

Sep 7, 2011

George Washington Forest Service

Dear Forest Service,

Please consider the following comments while you develop and approve a final plan for the George Washington National Forest.

There are some good aspects of the Plan Revision. I support the ban on horizontal natural gas drilling proposed in Alternative G and other alternatives, and would like all hydrofracking banned in the Forest. I support the more scientifically-sound definition of early successional habitats used in this Plan Revision that includes habitat created by natural disturbances, not merely logged areas of a certain acreage. The Forest Service, accordingly, should not log in areas where natural processes are already creating this kind of habitat.

However, Alternative G, the Forest Service's preferred alternative, has some problems that should be fixed:

a. Alternative G limits new wilderness recommendations to a tiny fraction of potential acreage, despite a shortage of wilderness in this forest. The Forest Service would add only one new stand-alone wilderness. There is a need for more wilderness throughout the Appalachians, and the George Washington National Forest has some of the best potential areas in the region.

b. Alternative G allows road development and logging in significant portions of newly inventoried roadless areas and Virginia mountain treasure areas. Core areas such as these should be maintained free of logging and roadbuilding in order to provide more resilient ecosystems, to enhance carbon sequestration, and to help ensure that water sources remain clean and abundant in the face of climate change.

c. Alternative G targets old-growth forests, allowing logging in two of the forest types where old-growth is most likely to be found.

Old-growth forests comprise only 0.5% of the forests of the southeast. Because of its rarity, all remaining tracts should be protected.

d. Alternative G does not protect all of the Virginia Natural Heritage program sites recommended for protection in 1991 and 2000 and in subsequent biological diversity reports. This puts rare natural communities at risk.

e. Nearly half of the forest (48%) would be designated Prescription Area 13 (Mosaics of Habitat), a prescription that allows widespread logging and roadbuilding. This prescription area includes many areas of significant ecological or recreational value.

f. All public drinking watersheds within the national forest are identified, but less than a third of the land area within them are considered Priority Watersheds.

g. Horizontal drilling is not allowed in the Forest under the preferred alternative, but virtually all of the Forest is open for conventional gas drilling. Gas drilling can fragment habitat and degrade water quality

As you know, the George Washington National Forest is the largest collection of federal lands in the greater Chesapeake Bay watershed. It is not only incredibly important for the health of our planet but is also a treasured destination for many in Virginia and the surrounding region.

My family and I greatly enjoy hiking in the forest and would like to see it preserved and protected. Thank you for helping protect this important resource.

To protect this treasured forest. I recommend Alternative C.

Compared to Alternative G, Alternative C does a far better job at protecting roadless areas, protecting special biological areas, protecting old-growth, protecting water quality, and providing large backcountry area experiences that are very rare in the eastern US. The Forest Service should pick Alternative C, or a modified Alternative C, particularly one that is modified so that it is consistent with the Friends of Shenandoah Mountain proposal.

Please go to <http://vasierraclub.org/2011/06/george-washington-national-forest/> to find out more.

Sincerely,

Serenity Smile
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