DRAFT DESCRIPTIONS OF ALTERNATIVES – 7/12/10

ALTERNATIVE A
NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE

KEY CONCEPTS:

36 CFR 219.12(f)(7)) 1982 Regs. *At least one alternative shall reflect the current level of goods and services provided by the unit and the most likely amount of goods and services expected to be provided in the future if current management direction continues. Pursuant to NEPA procedures, this alternative shall be deemed the "no action" alternative.*

Alternative A represents the 1993 Forest Plan, as amended through nine amendments. It is the 'no action' alternative, required by the National Environmental Policy Act. In this situation, 'no action' means no change from the current management direction and it provides the baseline for the effects analysis in the EIS.

The nine amendments to the 1993 Forest Plan included: the addition of Fore Mountain to the communication sites in MA 20; Laurel Fork Special Mgmt Area was made no longer available for oil and gas leasing; Mount Pleasant was designated as a National Scenic Area; the Biological Opinion for the Indiana Bat was adopted; and Jerkemtight Road was relocated and dropped as featured OHV route; and the remaining amendments were errata or clarifications. The Priest and Three Ridges recommended wilderness study areas have also been designated as Wilderness.

The 1993 Forest Plan provides a variety of resource benefits, including wood, wildlife, fish, range, dispersed recreation, developed recreation, minerals, wilderness and special uses, in a manner that maintains the diversity, productivity and long-term sustainability of ecosystems. Maintaining biological diversity is a major goal with standards designed to conserve specific elements of biodiversity and restore others. Conservation of biodiversity is an integral part of sustaining multiple uses of the Forest.

DRAFT

ALTERNATIVE B

KEY CONCEPTS:

This alternative is based on changes to the current plan identified in the Analysis of the Management Situation. The analysis was based on an IDT evaluation of the 1993 Forest Plan direction, monitoring and evaluation results, new policies, best available science and an attempt to balance public issues that were identified as of March, 2010. The need to change items that were listed in the Notice of Intent in March, 2010 to begin preparation of the EIS included the following:

Identify desired conditions and objectives to maintain the resilience and function of nine identified ecological systems, determine the desired structure and composition of those ecosystems, and incorporate management direction to provide habitat for maintaining species viability and diversity across the forest. Expand the Special Biological Areas by about 23,000 acres from the current Plan. Substantially increase the objective for using prescribed fire in ecosystem restoration and incorporate the use of unplanned ignitions for resource enhancement. Recommend Little River and additions to existing wilderness areas at Ramseys Draft, St. Marys and Rich Hole (about 20,000 acres). Move the remote backcountry boundaries to match the Inventoried Roadless Area boundaries. Portions of a few Inventoried Roadless Areas (about 8,000 acres), where the boundary of the Inventoried Roadless Areas is along existing roads and the adjacent forest has been actively managed for many years, are proposed to remain in active management rather than in remote backcountry. Manage the backcountry areas with standards to closely mirror the management restrictions on road construction and timber harvest that were described in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule, except that salvage of dead and dying trees without road construction is allowed if the roadless character of the area is maintained. Drop the proposed Archer Run ATV use area. Identify the following areas as unsuitable for the development of wind energy: wilderness or wilderness study areas, special biological areas, geological areas, research natural areas, Shenandoah Mountain Crest (Cow Knob Salamander Habitat), Indiana Bat protection areas, Appalachian Trail corridor, remote backcountry areas, and Mt. Pleasant National Scenic Area. Increase the acreage of lands suitable for timber production from about 350,000 acres to about 500,000 acres of land.

