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REVIEW OF H.R. 1011, THE VIRGINIA RIDGE AND VALLEY ACT OF 2007

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

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C O N T E N T S

	Page
Peterson, Hon. Collin C., a Representative in Congress from the State of Minnesota, opening statement	1
Prepared statement	23
Goodlatte, Hon. Bob, a Representative in Congress from the Commonwealth of Virginia, opening statement	2
Prepared statement	25
Salazar, Hon. John T., a Representative in Congress from the State of Colorado, prepared statement	27

WITNESSES

Holtrop, Mr. Joel, Deputy Chief, National Forest System, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C.	3
Prepared statement	32
Howe, Mr. Paul, Executive Vice President, Virginia Forestry Association, Richmond, Virginia, opening statement	9
Prepared statement	37
Bruton, Mr. C. Dowd, Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist, National Wild Turkey Federation, Traphill, North Carolina	11
Prepared statement	39
Muffo, Mr. John A., Virginia Board of Supervisors, Montgomery County, Virginia, Blacksburg, Virginia	12
Prepared statement	46
Davenport, Mr. Tom R., Business Manager, Mt. Rogers Outfitters, Damascus, Virginia	14
Prepared statement	48

SUBMITTED MATERIAL

Pelton, Dr. Michael R., Professor Emeritus, Wildlife Science, Middlebrook, Virginia	28
West, Dr. David A., Blacksburg, Virginia	30

HEARING TO REVIEW H.R. 1011, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2007

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to call, at 11:05 a.m., in Room 1300 of the Longworth House Office Building, Hon. Collin C. Peterson [Chairman of the Committee] presiding.

Members present: Representatives Peterson, Holden, Etheridge, Cuellar, Salazar, Pomeroy, Davis, Goodlatte, Conaway, Smith, and Walberg.

Staff present: Alejandra Gonzalez-Arias, Tony Jackson, John Riley, Sharon Rusnak, Lisa Shelton, Kristin Sosanie, Brent Blevins, Alise Kowalski, Kevin Kramp, Rita Neznek, and Jamie Weyer.

STATEMENT OF HON. COLLIN C. PETERSON, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF MINNESOTA

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning, everybody. Thank you for being here today. We are here to take a look at the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act, which has been introduced by Congressman Boucher of Virginia. My good friend and colleague, Bob Goodlatte, brought this bill to my attention and requested the committee hold a hearing on this issue. These gentlemen represent two beautiful districts in rural Virginia with significant forest areas, and they are strong advocates for these important natural resources. They have been working together to address some concerns raised about this bill, and I understand they have some common ground. However, some issues remain unresolved.

So this hearing today will allow us to consider all sides of the situation. Mr. Goodlatte has raised some valid concerns in my opinion about certain parts of the Jefferson National Forest that would be designated wilderness areas if this bill is passed. The designation of wilderness areas can limit forest flexibility and in my part of the country there is still controversy about land that was designated as wilderness many, many years ago. H.R. 1011 calls for wilderness areas well beyond the forest plan, and it is important that we consider the specific needs of the land affected by the bill.

I appreciate Ranking Member Goodlatte and Congressman Boucher for their work on this issue. I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses joining us here today. And with that, I would recognize my good friend and ranking member, Mr. Goodlatte, from Virginia.

STATEMENT OF HON. BOB GOODLATTE, A REPRESENTATIVE IN CONGRESS FROM THE STATE OF VIRGINIA

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I very much appreciate your holding this hearing on the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act, H.R. 1011. I want to welcome all the witnesses that we have before us several of which are from my home State of Virginia. I also want to commend Congressman Boucher for his hard work on this legislation. We have had discussions on this legislation for some period of time, and I am certainly supportive of many of the objectives of the legislation, but I do have some concerns that I want to put on the record here in my remarks, and also hear from witnesses who are here, I think, representing both sides of the issue.

H.R. 1011 proposes to create 38,898 acres of wilderness, 3,575 acres of wilderness study areas and potential wilderness areas, and 11,583 acres of National Scenic Areas in the Jefferson National Forest in southwest Virginia. While all the land included in this proposal is in my colleague, Congressman Boucher's district we share the Jefferson National Forest with about 108,000 acres of the 723,000 acre forest in my district. With over 1.2 million acres of publicly owned forest in my district the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests are important economic drivers. They serve as a fiber source for forest products industry and offer recreation opportunities to millions of people each year.

They are also an important wildlife habitat and serve several other important needs for the communities around them and for the people of our country. For 12 years the Forest Service worked to develop a new forest management plan for the Jefferson National Forest in a combined effort with four other National Forests. They held over 100 technical meetings, received over 3,000 written comments on draft plans, and then another 12,000 when the final plan was rolled out. The Forest Service eventually accepted the proposal developed by a collaborative group of citizens and interest groups as the 15-year plan for the Jefferson National Forest.

This plan included a recommendation to designate an additional 25,200 acres of wilderness on top of the 57,000 existing wilderness areas. Unfortunately, the bill before us today goes way beyond the recommendations that came out of the forest planning process proposing 13,600 more wilderness acres than what was recommended in the forest plan and another 14,000 acres of other set asides that were not included in the forest plan. It is disappointing that we are spending federal resources to develop locally driven collaborative plans for National Forests and Congress then proceeds to ignore these recommendations.

In addition to the process concerns, our witnesses will talk about several problems with proposed areas in the bill. My colleague, Mr. Boucher, has attempted to address some of these problems, but I do not believe all are fully resolved. We have a forest health crisis in our nation's public forests. So far this year's fire season is the fourth worse fire season on record, and we haven't seen the end of it yet. Additionally, insects and diseases like the gypsy moth which has invested over 73,000 acres of Virginia's forests this year are a serious threat. Congress needs to provide more tools to professional

resource managers in the Forest Service to mitigate these problems.

Instead, the wilderness designation in H.R. 1011 take tools away from the Forest Service. For example, the Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East proposed areas, some 8,500 acres, need prescribed fire treatments to restore and maintain a unique forest ecosystem, Table Mountain Pine. Table Mountain Pine is home to the state's rare Northern Pine Snake and several rare moths. If these areas are set aside for wilderness it is unlikely the Forest Service will be able to effectively manage the forest and will have to rely on the chance that fires will come through the area every 3 to 9 years as the trees require.

Recreation conflicts are also a problematic consequence of the proposed bill. Since several areas would be closed to motorized recreation and mountain biking the bill attempts to resolve of these conflicts by mandating another trail for mountain biking. However, this creates several safety, maintenance, and environmental problems. As we lock up more land to certain recreation users, we force other users to concentrate their activities in smaller areas. A recent survey of visitors to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forest found that only 2 percent of visitors visited wilderness areas when they came to the forest. This bill would shrink the amount of land that is available for a majority of forest visitors.

Additionally, there are private in-holdings and utility corridors, and many of the areas will be difficult to manage as wilderness due to their size and proximity to roads, private lands, and communities. The National Forests are already protected as National Forests set aside to provide the public with a number of products and services. Permanently locking up large areas and taking a hands off approach is not always the answer. So, again, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing, and I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses and continue to work with my colleagues to find a balanced approach to what is proposed in H.R. 1011.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank the gentleman, and the other members of the committee that have statements, they will be made part of the record. We will now proceed to hear from our first witness, the Deputy Chief, Mr. Holtrop, of the National Forest System, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Welcome to the committee, and your full testimony will be made part of the record, and we appreciate you limiting your remarks to 5 minutes. Thank you.

STATEMENT OF JOEL HOLTROP, DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM, FOREST SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, DC.

Mr. HOLTROP. Mr. Chairman, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department's views on the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act. We commend the sponsors and the Committee for its collaborate approach in how they have worked with us in the local communities. The Department supports several of the designations included in the bill but we object to other designations and to mandatory planning and construction requirements. The department would like to work with the committee to offer suggestions which we think will improve H.R. 1011. During the revision of the Jefferson National Forest Land Manage-

ment Plan the Forest evaluated potential wilderness or wilderness study areas that satisfied the definition of wilderness found in the Wilderness Act of 1964.

The Plan, signed in January of 2004, was developed over an 11-year period with extensive public involvement. The Department supports the bill provisions that would designate new wilderness areas and the designation of many of the additions to existing wilderness areas that are consistent with the Land Management Plan recommendations. The Department does not oppose the designation of several other additions though we have concerns about their suitability as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The Department does not support the designation as potential wilderness for the 349-acre portion of the Kimberling Creek area.

The subsequent designation of wilderness following a fixed time period and associated compulsory changes and conditions limit our discretion in the allocation of scarce resources. The Department does not support wilderness designation for the Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East areas. These areas contain fire dependent forest habitat and are largely surrounded by private lands. Wildland urban interface exists on north and south boundaries. The Department could support the designation of the Raccoon Branch area as wilderness if agreements are reached that resolve trail maintenance issues, and if the requirement for a sustainable trail is amended to provide more flexibility for alternative trail locations.

Many trails in this area are used by both equestrian and mountain bikers. Currently, 4 of the 6 miles of the Virginia Highlands horse trail in the Raccoon Branch area are open to mountain bike use. Wilderness designation would eliminate mountain bike use and raise concerns about trail maintenance. We would like to work with the Committee to adjust the boundary as now proposed in the bill. The adjustment could alleviate much of the concern with maintaining the trail for equestrian use. The bill would establish Seng Mountain and Bear Creek National Scenic Areas. The Department appreciates the action by the Natural Resources Committee to amend the bill to allow for seasonal motorized use during beer and deer hunting season. Last month the President signed Executive Order #13443, Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation. This Executive Order requires Federal land management agencies to manage wildlife and wildlife habitats of public lands in a manner that expands and enhances hunting opportunities.

We would like to work with the Committee on language that would allow a low level of habitat management for black bear that would be consistent with the Executive Order and compatible with the purposes for which the National Scenic Areas are being established. The proposed Seng Mountain National Scenic Area is within the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The Department recommends that the overlapping designation be clarified and continued motorized use on the Barton Gap Trail be allowed. H.R. 1011 would require the Secretary to establish a trail plan to develop hiking and equestrian trails on lands designated as wilderness by this bill.

The Forest Service already addresses trail management and planning standards within the planning process. We consider the requirement to develop additional trail plans to be unnecessary. This bill would also require the Secretary to provide a continuous connection for non-motorized travel between State Route 650 and Forest Development Road 4018. The bill language specifies the terminus of the connector route and limits our ability to locate and construct a trail that will meet Forest Service standards for safety and in a manner that is environmentally appropriate. We would like to work with the Committee on language that would allow us to construct trail facilities with adequate consideration for alternatives, priorities, and costs. This concludes my statement, and I will be happy to answer any questions that you have at this time.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you for that testimony. I am going to yield my time to Mr. Goodlatte at this point.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Holtrop, welcome, and thank you for your testimony. It is frustrating to me and many of my constituents when we spend federal resources and engage citizens in a forest planning process only to have the forest plan ignored as H.R. 1011 does. What was the total cost for developing the Jefferson forest plan, do you know?

Mr. HOLTROP. We don't track costs so that we are not able to give you an explicit answer to that although we do have some estimates that the average cost of forest plan revisions across the country is about $5 million.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you. And many, many people both in the agency and outside the agency are involved in this process?

Mr. HOLTROP. That is correct. I think in your opening statement you correctly identified that there were dozens of public meetings. We had over 500 people attend those public meetings. We had thousands of comments. We had 3,000 people on our mailing list as this plan was being developed.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I wonder if you might elaborate on the potential wildfire threats if the Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East areas are designated as wilderness. What risk would this pose to area communities like Blacksburg, and why is prescribed fire so important?

Mr. HOLTROP. I would like to—first of all, I would like to express my appreciation to you and others on the Committee for recognizing the value of our forest planning process and the value of the public input that we receive in that. Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East is one of those areas in which through the planning process we identified that a high need in that area is prescribed fire mostly for the purposes of maintaining a rare Table Mountain Pine ecosystem type, and there are large Table Mountain Pine that currently exist in the Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East areas but there are not established young Table Mountain Pine in that area, and in order to establish the young pine, fire needs to occur because it is a tree species that requires fire to open up the cone and to open up the seed bed on the forest floor for it to occur.

