



## Forest Planning in George Washington National Forest Comes to a Halt - Again!

### Bush-Era Planning Regulations Struck Down by Federal Judge

Forest planning on the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) has come to a halt. Again. At least for now.

On June 30, Judge Claudia Wilkin of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California determined that the national forest planning regulations, incorporating changes made by the Bush administration in April 2008, do not comply with the Endangered Species Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. The GWNF and many other national forests have been guided by these rules as they develop or revise their Forest Plans. Judge Wilkin's decision prohibits national forests from continuing to use the 2008 rules. Her ruling was the result of two separate lawsuits challenging the rules, brought by a group of conservation organizations represented by Earthjustice.

If this story line sounds familiar, it is no coincidence. Long-time readers may recall that the GWNF began revising its Forest Plan with

a series of public meetings in early 2007. That process was guided by planning regulations adopted by the Bush administration in 2005. But in March 2007, Judge Phyllis Hamilton (also a U.S. District Court judge in California) struck down the 2005 rules, finding them in violation of federal law



North River upstream of the Staunton Reservoir, as it flows through the Little River Roadless Area.

(see our Spring 2007 newsletter for article, available at our website, [www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org)). In order to comply with Judge Hamilton's ruling, the 2008 rules were developed. Forest planning for the GWNF then resumed

with a series of public meetings beginning in July, 2008. The revision process has continued, until now.

The federal court ruling is a very positive development, and one that many conservationists have anticipated since the challenging lawsuits were filed. Though this adds uncertainty to the process, it means the revised Forest Plan for the GWNF will not be completed under the inadequate (and illegal) 2008 planning rules.

The next steps are unclear at this point, as the Obama administration must decide how they want to proceed. The Forest Service could appeal the court decision and attempt to reinstate the 2008 rules. At the moment, they have the option of proceeding with forest planning under either the original 1982 rules or the 2000 rules (developed by the Clinton administration). Most conservation groups endorse the 1982 rules. Though the 2000 (continued on pg.4)

## Support for Protection of Drinking Water Resources Continues to Grow

Support for stronger protection of drinking water resources in the GWNF, through a revised Forest Plan, continues to grow. To date, 35 organizations have adopted resolutions calling on the USFS to improve watershed and water quality management. The resolutions have been submitted to the

USFS as comments on the revised Forest Plan. Fourteen of the organizations are localities (county boards of supervisors, city & town councils). Several other organizations are also public entities (e.g., planning district commissions, soil & water conservation districts). A list of the organizations and resolutions can be found at our website.

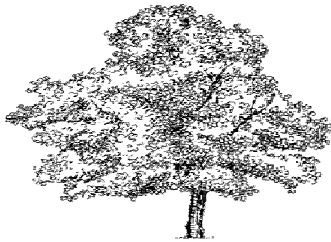
In July, Wild Virginia submitted comments to the USFS on drinking water and related issues, including non-native invasive species, roadless and wilderness areas, and woody biomass. Please visit our website to read our comments and let us know what you think!

## Wild Virginia Update

Letter from our President, Nathan VanHooser

In the larger effort to absorb real environmental sustainability into the mindset of corporate America, I am currently witnessing a fascinating exercise at a medium sized organization. New management at the top of the organization has injected the idea of sustainability and a task force is now wrestling with what that means. One of the immediate issues to confront is what the terms mean – “what is sustainability for this company?” And how powerful a change agent is the task force willing to be?

Some of the suggested background readings are interesting in that they presented views of



“sustainability” from, essentially, corporate green washing to nebulous imagining. Only one article seemed to take a practical view. The piece references an interesting blog by Michael Tobis called “My Little World (and Yours Too)” that can be read at <http://www.grist.org/article/my-little-world-and-yours-too/>. The point of this blog is to bring the lofty big-picture visions of sustainability down to an individual level using a clever personal asteroid analogy. But even that reading didn’t go for the reality of day to day sustainability practices.

A vision is a very necessary item in a corporation’s set of plans but we don’t need to all agree on what the end point must look like. While important questions abound about where it’s best to drive “windows down” versus “AC cranked high”, there is little debate that certain practices, like using less car transportation, will move us in the right direction. Travel presents great ex-

amples. Finding work close to home so that alternative transport is viable helps move towards sustainability, however that word is envisioned. Using video conferencing technology instead of hopping transcontinental flights will unquestionably get us closer to right-living. These examples are real world issues for the organization that I’m watching wrestle with the sustainability question.

Our own wilderness sustainability quest at Wild Virginia also has its share of visions which are difficult to define but not so hard to move towards, once one looks at the road right under one’s feet. The more ‘wild’ an area’s designation, the better off it will fare. When in doubt, go for less intensive management. Lower commercial technology is better. Higher ethics guiding scientific technology helps too. These are practical guidelines that will move us towards a better future, regardless how hazy the details seem today.