DRAFT

ALTERNATIVE C

KEY CONCEPTS:

In this alternative, restoration and maintenance of sustainable ecological systems is accomplished predominantly by natural processes with minimal human intervention. It also addresses the need for non-motorized recreation opportunities. This alternative emphasizes low-impact activities and passive restoration of natural communities at a slow rate. Active management is for the protection of Forest resources and meeting legal requirements, with limited exceptions. Recreation emphasis is on semi-primitive settings and opportunities. This alternative features the most area recommended for wilderness study. The character will be of a landscape evolving through successional stages toward a natural-evolving appearance. This alternative would also emphasize linking together movement corridors and large undisturbed areas for forest interior species and late-successional species. Effects of native insects and diseases would be accepted but nonnative species would be controlled. Road network mileage would be reduced through closure and obliteration of roads not needed for ecosystem stewardship, restoration or dispersed recreation use. Many of the closed roads would be used to supplement the trail system for non-motorized uses.

DRAFT

ALTERNATIVE D

KEY CONCEPTS:

In this alternative, restoration and maintenance of natural ecological systems would use practices that also produce a higher level of commodities and offers amenities that enhance tourism for local communities that benefit economically from forest visitors and forest products. This alternative would have the highest level of timber production. A mixture of timber outputs would be focused on species/product combinations with strong demand. Mineral leasing decisions would respond to public need and maximize benefits to local communities. Mitigation measures for the effects of climate change could be met through providing opportunities for alternative energy, such as wind power, natural gas, timber and biomass. Public access (travelways, use corridors, waterways, trails - including off-highway vehicles) would be increased in high-use areas and/or improved to provide for more opportunities for recreation and other forest uses to occur when compatible with other resources. Public access could be increased, or improved on existing roads, to support tourism opportunities, such as watchable wildlife, hunting and fishing access, developed recreation, trailhead access, and access to water-based activities. Additional roads may be needed to support the production of wood products and natural gas development. Highways and roads in the forests, trail and river corridors, and recreation-use areas would have forest stands with few, if any, broken views to support enhancements in tourism and local, rural economies. Roads would still be analyzed for decommissioning but opportunities for using unneeded roads for trail access would be preferable. Habitats would be provided for game species, species with high public interest, species with demanding habitat requirement, species that are ecological indicators and keystone species. Roadless areas adjacent, or in close proximity, to wilderness areas that are high-use areas would be recommended for wilderness designation. Management direction would support special use requests for facilities or developments that enhance economic development for local communities, such as communications towers or non-commercial wind towers. This alternative responds to public desires for more accessibility to and use of national forest lands.

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ALTERNATIVE E

KEY CONCEPTS:

Alternative E would actively restore and maintain vegetative compositional and structural conditions needed to provide for a variety of terrestrial and aquatic species in certain areas of the forest. Prescribed fire, timber harvest and maintenance of grasslands and shrublands would all be used to provide a diverse mix of habitats in the ecological systems. In some areas of the forest large blocks of mature forest would predominate. Restoration treatments would be focused in forests and riparian areas. Alt E emphasizes improving soil and water concerns in high priority watersheds. As a result of restoration treatments, commodities such as sawlogs, biomass, and fuelwood are available for local industry and individual needs. Activities such as prescribed fire and thinning would be more intensive than in the other alternatives. A variety of recreation settings would occur in areas compatible with restoration activities. New recreation developments are limited; the emphasis is on maintaining existing developments.

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ALTERNATIVE F

KEY CONCEPTS:

This alternative would restore and maintain the native ecological systems while also creating many opportunities for a variety of recreation settings. The emphasis is on recreation opportunities, scenery management, and wilderness designation, while focusing ecosystem health activities in support of wildlife based recreation. Resource management is designed to attract recreation users, both locally and from large population centers near the forest. A variety of recreation settings and experiences, both motorized and non-motorized would be provided. Developed recreation facilities would support dispersed recreation by providing access to water-based recreation, trailheads, cultural resource interpretation, and horse staging areas. In addition to open roads available for use, specific OHV routes would be provided. Large blocks of unroaded areas would provide remote, backcountry experiences not available on private lands. Habitat for early successional species would be maintained in a manner that would be unnoticeable to most forest visitors. High scenic quality would be a major emphasis. Active resource management would be concentrated in certain locations and support recreation use and visual quality.