So the main concern that we have for fire in the Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East is to provide the opportunity for prescribed fire for that rare ecosystem type. A benefit that would come from that would be it would reduce fuel build-up over time as well

so that if a fire were to occur in that area we would have a better chance of protecting very closely aligned communities in residential areas on both sides of this long, narrow wilderness designation.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Am I correct that these two areas, Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East, are two separate wilderness areas because that is a power line that runs right through the middle of this area?

Mr. HOLTROP. That is correct.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Can you elaborate a little bit more on the problems that come with the prescription and limitations on being able to use prescribed fire in a wilderness area? What limitations do you face there as opposed to a different type of management designation?

Mr. HOLTROP. Well, first of all, we take wilderness designation seriously. It is a high standard, and so our responsibility is to manage it to retain its wilderness character. There are some limited circumstances in which the determination is made that prescribed fire is the best way for us to maintain its wilderness character, a management decision could be made to ignite a prescribed fire. We could also allow for a naturally occurring fire to burn in the area. But without some treatment that had occurred in advance and without being able of course to control the naturally occurring fire, a lightning strike, for instance, the likelihood of it occurring at a time where we felt safe in terms of being able to protect the communities that would be at risk if such a wildfire occurred would be limited.

The ability for us to have prescribed fire in wilderness is there but it is limited again to make sure that we are maintaining wilderness character and there would be further limitations of course on the use of mechanized equipment while carrying out those activities which further restrict the ability for us to carry out extensive burns or the period of time we would be able to carry out the burns in order to continue to do it in a safe manner or to get something under control if it got out of control, so that is correct.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Are there plans to develop or intensively manage any of the areas that would be designated as wilderness under H.R. 1011 but weren't recommended for wilderness in the forest plan?

Mr. HOLTROP. There are no plans to intensively manage any of those areas. We would, for instance, in Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East continue with our plans to manage through prescribed fire and some vegetation treatment the Table Mountain Pine type and to reduce hazardous fuel build up. The Kimberling Creek potential wilderness area would be managed for restoration activities to allow it to restore to a more natural state. There would be some of those types of activities, but there is nothing that I would characterize as intensive management. Basically our Forest Plan direction for those areas is also pretty limited management activities largely to enhance ecosystems and enhance visitor use.

Mr. GOODLATTEE. So if they were not included as a wilderness area in this legislation they would still be protected from any kind of extensive development, extensive construction of roads, large clear cuts, that sort of thing?

Mr. HOLTROP. That is correct, they would.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I mean this is right next to the town of Blacksburg, and I can understand why the community wants to see the area protected. I think the question is what is the best way to protect it.

Mr. HOLTROP. I agree with you.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the gentleman. I recognize the gentleman from Colorado for a couple questions.

Mr. SALAZAR. I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, let me just for the record say that I do not oppose wilderness areas but I want to thank Chairman Peterson and Mr. Goodlatte for holding this important hearing today. I represent the Third Congressional District of Colorado, and it is approximately 74 percent federal land, and I understand that we have to protect our federal lands, but there are currently over 30 wilderness designations right in my district, and I think before we move forward with any designation, I think it is important for all of us that the entire congressional delegation be behind it, that local elected officials, local citizens, government agencies, and most importantly farmers and ranchers, I believe, must participate in every step of the process.

Many times federal land and federal grazing rights are overlooked, and many times permitees are kicked off the land. There is currently blanket environmental push in Colorado to designate I think some 58 pieces of wilderness in our community. And I believe that this is the wrong way to go about it. It is important for all of us to go to the communities and to make sure it is going to be acceptable to the communities. I am actually eager to hear some of the testimony today, but I have to run off to another meeting, and I just would ask that we put forth an effort for more cooperation between the delegations and the entire state delegations. This is not an issue that is going to affect me directly, but I understand Mr. Goodlatte's feelings, and I share some of his concerns as well. So once again I want to thank the Chairman and Mr. Goodlatte for having this important hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the gentleman, and I now recognize the ranking member for 5 minutes on his own time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. You have been very generous with the time, and let me ask you, Mr. Holtrop, several of the witnesses today will talk about the recreation value of wilderness designations, and can you tell me what percentage of National Forest visitors use wilderness?

Mr. HOLTROP. Across the system we have our national visitor use monitoring system which indicates that around 4 percent, 4.2 percent of all National Forest System visitors are to wilderness.

Mr. GOODLATTE. So when you are talking about the recreational values and when you are talking about the economic values to a community drawing people into an area, is it fair to say that an area that has greater access to it is likely to draw more visitation rather than less?

Mr. HOLTROP. Well, I think that is probably going to be site specific in many cases. I would say the vast—the majority of our recreation users if you are just going to be monitoring use, the majority of them will probably be in more developed areas and more developed sites. I think to totally understand the relationship between the recreational opportunities that are presented in wilderness you

also have to understand the percentage of the area that is currently designated wilderness. As Mr. Salazar was talking about as compared to what are some of the other opportunities that exist as well. There have been some studies, of course, that have indicated that the designation of wilderness becomes an attraction to some visitors but of course eliminate other people who have other recreational opportunities.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Well, that is undoubtedly so but hikers, for example, can enjoy those wilderness areas. They can also enjoy the other aspects of the forest that are not wilderness, and sometimes depending upon the access they can get a greater opportunity to enjoy hiking, and then other recreational opportunities are much more severely limited in the wilderness area. In several of the other wilderness bills exemptions have been made for certain activities such as mountain biking or wildlife management. There are also other options in addition to wilderness for setting aside land in National Forests. What other options would the Forest Service recommend for areas such as Lynn Camp Creek, Mountain Lake B, and the Shawvers Run areas, do you have those accessible to you?

Mr. HOLTROP. I think I can answer at least in some fashion that question. As we have already discussed, we have a Forest Plan that was 11 years in the making, and that Forest Plan provided prescriptions, management direction for those very areas that you just asked about. The Shawvers Run, for example, those areas were identified in the Forest Plan because there are Indiana Bat caves in those areas. They were identified for protection of Indiana Bats, those caves, and some limited habitat improvement work in case at some point in time there was a need to do some work to insure that the habitat still stayed productive for Indiana Bats. My sense is if the thing we should do if we are not to designate an area like that under this piece of legislation we should allow the Forest Plan direction to continue to apply, which was again thought through by land management professionals through the public process.

Mr. GOODLATTE. And what about Lynn Camp Creek?

Mr. HOLTROP. Lynn Camp Creek had similar protective prescription in the Forest Plan. I can't remember exactly what that prescription was at this time. The way we used the Forest Plan when looking at the proposals in this piece of legislation was of course if the legislation was consistent with our Forest Plan direction we were supportive. If it was different than our Forest Plan direction but we could see that we could meet our commitment to our public and meet our commitment to the types of activities we wanted to carry out on the land we did not oppose. In this case we did not oppose. Our concern with Lynn Camp Creek and Shawvers Run largely had to do with the configuration and the size of those as to whether they were suitable components of the National Wilderness Preservation System.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you. And, finally, let me ask you what changes you would recommend for the National Scenic Area language in the bill to enable compliance with the recently signed Executive Order on hunting and wildlife conservation.

Mr. HOLTROP. Well, as my testimony states, we would like to work with the committee on that language. The type of language that we are thinking of currently the bill allows vegetation treat-

ment in the National Scenic Areas solely for the purpose of retaining openings, wildlife openings or viewing openings. We would suggest that there might be some limited additional vegetation treatment for the purposes of enhancing wildlife habitat that is also consistent with the National Scenic Area designation.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the gentleman. We are going to have votes here in a little bit. I think what we will do—thank you very much for your testimony and being with us today. I think we will call the next panel. Did any of the other members have questions? I am sorry. I guess not, so thank you very much. We will call the next panel. And we will get as far as we can here before—we have with us some folks from the area and others, Mr. Paul Howe, Executive Vice President of the Virginia Forestry Association; Mr. C. Dowd Bruton, Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist for the National Wild Turkey Federation; the Honorable John Muffo, Virginia Board of Supervisors, Montgomery County, Virginia; and Mr. Tom Davenport, Business Manager for Mt. Rogers Outfitters, Damascus, Virginia. Welcome to the committee. Your full statements will be made part of the record, and we would encourage you to summarize your testimony, and we will recognize each of you for 5 minutes. So, Mr. Howe, if you would provide.

STATEMENT OF PAUL HOWE, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, VIRGINIA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION, RICHMAN, VIRGINIA

Mr. HOWE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to be here, Mr. Chairman, Congressman Goodlatte, and committee members, to speak about the Virginia Ride and Valley Act. My name is Paul Howe. I am the Executive Vice President of the Virginia Forestry Association. We are a not-for-profit organization. We have about 500 members scattered around the State of Virginia. Our membership is very diverse, and it includes private forest land owners, pulp and paper companies, saw mills, loggers, foresters in both the public and private sector, as well as individuals who are just interested in trees and our forests. These are the folks that own and manage the working forest in Virginia.

The association's mission is to promote stewardship and wise use of sustainable forest resources for the environmental and economic benefit. That is a short and simple mission statement but a lot of thought went into it, stewardship, stability, economic, and environmental importance and benefits. Congressman Goodlatte covered some of the numbers as did Mr. Holtrop in his comments. I am not going to belabor any of the points in terms of numbers. Numbers are numbers. But I do want to make two primary points and they have to do with policy.

First of all, the Virginia Forestry Association and many other groups and individual citizens provided public input and participated in the development of the current Jefferson National Forest plan, a plan that went over for 10 or 12 years. The plan development process for each National Forest is long, obviously, tedious and very thorough, and includes careful attention to the need for and designation of wilderness areas. The current Jefferson Forest plan recommends a little over 25,000 acres of wilderness, a recommendation that VFA has found acceptable. However, to the ex-

tent that H.R. 1011 circumvents and diverts from a plan based on broad public input and introduces concepts not in the Wilderness Act or used currently such as potential wilderness, we would not support additional wilderness area proposals or the additional National Scenic Area proposals.

I guess we look at the whole planning process as an activity done in good faith, and even though some of my members are not typically in favor of wilderness areas, we don't think after the planning process is the time to come in and try to ask Congress to make changes to something. Our point is we have a plan. Let us implement it. Our second concern is one based on the practical need for active force management that can best maintain the long-term health of the Jefferson National Forest. Our National Forests are already suffering from the lack of on the ground management. The hard working and dedicated Forest Service manager, and I worked with a lot of them in different states over the years, are very capable of caring for our National Forest lands in a manner that addresses the congressional mandate for multiple use, but restrictions on their day-to-day authority are creating forests that are susceptible to poor health, to insect and disease attacks, to fire threats, loss of certain wildlife habitat, and public access.

wilderness areas can make good science-based management very difficult. Without prescriptive silvicultural techniques, the forests in wilderness areas may deteriorate, resulting in fire, insect, and disease problems which can spread, and I would like to highlight this, spread to adjoining private lands. Recreational opportunities can be limited in wilderness areas. Also, non-management does not allow for the nurturing of a diversity of habitats, and can actually be negative impacts on some wildlife populations, including both game and non-game species.

The process of managing and in come cases harvesting forest to meet overall National Forest goals and specific forest plans, such as the current Jefferson plan, can provide timber and fiber supporting local businesses that provide goods made from wood that are in demand by the American public. The current timber harvest on the Jefferson and its sister National Forest, the George Washington in Virginia, are miniscule. Out of 1.8 million acres of land, I guess 1.6 or so is actually forested. There is only about 2,000 acres that are actually harvested annually. These forests cover a big part of Western Virginia.

So I will conclude by saying that on behalf of VFA and the forestry community in Virginia, we appreciate your attention to our opinions regarding H.R. 1011 and to the natural resource management of our National Forests. I would be happy to answer to any questions at the appropriate time or if I can't answer them now, I can always say—if I can't answer the question, I have a member somewhere that can, and we can get information to you. Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, Mr. Howe. I am going to recognize Mr. Bruton for 5 minutes, and then we will have to take a short break to go vote and come back. So Mr. Bruton.

STATEMENT OF C. DOWD BRUTON, SENIOR REGIONAL WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST, NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION, TRAPHILL, NORTH CAROLINA

Mr. BRUTON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning. My name is Dowd Bruton. I am a Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist with the National Wild Turkey Federation, an organization dedicated to the conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of our hunting tradition. Growth and progress define the NWTF as it has expanded from 300 members in 1973 to more than 585,000 members today. Together the NWTF's conservation partners and grass roots members have raised and spent more than $258 million on conservation projects on more than 13.1 million acres of habitat. Because of our efforts and partnerships with state and federal wildlife organizations the re-establishment of the wild turkey has become one of the most exciting wildlife success stories of the 20th Century with turkey populations exceeding 7 million nationwide.

