

Allegheny Mountain Cluster

Laurel Fork Paddy Lick West Back Creek Mountain

The Allegheny Mountain Cluster lies on the backbone of Virginia. Its components are located in the James River and Warm Springs Districts of the George Washington National Forest. Several areas extend onto the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia.

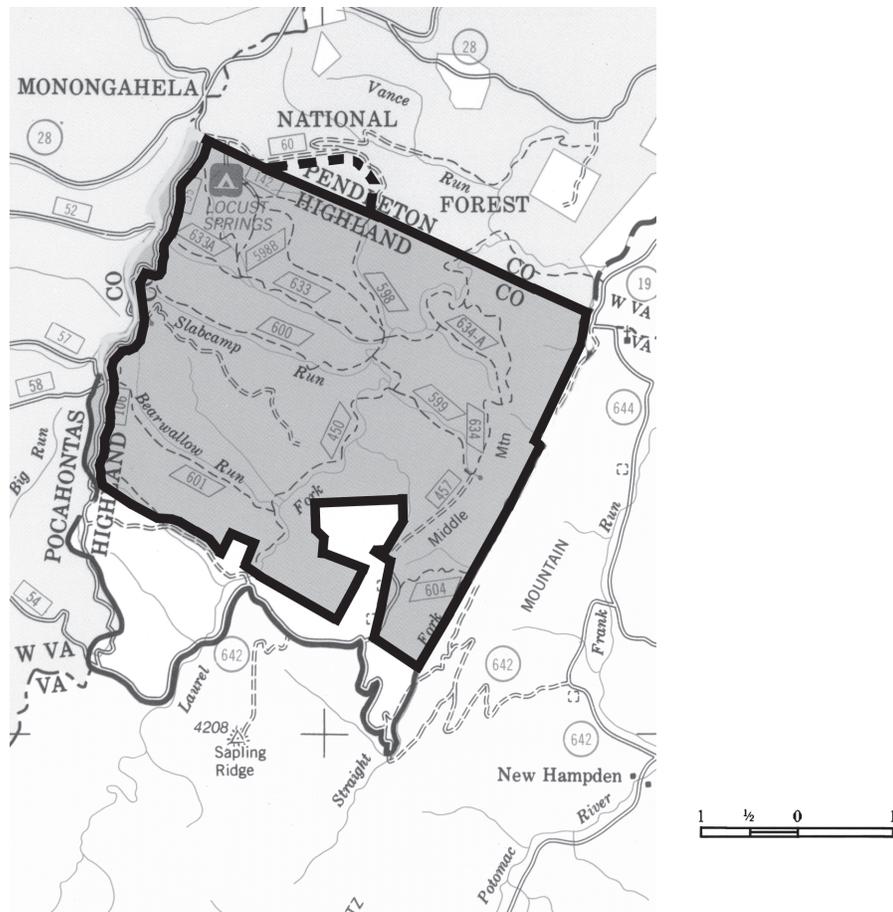
Many of the ridges in this cluster exceed 4000 feet and are deeply incised by numerous small streams. In Virginia these streams feed Back Creek and the Jackson River in the watershed of the James River. On the western slope of Allegheny Mountain the tributaries descend to Knapp Creek, a tributary of the

Scaffold Run Back Creek Mountain Little Allegheny Mountain

Greenbrier River. These waters eventually find their way to the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico.

The steep ridges harbor several Special Biological Areas. They also provide shelter to many small pockets of old growth stands. The forests here contain more northern hardwood and mixed meso-phytic communities than are generally found elsewhere on the Forest.

Recreational opportunities are limited due to the rugged and steep terrain. The exception to this is provided by Laurel Fork. Hunting and fishing are the major recreational activities.



Laurel Fork

Laurel Fork is unique in the state of Virginia, the result, in part, of its location on a high, stream-dissected plateau of the Allegheny Mountains and the Ridge and Valley. The elevations, ranging from 2700 feet to over 4000 feet, have given rise to a forest of northern hardwoods, montane Red Spruce, and White Pine, quite unlike the Appalachian oak forest that dominates the George Washington National Forest.

