



Virginia's Wood Turtle Gathers National Acclaim and Local Attention

The plight of Virginia's wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) received national attention when the Endangered Species Coalition named it one of the ten most important species in need of protection under the Endangered Species Act. And rightfully so—due to widespread habitat loss and fragmentation, the wood turtle's range is now restricted and it's primary habitat in the Southeast is the wild forests and streams of Virginia's Appalachian Mountains. The wildlife, fish and plants considered for the Endangered Species Coalition report were nominated by conservation and environmental organizations from around the country.

Wood turtles can be found in or near flowing, clear streams, in adjacent hardwood forests and old fields with favorite summer foods such as strawberries and raspberries. They eat mushrooms, leaves and many kinds of animals, including earthworms, grubs, snails, tadpoles and dead fish. They rarely venture far from flowing water but have strong homing instincts and will always try to return to their original location if they are displaced. Wood turtles will climb into bushes to eat berries or stomp on the ground to draw earthworms to the surface to eat.

The wood turtle's range is Northern Virginia and West Virginia up through the Northeast and upper

Midwest. However, the intense development of its native range has fragmented populations and shrunken available habitat which affects both the current population and limits their ability to repopulate areas. In addition, global warming threatens to alter their aquatic and terrestrial habitats.

Wood turtles face accumulating assault that can prevent many populations from persisting. The turtles may

step up for its protection, Virginia's Division of Natural Heritage (DNH), Department of Game & Inland Fisheries, and the US Forest Service are now acting to protect existing populations. DNH wants to see wood turtle habitat protected and the George Washington National Forest is planning on taking some small steps to safeguard the wood turtle.



Photo of female wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) in the George Washington National Forest. Photo by Steve Krichbaum

not reproduce enough or survive long enough to make up for collection, predation, or road kill as well as losses from habitat alteration or development.

Virginia is also home to the wood turtle's greatest fan and advocate, Steve Krichbaum. Thanks to Steve's constant monitoring of wood turtle populations and to his vigilant insistence that state and federal agencies

US Forest Service proposals, which include relocating foot trails away from nesting populations and removing the invasive autumn olive from these areas, are hopeful actions. But proposed use of herbicides and keeping roads open—which encourages both lawful and unlawful use of the roads—will continue to be clear and present dangers to wood turtles and their continually disappearing habitat.

Wild Virginia has asked for a more aggressive program which would include federal recognition of the wood turtle's endangered situation, creating special biological areas, and implementing immediate road closures in areas where wood turtles are not as free to roam as they should be. In addition, regular monitoring of populations where they are known to exist would go far in increasing the likelihood that wood turtles born in Virginia will grow, nest, reproduce, and ultimately thrive here in their Virginia home.

Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Nathan VanHooser

As the incoming President for 2009, I am both excited and wary of our prospects for positive change in the GWNF. We have new political leadership at every level yet much momentum remains from recent pro-resource extraction philosophies. Just as the US President's tone is set with achievements made in the first 100 days, we all need to push quickly to set a new trend in forest management. Please let your newly elected officials know you expect change at the Forest Service. It is certainly worth asking why the GWNF planning process lurches forward, spending money and public goodwill, while other National Forests are pausing to better understand how legal challenges define the validity of recent controversial rule changes.

I am very proud to announce [Wild Virginia has published our Drinking Water Study, *The State of Our Water*](#), on the Wild Virginia website. You can visit our website to find both the Executive Summary and the full report in downloadable

format. The study has already had a profound impact within the Shenandoah Valley with eight town/county localities and numerous Councils, Water Boards, and citizen groups recently passing drinking water resolutions based on Wild Virginia's work (article on Pg.5). I urge you to keep the topic of the GWNF's role in producing clean abundant drinking water in front of your local politicians and the Forest Service. Wild Virginia will continue to examine the effects of forest health on our communities in 2009 but we need your help to spread the word.

While a study on direct human impacts is a powerful tool for change, most of you are aware that impacts to our streams indicate far reaching, often complex problems in the watersheds of the GWNF. Many species in our forests will have long ago begun to suffer once we detect degraded water sources in our towns. Flowing waters seem inherently cleansing. It's easy to assume a sparkling stream in the woods is healthy

when in fact subtle temperature rises, sedimentation, or acidity have already taken a toll on water inhabitants. Stonefly larvae and native brook trout are examples of indicator species used to predict the underlying health of flowing water.

