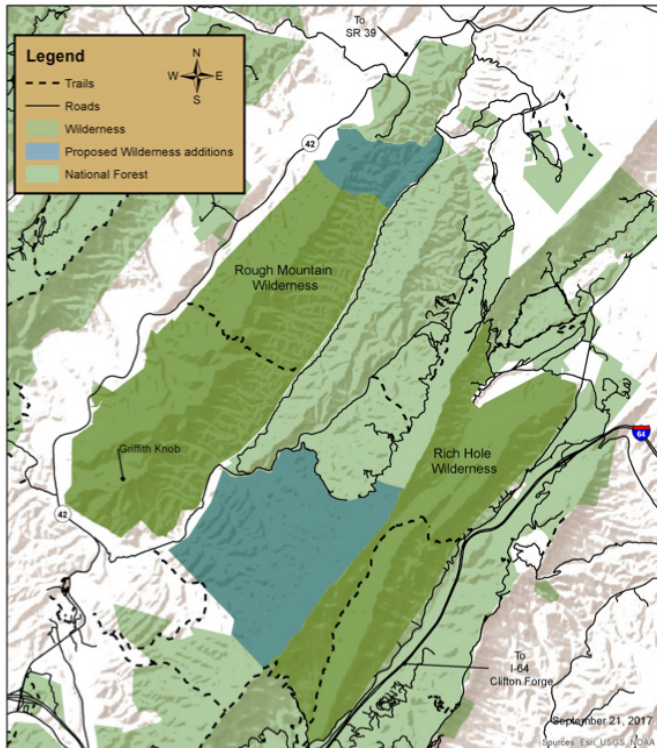


Rich Hole & Rough Mountain Wilderness Additions in the George Washington National Forest, Virginia



The Virginia Wilderness Committee (VWC) is proud to support S. 1975, the *Virginia Wilderness Additions Act of 2017*, introduced by Senator Tim Kaine and co-sponsored by Senator Mark Warner.

The bill proposes to protect 5,600 acres of the George Washington National Forest (GWNF) by expanding the existing Rich Hole and Rough Mountain Wilderness areas.

These Wilderness areas will provide an excellent refuge for wildlife, especially black bear; protect water quality in the pristine Cowpasture River, one of the cleanest and healthiest rivers in the Southeast; and provide other scenic and recreational benefits.

“Taking care of our Nation’s outdoor resources is good for our economy and good for our environment. Land disputes may sometimes be difficult, but the example of the GW Forest Stakeholder Collaborative proves they don’t have to be. When everyone comes to the table and invests the necessary time, we can find common ground.”

– Senator Tim Kaine

These proposed Wilderness additions have received strong support from local and state officials and a wide array of forest users:

- In its 2014 Revised Forest Plan, the **U.S. Forest Service** recommended that these areas be designated as Wilderness, following years of robust public engagement.
- In September 2017, the **Bath County Board of Supervisors** restated its support for these Wilderness additions.
- The **GWNF Stakeholder Collaborative** supports these Wilderness additions.



The Virginia Wilderness Additions Act of 2017

Located in a rugged, remote area of the GWNF, the existing Rich Hole Wilderness (currently 6,450 acres) and Rough Mountain Wilderness (currently 9,300 acres) span Rough Mountain, Mill Mountain, and Brushy Mountain. Rough Mountain and its monolithic peak, Griffith Knob, rise sharply from the banks of the Cowpasture River to dominate the surrounding landscape. To the east, Rich Hole Wilderness protects cold water trout streams and exceptional old growth forests, including especially large and rare cove hardwoods.

This bill would expand the Rich Hole Wilderness by approximately 4,600 acres and the Rough Mountain Wilderness by approximately 1,000 acres, in southeastern Bath County. This would create a nearly continuous Wilderness area on the GWNF of over 21,000 acres, which would be one of the largest well-protected areas on the GWNF.

Why Wilderness?

Virginia is blessed with a rich heritage of wild lands, and the GWNF harbors some of the most unspoiled of these special places. Here we can find clear mountain streams, deep woods, century-old trees, songbirds, breathtaking views, and a place to renew our spirit.



Wilderness designation is the strongest, most lasting protection for these areas. Permanently protecting wild lands ensures a natural legacy for future generations.

Protecting these steep mountains and headwater streams will help prevent soil erosion and maintain exceptional water quality in the Cowpasture River and its watershed.

Wilderness areas also preserve critical habitat for wildlife that thrives in large, intact forested areas, including nesting sites for peregrine falcons and migratory songbirds, an undisturbed forest floor for rare Appalachian salamanders, dens for black bear, and cold trout streams.