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ISSUE	ALT A (Current Plan)	ALT B	ALT C	ALT D	ALT E	ALT F
ACCESS	Road construction 5-8 miles/yr	No net increase in open road miles.	Extensive road closure or decommissioning; but some access still needed for non-motorized activities	Some road construction to support tourism opportunities and commodity production	No net increase in open road miles.	No net increase in open road miles.
ACCESS	Decommissioning roads 1 mile/yr	Decommissioning 1-2 miles/yr	Decommissioning 20 miles/yr	Decommissioning 1-2 miles/yr	Decommissioning 2-10 miles/yr	Decommissioning 5-15 miles/yr
WATER, SOILS, RIPARIAN, AQUATIC DIVERSITY	Streamside management zones (66' along perennial and 33' along intermittent streams)	Riparian Areas same as Jefferson (100' on perennial, 50' on intermittent streams) in all watersheds	Riparian areas same as Jefferson (100' on perennial, 50' on intermittent streams) but buffers would be larger in source drinking watersheds and along impaired streams	Riparian areas same as Jefferson (100' on perennial, 50' on intermittent streams) in watersheds with threatened and endangered aquatic species. Current plan standards in rest of watersheds	Riparian Areas same as Jefferson (100' on perennial, 50' on intermittent streams) in all watersheds	Riparian Areas same as Jefferson (100' on perennial, 50' on intermittent streams) in all watersheds
WATER, SOILS, RIPARIAN, AQUATIC DIVERSITY	Municipal watersheds not highlighted; impaired streams and reservoirs not recognized.	Drinking water supplies identified. Drinking water watersheds and watersheds above impaired streams and reservoirs negatively affected by acid deposition are a priority for restoration.	Management areas assigned for drinking water watersheds as identified in comments. These management areas and watersheds above impaired streams and reservoirs are a priority for restoration and include management activity restrictions.	Drinking water watersheds identified per State designation are a priority for restoration activities, along with watersheds above impaired streams and reservoirs.	Priority watersheds identified based on water use (sensitive aquatic species, drinking water), impairment (particularly acid deposition), and sensitivity are a priority for restoration activities.	Drinking water watersheds identified per State designation are a priority for restoration activities, along with watersheds above impaired streams and reservoirs.

ISSUE	ALT A (Current Plan)	ALT B	ALT C	ALT D	ALT E	ALT F
RECREATION	Three existing ATV/OHV use areas; one area planned	Three existing ATV/OHV use areas; drop planned Archer Run area	Closure of all ATV/OHV use areas	Three existing ATV/OHV use areas; more than one area could be planned	Closure of all ATV/OHV use areas	Three existing ATV/OHV use areas; trails would be expanded in these areas; drop planned Archer Run area
RECREATION	Large increase in trail construction	No net increase in trail miles or maintenance (can increase but would also have to decommission)	Increase in trails for non-motorized users but no net increase in maintenance (by relocating or decommissioning unsustainable trails)	Increase in trails for tourism, such as long distance, connected trails for user events	No net increase in trail miles or maintenance, focus on relocating or decommissioning of unsustainable trails	Increase in trails for all users but no net increase in maintenance (by relocating or decommissioning unsustainable trails)
RECREATION	OHV routes designated and managed for OHV use	No designation of OHV routes but miles would stay at current level	No designation of OHV routes and no management of roads for OHV use	OHV routes designated and managed for OHV use	No designation of OHV routes and no management of roads for OHV use	No designation of OHV routes but miles would stay at current level
RECREATION	New developed recreation and expansions of existing sites	No new developed recreation sites; few expansions of existing sites	No new developed recreation sites, closure of some sites	No new developed recreation sites but offer more amenities at existing sites	No new developed recreation sites, closure of some sites located in floodplains	No new developed recreation sites; few expansions of existing sites
RECREATION	Use of adopted ROS settings	Semi-primitive areas outside wilderness, recommended wilderness or backcountry areas not maintained through plan direction	Maintain inventoried semi-primitive acres and move towards a primitive ROS setting in Shenandoah Mountain area	Semi-primitive areas outside wilderness, recommended wilderness or backcountry areas not maintained through plan direction	Maintain inventoried semi-primitive acres	Maintain inventoried semi-primitive acres
WILDERNESS/ROADLESS	One recommended wilderness study area remains - St Mary's Addition (South)	Recommend St Mary's Addition (West), Little River, Rich Hole addition and Ramseys Draft addition (total 20,000 ac)	High level of recommended wilderness, could include areas not on Potential Wilderness Inventory	Low level of recommended wilderness, determined by additions, areas with unique visitor draws, and Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors recommended areas	Recommend St Mary's Addition (West)	Incorporate Shenandoah Mtn Proposal and add some additional recommended wilderness

