



## **Why More Wilderness on the Mon?**

### **A rare thing in the East & West Virginia**

- Eastern Wilderness is rare. Only about 4% of the National Wilderness Preservation System lies east of the Mississippi River where over 60% of the U.S. population resides. Furthermore, less than ½ of 1% of West Virginia's land base is in the NWPS. Currently, less than 9% of the Monongahela NF is Wilderness, nearly half the National Forest System average.
- Unlike many of our neighboring states West Virginia's Mon National Forest still has lands left that are suitable for Wilderness designation, and is centrally positioned in the East to provide more Wilderness recreation for much of the U.S. population. Even with new Wilderness designated on suitable federal lands, the amount of Wilderness in WV will always be very small, but very appealing!

### **Wild Areas on the Mon are under threat**

Like many National Forests across the country, wild areas on the Monongahela National Forest face a number of threats. Protections that wild areas used to have can no longer be relied upon. Special areas currently managed as 'backcountry areas' (6.2 areas) will no longer be protected from logging and road building if proposed changes to the Forest Management Plan take place. Cars already have been allowed to drive there in spite of the management guidelines that say no passenger cars are allowed. And an agenda item at a Jan. 2005 meeting of the State Forest Management Review Committee was how to get more timber harvested off the Mon.

It is also possible that a management plan will be adopted that nearly eliminates, or greatly reduces, backcountry areas altogether. Many wild areas were formerly protected under the Clinton era Roadless Rule. The current administration has refused to uphold that rule. These changes in management could open up wild places on the Mon to:

- ✓ **Logging**
- ✓ **Energy Development**
  - **Oil and Gas drilling**
  - **Pipelines**
  - **Inappropriately sited industrial wind facilities**
  - **Coal mining**
  - **Hard-rock mining**
- ✓ **Road Building**

Management of Wilderness areas is defined by Congress and remains constant. It is the strongest protection we can grant special places on federal public land. Wilderness designation is the only way we can assure these special places are protected, for our state's environmental health and for our citizens to enjoy.

## People ♥ Wilderness!

- ***Wild and Wonderful*** is West Virginia's state motto, our heritage, the theme that touches deep chords within us and draws us to this State, to its outstanding natural beauty.
- Designated Wilderness areas are ideal spots for a wide variety of outdoor pursuits including hunting, hiking/backpacking, fishing, paddling, skiing and photography. A 2003 study done by the Outdoor Industry Foundation found that over 26 million people in West Virginia and our surrounding states participate in Wilderness activities. Wilderness also helps define the scenic beauty that travelers driving our country roads marvel at.
- A current Trout Unlimited bumper sticker reads, 'Wilderness: A Great Place to Hunt and Fish'. TU has identified an important reason to protect wilderness: So West Virginians will always have high quality places to angle for Brook Trout or pursue an elusive Whitetail in an undisturbed setting similar to what their ancestors might have enjoyed.
- Wilderness recreation on the Monongahela National Forest continues to grow every year. Natural resource tourism and recreation throughout the Mon is one of the key parts of our state's economy and continues to grow. As the demand for wilderness recreation grows, we must make sure that West Virginia has an adequate, permanently protected supply.
- Existing wilderness areas in West Virginia are extremely popular and well used. Creating new areas would help relieve some of the pressure on those areas and help enhance and diversify the Wilderness experience for visitors.

### **Wilderness is valuable beyond tourism and recreation**

- Beyond tourism, Wilderness provides the people of West Virginia with a highly sought after and valuable quality-of-life. Wilderness provides priceless clean water, clean air and a healthy environment for neighboring West Virginian communities.
- Watershed protection results in protection of clean drinking water as well as a decreased potential for flooding downstream.
- A 2000 Survey done by the U.S. Forest Service showed that the most important things about Wilderness areas to the majority of the American public have nothing to do with setting a single boot into an area. The highest ranking values were:
  - **Protecting water quality**
  - **Protecting air quality**
  - **Protecting wildlife habitat**
  - **Legacy: Knowing future generations will have wilderness**
  - **Protecting rare and endangered species**
  - **Providing scenic beauty**
  - **Existence: Knowing wilderness areas exist**
  - **Protecting water quality**

**Over the years we have developed and forever changed so much of West Virginia, some good, some not good at all. The small remnants of wilderness public land we in this generation choose to preserve will serve as testimony to a vision in which some semblance of balance with our natural world, and with the outdoor recreation opportunities it provides, are approached. So let us speak, not just for ourselves, but for West Virginians of the future, and secure protection of some of the wildest lands left in WV and the East.**