In addition, Wilderness areas help support local economies by attracting outdoor enthusiasts and protecting the scenic backdrop for many communities. More than one million people visit the GWNF each year. And national forests play a key role in Virginia's outdoor recreation economy, which as a whole supports 197,000 jobs and annually generates \$21.9 billion in consumer spending, \$6.5 billion in wages and salaries, and \$1.2 billion in state and local tax revenue.



Wilderness designation offers these benefits at no cost to taxpayers. Since the land is already federally owned and part of the GWNF, no land acquisition is required. There are no private inholdings within the proposed Wilderness additions.

What Activities are Allowed in Wilderness?

To preserve the wild character of these special areas, timber harvest, permanent roads, and other development are not allowed in Wilderness. The use of motorized equipment, motor vehicles, or other mechanical transport is normally not allowed, except in certain circumstances like control of fire, insects, and diseases, and search and rescue operations.

Current uses and access to the proposed Wilderness areas will not change. No open roads or trails will be closed, and there are no mountain bike trails or Off-Highway Vehicle roads in the proposed Wilderness areas. And because the

Forest Service already classifies these areas as “roadless,” no logging, mining, or road building is currently allowed.

Hiking, camping, backpacking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, paddling, birdwatching, and many other forms of non-mechanized recreation are allowed and enjoyed in Wilderness.

Wilderness designation does not affect hunting or fishing rules, which are determined by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries.

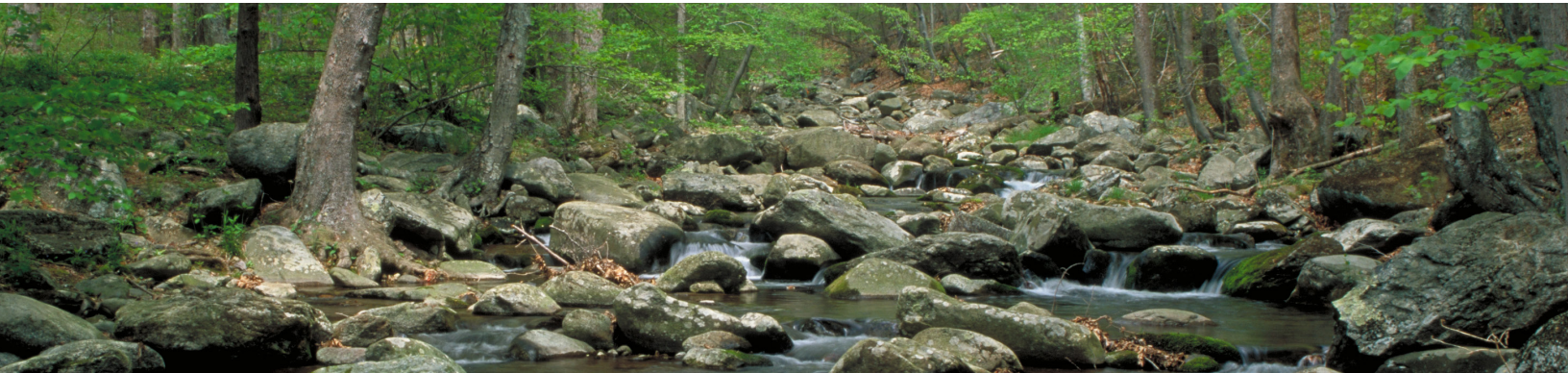
The GWNF Stakeholder Collaborative

Formed in 2010 by the Virginia Wilderness Committee and others, the GWNF Stakeholder Collaborative is a diverse group that represents a range of interests, including the timber industry, wildlife managers, sportsman’s groups, forestry consultants, conservation organizations, and recreational groups—all of whom have a deep appreciation and connection to the Forest. We believe that a 1.1 million-acre forest like the GWNF is large enough to provide for everyone’s needs and that ongoing collaboration presents the best opportunity to find this balance.

The Collaborative has reached consensus on many issues regarding management and protection of the GWNF that have long been contentious. We worked together to help the Forest Service revise its management plan and continue working together to help implement the plan. To that end, we helped the Forest Service develop the GWNF’s first large, landscape-scale, multi-resource project—the Lower Cowpasture Project, which is now being implemented.

We believe that Wilderness is part of a healthy, resilient forest that has a mosaic of habitat types and forest ages. Wilderness designation protects core interior forests, which provide refuge for certain wildlife and protect old growth forest. By protecting these cores and allowing active management outside of them, including timber harvesting and forest restoration, we are finding win-win solutions for the Forest and its users.

In light of the progress that has been made—and in the same spirit of cooperation that defines this Group’s work—the Stakeholder Collaborative supports these Wilderness designations.



“We envision a well-connected network of core, relatively unfragmented, forested areas embedded within a landscape of diverse age and structural character that supports a variety of wildlife species, builds ecological resilience, and provides essential ecological, social, economic, and recreational benefits for people.”

-GWNF Stakeholder Collaborative (Comments on GWNF Forest Plan, 2011)