ISSUE	ALT A (Current Plan)	ALT B	ALT C	ALT D	ALT E	ALT F
WILDERNESS/ROADLESS	Portions of the Inventoried Roadless Areas are allocated to active management (9%), rest allocated to remote backcountry, special biological areas. No Potential Wilderness Areas Inventory	Portions of the Inventoried Roadless Areas are allocated to active management (4%), rest allocated to remote backcountry, special biological areas. Most of the additional Potential Wilderness Areas in current active management would remain in active management.	All of the Inventoried Roadless Areas, the rest of the Potential Wilderness Areas and Virginia Mountain Treasure areas would be either recommended wilderness or remote backcountry, special biological areas; but with considerations for mountain bike use	Portions of the Inventoried Roadless Areas are allocated to active management, rest allocated to remote backcountry, special biological areas. Most of the additional Potential Wilderness Areas in current active management would remain in active management	Portions of the Inventoried Roadless Areas are allocated to active management, rest allocated to remote backcountry, special biological areas. Most of the additional Potential Wilderness Areas in current active management would remain in active management	All of the Inventoried Roadless Areas would be either recommended wilderness or remote backcountry, special biological areas. Someof the additional Potential Wilderness Areas in current active management would remain in active management
TIMBER HARVEST	ASQ is 33 mmbf/yr. Annual harvest program of 3,000 acres. Suitable acres are 348,000.	ASQ probably around 33 mmbf/yr. Annual harvest program of 1,000-1,800 acres. Suitable acres around 348,000 - 500,000 acres.	No ASQ or suitable land base	ASQ higher than current plan to meet an annual harvest program of 3,000 - 5,000 acres/yr. Suitable acres around 570,000	ASQ higher than current plan but not as high as Alt D, to meet ecological restoration objectives; suitable acres between 350,000 and 500,000. Annual harvest program of 1,800-3,000 acres.	ASQ probably around 33 mmbf/yr. Annual harvest program of 1,000-1,800 acres. Suitable acres around 348,000.
TIMBER HARVEST	Utilize a management area with timber as primary management objective	Primary purpose of timber harvest is to support other resource objectives	No commercial timber program but incidental harvest may occur	Utilize a management area with timber as primary management objective	Primary purpose of timber harvest is to support other resource objectives	Primary purpose of timber harvest is to support other resource objectives

