

JANUARY 07, 2020

Warner & Kaine Bill To Protect Wilderness In Bath County Passes Senate

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senators Tim Kaine and Mark R. Warner applauded Senate passage of the *Virginia Wilderness Additions Act*, a bill they introduced to add a total of 5,600 acres to two existing wilderness areas within the George Washington National Forest in Bath County: the Rough Mountain Wilderness area and the Rich Hole Wilderness area. A wilderness designation is the highest level of protection for public land under federal law. These additions were recommended by the U.S. Forest Service in 2014 and endorsed by members of the GW National Forest Stakeholder Collaborative, a group of forest users that has worked together for seven years to agree on acceptable locations in the GW for wilderness, timber harvest, trails, and other uses.

“We’re proud that the Senate passed our bill to protect wilderness in Bath County. The George Washington National Forest is a critical part of Virginia’s environment and economy. This legislation would help ensure Virginians can enjoy more of its wildlife, scenery, and trails for generations to come. We’re so thankful to the folks from the U.S. Forest Service, conservationists, and leaders in Bath County for their collaborative efforts to make this happen. We’ll keep working together to get this bill signed into law,” **said the Senators.**

“Senate passage of the Virginia Wilderness Additions Act affirms our belief that working in a collaborative manner with diverse interests groups including the timber industry, wildlife managers, and recreation interests creates an

atmosphere where dialogue promotes trust and compromise. It is this spirit of cooperation that the Stakeholder Collaborative agreed to a plan that balances the need for managed young forest, recreation, and uninterrupted wilderness,” **said Mark Miller, Executive Director, Virginia Wilderness Committee.**

“I have supported an increase in active management of the GW National Forest while working with a diverse group of people that share a common interest in our public lands. Where previously we may have advocated for different uses of the forest, we now look for ways to accomplish all of our goals. I support the proposed Wilderness additions in this bill by understanding that the GW is large enough to provide a variety of forest conditions, through differing management techniques, as identified in the Forest Plan. It is possible to simultaneously increase timber harvests, improve wildlife habitat, and create forest age diversity while setting aside remote areas that are valuable for recreation and certain species of wildlife. This proposal reinforces several year’s-worth of work and demonstrates the ability to accomplish this balance,” **said John Hancock, member and a previous President of the Virginia Forestry Association.**