

## **Cheat Mountain Wilderness Area (Proposed)**

**Size:** approx. 12,127 acres

**Location:** Randolph County

**Watershed:** Cheat, Tygart

**USGS Topographic Maps:** Beverly East,  
Wildell, Gladly

**Elevation Range** (approx.): 2,680 – 3,965 ft

**Dominant Vegetation:** Sugar Maple/Beech/  
Yellow Birch; Red Spruce/Balsam Fir; Cherry

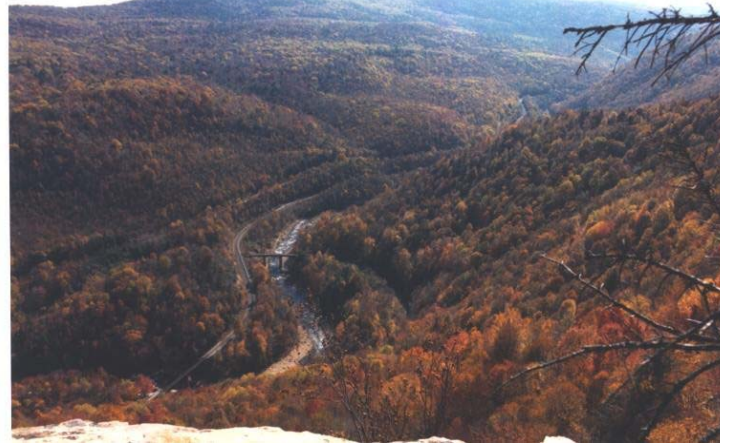


Photo © Zach Henderson

The proposed Cheat Mountain Wilderness lies on Cheat Mountain west of the Shavers Fork and south of Bemis. It is bordered on the north by a gas pipeline, on the east by the Shavers Fork of Cheat River, on the south by a gated Forest Service logging road, and on the west by National Forest and private lands. About 70% of the area is relatively flat forested plateau at an average of 3650 feet elevation; the eastern 30% is cut by five or six streams and rugged forested terrain dropping steeply to the river. High Falls of Cheat, a favorite destination for hikers and excursion train visitors, is on the eastern border. The geology is primarily infertile Pottsville sandstone. This area is relatively remote. The most direct access is on foot by the gated logging road at the south; by the gated pipeline access road at the north; or by the steep pipeline swath up from Bemis.

As late as the early 1900's, vast stands of Red Spruce covered nearly the entire upper portion of the watershed and supported a variety of plant and wildlife species. Two species dependent on this ecosystem are currently federally listed endangered species (the Northern Flying Squirrel and the Cheat Mountain Salamander). Several other plant, animal, and bird species thrive best in this environment, including Saw-whet Owls, Northern Goshawk, Snowshoe Hare, Northern Water Shrew, Long-stalked Holly, White Monkshood and several rare plants growing in scour zones along the river.

The once pristine conditions of this area were severely altered by logging in the early 1900's; a railroad was built beside the river and temporary rail lines were laid up most tributaries; coal was deep-mined in the Fishing Hawk Creek drainage and transported by rail; later, when second growth was logged, roads were constructed. The Red Spruce ecosystem of Cheat Mountain may never return to pre-industrial conditions, but after mine reclamation and a decade free of logging, the area shows encouraging signs of healing itself. The Red Spruce/Mixed Northern Hardwood forests in the proposed Cheat Mountain Wilderness Area are quietly regenerating. This area has the least fragmented Red Spruce stands in the watershed, providing continuous habitat for its relatively rare species.

These wildlands provide residents and visitors with a unique experience in this remnant northern forest, and remain a favorite of fishermen. The proposed Cheat Mountain Wilderness has no developed trails, although a couple of old logging roads are used by determined hunters. It is very quiet and beautiful, with occasional views of high knobs to the east across the narrow steep watershed. The sound of the river below, in one of its steepest, most boulder-strewn stretches, adds to the visitor's experience along the Shavers Fork of Cheat, the highest river of its size in the Eastern U.S. Those bushwhacking to cliffs above High Falls will be rewarded with fine long views of the Shavers Fork watershed.