for deer which is commonly found on other lands.

Forest Plan should use science as one of the multiple uses. More emphasis on accurate inventory data would provide for ecological sustainability and better decisions. (e.g. roads inventory). This information should be for plan and public

Forest Service providing energy is problematic. Concern about impacts to water quality.

Enforcement! Concern for the lack of law enforcement resources.

-Combining elements of both alternatives (the Need for Change and Remote proposals) would be better than either one. There should be an alternative somewhere in between these two as far as acres of remoteness and areas available for management. Shenandoah Mountain proposal should be a

component of any alternative. Shenandoah Mtn proposal is a good part of the primitive recreation whole. Shenandoah Mt. area is an ecological gem (This in response to what percentage of Forest should be remote. No response when asked what percentage of forest should be manageable.)

Increase opportunities for youth in forest management: Recreation opportunities and education , beginner trails

Improve/ increase Leave No Trace Programs (too much trash)

Interpretive Trails demonstrating forest management and Front Country (Ex. Braley Pond Loop)

Watershed Protection becomes more important with climate change.