With wild turkey populations firmly established the NWTF has shifted its focus to science-based active land management to provide habitat for turkeys and the thousands of wildlife species that exist in our forests across this great nation. Consider wise forest management to be a giant puzzle. Each piece has its proper place but without each individual piece the puzzle could never be completed. Wilderness is in fact one of those pieces to the puzzle. With any puzzle too many pieces that are exactly alike create problems in the final product. Our concern with H.R. 1011 is that it is overly aggressive in terms of adding additional wilderness in the Jefferson National Forest.

Jefferson National Forest total acreage is 723,300 acres. Over 88 percent of the land is in wilderness. Additional wilderness study areas and National Scenic Areas represent another 7 percent. If the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007 is enacted the wilderness along with existing acreage would total approximately 19 percent of the total forest area. I would just like to list a few reasons why the NWTF believes too much wilderness as prescribed in H.R. 1011 is a problem. First of all, any type of active forest management is restricted on wilderness areas. Additionally, wilderness is created by an act of Congress and cannot be changed without federal legislation. There can be no timber harvest, even thinning, which is a great tool for creating early successional habitat that many species require for foraging, breeding, nesting, and survival.

Combating non-native evasive forest insect and disease problems will be difficult to implement under the wilderness designation. A few striking examples are the beech bark scale disease and the hemlock wooly adelgid, which are killing nearly all of the American beech and eastern hemlock trees that they infect. Wilderness standards dictate that wildfires be suppressed and that prescribed fire can occur only with an approved burn plan. Perversely though, prescribed fire is actually not a realistic management option because there can be no use of equipment to create fire lines and no mechanical options for fire control, only the use of hand tools are allowed for control.

Many people believe that wilderness protects the forest and its wildlife species from man. Science simply does not corroborate that belief. Active forest management, including prescribed fire, reduces

the build up of fuel levels within the forest, protects against catastrophic wildfires and protects biodiversity. It is scientifically documented that there is an oak decline occurring in the eastern Oak Forest. There are many suspected reasons for this decline. Old growth forests, wilderness, are at the highest risk. Active management, using a variety of techniques, including prescribed fire and forest thinning, are the only wide-scale solutions to allow sunlight to reach the forest floor and promote the oak seedlings from acorns.

Wildlife has been managed by God and man since creation. Lightning strikes, wildfire, and wind storms have existed for all time. They create openings in the forest for wildlife. In the days before European settlers came to America, native Americans cleared land using fire for their livestock and crops to support their families. When the settlers arrived, many accounts from those settlers indicate the overwhelming species diversity and actual numbers of species. Those early settlers simply expanded what Native Americans had been doing for thousands of years. As a result, they fed their families and understood the value of forest management and biodiversity.

Only recently have certain factions begun to think that no management is best. I urge you to consider what is proven to happen when a forest becomes wilderness. The forest matures into an old growth forest. The trees are tall and the canopy of the forest closes in. This in turn restricts the sunlight that reaches the forest floor. Many of the grasses, forbs, and shrubs that are dependent on that sunlight can no longer exist. Plant species diversity and wildlife species that depend on these plants suffer. The NWTF believes that wilderness certainly has its place in the forest plan and in forest management.

We cannot support, however, the overreach of H.R. 1011 and would urge a more limited approach that does not imperil biodiversity and forest health. We urge the committee to propose some adjustments to H.R. 1011 that move the wilderness designation closed to being consistent with those in the forest plan. Please know that NWTF stands ready to work with you to craft these adjustments, and to continue to invest our funding and sweat equity into National Forest conservation efforts. Mr. Chairman, thanks for allowing me to share my comments.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much, and as a turkey hunter I want to thank the NWTF for all they do. You guys do a great job. We are going to take a break, go vote, and as soon as these votes are over we will be back and continue with the last two members of the panel. We appreciate your patience putting up with us.

[Recess]

The CHAIRMAN. I apologize. I didn't realize it was going to take that long, but that is the way things go around here. We left off with Mr. Muffo, so we will recognize you next for 5 minutes. We appreciate you being with the committee.

STATEMENT OF JOHN A. MUFFO, VIRGINIA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, MONTGOMERY COUNTY, VIRGINIA, BLACKSBURG, VIRGINIA

Mr. MUFFO. Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Goodlatte and members of the committee, I am John Muffo, a member of the

Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, and I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 1011, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act. And with the sense of time and the fact that I had to listen to a lot of presentations the way you do, and I have to face the voters and I am probably the only speaker that has to face the voters in November, I would like to abbreviate my comments a little bit, if you don't mind.

During the Forest Service planning process in 2003, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution supporting wilderness designation for portions of Brush Mountain in Montgomery County. This resolution was adopted after a series of public meetings by the board and with significant public input. While the Forest Service did not include our recommendation in the final plan, I am pleased that Senator Warner and Congressman Boucher did listen to the citizens and the Board of Supervisors and did include the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area in the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act. The board considered a number of factors when we voted to support a Brush Mountain wilderness area.

First and most importantly, we believed that the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area would enhance the quality of life for our constituents. The designation of portions of Brush Mountain as wilderness area ensures that this section will be enjoyed by current and future generations in its natural state. The protection of view sheds is a high priority for the Montgomery County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. Brush Mountain is a natural scenic backdrop for Blacksburg and nearby communities and should be preserved to the extent possible.

The Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan recognizes and promotes the fundamental notion that the county's natural resources are vital to the county's quality of life and provide substantial economic and recreational opportunities for the citizens of Montgomery County. Eco-tourism already benefits the county and has the potential to grow. It is a key element of the county's economic development plan for the county, and this Brush Mountain wilderness area along with other activities, outdoor activities, would certainly enhance the county as an attractive destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Looking at those factors, it is clear that the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area is a good investment for our community. Mr. Chairman, we in Montgomery County appreciate our National Forest lands and support reasonable stewardship of these lands. And we do appreciate, by the way, the stewardship of the forestry people, and we like to work in cooperation with those folks. Certainly timber harvesting is an integral part of the forest plan, and so too should be other activities and considerations such as recreation and view shed preservation. As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I have learned that as our county grows at a rate of approximately 1,000 people per year, so do the demands for more recreational opportunities.

The Jefferson National Forest offers a wide variety of outdoor activities that my constituents enjoy every day. That is why the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area is so important. Favorable congressional action would set aside a small portion of

the forest for all to enjoy. I urge the committee to pass the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act. I also have a statement from a constituent, Dr. David West, who is a biologist, that I would like to include in the record. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. We will include that statement in the record. Thank you for summarizing that. Mr. Davenport.

STATEMENT OF TOM R. DAVENPORT, BUSINESS MANAGER, MT. ROGERS OUTFITTERS, DAMASCUS, VIRGINIA

Mr. DAVENPORT. Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Goodlatte, thank you for the opportunity to be here to present my views on H.R. 1011. My name is Tom Davenport. I am the business manager for Mt. Rogers Outfitters, an outdoor retail establishment in Damascus, Virginia. I am a resident of Damascus, and have been a resident there in the 9th district for the past 16 years. Many people talk about the value of wilderness, and some emphasize the esthetics, some emphasize ecosystem management. Today I would like to address my support for H.R. 1011 to largely a pragmatic reason, and a reason that is rooted deeply in my economic self interest.

Our customers are people who come to us to have a wilderness experience. The vast majority of our customers are not local. Rather, they come from places like Ohio, from Michigan, from Indiana, from North Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, and they come to experience wilderness. The better the wilderness experience, the more customers we have because what happens is, and we see it time and time again, they go back, they tell about their experience, they tell about the Lewis Fork Wilderness Area, and their friends come back. Without these customers, I think it is fair to say Mt. Rogers Outfitters would not be in business. Mt. Rogers Outfitters was the first tourism-based business to open in our small town. That was in 1991. And our opening was in direct response to the congressional designation of the Lewis Fork and the Little Wilson Creek wilderness areas.

We were the first business within a 50-mile radius of those wilderness areas to begin a client base, to build a client base around those two resources. Our business plan and our marketing campaign focused on those two wilderness areas. That campaign reached a milestone this past year, and we are kind of proud of that. The Backpacker magazine, which is the premier national journal of publication on backpacking in the backpacking and hiking industry, did an article on the best of the best places for enjoying outdoor recreation. They listed the Lewis Fork Wilderness Area and the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Area as the best weekend hike in the Appalachian region. By the way, they also recognized our store as the top hiking store on the Appalachian Trail.

Since our beginning, and actually just within the past few years competition has been introduced. There is a second backpacking store in our town and that is okay. There are other uses, other competitive businesses, being developed in our town. Our town today has 6 to 7 bicycle shops, has 12 to 15 B&Bs. New restaurants have opened. We have developed a pretty respectable little tourism

economy. Not all of it based on wilderness, but the point I would like to make for you today to consider is that for Damascus it all began with setting aside a resource. It takes two components to create a tourism-based economy. It takes a significant attraction and then it takes a certain amount of entrepreneurial skills.

I think it was significant that in our case that wilderness designations provided the impetus. Wilderness is what first brought people into the community from places far and wide. It was seeing those perspective customers that prompted other entrepreneurs into action. We think it is in our economic interest to secure the present and future integrities of these outstanding resources. Indeed, we think it is in the economic self interest of much of the rural portion of the 9th Congressional District. We were pleased, therefore, to see the Smith County and Bland County boards of supervisors endorse permanent protection for these special areas. We ask you to advance this legislation.

Gentlemen, the Jefferson National Forest is big enough for this legislation, and for all the other uses and all the other management activities that you have heard about today. I thank you for your time, and I will be glad to answer any questions.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you very much. I am pleased to recognize Mr. Goodlatte at this time.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank all of the witnesses. They have helped us move forward in terms of determining the areas of this legislation that have merit, and those that do not. Let me just start, Mr. Davenport, I certainly concur in your assessment that the type of business that you have is enhanced by making sure that the wilderness areas that are made available are the best quality. I know that the ones that are recommended by the Forest Service that we have no objection to do enhance the Lewis Fork Wilderness Area and the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Area. I would hope that we could agree that there are different parts of the forest that serve different purposes.

Mr. DAVENPORT. Mr. Goodlatte, we can agree.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Sure. And that is what I would like to focus on. No question that there are different types of businesses that are benefited by having National Forest land in their districts, in their counties and their communities, and I have long believed that that is an asset that we do not get enough benefit from in Virginia. I have been down to Mt. Rogers and hiked extensively through that area. Unfortunately, I didn't use your business but maybe the next time I will. I have also hiked in Montgomery County. I enjoy it very much. My concern is making sure that we address a multitude of different concerns and uses, and that each area we select are appropriate for that purpose.

And I would say the same thing to you, Mr. Muffo. I very much think that this area, Brush Mountain, should be protected but my concern is that the use of wilderness designation for that particular area as opposed to, for example, the Scenic Areas that Mr. Boucher has used extensively, and I might add that that came about from a discussion, in fact, several discussions that we have had over the years that stemmed from the creation in my district of the Mt. Pleasant National Scenic Area when I was first elected. The Amherst County board of supervisors asked us for a wilderness des-

ignation at Mt. Pleasant in part to protect their watershed and they had other concerns as well.

So I went and hiked that area again extensively and found a number of reasons why wilderness would affect that area. There was a bald on top of one of the mountains in the wilderness area that was maintained using mechanical—and it is one of the most spectacular areas on the entire Blue Ridge Mountain chain, that the Appalachian Trail wanted to be able to use power tools to maintain the trail as it runs through that areas, but what really struck me the most was I ran into a father and son who were out fishing, and I stopped our little group, and I went over to ask the father of what he thought of converting that area into a wilderness area. And he said, well, you know, it is a beautiful area, and I think it should be protected, but I sure hope you don't make it wilderness area.

And I said why is that, and he said, well, I am getting up in years, and I am not going to be able to get in here to enjoy this beautiful stream unless I can use these couple of existing dirt roads to get in here. And then he pointed to his son, who looked like he was about 30 years old, and he said he certainly wouldn't be able to come up here. And I said, well—he looked like a fine, strapping young man, and I said why is that, and he said, well, he has an artificial leg. So, you know, from the standpoint of access to our National Forests it is important to make sure that we measure these things. I happen to believe that you will get greater benefit from Brush Mountain if you were to consider going the Scenic Area route as opposed to the Wilderness Area because you can have the flexibility that allows the Forest Service to protect and enhance the growth of the Table Mountain Pine.

