

## Upper Shavers Fork Wilderness Area (Proposed)

**Size:** approx. 14,168 acres

**Location:** Randolph, Pocahontas Counties

**Watershed:** Cheat, Tygart

**USGS Topographic Maps:** Snyder Knob, Cass

**Elevation Range** (approx.): 3,600 – 4,751 ft

**Dominant Vegetation:** Sugar Maple/Beech/ Yellow Birch/Red Spruce

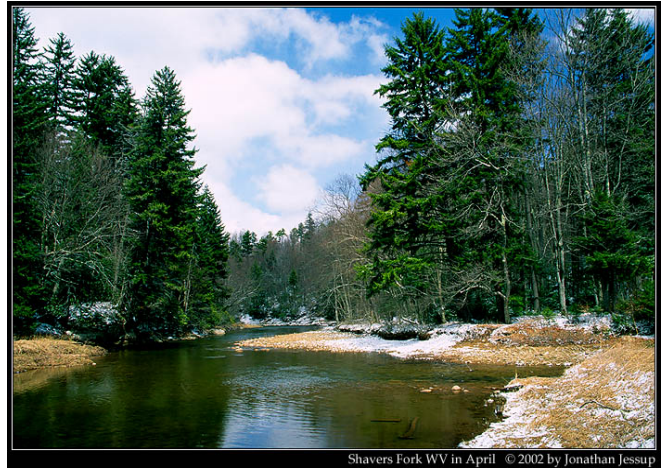


Photo © Jonathan Jessup

Shavers Fork WV in April. © 2002 by Jonathan Jessup

Shavers Fork is a major tributary of the Cheat River, which flows north out of Parsons to join the Monongahela River. Shavers Fork starts at elevations well over 4,000 feet and runs for the

first 20 miles at over 3,500 feet. This makes its headwaters the longest and highest river reach in West Virginia. Similar to the existing Laurel Fork North and South Wilderness Areas to the northeast, two contiguous potential wilderness areas exist in the Upper Shavers Fork region, with only the river and adjacent rail corridor running between them. Upper Shavers Fork East would be bounded on the east and north by FS road 235, and on the south by FS 235. Upper Shavers Fork West would be bounded on the south and west mostly by private land and on the north by Snyder Knob.

The upper reaches of the Shavers Fork watershed are made up of high-elevation sub-Arctic forests of Red Spruce and northern hardwoods. There are small stands of Balsam Fir, which are re-emerging. Also there are extensive stands of beech, a tree which is currently affected by a plague that puts stress on this food source for the Black Bear and associated forest species. Both of the potential wilderness areas provide critical habitat for several federally threatened and endangered species as well as other rare ones. In both areas, there have been occurrences of the federally endangered West Virginia Northern Flying Squirrel and the federally threatened Cheat Mountain Salamander. Upper Shavers Fork West also provides habitat for the federally endangered Running Buffalo Clover as well as rare species including Butternut and the Southern Rock Vole. The Upper Shavers Fork region contains six Tier 2.5 designated streams, able to provide habitat for trout in their clear, cold waters. Most of the tributary streams that feed Shavers Fork all hold native trout populations. The area also has numerous wetlands.

The Upper Shavers Fork areas provide ample opportunity for primitive and unconfined recreation. These lands are the wild heart of the region, which is renowned for its excellent fishing, hunting, hiking and paddle sports. While there are no established trails, old railroad grades can be followed up Second Fork and other sections. Backpacking and horseback riding opportunities here are extensive, partly due to the proximity of Snowshoe Resort. The *Cheat Mountain Salamander*, a recreational rail bus, regularly takes visitors up the corridor between the two proposed areas. Designating wilderness on both sides of this corridor would add to the attraction of these trips, and the rail bus could potentially drop off hikers and anglers in the otherwise hard to reach center of these areas. This would provide a recreational experience like no other in the eastern United States.

The Monongahela National Forest and its associated northern hardwood and sub-Arctic environments make this land mass unique in the mid-Atlantic states and North America. By preserving the Upper Shavers Fork East and West as designated wilderness, the state and region will receive benefits that include clean water, abundant wildlife, recreational opportunities, threatened & endangered species preservation, scientific values, and continued recovery of this large, unique and fragile ecosystem.