ISSUE	ALT A (Current Plan)	ALT B	ALT C	ALT D	ALT E	ALT F
TIMBER HARVEST TERRESTRIAL DIVERSITY FIRE	Amount and location of early successional based on biodiversity, wood product demand, balanced age class concerns, increased game populations	Amount and location of early successional based on wildlife needs, ecological objectives, restoration	Creation of early successional habitat through harvest of trees very limited, for ecological reasons	Amount and location of early successional based on wood product demand, balanced age class concerns, increased game populations, restoration	Amount and location of early successional based on wildlife needs, ecological objectives, restoration	Amount and location of early successional based on wildlife needs, ecological objectives, restoration
TERRESTRIAL DIVERSITY	Separate management areas for wildlife: early successional, remote habitat, mosaics of habitat, small game/watchable wildlife	One broad management area for wildlife habitat emphasis	No management area defined for wildlife or timber since most of the forest will provide for forest interior species and late-successional species; emphasis is to minimize fragmentation and edge effects	Separate management areas for wildlife: early successional, remote habitat, mosaics of habitat, small game/watchable wildlife; perhaps add one specifically for grouse	One broad management area for wildlife habitat emphasis	One broad management area for wildlife habitat emphasis
TERRESTRIAL DIVERSITY	Special Biological Areas around 70,000 ac	Add about 46,000 ac of Special Biological Areas	Add about 46,000 ac of Special Biological Areas; add wood turtle habitat to Special Biological Areas	Add about 46,000 ac of Special Biological Areas	Add about 46,000 ac of Special Biological Areas	Add about 46,000 ac of Special Biological Areas
OLD GROWTH	No old growth management area. Old growth defined by Forest derived definitions.	No old growth management area. Old growth defined by Regional definitions.	No old growth management area. Old growth defined by Regional definitions.	No old growth management area. Old growth defined by Regional definitions.	No old growth management area. Old growth defined by Regional definitions.	Old growth would be allocated to management prescription for old growth. Old growth defined by Regional definitions.

ISSUE	ALT A (Current Plan)	ALT B	ALT C	ALT D	ALT E	ALT F
OLD GROWTH	Allowed to cut old growth forest type in Dry-Mesic Oak group	Allowed to cut old growth forest type in Dry-Mesic Oak group and in Dry and Dry-Mesic Oak-Pine group	No harvest of any old growth forest types	Allowed to cut old growth forest type in Dry-Mesic Oak group and in Dry and Dry-Mesic Oak-Pine group; can cut trees in other old growth forest types to actively restore structural conditions	No harvest of any old growth forest types but can cut trees to actively restore structural conditions	No harvest of any old growth forest types
FOREST HEALTH	Not much recognition of non-native invasive species, except for gypsy moth; use of Integrated Pest Management techniques	Increased recognition of non-native invasive species; use of Integrated Pest Management techniques	Heavy emphasis on prevention of the introduction and minimizing the spread of non-native invasive species, especially in remote settings. Increased emphasis on non-motorized recreation may require aggressive prevention measures in concentrated use areas. Limited use of herbicides and insecticides	Aggressive treatment of non-native invasive species; use of Integrated Pest Management techniques; emphasis on preventing spread to adjacent private lands; aggressive prevention and control in disturbed areas or high use areas	Aggressive treatment of non-native invasive species; use of Integrated Pest Management techniques; emphasis on preventing spread to adjacent private lands; aggressive prevention and control in disturbed areas or high use areas	Aggressive treatment of non-native invasive species; use of Integrated Pest Management techniques; emphasis on preventing spread to adjacent private lands; aggressive prevention and control in disturbed areas or high use areas
WIND	No direction	Areas not suitable for wind development: Wilderness, recommended wilderness, National Scenic Area, Special Biological Areas, Indiana bat protection areas, Appalachian Trail corridor, remote backcountry areas	No wind development allowed.	Wind development would be suitable across much of the forest; may place a higher priority on wind potential before assigning land allocation	No wind development allowed.	Areas not suitable for wind development: Wilderness, recommended wilderness, National Scenic Area, Special Biological Areas, Indiana bat protection areas, Appalachian Trail corridor, remote backcountry areas