You deal with the issue of whether you should have a Wilderness Area that is really created into two wilderness areas because you bifurcated it with a power line. I don't know whether there would be any way to take the area that has the greater amount of Table Mountain Pine and make that one a Scenic Area rather than a Wilderness Area. That is what I concluded when I did the Mt. Pleasant National Scenic Area. We did that in order to highlight it, have a very clear designation for the tourism value, the eco-tourism that Mr. Davenport mentioned, but it also allowed us to maintain the existing roads and restrict and prohibit any new roads to restrict use of forestry activities to allow for the clearing of that bald and some of the other things. It was a very good designation.

And it seems to me that with regard to Brush Mountain there are some similarities there in terms of being as close to the town of Blacksburg as it is, in terms of the need to be able to use equipment for certain purposes to promote that species of trees, to fight forest fires and other disease infestation, which you can do in a wilderness area but you can do it more effectively and more rapidly when you don't have those areas, and if you can do that and prescribe things that are very specifically spelled out in the language to protect it, it would seem to me that there is some greater flexibility if you allow that. And I just ask you with regard to Brush Mountain where the board is in terms of that kind of flexibility that could be given to highlight it and create the kind of protection you want, which I certain concur with but also give the Forest

Service the kind of flexibility that would allow them to manage the things that have caused them to express concern and caused them to exclude it from the plan as a Wilderness Area.

Mr. MUFFO. Well, first of all, there is no loss of a road in the Wilderness Area designation. There is only one road there, and it is not affected by the Wilderness Area designation.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Sure, I understand that. I am talking about other features that the——

Mr. MUFFO. Well, I am not sure exactly what feature would be lost. You can't cut it because it is too steep. The only thing that we can figure out that would be lost is the Forest Service would not be able to burn it. And, frankly, we are not very enthusiastic about the Forest Service burning it to begin with. And so it is not something that most of the citizens that I have talked to are very enthusiastic about the Forest Service doing to begin with. And that is about the only difference that we can see.

Mr. GOODLATTE. So you are not concerned about the Table Mountain Pine issue then?

Mr. MUFFO. I am not a forester, and the only thing I know about Table Mountain Pine is in the letter from my biologist constituent, and he said it is not—he said there was a whole lot of Table Mountain Pine around. And I will give you this as part of the record.

Mr. GOODLATTE. I yield back to the Chairman.

The CHAIRMAN. So you don't want the Forest Service to burn this so what if it catches on fire and the whole thing is going to burn up, then what happens?

Mr. MUFFO. Okay. Well, first of all, let me give you a quick picture. There is a road on top of the mountain. The back side, the side we are talking about, that faces—the west side faces towards West Virginia. The east side is the part that faces Blacksburg and there is a half mile buffer that the Forest Service is still maintaining that is not affected by this particular bill. So we have got a half mile buffer with the residential areas that is unaffected. And there is a road on top so it is basically the back side that we are asking to be put in——

The CHAIRMAN. Well, this is not my district in Minnesota, and I may be wrong about this but we have the BWCA wilderness, and, you know, they have had a controversy about that. We had a big blow down and a storm came through and blew down almost all the trees, and they were again spurning the environmental groups and so forth until that happened. There are things that go on that I don't think any of us can foresee, and I agree with Bob, I thing we get ourselves locked in on ideology and nature may change things that people don't know about.

So all of a sudden we have people asking us to do things that a few years ago they were against, you know, and I told them I thought we should just leave it the way it was. That is what they wanted, but they couldn't get in there. So anyway——

Mr. MUFFO. It is also my understanding that under the proper circumstances it can still be managed if it has to be. If it is a clear danger the Forest Service can burn if it has to.

The CHAIRMAN. Because you are making it a Wilderness Area.

Mr. MUFFO. Even if it is a Wilderness Area they have the ability to do it if they have to. It is just a much higher standard.

Mr. DAVENPORT. They fought a fire in St. Mary's wilderness.

The CHAIRMAN. They what?

Mr. DAVENPORT. They fought a fire in the St. Mary's wilderness. They used helicopters to go in. They used chainsaws to cut trees so the Forest Service does have the ability to fight fires in the wilderness.

The CHAIRMAN. I thought the whole purpose of the Wilderness Area was to not do that so what are we doing here? I mean it is like we are putting something off limits so a few elite people can have whatever they want, and then when things don't go their way then they want to do it different. It just seems kind of——

Mr. DAVENPORT. I am just relating the events that happened, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. What is that?

Mr. DAVENPORT. I am just relating the events as they happened.

The CHAIRMAN. Go ahead, Bob.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Well, I am very familiar with the St. Mary's Wilderness Area. It is in my congressional district, and the fact of the matter is there have been enormous problems with dealing with a syndication of the river, and they can't bring in the limestone. This was done by my predecessor, Jim Owen, and when I was asked about the Mt. Pleasant area, I went to him first and he said I would urge you to be cautious about wilderness areas, and he cited the same areas and the problems therein as a matter to be concerned about. However, notwithstanding that the gentleman is correct. Mr. Davenport, under correct circumstances the Forest Service can fight forest fires in wilderness areas, and they should, but the problem is they can't do the kind of things that are necessary ahead of time to prevent those forest fires from being likely to occur if they can't use all of the appropriate management tools.

And so what is going to happen is if you say it is a Wilderness Area it is going to be treated by the Forest Service like a Wilderness Area, and it is a lot less likely that they will try to do the kind of things that are necessary to keep a forest fire from getting out of control. And given that it is close to residential and urban areas it is of concern to me, and it is also a concern to them. It is not in my congressional district so it is not the primary foundation for my thinking that this should be altered. My primary thinking relates to the testimony of the Forest Service that they could better manage this area if they are given the flexibility to do that.

And, quite frankly, I think in terms of tourism values if you designate an area as a Scenic Area it will do at least as well. There are very few Scenic Areas in the country. There are lots of wilderness areas. But the access to it, the ability of people to utilize it effectively, I think has dramatically changed, and I would hope that there would be more flexibility on the part of the board of supervisors in being willing to discuss this with the Forest Service, with this committee in terms of what is the most appropriate way to find that kind of protection. But having heard your testimony, I understand you are not there.

Mr. MUFFO. They haven't convinced any of us. I mean you have heard that four different boards of supervisors have not been convinced. Craig County has voted in favor of a designation. Montgomery County and two other counties that were mentioned, they have not convinced the people because it is the people who told us

at our public hearings what they wanted. I have got to stand for election in November. My colleague who represents the district that borders this has to stand for election in November. We are both running unopposed. It is the people who are telling us they want this as wilderness. I wouldn't be in favor of it if they people weren't. And so they haven't convinced the people. I don't care what the Forest Service is telling you, they haven't convinced the people, and that is why I am here.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Well, let me just say that I appreciate that, and I think that is all well and good, but the fact of the matter is that individual people are represented by members of boards of supervisors who are charged with learning more about a particular subject than the individuals that they represent always necessarily know. So we are talking here about two designations that have names attached to them, and those names are of interest to people, but when you get to the underlying issue of what is going to be the legacy of that and the problems that may be incurred it is worth finding out. That is certainly what I found out. The people of Amherst County and their board of supervisors unanimously said that they wanted a Wilderness Area. By the time we were done, I had testimony here in the Congress with environmental groups and forestry groups and the local government representative all testifying in favor of the Scenic Area because after considering all of the evidence carefully that is what they determined was the appropriate alternative to take notwithstanding the fact that there was a 5-0 vote by the board of supervisors initially saying that they wanted wilderness, and it has been a great success ever since, and we have not had problems with that area.

We have had problems with the James River Face Wilderness Area or the St. Mary's Wilderness Area, and we have not had problems with other Wilderness Area designation in my congressional district, and I am sure in Mr. Boucher's district too. Every piece of land is different and is deserving of different treatment, and that is why I think it is well worth listening to what the National Forest representatives say when they express those kind of concerns about it. But be that as it may, let me ask Mr. Bruton about another issue, and that is hunting and fishing contribute millions to Virginia's economy and are integral to the culture and the way of life for many Virginia natives. Are hunting opportunities in Virginia increasing or decreasing?

Mr. BRUTON. I think I would have to say with urban sprawl in eastern and northeastern Virginia certainly opportunities on that end of the state are decreasing. Our National Forest, Jefferson and George Washington, are some of the few strongholds remaining for hunters and fishermen. Those lands need to be protected, but they also need to be actively managed for the sportsmen that use those areas. Sportsmen are attracted to areas that have quality opportunities and obviously wilderness would—this land would still be in public ownership and available to hunters and fishermen and backpackers and hikers, but hunters and fishermen like that quality experience, and having more active management on those lands it provides more opportunities for those hunters to enjoy their trips to the field.

Mr. GOODLATTE. When you have small wilderness areas, what kind of impact does the surrounding areas have on the ability to protect wildlife in those areas when you can't do some of the things you could do if you had a different designation regarding, for example, prescribed burns and other things that would allow for habitat management that are more difficult to do when you have the wilderness designation?

Mr. BRUTON. I think small wilderness areas creates all kind of problems. First of all, you have the potential of a lot of illegal access and use from the private lands adjoining those small areas. It also creates potential for conflicts between hunters that access from the public access on lands and walking in versus maybe a hunter accessing from the private lands on the adjoining properties. Basically it not really an unfair advantage but it is certainly an advantage that those private landowners and people that access from the private property have.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you. Mr. Howe, were you or your members involved in the Jefferson Forest plan development?

Mr. HOWE. Yes, sir. Of course it was a long process and we at the association monitored it the whole way through, and as I recall there were three main alternatives so we had spent many days sifting through that material. More importantly, I guess our members, we probably had 15 or 20 key forestry members that had—a lot of people were interested but didn't necessarily have the time but some folks took time out of their busy schedules to go to public hearings and the meetings. I actually went back through my file before I came up here, and one interesting quote from a gentleman who happens to the president of our association right now said you had to become a professional meeting goer to get your points across. And my point there would be folks taking a lot of time out of their busy schedule in good faith to go and get their points across, and then after the fact I think there is a plan that has been developed and is going to be implemented, and we have to keep coming back and revisit in this case additional wilderness areas.

And there were others that were involved. I found at least one local planning commission that spent a lot of time on it, and they did come out in opposition to wilderness areas during that time. They made a comment that they believed that timber resources on federal lands within the Jefferson are not being aggressively managed as they could be and should be, particularly hardwood, and they do not support any measure that would move the Clinch River district, which is one district there in the Jefferson Forest, toward a wilderness designation or any designation that would potentially place extreme restrictions on the multiple use approach to forest management. And that was a planning commission that represented Wise County, Scott County, and Lee County, and the town of Norton. So just not in the forestry community but some others in the local planning community and local government.

Mr. GOODLATTE. You mentioned fire and forest health problems that may result from the wilderness designations in the bill, and I wonder if you might elaborate on that. What is the current fire risk in southwest Virginia where these areas are located?

Mr. HOWE. It is pretty bad this year with all the talk about climate change. Whatever is causing it, we have had a dry year, and

the Department of Forestry sent out some notices earlier in the year, sent out a map, and designated certain areas that were really threatened by wildfire. In fact, I think they are already well ahead of the—maybe even have double the number of wildfires and the acreage impacted that they have in a typical year. One of the areas, I am looking at the map, it basically corresponds to Congressman Boucher's district that has high incidents of threat, and I don't think that has changed. I received another e-mail from the Department of Forestry just earlier this month. Again it says we are easily going to start pushing double what our normal average is. I guess our concern is that this impacts National Forests but these National Forests are inundated with private land holdings and surrounded by private land holdings.

And whether we like it or not there are homes in many of these areas, and the fire doesn't know where the boundary is nor do insects, for that matter. When a fire starts, and if it is not contained in a timely manner it is going to burn up some private lands and perhaps private homes. The state forester called me last week and then we talked again yesterday, and I received a call also from my counterpart in Tennessee with the Tennessee Forestry Association who had talked to the state forester there, and they are so concerned they have asked us in the private sector to help them with a public relations campaign to try and get the word out about the current dangers with fire. And our state forester said he is very concerned about what they term the Wildlife Urban Interface and that the restrictions—it is not just the restrictions during the fire.