## Volunteer Spotlight

Kim Skibinski – Wild Virginia’s New Outreach Coordinator

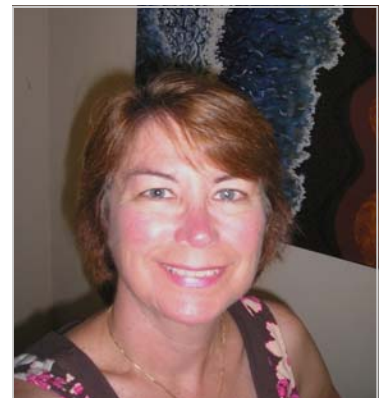
Kim Skibinski recently joined Wild Virginia’s ranks, volunteering to help us with our outreach and education activities. With an abundance of energy and enthusiasm, she has hit the ground running!

Kim holds a BA from the University of Virginia, majoring in English Literature and Sociology. Since college, she has raised two children and worked and volunteered in a variety of fields, including many years with the Red Cross and military support organizations. She has enjoyed living all across the country--her recent return to the Charlottesville area is move number 32!

Kim is excited about working in the local nonprofit community as Membership Manager with the Center for Nonprofit Excellence. She also enjoys learning about, and supporting, “green” living while working at Blue Ridge Eco Shop. Days off find Kim mostly outdoors walking, hiking (she especially recommends Wild Virginia outings!), reading, appreciating the arts, and exploring Charlottesville to see what’s changed and what remains the same.

If you have questions about our work, know of some upcoming outreach opportunities, or have ideas on improving our efforts to inform citizens about our work, our events, and

conservation issues in the national forests, please feel free to contact Kim at [Kskibinski12@gmail.com](mailto:Kskibinski12@gmail.com). She would love to hear from you!



*Ancient Mountain Sentinel*  
Volume XI, Number II - Summer 2009



David Hannah  
Conservation Director  
PO Box 1065  
Charlottesville, VA 22902  
(434) 971-1553  
<http://www.wildvirginia.org>  
[dhannah@wildvirginia.org](mailto:dhannah@wildvirginia.org)

#### Board of Directors

Nathan VanHooser —President  
Chris Bowlen—Vice President  
Jennifer Johnson—Secretary  
Eric Gilchrist—Treasurer

Jen Creasy  
Cynthia Hurst  
Ernie Reed  
Kristin Taverna

Carolyn Ettinger—Newsletter Editor

#### 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, August 30 Ramsey's Draft Wilderness

We will enjoy the stream-side trail and many stream crossings as we hike between the trailhead at Mountain House and the beginning of the Wilderness Area. This may be a good opportunity to hike in Texas or sandals. However, poison ivy is abundant along sections of the trail, so long pants are advised!

Before we begin our hike, we'll discuss and identify a few of the non-native invasive plant species that are plaguing our forests and what we can do to combat them.

Afterwards we'll hike for about 6 miles on flat trails to see remnants of old growth forests. If it is a warm day, we'll cool off in the stream and pools.

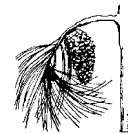
Meet at the Mountain House Trailhead at 10AM. We'll make arrangements for carpooling from Charlottesville or other originating points.

Contact: Eric Gilchrist at 434-882-3179 or [ericg@ntelos.net](mailto:ericg@ntelos.net)

walk up along an abandoned trail/roadbed and lunch on the banks of the North Fork. There are a few stream crossings but we expect low water conditions. There is no swimming in Hearthstone Lake but there will be no shortage of wading opportunities upstream.

Our hike will begin at the Hearthstone Lake parking area at 10am. Directions are available on our website. Charlottesville carpoolers should meet at Shenandoah Joes (2214 Ivy Road by Sneak Reviews) at 8:15 for an 8:30 departure.

Contact Ernie Reed, hike leader, if you are planning on coming or if you have any questions: 434-971-1647 or [lec@wildvirginia.org](mailto:lec@wildvirginia.org).



#### Sunday, October 18 Down the Mountain

From Reddish Knob, the highest peak along Shenandoah Mt., run a series of ridge trails that bottom out near the edge of the George Washington NF. We will make this decent along the Timber Ridge and Wolf Ridge Trails.

The hike will be a one way stroll of about 7.5 miles with a car positioned to meet us at the bottom. While the trail will be rocky in places and will demand good boots, the day will be downhill all the way.

A shorter version of 4.5 miles is possible for those with balky knees or time constraints. To carpool from C'ville, meet at Shenandoah Joe's location on Ivy Road (next to Sneak Reviews) by 8:30am.