Perhaps our own ability to adapt to radical extremes of environment blinds us to the fragile sensitivity of most other plants and animals. I hope Wild Virginia's water study provides a path back to stewardship; at least for our small slice of Earth here in central and western Virginia.

While the study indicates the surface waters in the GWNF are generally good, this seems more likely the result of geography and good luck than careful planning. We must plan to keep our surface waters healthy. The water we raise to our lips to drink is the same as the silted river flowing through the fields, the same as the over-heated brook tumbling down the hillside. The stonefly larvae and brook trout can only die. We must act.

New Changes in 2009 for the Board of Wild Virginia & Wild Virginia is now an independent non-profit

We are very pleased to announce the 2009 slate of Officers for Wild Virginia. Nathan Van Hooser is taking the reins as President with large shoes to fill from the excellent work done the last two years by our outgoing leader, Eric Gilchrist. Eric is not wandering far; he is taking over treasury duties and has a major project on his hands thanks to our new independent non-profit status (more about that below). Chris Bowlen has accepted the challenge of the Vice Presidency and continues to be our vanguard in the Shenandoah Valley. Jennifer Johnson is our new Secretary with the daunting task of wrestling our spirited Board meetings into a coherent official record.



Jason Halbert, perennial Board member and catalyst for the very existence of Wild Virginia, has officially stepped back from the Board as of January, 2009. Jason's defense of ecosystems in Virginia's forests is legendary. We are glad he remains active in the local fight to preserve Virginia's last roadless areas and the Board will continue to seek his counsel.

All of our Board members bring unique talents and do a tremendous amount of work behind the scenes. We are always looking for additions to the Board; please contact Wild Virginia if you know someone who has the passion for direct involvement with preserving our forests.

One major administrative change this year is the branching out of Wild Virginia as an independent non-profit. We have thrived for years under the non-profit financial umbrella of the Virginia Organizing Project (VOP). We are indebted to VOP and wish to thank them for good advice, encouragement, and administrative support. Wild Virginia's decision to strike out on our own, financially, brings inherent costs but simplifies our fundraising process. One immediate change for our donors is that all checks can now be written to "Wild Virginia" directly. All donations continue to be tax deductible to the extent of IRS law.

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NEW UPDATE on DONATIONS:

Wild Virginia is now an independent 501(c)3 non-profit organization. We are no longer a partner of VOP. Please make checks payable to Wild Virginia and mail to PO Box 1065, Charlottesville, VA 22902. All donations are tax deductible to the extent of IRS law.

Ancient Mountain Sentinel is printed on 100% recycled, non-chlorine bleached paper. Your use of this or similar paper will prevent the destruction of native forests. **Recycle.... Pass this newsletter on to a friend!**

PLEASE BUY RECYCLED PAPER, OTHERWISE YOU ARE NOT COMPLETING THE CYCLE!

Wild Virginia Hikes and Outings

All hike info also available on our website: <http://www.wildvirginia.org>

A Full Outings Calendar : COME JOIN US!

Sunday, March 8th Little River Roadless Area

The Little River Roadless area is the largest inventoried roadless area in Virginia. Get a feel for the mature oak forests on this hike and see why this area meets the criteria for Wilderness designation.

The hike will start at 10 AM on Lynn Trail, just north of Briery Branch reservoir. We will continue on to Timber Ridge Trail, then return and descend Wolf Ridge Trail. Moderate difficulty, 6.5 miles.. Moderate stream crossing 3/4mi from the end of Wolf Ridge Trail.

Hike contact: Chris Bowlen, 540-289-6801. Please call to sign up. We need cars in 2 locations since weather or trail conditions could change the hike. To carpool from C'ville, meet at Java Java (2214 Ivy Road) at 8:15 AM.

Join Ernie Reed for a full weekend trip! Hike and camp overnight on Saturday, March 7th and then meet up with the above hike on March 8th. To be part of the extended weekend trip contact Ernie at 434-971-1647.