I think, Congressman Goodlatte, you mentioned that. It is managing in a way that would keep some of those fires from starting or becoming true wildfires. So the state foresters in the states and around the Jefferson National Forest are concerned. I will give an example. I had an opportunity to go out to a meeting in Tahoe this past year, and you will recall they had a major wildfire in that area. And the National Forest representative gave us a tour and pointed out that the public in that area had originally not wanted any timber management but had decided perhaps it was a good thing so that eventually with some of the timber thinning and the active management they were able to quell that fire from taking over and burning up south like Tahoe. Different situations geographically but still the dangers, similar dangers, are there in southwest Virginia.

Mr. GOODLATTE. Thank you, Mr. Howe. Mr. Chairman, I think that completes the questions that I had. I want to thank all the witnesses again, and I would just say to our member of the board of supervisors I hope we can continue to talk about these even if we don't necessarily agree on the appropriateness. And I think the objective here is to find the best way to protect this land, not to not protect it. And wilderness areas have their place but they also have their problems, and I just want to make sure that everybody is aware of that, and I hope that as we continue to discuss this with Congressman Boucher and with others, I expect this legislation will move forward fairly soon. What the Chairman has said is exactly right. Once this is done, once it is put into wilderness, that is it. You are not going to have any opportunity to allow for some greater management and flexibility on the part of the Forest Serv-

ice, and I think that is the concern that they have expressed, and I think it is a legitimate concern but I stand prepared, and I know Mr. Boucher knows to continue to talk about ways to make sure that the greatest amount of flexibility and the greatest amount of protection are brought together in a way that would serve the people of Montgomery County in this regard. So, in any event, I thank all of you for your testimony. And, Mr. Chairman, again I thank you very much for holding this hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. I thank the gentleman, and I think the gentleman has raised some valid concerns, and I too want to thank the witnesses and thank you for your patience in putting up with us being gone for a while. And with no further business before the committee, the committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:30 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

Opening Statement by
Chairman Collin C. Peterson
Full Committee Hearing to Review H.R. 1011
The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007
September 21, 2007

Good morning, everyone, and thank you for being here today. We are here to take a look at the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act, which has been introduced by Congressman Boucher of Virginia. My good friend and colleague Bob Goodlatte brought this bill to my attention and requested that the Committee hold a hearing on the issue. These gentlemen represent two beautiful districts in rural Virginia with significant forest areas, and they are strong advocates for these important natural resources. They have been working together to address some concerns that have been raised about this bill, and I understand that they have found some common ground. However, some issues remain unresolved, so this hearing today will allow us to consider all sides of the situation.

Mr. Goodlatte has raised some valid concerns about certain parts of the Jefferson National Forest that would be designated wilderness areas if this bill is passed. The designation of

wilderness areas can limit forest flexibility, and in my part of the country, there have been problems with fire hazards and land management in some places that should never have been designated as wilderness areas. H.R. 1011 calls for wilderness areas well beyond the forest plan, and it is important that we consider the specific needs of the land affected by the bill.

I appreciate Ranking Member Goodlatte and Congressman Boucher for their work on this issue, and I look forward to the testimony of the witnesses joining us today.

Opening Statement of Rep. Bob Goodlatte
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture
Hearing to review H.R. 1101, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007
September 27, 2007

Good morning. I'd like to thank Chairman Peterson for holding this hearing on the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act, H.R. 1011, and welcome the witnesses we have before us, several of which are from my home state of Virginia.

H.R. 1011 proposes to create 38,898 acres of wilderness, 3,575 acres of wilderness study areas and potential wilderness areas, and 11,583 acres OF National Scenic Areas in the Jefferson National Forest in southwest Virginia. While all of the land included in this proposal is in my colleague, Congressman Boucher's district, we share the Jefferson National Forest, with about 108,000 acres of the 723,000 acre forest in my district.

With over 1 million acres of publicly-owned forests in my district, the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests are important economic drivers. They serve as a fiber source for the forest products industry and offer recreation opportunities to millions of people each year.

For twelve years, the Forest Service worked to develop a new forest management plan for the Jefferson National Forest, in a combined effort with four other national forests. They held over 100 technical meetings, received over 3,000 written comments on draft plans and then another 12,000 when the final plan was rolled out. The Forest Service eventually accepted the proposal developed by a collaborative group of citizens and interest groups as the 15 year plan for the Jefferson National Forest. This plan included a recommendation to designate an additional 25,200 acres of wilderness on top of the 57,000 existing wilderness acres.

Unfortunately, the bill before us today goes way beyond the recommendations that came out of the forest planning process, proposing 13,600 more wilderness acres than what was recommended in the forest plan, and another 14,000 acres of other set asides that were NOT INCLUDED IN the forest plan. It's disappointing that we are spending federal resources to develop locally driven, collaborative plans for national forests and Congress then proceeds to ignore these recommendations.

In addition to the process concerns, our witnesses will talk about several problems with proposed areas in the bill. My colleague, Mr. Boucher, has attempted to address some of these problems but I don't believe all are fully resolved.

We have a forest health crisis in our nation's public forests. So far, this year's fire season is the fourth worst fire season on record, and we haven't seen the end of it yet. Additionally, insects and diseases, like the gypsy moth which has infested over 73,000 acres of Virginia's forests this year, are a serious threat. Congress needs to provide more tools to the professional resource managers in the Forest Service to mitigate these problems. Instead, the wilderness designations in H.R. 1011 take tools away from the

Forest Service. For example, the Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East proposed areas, some 8,500 acres, need prescribed fire treatments to restore and maintain a unique forest ecosystem, Table Mountain pine. Table Mountain pine is home to the state's rare northern pine snake and several rare moths. If these areas are set aside for wilderness, it is unlikely THE Forest Service will be able to effectively manage the forest and will have to rely on the chance that fires will come through the area every 3 to 9 years as the trees require.

Recreation conflicts are also a problematic consequence of the proposed bill, since several areas would be closed to motorized recreation and mountain biking. The bill attempts to resolve some of these conflicts by mandating another trail for mountain biking. However, this creates several safety, maintenance, and environmental problems. As we lock up more land to certain recreation users, we force other users to concentrate their activities in smaller areas. A recent survey of visitors to the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests found that only 2% of visitors visited wilderness areas when they came to the forests. This bill would shrink the amount of land that is available for a majority of forest visitors.

Additionally, there are private inholdings AND utility corridors, and many of the areas will be difficult to manage as wilderness due to their size and proximity TO roads, private lands, and communities.

The national forests are already protected as national forests; set aside to provide the public with a number of products and services. Permanently locking up large areas and taking a hands-off approach is not always the answer.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of the witnesses and continuing work with my colleagues to find a more balanced approach than what is proposed in H.R. 1011.

JTS Opening Statement
Ag Committee Hearing
Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007
September 27, 2007

Good Morning, I first want to thank Chairman Peterson and Ranking Member Goodlatte for holding this important hearing today.

Representing the 3rd Congressional District of Colorado, which is approximately 70% federal lands, I understand what it takes to protect our lands for future generations.

There are currently over 30 wilderness designations in my district.

Protecting our lands is an important issue that congress can act upon, but it must be done in a cooperative manner.

Before moving forward with any designation significant work must be put forth.

The congressional delegation, local citizens, government agencies, and most importantly---farmers and ranchers must participate through every step of the process.

Many times federal grazing rights are overlooked and permitees are kicked off their land.

Also, especially in the west, water rights are obstructed and farmers and ranchers lose such a valuable natural resource.

I am eager to hear the testimony today to make sure we have put forth that cooperative effort to ensure support from all sides.

Thanks again to the leadership of the committee for their hard work and I look forward to hearing the testimony.

12 September 2007

Hon. Collin Peterson
Chairman
House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Peterson:

This letter is written in support of H R.1011/S 570, The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007. This Act will add nearly 43,000 acres as Wilderness or Wilderness Study Areas and will bring total designated wilderness on the Jefferson/George Washington National Forest up to only 8 percent.

My professional interest in this Act has to do with the future welfare of black bears in the Appalachian mountains of the East, and specifically in Virginia where I am now a resident. I received my PhD in Wildlife Science at the University of Georgia in 1968 and, at that time, began research on black bears in the southern Appalachians through my faculty appointment at the University of Tennessee. My research was funded through grants and contracts from a variety of public and private sources and led to over 50 bear studies on 15 study areas in 7 southeastern states. These projects ranged in length from 4 to 32 years. One project is continuing, and represents the longest continuous study on any bear species in the world. Much of my research was undertaken in the southern Appalachians, specifically Great Smoky Mountains National Park (TN &NC), Cherokee National Forest (TN), and Pisgah National Forest (NC); many of the study sites in these forests are very similar to the Appalachian forests of Virginia. During my tenure at UT and into retirement I continue to serve in an advisory /consulting capacity for a variety of private and public agencies and institutions including the USFS, NPS, USFWS, and state wildlife and fisheries agencies.

In the 1960s, fewer than 4,500 bears were estimated to occur over the millions of acres of the south-central Appalachian mountains encompassing 6 states (SC, GA, TN, NC, VA and WV). Bears were found only in the most inaccessible reaches of national forest and park- lands. In 1968 the total harvest by hunters for the 6-state region was 527 bears. Over the next 35 years bears made a dramatic recovery. Last year 4,673 bears were harvested from this region, more than the entire estimated regional population in 1968 when I began my research. I am often asked about the reasons for this success. Black bears are landscape species and require large expanses of land for population viability. Thus, the first and foremost ingredient is the presence of millions of acres of forested public lands down the Appalachian chain that provide critical food and cover: food primarily in the form of acorns from oak forests now reaching middle-age, and cover in the form of refugia from human activities. My research supports the fact that this species

responds positively to a healthy mix of both early and late successional habitats at a broad scale with wilderness serving as the source of refugia (e.g. escape cover, winter dens, and key foods such as acorns). It seems apparent that Shenandoah and Great Smoky Mountains National Parks are prime examples of the positive impacts protected landscapes had on recovery of black bears in this region. On a smaller scale such enclaves on national forests in the Appalachians are vital to bears.

In my opinion a mosaic of wilderness and managed forests at a landscape level is the only way to ensure a high degree of stability for the future of bears and bear hunting in Virginia and the southern Appalachians in general. Building long- term stability for this species should be a high priority. The size and dispersed nature of the proposed Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas, and National Scenic Areas in the Jefferson National Forest under the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act will contribute to this long- term stability. And, since this mammal serves as an important "Umbrella Species", passage of this Act also will contribute to the overall biological diversity of southwest Virginia.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Michael R. Pelton
Professor Emeritus, Wildlife Science
545 Balser Lane
Middlebrook, VA 24459

Statement to the Agriculture Committee, to be part of the record of the hearing of September 27, 2007 on HR 1011, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act

My wife and I have been residents of Blacksburg, Montgomery County, Virginia for 45 years. I taught in the Biology Department of Virginia Tech for 36 of those years, retiring in 1998, and also during ten summers at the Mountain Lake Biological Station of the University of Virginia in neighboring Giles County. My PhD was in ornithology, my professional field evolutionary genetics, and I have a deep and broad interest in natural history. Against that background, we have hiked the mountains of southwest Virginia for 45 years.

I support the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act, HR 1011, which includes proposals for several new wilderness areas in the Ninth District of southwest Virginia. I am committed to the multiple use of the National Forests, and wilderness is one of those uses, but I would like to address particularly the proposed wilderness areas in the bill that I know best: Brush Mountain, in Montgomery County, and Brush Mountain East in adjacent Craig County.

These areas, comprising a series of narrow lateral ridges and hollows rising 1200 to 1800 feet from Craig Creek to the crest of Brush Mountain on its north face, are remote and rugged and show very little evidence of human impact, despite being within a 20-35 minutes drive of Blacksburg. Between 1999 and 2005 we hiked 15 or 20 times in the area to study its topography and natural history. Many of those lateral ridges terminate in cliffs plunging into Craig Creek, making them difficult of access, and except for a foot bridge on the Appalachian Trail in the Brush Mountain East area in Craig County, getting across the creek itself from the valley road is possible only by wading or shinnying across on a fallen tree. Once in the area, however, you can spend a day exploring the ridges and hollows out of sight or sound of civilization. The areas are considered unsuitable for timber production by the Forest Service and are roadless except for a small long-disused Forest Service road in the Brush Mountain area. They hold a diversity of forest types, including dry west-facing slopes with pines, moist east-facing slopes with deciduous trees, and moist hollows with streams.

Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East were proposed for inclusion in HR 1011 by Congressman Boucher with input from citizens' groups, which have, contrary to some critics, a legitimate role to play in wilderness designation. The areas were endorsed by the Craig and Montgomery Boards of Supervisors in 2002 and 2003, respectively, and Brush Mountain was endorsed by the Preston Forest Neighborhood Association, Blacksburg, in 2005 and again in 2007. Preston Forest contains about 200 homes and is the only neighborhood near the Brush Mountain area. The areas were also endorsed by the bear hunters association and the International Mountain Bike Association and have the support of many citizens of the two counties.

In 2004 the Jefferson National Forest Plan designated these areas as Remote Backcountry Recreation, Non-Motorized, "where users can obtain a degree of solitude

and the environment can be maintained in near-natural state," but the Forest Service has chosen to emphasize the allowed use of prescribed fire, primarily to favor certain fire-dependent species, especially table mountain pine. Their rationale is that without repeated fires table mountain pine will decline in abundance, and they cite evidence of frequent fires on the mountain until it became National Forest 70 years ago. But before then, the land was occupied by farmers and much of the forest cleared, and most of those fires were undoubtedly of human origin. It is likely that table mountain pine was originally limited to upper slopes and that settlers created additional "artificial" habitat for it through their land-use practices. In any event, table mountain pine is common throughout the central Appalachians and is in no way a threatened species, as critics claim. Why should wilderness be held hostage to it?

The Forest Service has already done prescribed burns on part of Brush Mountain. These have swept across areas of a square mile or more, and they have burned quite unnaturally all the way from Craig Creek to the top of Brush Mountain. Unlike typical wildfires, which burn upper slopes, these have encompassed the deciduous forest and moist hollows, a draconian approach to managing the small areas where table mountain pine might normally grow, and destroying the recreational value of the forest.

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STATEMENT

JOEL HOLTROP
DEPUTY CHIEF
NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM
FOREST SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
SEPTEMBER 27, 2007

CONCERNING:

H.R. 1011 – Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007

Thank you for the opportunity today to provide the Department's view on H.R. 1011, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007. I am Joel Holtrop, Deputy Chief, National Forest System of the Forest Service.

H.R. 1011 would designate 27,817 acres in the Jefferson National Forest as new components of the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS). Specifically, the bill would designate the following areas: Brush Mountain East Wilderness, Brush Mountain Wilderness, Raccoon Branch Wilderness, Stone Mountain Wilderness, Hunting Camp Creek Wilderness, and Garden Mountain Wilderness. H.R. 1011 would also designate 11,344 acres as additions to existing wilderness areas namely, Mountain Lake Wilderness, Lewis Fork Wilderness, Little Wilson Creek Wilderness, Shawvers Run Wilderness, Peters Mountain Wilderness, and Kimberling Creek Wilderness.

H.R. 1011 would designate 3,226 acres in the Jefferson National Forest as the "Lynn Camp Creek Wilderness Study Area." The bill also would designate 349 acres depicted on the map as the "Kimberling Creek Additions and Potential Wilderness Area" as a potential wilderness area for eventual incorporation in the Kimberling Creek Wilderness. The bill would set forth requirements regarding ecological restoration within this area and would provide for the designation of the area as a wilderness within five years.

In addition, the bill would designate 11,583 acres of the Seng Mountain and Bear Creek areas as national scenic areas for purposes of ensuring the protection and preservation of scenic quality, water quality, natural characteristics, and water resources; protecting wildlife and fish habitat; protecting areas that may develop characteristics of old-growth forests; and providing a variety of recreation opportunities.

Finally the bill would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to develop a management plan for the designated national scenic areas. The Secretary also would be required to develop a trail plan for hiking and equestrian trails on lands designated as wilderness by this Act

and to develop a plan for non-motorized recreation trails within the Seng Mountain and Bear Creek National Scenic Areas. The bill also would direct the Secretary to develop a sustainable non-motorized trail in Smyth County, Virginia.

We recognize and commend the delegation and the Committee for its collaborative approach and local involvement that has contributed to the development of this bill. The Department supports several of the designations included in the bill but we object to other designations and to mandatory planning and construction requirements. The Department would like to work with the Committee to offer suggestions which we think will improve H.R. 1011.

Wilderness Proposals

During the development or revision of a forest land and resource management plan (LRMP), a national forest conducts an evaluation of potential wilderness or wilderness study areas that satisfies the definition of wilderness found in section 2(c) of the Wilderness Act of 1964. On National Forest System (NFS) lands in the Eastern United States (east of the 100th meridian) the criteria for evaluating potential wilderness recognizes that much, if not all of the land, shows signs of human activity and modification. The Record of Decision for the revised Jefferson National Forest LRMP, signed on January 15, 2004, was developed over an 11-year period with extensive public involvement. It contains recommendations for 25,200 acres of wilderness study areas, including new wilderness study areas and additions to existing areas designated as wilderness.

The Department supports the provisions in H.R. 1011 that would designate new components of the NWPS that are consistent with the Jefferson National Forest LRMP recommendations for wilderness study. These areas are the proposed Garden Mountain, Hunting Creek Camp, and Stone Mountain Wilderness areas.

The Department supports the designation of additions to existing wilderness areas for the following areas: Kimberling Creek A and B Additions, Lewis Fork Addition, Little Wilson Creek Addition, Mountain Lake A and C Additions, Peters Mountain Addition, and Shawvers Run A Addition.

The Department does not oppose the designation of the "Lynn Camp Creek Wilderness Study Area," the Mountain Lake B Addition, and Shawvers Run Additions B and C areas. However, we have concerns about the suitability of the Lynn Camp Creek Wilderness Study Area as a component of the NWPS due to its small size, configuration, and manageability (due to outstanding mineral rights). The Department is willing to work with the committee to look at other options for protection of this area. We also have concerns about the suitability of the Mountain Lake B Addition and the Shawvers Run Additions B and C as components of the NWPS due to their size and configuration. An additional concern with the Mountain Lake Addition B is that it contains a 59-acre

private inholding which could require associated road access in the future if the parcel is developed.

The Department does not support the designation as "potential wilderness" for the 349-acre portion of the Kimberling Creek area. The designation "Potential Wilderness" is not a designation referenced in the Wilderness Act of 1964. A subsequent designation of wilderness following a fixed time period and associated compulsory changes in conditions can serve to limit the Secretary's discretion in the allocation of scarce resources and other management actions associated with the administration of the NFS and the NWPS. We use the term, potential wilderness, in our wilderness evaluation process under our LRMP efforts to evaluate areas as potential additions to the NWPS. The Kimberling Creek addition was recently acquired as NFS land and in its current condition does not contain the basic natural characteristics that make it suitable for wilderness due to an extensive road network. We would recommend that the Committee consider allowing the Secretary to continue the current management prescription for this area which is Dispersed Recreation-Unsuitable. This management emphasis provides for a variety of dispersed recreation uses with minimal vegetation management and would allow use of motorized and mechanized equipment for needed road and trail rehabilitation work. We plan to develop rehabilitation plans and implement these plans within the next 5 to 10 years. While this area was not recommended as a potential wilderness area in the LRMP, future wilderness designation of this area could be reevaluated after restoration activities occur.

The Department does not support wilderness designation for the Brush Mountain and Brush Mountain East areas. These areas lie on the north side of Brush Mountain and are separated by a 345 kilovolt powerline corridor. They were not recommended for wilderness study in LRMP. They contain fire-dependent forest habitat which make up approximately 50 percent of these two areas. Additionally, the areas are largely surrounded by private lands. Wildland urban interface (subdivisions and housing developments) exists on the north and south boundaries. If designated as wilderness, our ability to utilize prescribed fire for the maintenance of southern yellow pine forest communities and to conduct hazardous fuels reduction projects would be hampered in these interface areas. Our ability to use prescribed fire is compromised when we cannot mechanically construct firelines to better control fire management activities. Additionally, the narrow width of, and the bisecting powerline corridor within these areas detract from their naturalness and offer few opportunities for solitude. We have also recently identified a need for a small boundary change in the proposed wilderness area along the northwest side of Brush Mountain East. An electric distribution line is located along Craig Creek and the current boundary includes some of the line within the proposed wilderness. If the Committee proceeds with wilderness designation, we would like to work with the Committee to adjust the boundary to exclude this existing line.

The Department could support the designation of the Raccoon Branch area as a wilderness area if agreements are reached in resolving trail maintenance issues in the area and if the requirement contained in section 5(d) of the bill for a sustainable trail is amended to provide more flexibility for any future alternative trail locations. Nearly six

miles of the Virginia Highlands Horse Trail (VHHT) and the Dickey Knob Trail traverse this area. These trails are heavily used by both equestrians and mountain bikers. Currently only four of the six miles of the VHHT in the Raccoon Branch area are open to mountain bike use due to the steep nature of the trail where it enters the west end of Raccoon Branch. Wilderness designation would eliminate mountain bike use within the area. While equestrian use is compatible with wilderness designation, heavy use and ground conditions along the VHHT necessitate extensive maintenance to maintain the integrity of the trail and protect watershed and other resources values. To maintain the trail to the standards that are needed without mechanized or motorized equipment will require cooperative agreements and commitments from user groups to help in maintenance to protect the resources and to provide for continued equestrian use of the trail. We would like to work with the Committee to adjust the boundary as now proposed in the bill. The adjustment would exclude the section of VHHT from the western boundary to its intersection with Hickory Ridge Trail #4516 which we believe would alleviate much of the concern with maintaining the trail for equestrian use.

National Scenic Area Proposals

Section 4 of H.R. 1011 would establish Seng Mountain and Bear Creek National Scenic Areas (NSAs). In testimony to the House Natural Resources Committee in May, the Department expressed concerns regarding the proposed Bear Creek NSA over the limitations on our ability to improve black bear habitat and to provide opportunities for hunting as a result of this designation and mandated closure of a Forest Service development road. The Department indicated it could support the Bear Creek NSA designation if allowances were made for seasonal motorized use of Forest Development Road #6261 during hunting season. Subsequently, the Natural Resources Committee amended H.R. 1011 to provide that the road will be open for motorized use during bear and deer hunting seasons. The Department appreciates the action by the Natural Resources Committee relative to the road.

Last month, the President signed Executive Order (E.O.) No. 13443, "Facilitation of Hunting Heritage and Wildlife Conservation." This E.O. requires Federal land management agencies to "...Manage wildlife and wildlife habitats on public lands in a manner that expands and enhances hunting opportunities...". Forest Service direction on compliance with the E.O. is being developed. Portions of both the Seng Mountain and Bear Creek NSAs are managed under the LRMP to manage black bear habitat. We would like to work with the Committee on language that would allow a low level of habitat management for black bear that would be consistent with the E.O. and compatible with the purposes for which the scenic areas are being established.

The proposed Seng Mountain NSA is within the congressionally designated Mount Rogers National Recreation Area (NRA). The Mount Rogers NRA is managed to provide public outdoor recreation benefits and the continued use by a diversity of recreation uses. The Seng Mountain area contains a motorized trail, the Barton Gap Trail #4624. Motorized use of the trail would be prohibited under H.R. 1011. The Barton Gap

Trail is one of only five designated motorcycle trails on the George Washington and Jefferson National Forests and is an important part of the diversity of recreation opportunities that we provide the visitors that use the Forest and the Mount Rogers NRA. The Department would like to work with the Committee to resolve any confusion resulting from the overlapping designations for the Seng Mountain area. The Department recommends that the overlapping designation be clarified and continued motorized use on the Barton Gap Trail be allowed.

Trail Development Plans

H.R. 1011 would require the Secretary to establish a trail plan to develop hiking and equestrian trails on lands designated as wilderness by this bill. The designated lands would be administered in accordance with the Wilderness Act. The Forest Service already addresses trail management and planning standards within the LRMP planning process. The Department considers the requirement to develop additional trail plans to be unnecessary.

