

## **Big Draft Wilderness Area (Proposed)**

**Size:** approx. 5,300 acres

**Location:** Greenbrier County

**Watershed:** Greenbrier

**USGS Topographic Maps:** Anthony, White Sulphur Springs

**Elevation Range** (approx.): 1,800 – 3,121 ft

**Dominant Vegetation:** Mixed Oaks, Hardwoods



Photo © Brent Rowley

Situated on the southern tip of the Monongahela National Forest, the proposed Big Draft Wilderness Area is just 5 miles north of White Sulphur Springs, WV. The area is bounded on the north by County Road 21/2, on the south and east by Big Draft Road (County Road 36/1) and on the west by private land. The entire area has been managed by the U.S. Forest Service as semi-primitive non-motorized (management prescription 6.2) for the past 18 years. Its primary uses are hiking, fishing, hunting and whitewater paddling.

This area is covered mostly with second growth, mixed oak forest with patches of hickory, Black Locust, and Sassafras. The slopes above Anthony Creek are rugged and steep, supporting dense Rhododendron thickets. At the bottom of the gorge near the water is a remarkable mature Eastern Hemlock and White Pine forest.

The area provides critical habitat for various rare and threatened species. The Small Whorled Pogonia, a member of the orchid family, is found here, and is listed as a threatened species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Candy Darter, a member of the perch family, and Barbara's Buttons, a type of aster, are both U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Species of Concern found in the area. Several other occurrences of rare species have been noted as well.

Located in the Ridge and Valley Province of the Appalachian Mountains, the proposed Big Draft Wilderness is underlain predominantly with shale formed during the Devonian Period and sandstone of the Mississippian Period. Anthony Creek meanders through the area for nearly 5 miles, picking up Laurel Creek and Big Draft Run before its confluence with the Greenbrier River near the town of Anthony.

The proposed Big Draft Wilderness Area has outstanding recreational opportunities. The area boasts over 13 miles of established system hiking trails with connectivity to many more. It is adjacent to Blue Bend Recreation Area, which has a campground and trailhead for the Blue Bend Loop Trail, which travels through the proposed wilderness and has multiple scenic overlooks. The Anthony Creek Trail can be accessed from this loop and connects the system with the Greenbrier River Trail and the town of Anthony. The area has long been popular for the wilderness quality whitewater trip down Anthony Creek which challenges paddlers with up to Class III rapids. The trout, and small-mouth and rock bass fishing along this route is excellent as well, offering multiple ways to become immersed in the area's solitude and scenic beauty.

The Big Draft area could provide designated wilderness for a region of the forest that has none. The Lewisburg and White Sulphur Springs region has a strong and growing natural resource tourism economy. Having designated wilderness nearby would only strengthen the area's attractiveness both for tourism and business development /relocation.