Sunday, April 26th Headwaters of the North River

The hike will start at an elevation of about 3800 ft. We will hike about 4 miles down along the headwaters of the North River to the Little River confluence and back. The spring thaw will likely present some nice interactions with the North River and possible sightings of rare mountain flowers and other spring flora.

This is a moderate 8-mile hike. We can adjust the difficulty level and length to fit the group.

Bring hiking shoes, appropriate cool weather clothing, lunch, water, and a camera (optional). We should be back in Charlottesville around 7:00 pm. Call hike contact for rain date information.

Meet at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road in C'ville at 8:30 AM, or at the trailhead at 10:30 AM. Trailhead is at Shenandoah Mountain Picnic Area and Rest Stop off Forest Road 85.

Hike contact: Eric Gilchrist, eric@ntelos.net (434) 293-8039. Contact Eric if you are planning on attending. You may also contact Eric with any questions, for directions, or if you'd rather meet the group at another rendezvous point.

Sunday, May 17th Wildflowers at Oak Knob

Immediately north of the Hone Quarry Reservoir lies the Oak Knob roadless area. Come join Wild Virginia as we explore the knobs overlooking the Reservoir and wander a length of Hone Quarry Run in the valley below. The spring weather should allow for excellent wildflower spotting along the Run. Trails ascend about 1200 feet from the Run to the ridgeline in short order but the overall loop is only seven miles.

Bring sturdy shoes, lunch and wildflower identification guides. Meet at Java Java, 2214 Ivy Road in Charlottesville by 8:15 AM. For more information or to meet the group at the trailhead, call the hike contact.

Hike contact: Nathan Van Hooser, 434-989-3929.

Forest Plan Update for the George Washington National Forest

Please Send Comments Now !

The meeting on February 5 in Woodstock was the last public forum scheduled by the Forest Service as it continues revising the Forest Plan for the GWNF. A draft plan is scheduled for release in April or May of 2009.

A great deal of uncertainty about the planning process remains. The Plan revision is proceeding under forest planning regulations that were revised in 2008. The 2008 rules have been challenged in federal court and the case is scheduled to be heard this month (February 2009). On a separate front, many organizations (including Wild Virginia) are urging the Obama administration to reinstate the original 1982 planning rules. These rules require a thorough environmental analysis of forest plans along with extensive public involvement. The 2008 rules lack these and other important requirements.

It is interesting to note that, with one minor exception, the GWNF is the only national forest that is proceeding with forest plan-

ning while the uncertainty about status of the planning rules remains. The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest in Arizona continues to perform some limited activities associated with revising their plan. All other national forests that were revising their plans have put the process "on hold."

Despite the cloudy picture surrounding the GWNF Plan, it is very important to submit comments about the plan NOW. If the planning process continues, there will be a 90-day comment period after the draft plan is released. However, submitting comments prior to the release of the draft plan is important.

There are numerous issues affecting the GWNF that are worthy of comment. A four-page Citizens Vision for the forest, *Forests for the Future*, is available from the Forest Planning page of our website. Wild Virginia and eight other organizations developed the report, which includes management priorities that we believe should be included in the revised Plan.

Two issues of high priority for Wild

Virginia are protecting public drinking water sources and creating Special Biological Areas in the forest. Please tell the Forest Service:

- Local drinking watersheds in the GWNF should be identified and managed appropriately.
- Impaired streams and reservoirs (as identified by VA Dept. of Environmental Quality) and their watersheds need special attention and should be prioritized for restoration efforts, such as road decommissioning and aquatic habitat improvement projects.
- Ground disturbing activities such as logging and road construction should not be conducted near impaired waters.
- A Special Biological Area (SBA) should be designated for wood turtles. In addition, all the sites recommended for SBA designation by VA Division of Natural Heritage should be adopted.

Wild Virginia Outings Report - Cross Country Skiing in WV

It was still dark when four adventurous Wild Virginia members begin our trek to a remote corner of West Virginia's Cabin Mountain range to do some cross-country skiing. Our drive to the quaint cross-country ski chalet of Whitegrass in Canaan Valley was almost as beautiful as our skiing voyage itself. When we wound up and over each mountain pass, the sun climbed higher in the sky, and we thanked Mother Nature for a fantastic day for skiing.