For more information or to meet the group at the trailhead, contact Nathan Van Hooser – 434-989-3929

#### Sunday, September 27 Buck Mountain Trail

Join us for an early autumn afternoon exploring the main drainage of the 30,000 acre Little River Roadless Area.

Our hike begins at Hearthstone Lake and will follow the Buck Mountain trail along Little River. This is an easy "up and back" 6.5 mile hike along flat, wooded floodplains, becoming more mountain-like past the confluence of the North and South Forks of Little River to the base of Buck Mountain.

While more intrepid hikers might be tempted to continue up Buck Mountain, we will instead



## Good News for Roadless Area Protection and Legislative Update

Protection of Roadless Areas is once again in the news - and the news is good! On August 5, the 9<sup>th</sup> U.S. District Court of Appeals ruled that the Bush administration acted improperly when it repealed the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule and replaced it with a state by state process for determining management of these critical areas. The ruling affirmed an earlier federal court decision.

The result is that, at least for now, the roadless area rule is back in place for all national forests except those in Idaho (which have their own roadless area policy) and the Tongass National Forest in Alaska (which is exempted from the rule). Future rulings could come down from the 10<sup>th</sup> district, where the application of the rule has been challenged. As always, stay tuned for further developments.

Prior to this newest twist, Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack in May essentially called a year-long "timeout" on projects within roadless areas in our national forests (excluding those in Idaho). Any new projects in these vital areas must be personally approved by Secretary Vilsack. The move should allow Congress and the Obama administration adequate time to develop a permanent policy for roadless areas.

Though the timeout is ostensibly a good thing, Secretary Vilsack recently approved a road construction and logging project in the South Revilla Roadless Area in the Tongass NF. His approval certainly casts doubt on the Obama administration's level of commitment to protecting these important areas.

As Wild Virginia and many other organizations have maintained for years, legislation is needed to permanently protect roadless areas once and for all. The saga of managing roadless areas is a long and twisted one, lengthier and every bit as confusing as the tale of forest planning regulations described in the cover story. We should move beyond the current circumstance in which the rule is upheld, challenged, or revised based upon the leanings of the sitting president.

There is promising news on this front. The Roadless Area Conservation Act of 2009 is being developed in the Senate, and would permanently protect inventoried roadless areas in all national forests. Virginia Senators Jim Webb and Mark Warner have both signed on as original cosponsors of the bill, thus following in the footsteps of former Senator John Warner, who championed this legislation in previous years. Please contact our senators and thank them for their support, and contact members of the House of Representatives to encourage them to de-

velop a companion bill. Unlike the past eight years, we now have a president willing to sign such a bill when it reaches his desk.

.....

In another positive development, a very significant milestone was reached on June 26<sup>th</sup>, when the House of Representatives passed the American Clean Energy and Security Act. This is the first bill passed by a federal congressional body that addresses global warming in a serious manner, creating a cap on carbon emissions while encouraging energy efficiency and clean energy production.

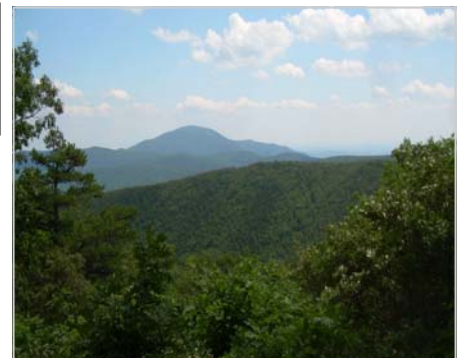
Yet there are some serious flaws in the bill. Of particular concern is the promotion of biomass as a clean energy source. While biomass holds promise as a renewable source of energy, harvesting mature forests for biomass is probably not a winning strategy for combating global warming. Further, the bill affords only limited protection to national forests and the myriad resources and benefits provided by these standing forests. Hopefully the Senate will develop a similar bill that corrects these and other shortcomings. There is no doubt that legislation dealing with global warming is long overdue.

### Forest Planning in GWNF Comes to a Halt

(continued from p.1)

rules were generally given positive reviews by environmentalists, they have never been used to create or revise a Forest Plan. So legal and procedural uncertainties would probably surface, and the degree of environmental protection provided by these rules is untested.

Wild Virginia continues to monitor the process and stay involved with the GWNF Plan. We hope you will too. Please visit our website if you want to read the recent court ruling, a New York Times article about the ruling, or a short letter by the GWNF Supervisor.



