

Fact Sheet

Wilderness and Wildlife Management on the Mon National Forest:

- Hunting and fishing are not only ‘allowed’ in wilderness, but they are intended uses of the National Wilderness Preservation System which aims to ensure that high quality, wilderness quality hunting and fishing are available to the public
- Many species that depend on wild, roadless areas for survival such as black bear, bobcats fishers, migratory song birds and threatened and endangered species like the Cheat Mountain Salamander and WV Northern Flying Squirrel need a minimum amount of human disturbance to thrive. Wilderness ensures that at least some roadless habitat that is so critical will remain that way in perpetuity.
- Several proposed wilderness areas have wild brook trout populations which are best served by keeping these watersheds undisturbed and well shaded. Brook trout cannot tolerate lack of shade caused by openings in the forest or the sedimentation caused by erosion from roads and openings. Wilderness is the best way to keep forests intact for this state treasure.
- Wilderness Designation does not affect Payment in Lieu of Taxes or PILT for counties with National Forest land. These federal payments go to counties as compensation since lands owned by the federal government are not subject to property taxes. Wilderness designation does **not** change land ownership, thus **PILT payments are unaffected**.
- Many species, including a number of game species and those listed as federally threatened or endangered, need minimum impact from humans to thrive. Such remote habitat is increasingly rare in the East. In West Virginia, **total current and proposed WV Wilderness accounts for less than 1.5% of the state’s land**, and less than ¼ of the Mon NF. Furthermore, nearly half of the acreage with Mon NF proclamation boundary is **private land**, containing large expanses of open fields and small openings, and early successional habitat that add to the diversity of the Mon NF ecosystem. Rather it is actually old growth, provided by permanent Wilderness, which is truly lacking in terms of habitat diversity in the Mon.
- What now appears to be essential to grouse *nesting* success is not clearcuts and their resulting high-density ground cover, but rather dense, large old trees, a closed canopy, and downed logs, in other words the old growth that Wilderness can provide. This was demonstrated in a recent 7-year study published in 2006 in the *Journal of Wildlife Management* involving the WV DNR and nine other state and university wildlife research programs¹.
- Wildlife management can and does occur in Wilderness areas across the nation, including West Virginia. One of the main purposes of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which our own Senator Robert Byrd strongly supported, is to **restore native wildlife species whose populations have been negatively impacted by human activities**. Management needs to be done in a way that protects the area’s wild character using what is known as the “**minimum tool**,” Simply put, the least impacting tool that can be used to accomplish a task is the one that should be used. If the minimum tool is found to be mechanized or motorized, then that is the tool that can be used. Current and proposed wilderness areas make up less than 15% of the 1.5 million state and

¹ JOURNAL OF WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT 70(1):138–144; 2006

federal across the WV Department of Natural Resources manages²; management of the other more than 1.2 million acres is not subjected to the minimum tool requirement.

- Trout Unlimited strongly supports wilderness designation because of the positive impact it has on trout species, particularly native brook trout. **A recent National TU bumper sticker reads, “Wilderness: A Great Place to Hunt and Fish.”**
- The West Virginia Wilderness Coalition has worked with WV DNR Wildlife and Fisheries managers, along with U.S. Forest Service fisheries personnel and WV Trout Unlimited members, in drawing proposed Wilderness boundaries. As a result, boundaries for several areas were modified to avoid conflict with current wildlife management activities. Over 17,000 acres of proposed Wilderness acreage (nearly 10%) were removed from consideration to accommodate most current WV DNR wildlife management activities requiring occasional vehicular access and motorized equipment. Another 8,200 acres (Tea Creek Mtn. 6.2 Area) were removed to insure access to the streams within for liming.
- Before the massive timber harvesting of the early 1900’s, an incredibly diverse and rich old growth forest with abundant, diverse, and healthy wildlife populations existed here, and not because of human management! Classic ecology describes the stability and resilience of natural, old growth ecosystems. They are not generated overnight. Our Appalachians have recovered remarkably by mother nature’s hand from what humans did to them a century ago. Wilderness will guarantee regeneration of at least small areas of old growth in the Mon NF.
- Chemical treatment of waters is permissible in Wilderness if done **to restore native habitat impacted by human activity**. In fact, application of limestone fines to counteract acidification is already being done here in West Virginia in **Otter Creek and Middle Fork of the Williams, both Wilderness streams**, as well as the North Fork of the Cranberry which borders the Cranberry Wilderness. In developing its proposed wilderness boundaries, the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition worked closely with WV DNR and Trout Unlimited to make sure that streams being considered for liming in the future could be accessed by vehicle. ‘Limestone treatment facilities’ are no longer the standard method for treating streams as more efficient, less impacting methods have been developed. The need to build an industrial liming facility in a wilderness area is non-existent.
- Fish stocking of non-native species can only occur where that activity has occurred in the past but native populations can be restored in a wilderness area where stocking did not previously take place
- Concerning maintenance of oak-hickory or oak-pine forests (a concern of some wildlife managers), even if all proposed wilderness areas were designated, over 75% of the Mon National Forest would be open to more intensive forms of wildlife management. **Importantly, only one area being considered for Wilderness has oak-hickory forests and only one has oak-pine forests.**
- 6.2 management is a temporary, administrative protection put in place by the U.S. Forest Service. It is created ‘with the stroke of a pen’ rather than through an act of Congress like Wilderness, and can be taken away just as easily, as we have now seen here. In their recent Forest Plan Revision for the Mon NF, the Forest Service attempted to change 6.2 guidelines to

² West Virginia Land Stewardship Data, Natural Resource Analysis Center and West Virginia Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, West Virginia University, updated January 2000

allow for clear cutting and road building in these areas. Because of push back from wilderness advocates, this did not come to pass. However, in the new Mon NF Final Plan, **39% of the original 6.2 areas, all or parts of ten of the original 16 areas, have been switched to management prescriptions that allow logging and road building.** Some other areas (less acreage) were put into 6.2, showing the impermanence of 6.2 protection. Such switching of lands will never promote the old growth ecosystems so lacking in the Mon. Every time the management plan is revised, 6.2 areas will be threatened.³ This 6.2 management prescription espoused by opponents of wilderness would also prevent even-aged timber management that they feel is so critical to game species success

- The Wilderness Act allows for the restoration of native species. If a disease-resistant strain of American Chestnut was developed, it could be planted in a Wilderness Area, and in fact, this would likely be a high priority for restoration given its important role in the native ecosystem.
- The Wilderness Act specifically states that certain measures may be taken to control fires, insects and disease in Wilderness Areas, including the possible use of mechanized equipment, when justifiable
- Wilderness standards do not dictate that wildfires be suppressed. Fires, where they are a part of the natural ecosystem, are allowed to burn. Suppression can and does take place where property is at risk. Fire is not a significant issue on the generally wet Monongahela National Forest.
- Noxious weeds and invasive non-native plant species may be eradicated from designated Wilderness by physical means, such as grubbing, when the infestations are isolated, and herbicides may be used when justifiable.

³ Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan 2006 Table RE-10