H.R. 1011 also would require the Secretary to develop a sustainable trail to provide a continuous connection for non-motorized travel between State Route (SR) 650 and Forest Development Road 4018. This trail would be along SR 16. We believe that it would be costly and difficult to provide a trail in this general location that would be safe for both equestrians and mountain bikers. The existing gravel road (SR 650) is winding and narrow and contains several blind curves. It receives high local use and is the main access road for campers and recreational vehicles to enter Hurricane Campground. Further, a potential connector trail for horses and bikes from SR 650 along the route of the old Marion-Rye Valley rail bed would require crossing SR 16, a 55-mph State highway that receives heavy commercial use, in a location with poor sight distance. Trail construction along the stream would be unlikely to meet our Forest standards for riparian protection. The bill language that specifies the terminus of the connector route limits our ability to locate and construct a trail that will meet Forest Service standards for safety and in a manner that is environmentally appropriate. We would like to work with the Committee on language that would allow us to construct trail facilities with adequate consideration for alternatives, priorities, and costs.

This concludes my statement, I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

STATEMENT

Paul R. Howe
Executive Vice President
Virginia Forestry Association

Before the
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Agriculture
September 27, 2007

H.R. 1011 – Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007

Thank you for the opportunity today to speak before the Committee on Agriculture regarding H.R. 1011, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007. I am Paul Howe, Executive Vice President of the Virginia Forestry Association (VFA). We are a not-for-profit organization representing some 1500 members in Virginia. Our members include private forest landowners, pulp and paper companies, sawmills, loggers, private and public foresters, and individuals, all interested in forestry in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The association's mission is to promote stewardship and wise use of sustainable forest resources for the economic and environmental benefits of all Virginians.

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act proposes nearly 39,000 acres of wilderness area, another 3,575 acres of study areas or potential wilderness, and more than 11,500 acres as National Scenic Areas in the Jefferson National Forest. The United States Forest Service is very adept at describing the specific natural resource and public use needs of all these areas in great detail. VFA would like to focus on two primary concerns.

First, VFA and many other groups and individual citizens provided public input and participated in the development of the current Jefferson National Forest Plan. The plan development process for each National Forest is long, tedious and very thorough, and includes careful attention to the need for and designation of wilderness areas. The current Jefferson Forest Plan recommends 25,200 acres of wilderness, a recommendation that VFA finds acceptable. To the extent that H.R 1011 circumvents and diverts from a plan based on broad public input, and introduces concepts such as "potential wilderness" not currently in the Wilderness Act, we would not support the additional wilderness area proposals or the additional national scenic area proposals.

Our second concern is one based on the practical need for an active forest management program that can best maintain the long-term health of the Jefferson National Forest. Our National Forests are already suffering from lack of on-the-ground management. The hard working and dedicated Forest Service managers are capable of caring for National Forest lands in a manner that addresses the Congressional mandate for multiple use, but restrictions on their day-to-day authority are creating forests susceptible to poor health, pest attacks, fire threats, loss of certain wildlife habitat, and public access.

Wilderness areas can actually make good science-based management very difficult. Without prescriptive silvicultural techniques, the forests in wilderness-designated areas may deteriorate, resulting in fire, insect, and disease problems which can spread to adjoining private land. Recreational opportunities can be limited in wilderness areas. Lack of access and strict use limitations severely curtail use by the majority of the public, particularly families with young children, the elderly and the handicapped. Also, non-management does not allow for nurturing a diversity of habitats, with subsequent negative impacts on some wildlife populations, including both game and non-game species.

The process of managing and in some cases harvesting forests to meet overall National Forest goals and specific forest plans, such as the current Jefferson Forest Plan, can provide timber and fiber supporting local forest product businesses as they produce wood goods in demand by the American public. Current timber harvests on the Jefferson and its sister National Forest in Virginia, the George Washington, are miniscule, reflecting a great waste of the economic potential of a total of 1.66 million acres of forestland covering much of western Virginia.

On behalf of the Virginia Forestry Association and the forestry community in Virginia, we appreciate your attention to our opinions regarding H.R. 1011 and natural resource management of our National Forests. I would be happy to answer questions or provide you with additional information as you address this legislation.

Testimony of

Dowd Bruton
Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist
The National Wild Turkey Federation

Review of
HR 1011, The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007

Before The
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United State Senate

September 27, 2007

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Dowd Bruton. I am a Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist with the National Wild Turkey Federation. The National Wild Turkey Federation is one of the nation's leading non-profit conservation organizations.

The National Wild Turkey Federation is dedicated to the conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of our hunting tradition. Growth and progress define the NWTF as it has expanded from 1,300 members in 1973 to more than 500,000 members today. NWTF has 2,200 chapters in all 50 states, Canada, Mexico and 14 other foreign countries. With that growth has come impressive strides in wildlife management as the NWTF has forged dynamic partnerships across the country. Together, the NWTF's conservation partners and grassroots members have raised and spent more than $224 million on conservation projects. This investment has helped conserve and improve more than 9.6 million acres of wildlife habitat and uphold hunting traditions.

In our early existence, wild turkey restoration was our primary focus. Because of our efforts and partnerships with state and federal wildlife organizations, the re-establishment of the wild turkey has become one of the most exciting wildlife success stories of the 20th century. When the National Wild Turkey Federation was founded in 1973, there were only 1.3 million wild turkeys throughout North America. Since then, the number of wild turkeys has increased to nearly 7 million birds thanks to state, federal and provincial wildlife agencies, the NWTF, its members and partners.

With wild turkey populations firmly established, the NWTF has shifted its focus to wise and science-based active land management to provide habitat for turkeys and the thousands of wildlife species that exist in our forests across this great nation.

Trained wildlife biologists know that forest diversity is the key to proper management. There are four fundamental criteria that each forest species needs for survival. These are food, water, shelter and space. Depending on how a forest is managed, various amounts of each of these criteria become available to the animals that live there. When wildlife managers consider wildlife species and their habitat requirements, **active management** is the best solution to meeting the needs of the largest variety of species.

Consider wise forest management to be a giant puzzle. Each piece has it proper place, but without each individual piece, the puzzle can never be completed. **Wilderness** is in fact one of those pieces to the puzzle. With any puzzle, too many pieces that are exactly alike create problems in the final product. Our concern with HR 1011 is that it's overly aggressive in terms of adding additional wilderness in the Jefferson National Forest. HR 1011 proposes designating 38,898 acres of wilderness, 3,575 acres of wilderness study areas/potential wilderness areas, and 11,583 acres as National Scenic Areas. In fact, the Jefferson National Forest Plan already includes 23,463 acres proposed for wilderness designation in H.R. 1011.

Already 8% of the land (57,645 acres) is wilderness, with additional wilderness study areas (25,200 acres) and national scenic areas (23,500 acres) totaling 48,700 acres. HR 1011 would increase that acreage by 30,593 acres. Worse, in some of the proposed areas,

wilderness would increase to as much as 50% of the total area. Jefferson National Forest total acreage is 723,300. If the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007 is enacted, new wilderness along with existing acreage, would total 136,938 acres. This would represent approximately 19 percent of the total forest area.

Passive vs. Active Management

I will just list a number of reasons why NWTF and my fellow wildlife biologists believe too much wilderness as prescribed in HR 1011 is a problem.

- First of all, any type of active management is restricted on wilderness areas.

- In Wilderness, natural succession of less desirable tree species (such as red maple or sugar maple) over-topping and killing black cherry severely hinders available food sources to wildlife during fall and winter months. Wilderness prohibits the creation of any new early successional habitat such as wildlife openings, linear wildlife openings (such as seeded log roads), cut-back edge borders to limit predation, savannahs or water holes.

- Active forest and wildlife management are inextricably woven together in regard to silvacultural treatments, forest age class distribution and diversity of habitat types to benefit wildlife populations within forest ecosystems and across the forest landscape. Wilderness designation prohibits these practices.

- Additionally, Wilderness is created by an act of Congress and can not be changed without federal legislation. Other management prescriptions can be adjusted or improved through the Forest Service planning process. Historically speaking, Congress does not remove land from Wilderness designation.

- Wilderness laws and regulations on federal lands can sometimes provide exceptions for doing various activities. However, history shows that nearly all management activities are virtually forbidden in designated wilderness, or are only allowed at the discretion of the Forest Supervisor. Historically, Forest Supervisors do not approve the various management activities.

- Forest management is not allowed to be used as a tool to create and perpetuate diverse wildlife habitats. Active management of important mast producing (nut and fruit) tree species that are critical to game populations throughout the fall and winter months is prohibited.

- There can be no timber harvest – even thinning - which is a great tool for creating early successional habitat that many species require for foraging, breeding, nesting, and even their survival.

- Active management of important timber types (i.e., oak-hickory, mixed hardwoods, northern hardwoods) to perpetuate these important forest

communities is prohibited. There would be no dispersed age classes of these forest types or a continuous supply of important and critical mast producing tree species.

- Combating nonnative, invasive forest insect and disease problems will be difficult to implement under Wilderness designation. Currently, many of the recommended Wilderness areas have such problems. Two striking examples are the beech bark scale disease and hemlock wooly adelgid, which are killing nearly all of the American beech and eastern hemlock trees that they infect.

- Vegetation management can not be used to create vistas (viewing areas) or alter the natural environment.

- Only horse or foot travel is permitted; wheeled vehicles cannot be used at anytime (e.g., carts, wagons, mountain bikes, etc...). Motorized vehicles, motorized equipment, motor boats and other forms of motorized use or mechanical transport are not allowed, which restricts wildlife managers from developing food and water resources in the form of food plots, linear wildlife openings, and water holes.

- No permanent structures can be constructed in Wilderness areas, such as limestone treatment facilities used to restore trout streams, without federal legislation.

- Only hand tools are allowed for existing wildlife openings and trail maintenance.

- The collection of any forest product is prohibited (e.g., mushrooms, ginseng, etc.).

- Fish stocking is allowed only in those streams or portions of streams where a history of such use exists. Stocking must be by non-mechanical means only, e.g. horseback and backpack.

- Motorized use and mechanized transport may be used for life-threatening situations in search and rescue operations – but is up to the discretion of the Forest Supervisor. However, in reality Forest Supervisors do not necessarily allow this, even in removing a deceased person deep within a Wilderness area. For example, on July 20, 2003 the Monongahela National Forest denied permission for rescuers to remove a deceased person from the Otter Creek Wilderness by wheeled motorized vehicles. A total of eight people were used to carry out the deceased over a distance of three miles taking over 2 1/2 hours!

- Wilderness standards dictate that wildfires will be suppressed and that prescribed fire can occur only with an approved burn plan. Perversely though, prescribed fire is actually not a *realistic* management option because there can be no use of equipment to create fire lines and no mechanical options for fire control - only the use of hand tools are allowed for control.

- Tractors, tractor/plows, tracked or wheeled motorized equipment, chainsaws, portable pumps, or fire retardants from aircraft can not be used for fire suppression unless approved by the Forest Supervisor.

What do other scientists say about active management?

Active Management is Preferable to Passive Management

In addition to the above, there is a significant amount of science available demonstrating the compatibility of active management for early successional wildlife habitat with goals for mature forest species. This includes the need for both types of forests by some songbirds and many species of mammals.
(Vitz, Andrew C. Vegetative and Fruit Resources as Determinants of Habitat Use by Mature-Forest Birds During Post Breeding Period. The Auk, 4/1/07.)

"The alternative to active management is reduced productivity, many dead trees, and fuel conditions favorable to severe and potentially destructive wildfires…[however] public policies tend to inhibit active management of national forests."
(O'Laughlin, J., and P.S. Cook. 2003. Inventory-based forest health indicators: implications for national forest management. Journal of Forestry 101(2):11-17.)

Forest Service scientists concluded in their integrated assessment of resources
In the interior Columbia River basin region that when compared with traditional approaches, "active management appears to have the greatest chance of producing the mix of goods and services that people want from ecosystems, as well as maintaining or enhancing long-term ecological integrity". A reserve-based passive management strategy was one alternative approach evaluated by these scientists. Passive management simply would not be as effective as active management in restoring desired conditions on federal lands in the region. (Quigley, T.M., R.W. Haynes, and R.T. Graham, tech. eds. 1996. Integrated Scientific Assessment for Ecosystem Management in the Interior Columbia Basin, PNW-GTR-382, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, OR.)