We rented our skis at the Whitegrass lodge, suited up, and then we headed out onto the trails. Since two of our members had never cross-country skied before,



our first foray was to the trail for beginners. Within fifteen minutes, however, everyone had mastered their skis and we decided to head up to Bald Knob, elevation 4,308 ft, the highest peak in the park. While we slowly ascended the ridgeline, the snow became deeper and our skis began to glide effortlessly in the soft powder. The pine trees, laden with inches of fresh snow made us feel like we were skiing in a

winter wonderland.

After several hours of delightfully hard work, we were rewarded with reaching the summit of Bald Knob. The view from the top was panoramic perfection itself, albeit quite blustery. After braving removal of our mittens for a quick photo, we reluctantly headed back towards civilization. On the way down, we amused ourselves with discussions of how skiing downhill in cross-country skis is much different than skiing uphill – less control! We arrived back at the lodge as the sun was beginning to slip behind Bald Knob. We returned our skis and partook in a delicious cup of hot cocoa before bidding adieu to our West Virginia winter wonderland.

Wild Virginia Drinking Water Study Yields Results

The recent release of *The State of Our Water: Managing and Protecting the Drinking Water Resources of the George Washington National Forest* has already made an impact. Both the full report and a four-page executive summary are available from our website, www.wildvirginia.org.

Using data from the report, Shenandoah Valley Network, Rockingham Community Alliance for Preservation, and other groups and individuals helped communicate the tremendous importance of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) as a local source of public drinking water. As a result, eight localities and 15 organizations have adopted resolutions calling on the Forest Service to identify and appropriately manage local drinking watersheds in the GWNF (see list below). Other groups and localities will be considering similar

resolutions in the coming weeks. These watersheds occupy approximately 44.5% of the GWNF land in Virginia and provide drinking water to 22 communities in western Virginia.



Skidmore Fork emptying into Switzer Lake. Switzer Lake is a drinking water source for the City of Harrisonburg and some Rockingham County residents.

At the final two public meetings for the GWNF Plan revision (January, February 2009), the Forest Service announced they would identify public

drinking watersheds in the revised plan. Further, they plan to use water quality measures adopted in the Jefferson National Forest Plan in 2004 in the revised plan for the GWNF. Both of these are positive steps, with the Forest Service responding to comments they have recently received. The Jefferson National Forest water quality measures are more stringent than those in the current (1993) plan for the GWNF. We commend the Forest Service for being responsive. As the planning process continues, we will be taking a close look at the water quality measures to determine if they are appropriate and adequate.

We want to thank the local communities as well as the many individuals and organizations that communicated their concerns to the Forest Service!

Localities and Groups that have Passed a Resolution in Response to the Wild Virginia Drinking Water Study

- Clarke County Board of Supervisors (BOS)
- Dayton Town Council
- Friends of the North Fork Shenandoah River
- Friends of the Shenandoah River
- Harrisonburg City Council
- Page County BOS
- Page County Water Quality Committee
- Potomac Conservancy
- Preserve Frederick
- Pure Water Forum
- Rockingham Community Alliance for Preservation
- Middletown Town Council
- Rockingham County BOS
- Scenic 340 Project
- Shenandoah Forum
- Shenandoah Riverkeeper
- Shenandoah Valley Network
- Shenandoah Valley Soil & Water Conservation District
- Timberville Town Council
- Trout Unlimited Virginia Council
- Valley Conservation Council
- Virginia Wilderness Committee
- Warren County BOS

Wild Virginia Earth Day Celebration Postponed



In our last newsletter, we sent out a 'Save the Date' for an Earth Day celebration on Saturday, April 18th. Since then we have become aware of a concert at the Charlottesville Pavilion on Saturday, April 18th as part of the Charlottesville Earth Week and Eco Fair.

Rather than compete with this fabulous event, we have decided to postpone our annual party. Wild Virginia will have a booth set up at the Eco Fair at the Pavilion on April 18th. Please stop by! For more information on the Eco Fair, the concert, or the Earth Week events, please visit: www.earthweek.org.

Please stay tuned for more details on our annual party! If you would like to be on the planning committee for the party, please contact Jennifer Johnson at jenn276@gmail.com.



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