

## **Roaring Plains Wilderness Area (Proposed)**

**Size:** approx. 15,138 acres

**Location:** Randolph, Pendleton, Grant Counties

**Watershed:** Cheat, South Branch Potomac

**USGS Topographic Maps:** Laneville, Hopeville

**Elevation Range:** 2360 – 4770 ft

**Dominant Vegetation:** Red Spruce, Mixed Hardwoods, Mesic, Open Brush

The Roaring Plains and Flatrock Plains areas comprise the highest plateaus in the eastern United States. Combined with Red Creek Plains they are the geologic backbone of West Virginia that is called the Allegheny Front and make up three potential wilderness areas, Roaring Plains North, East and West. Most of the proposed areas have been managed as semi-primitive, non-motorized for the past 20 years. The Roaring Plains Wilderness Areas would legally be comprised of three separate wilderness areas, as they are divided by a pipeline and a high clearance road to access it. The three

areas are bounded either by this road and pipeline or the private land that surrounds them. The proposed wilderness areas can be accessed at multiple locations by both trails and roads. Of special note is that Roaring Plains towers 3,100 above the Potomac River at the east base of the mountain. This is the greatest vertical difference in West Virginia, even more than Spruce Knob, the highest point in the state, has directly above its lowest base. Red Creek Plains has similar vertical difference on its east slope to the Potomac River. Not only can many cliff areas be found on top of the Plains, but also at least seven known high elevation wetlands (sphagnum bogs), the highest in the state, are present and are home to rare plants and animals such as the Snowshoe Hare, Bog Lemming, Bobcat and fisher. These bogs serve to regulate stream flow at the headwaters for both sides of the eastern continental divide. The area also provides habitat for the federally threatened Cheat Mountain Salamander. In addition to the native spruce forest on top of the Plains, there are extensive and virtually impenetrable laurel and rhododendron thickets that help to maintain a mystery of the area and keep people on the designated trails. In late June the laurels bloom and there is a spectacular show of countless acres of pink and white blossoms.

The Plains are of unusual and exceptional scenic value and offer outstanding remote wilderness experiences for many people. The area offers many opportunities for solitude of unusually good quality. Backpacking is a popular way people enjoy the Plains. Area trails have been well designed to provide loops within the area as well as connecting to Dolly Sods and even further north to Canaan Valley. Deer, turkey, bear and other native faunal populations are abundant and already provide outstanding hunting opportunities. On all sides of the Plains, there are many rocky outcrops and other areas affording spectacular and unparalleled views of the surrounding mountainous countryside. To date, at least forty-two viewpoints have been located and only three of them are on designated trails. An average of about 180 inches (fifteen feet) of snow fall every year on the Plains offering outstanding opportunities for both cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. Hiking, hunting and fishing opportunities are also of exceptional quality. The Plains are less visited than the adjacent Dolly Sods Wilderness area to the north primarily due to lesser road access as well as offering fewer miles of designated trails. The area offers many opportunities for solitude of unusually good quality.



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