Many people believe that wilderness protects the forest and its wildlife species from man. Science simply does not corroborate that belief, in fact the studies above and many more prove that active forest management, including prescribed fire, reduces the build-up of fuel levels within the forest and protects against catastrophic wildfires and protects biodiversity. It is scientifically documented that there is an oak decline occurring in eastern Oak Forest. There are many suspected reasons for this decline. Old growth forests (**wilderness**) are at the highest risk. If some unforeseen catastrophic event occurs, such as an insect outbreak, there are no young oak seedlings on the forest floor that would reforest the area. This would lead to reforestation by undesirable species such as maple, poplar, and locust, with a total loss of the oak component. Active management, using a variety of techniques, including prescribed fire and forest thinning, are the only wide-

scale solutions to allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor and promoting the development of oak seedlings from acorns.
(Loucks, Orie L., The Epidemiology of Forest Decline in Eastern Deciduous Forest, Northeastern Naturalist, 1998, and O'Brien, Joseph G, Mielke, Manfred E., Oak, Steve, and Moltzan, Bruce, Sudden Oak Death. USDA-Forest Service, Pest Alert, January 2002)

Benefits of Active Forest Management vs. Wilderness

Wildlife has been managed by God and man since creation. Lightning strikes, forest wildfires, and windstorms have existed for all time. They create openings in the forest for wildlife. In the days before European Settlers came to America, native Americans cleared land for their livestock and crops to support their families. They used prescribed fire to clear the underbrush in the forest and promote the growth of grasses and forbs on the forest floor, which they used in their day to day life. Wildlife also benefited from this clearing and burning. When the settlers arrived, many accounts from those settlers indicate the overwhelming species diversity and actual numbers of species. Those early settlers simply expanded what native Americans had been doing for thousands of years. As a result, they fed their families and understood the value of forest management and biodiversity.

Only recently have certain factions begun to think that no management is best. I urge you to consider what is proven to happen when a forest becomes wilderness. The forest matures into an old growth forest. The trees are tall and the canopy of the forest closes in. This in turn restricts the sunlight that reaches the forest floor. Many of the grasses, forbs, and shrubs that are dependent on that sunlight can no longer exist. Plant species diversity suffers. In good years, this old growth forest will produce huge amounts of hard mast in the form of acorns, hickory nuts, beechnuts of other hard mast. These favored wildlife foods will provide a bountiful food option for many species of wildlife.

But, in bad years, there will be mast failure and this same forest becomes a virtual desert, void of food and void of shelter because the grass, forb, and shrub layer has been removed due to the loss of sunlight. Where is the gray squirrel, or the small rodents, or even the deer, turkey, grouse, or bear to go for food? Animals caught in the middle of thousands of acres of food-barren wilderness will suffer.

Even in the springtime, when hard mast doesn't have as great an importance to most species, the grasses, forbs, and shrubs that provide food and cover for wildlife are not present. These same grasses and forbs attract high numbers of insects. Grouse chick and turkey poults are very dependent on insects in the spring and early summer. These insects provide the high protein diet that these young animals require. High protein translates into rapid body growth. Rapid growth means an increased ability to escape predation. Even species like black bears, which are usually associated with mature forest, depend heavily on soft mast in the spring and early summer months. This is the time when most of the hard mast crop has been depleted. Sow bears, needing highly nutritious diets to offset the energy requirements of lactation and feeding their cubs, suffer without this soft

mast component provided by active management. As with the puzzle we talked about earlier, everything is interrelated. One piece missing eventually affects the entire product.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, the NWTF believes that wilderness certainly has its place in the Forest Plan and in forest management. We cannot support, however, the overreach in HR 1011 and would urge a more limited approach that does not imperil biodiversity and forest health. We urge the Committee to propose some adjustments to HR 1011 that move the wilderness designations closer to being consistent with those in the Forest Plan. NWTF is confident that a balance can be achieved that provides additional wilderness but still benefits wildlife, people, and the economy. Please know that NWTF stands ready to work with you to craft these adjustments, and to continue to invest our own funding and sweat equity into National Forest conservation efforts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our comments with you today.

I will be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JOHN A. MUFFO
MONTGOMERY COUNTY, VIRGINIA BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE
H.R. 1011, THE VIRGINIA RIDGE AND VALLEY ACT
SEPTEMBER 27, 2007

Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Goodlatte and members of the Committee, I am John Muffo, a member of the Montgomery County, Virginia Board of Supervisors, and I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 1011, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.

It is easy to understand why Montgomery County's slogan is "Naturally good for business." We are located along Virginia's Technology Corridor in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Our county is home to Virginia's largest and most technologically oriented university, Virginia Tech. The nationally renowned Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center is home to a college of osteopathic medicine and over 100 companies engaged in leading-edge technology research.

Amidst this growing development, Montgomery County is blessed with beautiful mountains and valleys and streams. Hiking, fishing, hunting, mountain biking and other outdoors activities are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. The Blue Ridge Parkway is easily accessible. The nearby Claytor Lake State Park is one of the most popular parks in the entire state. The New River, which is the second oldest river in North America, is a popular destination for canoing, fishing, and tubing. Hiking and mountain biking trails abound and are widely used. And most importantly, over 19,000 acres of the Jefferson National Forest are located in Montgomery County.

During the Forest Service Planning process in 2003, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution supporting wilderness designation for portions of Brush Mountain in Montgomery County. This resolution was adopted after a series of public meetings by the Board and with significant public input. While the Forest Service did not include our recommendation in the final plan, I am pleased that Senator Warner and Congressman Boucher did listen to the citizens and the Board of Supervisors and did include the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area in the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.

The Board considered a number of factors when we voted to support a Brush Mountain Wilderness Area. First and most importantly, we believed that the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area would enhance the quality of life for our constituents. The designation of portions of Brush Mountain as wilderness area ensures that this section will be enjoyed by current and future generations in its natural state.

The protection of view sheds is a high priority for the Montgomery County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. Brush Mountain is a natural scenic backdrop for Blacksburg and nearby communities and should be preserved to the extent possible.

The County Comprehensive Plan recognizes and promotes the fundamental notion that the County's natural resources are vital to the county's quality of life and provide substantial economic and recreational opportunities for the citizens of Montgomery County.

Eco-tourism already benefits Montgomery County and has the potential to grow. It is a key element of the county's Economic Development Plan. The Brush Mountain Wilderness Area, along with other outdoor activities, would certainly enhance Montgomery County as an attractive destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Looking at those factors, it is clear that the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area is a good investment for our community.

Mr. Chairman, we in Montgomery County appreciate our national forest lands and support responsible stewardship of those lands. Certainly timber harvesting is an integral part of the forest plan, but so too should be other activities and considerations such as recreation and view shed preservation.

As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I have learned that as our county grows at a rate of approximately 1,000 people per year, so do the demands for more recreational opportunities. The Jefferson National Forest offers a wide variety of outdoor activities that my constituents enjoy every day. Whether it is hiking, hunting, bird watching, fishing or just enjoying nature, this area is what makes Montgomery County special.

That is why the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area is so important. Favorable Congressional action would set aside a small portion of the forest for all to enjoy. I urge that the Committee pass the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Statement of Tom R Davenport,
Business Manager for Mt Rogers Outfitters

For The Committee on Agriculture

Regarding H.R. 1011, the *Virginia Ridge and Valley Act*

September 27, 2007

Chairman Peterson, Ranking Member Goodlatte and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to express my views as a businessperson on H. R. 1011, the *Virginia Ridge and Valley Act*, introduced by Representative Rick Boucher.

I am the business manager for Mt Rogers Outfitters, an outdoor recreation retail establishment focused primarily on the backpacking and hiking segment of the market.

I am a relative newcomer to the retail industry; the first 25 years of my career were in manufacturing management.

I am pleased now to be a part of a growing sector of the U. S. economy rather than a declining one. Nationwide the outdoor recreation retail industry generates $289 billion annually in retail sales and services. This makes outdoor recreation retailing big business, exceeding the sales contributions of several economic sectors, including pharmaceutical and medicine manufacturing; automobile and light truck manufacturing; power generation and supply; securities, commodity contracts, and investing; legal services; and the motion picture and video industry.

Outdoor recreation retailing is also big business in the southeast. Of nine geographic census divisions in the U. S., the South Atlantic Region, which includes Virginia, generates more active outdoor recreation sales than any other, followed by the Pacific Region. In our region the industry generates $51.3 billion in retail sales annually and supports nearly 800,000 jobs.

One significant feature about our industry is that you do not have to be a big operator to participate. It does, however, require a fair measure of entrepreneurial talent, and it requires a significant natural resource attraction.

Our business is a small operation. We are located in Damascus, VA, a small community (population 981) surrounded on three sides by National Forest lands. Our business was the first outdoor retail business in Damascus, founded in 1991 by Dave Patrick, who, the previous year, was the first person from the area to complete a thru hike of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (AT). The Appalachian Trail, in fact, follows a course down the main street of Damascus and on the sidewalk in front of our store.

Long distance hikers and backpacking enthusiasts recognize the area around Damascus as an outstanding backpacking venue. The June, 2006 edition of *Backpacker Magazine* highlighted the section of the AT from Grayson Highlands to Damascus as the best weekend hike on the entire AT. The article refers to our store as "the ATs top hiking store". Last year, the Wall Street Journal ran a feature about the "Trail Days" festival in Damascus, an event that draws maybe 20,000 people to our small town for a reunion and celebration of the hiking adventure.

The economy of the town of Damascus is highly dependent on the National Forest and the natural resources and scenic quality of the area. We do have one light industrial facility on the outskirts of town and one general service grocery store. All other economic activity revolves around outdoor recreation, mostly on National Forest. People come to Damascus, not because there is something to do or see in the town, but because of the recreational opportunities in the National Forest.

So far, we have managed to build our economic base locally, meaning that there are no regional or national chain-store franchises operating in the town—with the exception of gasoline service stations and one minor food establishment.

The vast majority of the customers and clients that we serve at Mt Rogers Outfitters come from outside the area, even outside the state of Virginia. North Carolina, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, and Florida stand out as major sources of our customer base. We are, therefore, bringing "new" money into the area. We provide a variety of products and services for the customer. We emphasize gear that is functional (as opposed to gadgetry or fashion); we emphasize fit and performance (providing impromptu demonstrations and comparisons of products along with fit workshops); we provide detailed consultation in planning the ventures; we provide a bunkhouse for overnight stays in town; and we provide transportation to and from various trailheads. More importantly, we provide a gateway to a valued resource—one our customers cannot access in their home area.

Many of our customers are, or become, long distance hikers or they seek off trail adventures to strengthen their outdoor skills and enhance their outdoor experience. Most of our customers value the solitude, remoteness, and natural qualities associated with the National Forests in our region. The comments we hear from these folks show that they connect with the mountains and forest in a very powerful and dynamic way, and that their experience elicits very strong emotions.

Because of the nature of our business, because of our proximity to National Forest lands, and because of our interest, and our customer's interest, in the quality of our outdoor recreational opportunities and experience, we have been actively involved in participation in the management of the National Forest. We help maintain trails, we collaborate in public participation opportunities, and we participated in the forest plan revision process.

During that planning process we advocated for Wilderness recommendations for Seng Mountain, Raccoon Branch, Garden Mountain, Hunting Camp/Little Wolf Creek, and for

the proposed additions to Lewis Fork and Little Wilson Creek. These are the areas most frequently visited by our customers according to our shuttle records.

We readily acknowledge that the management activities of the Forest Service in our service area have been generally sound and reasonable. The managers of the Mt Rogers National Recreation Area have been supportive and responsive to the needs of our business as well as the other outdoor recreation businesses that have recently sprung up in Damascus. We view the Forest Service as a partner and share credit with them for the economic revitalization in our community.

We think we are being realistic, however, in recognizing that the direction of National Forest management can swing on political considerations independent of our ability to control or influence them.

We think it is in our economic self interest to secure the present and future integrity of a few of the best places. Indeed we think it is in the economic self-interest of much of the rural portion of the region encompassed by the Ninth Congressional District. We were pleased to see the Smyth County and Bland County boards of supervisors endorse the permanent protection of these special areas in their counties. Given the scale and distribution of Federal lands in the District, outdoor recreation retail sales could play an increasingly significant role in other local economies, just as it does in Damascus.

Economics is about how to best utilize our natural, human, and capital resources to ensure our long range future. The designations contained in the Ridge and Valley Act provide the most secure assurance that a key component of our economic vitality—our resource attraction—remains a high quality resource. We ask you to advance the *Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.*

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