ISSUE	ALT A (Current Plan)	ALT B	ALT C	ALT D	ALT E	ALT F
OIL AND GAS	Approx 800,000 acres are available for leasing (acres not verified yet as result of new wilderness, etc.)	Moderate amount compared to current plan is available for leasing	No areas available for oil and gas leasing.	Approx 800,000 acres are available for leasing, same as current plan	Low amount compared to current plan is available for leasing	Moderate amount compared to current plan is available for leasing
OIL AND GAS	No direction for Marcellus shale development	Marcellus shale development allowed on all available acres but specific standards related to hydrofracking would be used	No areas available for oil and gas leasing.	Marcellus shale development allowed on all available acres but specific standards related to hydrofracking would be used	No areas available for Marcellus Shale development.	Marcellus shale development allowed on all available acres but specific standards related to hydrofracking would be used
ECONOMICS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY	Mix of ecosystem services and commodity outputs	Similar to Alt A	Fewer commodity outputs, focus is on remote non-motorized recreation and ecosystem services outputs	Increase in commodity outputs related to wood, minerals, alternative energy and on tourism, including motorized recreation	Focus is on outputs of ecosystem services, but this results in some increase in timber commodity outputs	Similar to Alt A
FIRE	Rx fire program is 3,000 acres/yr.	Rx fire program between 12,000 and 20,000 acres/yr	Very limited use of Rx fire, for TES species	Rx fire on unsuitable acres and timber management on suitable acres to achieve ecological objectives	Rx fire program around 20,000 acres/yr based on ecological objectives.	Rx fire program between 12,000 and 20,000 acres/yr
FIRE	Unplanned ignitions fire use is allowed but no criteria developed	Favor use of unplanned ignitions to achieve ecological objectives instead of aggressive suppression	Allow unplanned ignitions to burn as much as possible	Suitable acres and the urban-wildland interface would have aggressive fire suppression	Favor use of unplanned ignitions to achieve ecological objectives instead of aggressive suppression	Favor use of unplanned ignitions to achieve ecological objectives instead of aggressive suppression

ISSUE	ALT A (Current Plan)	ALT B	ALT C	ALT D	ALT E	ALT F
CLIMATE CHANGE	No direction is specifically related to climate change. About 2/3 of Forest is managed to move towards late successional conditions. Active management of vegetation structure and composition is predominantly through timber harvest activities. Much of Forest is available for development of natural gas production. Soil and water improvement are important, but not prioritized by any specific watersheds.	Impaired streams and reservoirs are priority for restoration; actively restore (chestnut, yellow pine, hemlock, spruce, riverfront hardwoods, beaver meadows, fire dependent and adapted communities, open woodlands, TESLR spp). Timber harvest, fire and grassland/shrubland maintenance are used to manage vegetation structure and composition to improve resiliency of the ecosystems.	Passive restoration through natural processes; manage most of the forest to move towards late successional conditions; reduction of access to the forest to limit introduction and spread of invasives; decommissioning of roads to reduce potential sedimentation in streams; less fragmentation to increase connectivity of migration corridors for species that rely on mature, closed canopy forests	Increase opportunties for climate change mitigation (alternative energy sources such as wind, oil and gas leasing and Marcellus Shale development); source drinking watersheds and impaired waters are priority for restoration; actively restore (chestnut, yellow pine, hemlock, spruce, riverfront hardwoods, beaver meadows, fire dependent and adapted communities, open woodlands, TESLR spp); Timber harvest, fire and grassland/shrubland maintenance are used to manage vegetation structure and composition to improve resiliency of the ecosystems.	Increase activities to adapt to climate change (improve ecosystem resiliency, restore vegetation composition and structure, aggressive treatment of invasives); source drinking watersheds and impaired waters are priority for restoration; relocation or closure of some recreation sites in floodplains; a factor to consider in amount of recommended wilderness areas is the desire for future flexibility; actively restore (chestnut, yellow pine, hemlock, spruce, riverfront hardwoods, beaver meadows, fire dependent and adapted communities, open woodlands, TESLR spp); Timber harvest, fire and grassland/shrubland maintenance are used to manage vegetation structure and composition to improve resiliency of the ecosystems.	Source drinking watersheds and impaired waters are priority for restoration; actively restore (chestnut, yellow pine, hemlock, spruce, riverfront hardwoods, beaver meadows, fire dependent and adapted communities, open woodlands, TESLR spp); Timber harvest, fire and grassland/shrubland maintenance are used to manage vegetation structure and composition to improve resiliency of the ecosystems.