Kelley Mountain Roadless Area  
George Washington National Forest

## Species Spotlight: Timber Rattlesnake, The Buzz in the Forest

Article and photo by Rick Wellbeloved-Stone

*Crotalus horridus*, roughly translated “dreadful rattle,” is better known as the Timber Rattlesnake. While the buzz of its rattle strikes fear in most, for many of us it is an exhilarating thrill and the true sound of wildness. Regardless, for all of us it is an immediate reminder that we need to pay attention. Pay attention first to where we are, and perhaps more importantly, to where the buzz is coming from. None of us wants to get bitten, though if we did, our chances of death are extremely slight given on average less than 10 people die from snakebites in this country, with 9 of those coming from diamondback rattlers, and about half of them coming from snake handlers in Baptist churches.

Fortunately that unmistakable rattle reminds us to pay attention. But more deeply, it reminds us that we need to be more aware of the forest all around us. The plight of a species so ancient in this modern age is nothing new to us. The plight of the forests at large is nothing new. But when our very safety is threatened, it rattles our cage.

Much about the timber rattlesnake is well known and documented. Basic biology such as size (specimens up to 6 feet have been reported, though 5 feet is more likely), life span (up to 30 years in captivity and 20 or so in the wild), diet, mating, and hibernation habits are all well reported. Unfortunately, as for all snakes world wide, misconceptions about timber rattlesnakes abound while more important truths remain unknown.

Something as simple as known deaths from timber rattlesnake bites is extremely hard to find even though statements of them being deadly are frequently made. Ru-

mors and stories spread quickly of people being bitten or even “attacked” (like the recent, now debunked, story of a man being bitten five times by a timber rattler in Shenandoah National Park), while substantiated stories are rare or non-existent. And perhaps the most important information, the population status of the timber rattlesnake across its range, is largely unknown. Since it is extremely difficult to study in the wild, commonly used and accepted catch and release methodology doesn’t work, forc-



Timber rattlesnake on Loft Mountain in Shenandoah National Park.

ing studies regarding their populations to rely more on anecdotal information than solid scientifically gathered and statistically supported data.

As a result, the timber rattlesnake is not given any protection under the Endangered Species Act despite widely accepted estimates of its population declining by 10% annually throughout much of its range. Different states have given it different levels of protection, but in Virginia it is given no special status or real protection (excluding its variant, the Canebrake Rattlesnake). Indeed the population is officially considered stable in Virginia in its remaining habitat.

Habitat loss and fragmentation are the greatest threats to the continued health and existence of timber rattlesnakes. Contiguous forests of at least

5,000 to 10,000 acres are needed for any given population of timber rattlesnakes. The species is known to use the same communal hibernation den site every year, and the loss of a den site is detrimental to the entire population using that den. Current recommendations regarding den protection include a 1.5-2.5 mile radius around a known den site to protect it from all disturbances. Logging of the area surrounding that perimeter should be selective and done during the fall and winter months.

In addition to protecting den areas from unrestricted logging and other disturbances (including roads of any kind), the den sites’ actual locations need to be kept secret and not revealed to the general public. The disturbance of any remaining population of timber rattlesnakes by collectors or others can be devastating since they have a relatively low reproduction potential.

Females do not become sexually mature until they are 7 or more years old, and then only reproduce every three years or so. They give birth to 9 live young on average and are figured to only reproduce 2-3 times through the course of their lives. This low reproductive rate combined with the loss of den sites and forest habitat requires us to pay attention to the populations that remain. Their loss is our loss and we need to ensure they continue to thrive, especially if we wish to have the wilderness remain a place that allows us, indeed requires us, to pay attention.

*Rick Wellbeloved-Stone is a science teacher at Charlottesville High School. With his students, he has explored the caves, mountains, bogs, and forests of the Virginias as well as remote areas of the Everglades, Costa Rica, the Grand Canyon, and Yosemite National Park.*



Breathtaking Beauty!  
Conservation activism!  
Hiking, Climbing, Biking, Skiing!  
Nature at its most glorious!  
Exploring the limits of human endurance and passion!  
...all of this and more at the  
2009 Wild and Scenic Environmental Film Festival  
Coming this winter to Staunton and Charlottesville  
Hosted by Wild Virginia and Blue Ridge Mountain Sports.  
Stay tuned for more information

**BECOME A WILD VIRGINIA FAN ON FACEBOOK!**

Wild Virginia has a new Facebook page! When you search for Wild Virginia and click "Become a Fan" you can stay up to date on future events, receive action alerts and news stories. Also, suggesting that your friends become fans of Wild Virginia will help expand the community that's working to protect Virginia's wild places. We look forward to seeing you in our little spot of cyberspace!



P.O. Box 1065  
Charlottesville, VA 22902  
[www.wildvirginia.org](http://www.wildvirginia.org)