

Shenandoah Mountain Proposal Information for Landowners

Friends of Shenandoah Mountain is a local citizens group working to protect the wild heritage of the Shenandoah Mountain area of the George Washington National Forest. We include hikers, hunters, wilderness advocates, mountain bikers, business owners, and many others. The Shenandoah Mountain Proposal includes National Scenic Area and Wilderness designations as described in the "Virginia: We Love It Wild" brochure.

Why here on Shenandoah Mountain?

The 115,000-acre section of Shenandoah Mountain that lies in Virginia between Rt. 250 and Rt. 33 knits together one of the most significant concentrations of roadless wildlands in the Eastern United States. It includes the Ramsey's Draft Wilderness Area and ten named peaks above 4,000 feet. Shenandoah Mountain provides clean drinking water for Staunton, Harrisonburg, and many other communities in the Valley. Several streams in the area support native trout. The area is home to dozens of rare and sensitive animals and plants. Shenandoah Mountain is a special gem in Virginia, and in the nation.

How will a National Scenic Area or Wilderness Area designation affect my rights as a private land owner?

Only federal land can be designated. Private land near or within the proposed boundaries is not included. Private landowners retain all their rights to access and all rights associated with private land ownership including sub-surface mineral rights.

Who will manage areas designated as National Scenic and Wilderness Areas?

Designated areas in the George Washington National Forest will continue to be part of the National Forest and will continue to be managed and maintained by the U.S. Forest Service.

What's the difference between a National Scenic Area and a Wilderness Area?

National Scenic Area Site-specific management for a National Scenic Area will be detailed in the language of the congressional bill. Within the proposed National Scenic Areas, the bill will:

- maintain the current status of existing roads (continue to allow scenic driving and OHV access)
- allow Forest Service maintenance and management of all trails, roads, and wildlife clearings
- allow controlled burns by the Forest Service
- preserve hunting and OHV access on fire roads

Wilderness Management for designated Wilderness Areas is defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964. Wilderness Areas have the strongest protective status to preserve their wild character. Because "mechanized vehicles" are not allowed, Wilderness Areas are closed to all vehicular traffic and mountain bikes. Hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, canoeing, and birding are all welcome in designated Wilderness.

Both the National Scenic and Wilderness areas will be off-limits to commercial development (such as wind turbines, gas drilling, or energy development of any kind) and commercial logging.

May hiking trails be maintained?

Yes. Existing foot and horse trails may continue to be maintained. Mechanical equipment is not allowed in a Wilderness Area; therefore, chain saws may not be used to maintain trails unless exceptional circumstances occur, such as a hurricane or significant wind storm. New trails may be built if they are consistent with wilderness values.

How will this proposal impact hunting/fishing access?

All permanently open roads and seasonally open roads will remain open to the public. People may continue to hunt and fish in the area subject to state laws. All wildlife openings currently managed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries will continue to be actively managed. The designation of these areas as National Scenic Area or Wilderness will not restrict an individual's right to hunt or carry a firearm.

Can forest fires be fought effectively in a National Scenic or Wilderness Area?

Yes. The Forest Service may do anything it considers necessary to control wild fires, including the use of chain saws, helicopters, and bulldozers. The Wilderness Act also allows the building of fire roads, fire breaks, or fire suppression facilities. In short anything necessary for the protection of public health and safety is clearly permissible. Prescribed burning may be used to reduce excessive fuel load.

What about disease and pest control?

The Forest Service may battle insects and disease within National Scenic and Wilderness areas using any measures necessary. The time necessary to approve a pest control plan in these areas is similar to approval on other National Forest lands.

Why now?

Population pressures continue to increase across the Shenandoah Valley. We have recently seen more proposals for alternative energy exploration, including industrial wind turbines and natural gas drilling by a method called hydrofracking. Even though much of Shenandoah Mountain is National Forest land, activities such as these are very real threats. This proposal will protect important resources we all value: clean water, healthy outdoor recreation, and wildlife.

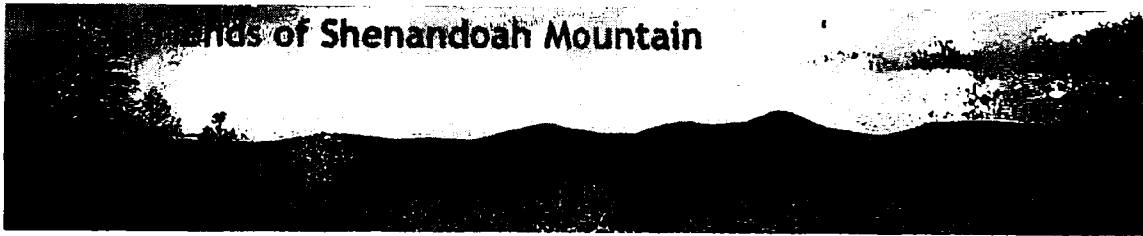
What needs to happen for the designations to become law?

The National Scenic Area and Wilderness Area designations can only be accomplished by passage of a bill in the U.S. Congress. This process can take years. Our strategy is to begin by building strong local support for protection of Shenandoah Mountain.

For more information, contact:

Friends of Shenandoah Mountain:

Carol Lena Miller (540)578-0275, carollenamiller@comcast.net or
Lynn Cameron (540)234-6273, slynncameron@gmail.com



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