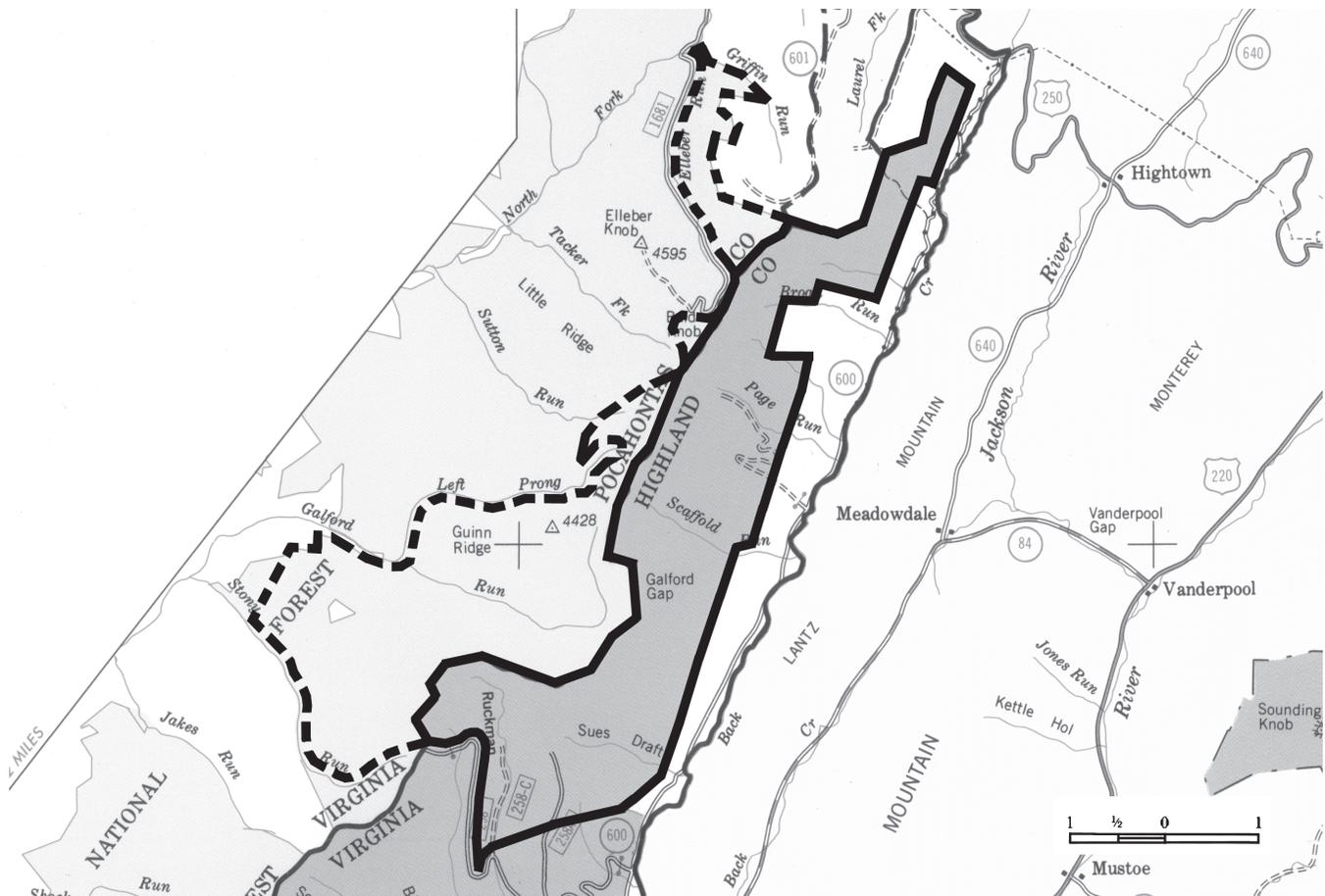
Laurel Fork and Straight Fork are the main streams in the area. Laurel Fork and its tributaries support a native brook trout fishery highly prized by fly fishermen.

Beaver ponds and meadows in the headwaters of

various runs west of Laurel Fork attract many visitors. There are at least 25 species of flora and fauna that are ranked by the Virginia Division of Natural Heritage as rare in Virginia, including the Northern Flying Squirrel, a federally listed endangered species. Disjunct populations of Snowshoe Hare and Fisher have been documented. Two-thirds of Laurel Fork is a forest plan-designated Special Biological Area. The area may contain 701 acres of possible old growth.

The existing trail system provides good access into the area and offers excellent opportunities for hiking and backpacking. Due to its remote location this area offers a significant opportunity for solitude.

Approximate Size: 10,324 acres
Location: Highland County, Virginia in the Warm Springs District
Topos: Thornwood, Snowy Mountain



Scaffold Run

Located along the spine of Allegheny Mountain, Scaffold Run straddles the border of Virginia and West Virginia. Allegheny Mountain is one of Virginia and West Virginia's highest mountains with many knobs exceeding 4000 feet. Scaffold Run is no exception, with Guinn Ridge exceeding 4500 feet and Chestnut Ridge exceeding 4250 feet. Indeed Scaffold Run contains the highest elevations on the George Washington National Forest.

The eastern slope of Scaffold Run is rugged and steep with numerous small drainages that feed Back Creek and the Jackson River. The western

slope is more gradual. Galford Run and Stony Run are tributaries of Greenbrier River. These waters ultimately flow to the Gulf of Mexico.

The area contains significant stands of high elevation old growth with Northern Red Oak, Sugar Maple, and Basswood. Scaffold Run may contain 1752 acres of potential old growth. It is also one of the few sites on the George Washington National Forest with Red Spruce

Due to the steep rugged terrain of Scaffold Run, remote recreational opportunities are plentiful. There is no existing trail system.

Approximate Size: 6611 acres

Location: Highland County, Virginia in the Warm Springs District

Topos: Green Bank, Paddy Knob, Mustoe, Hightown

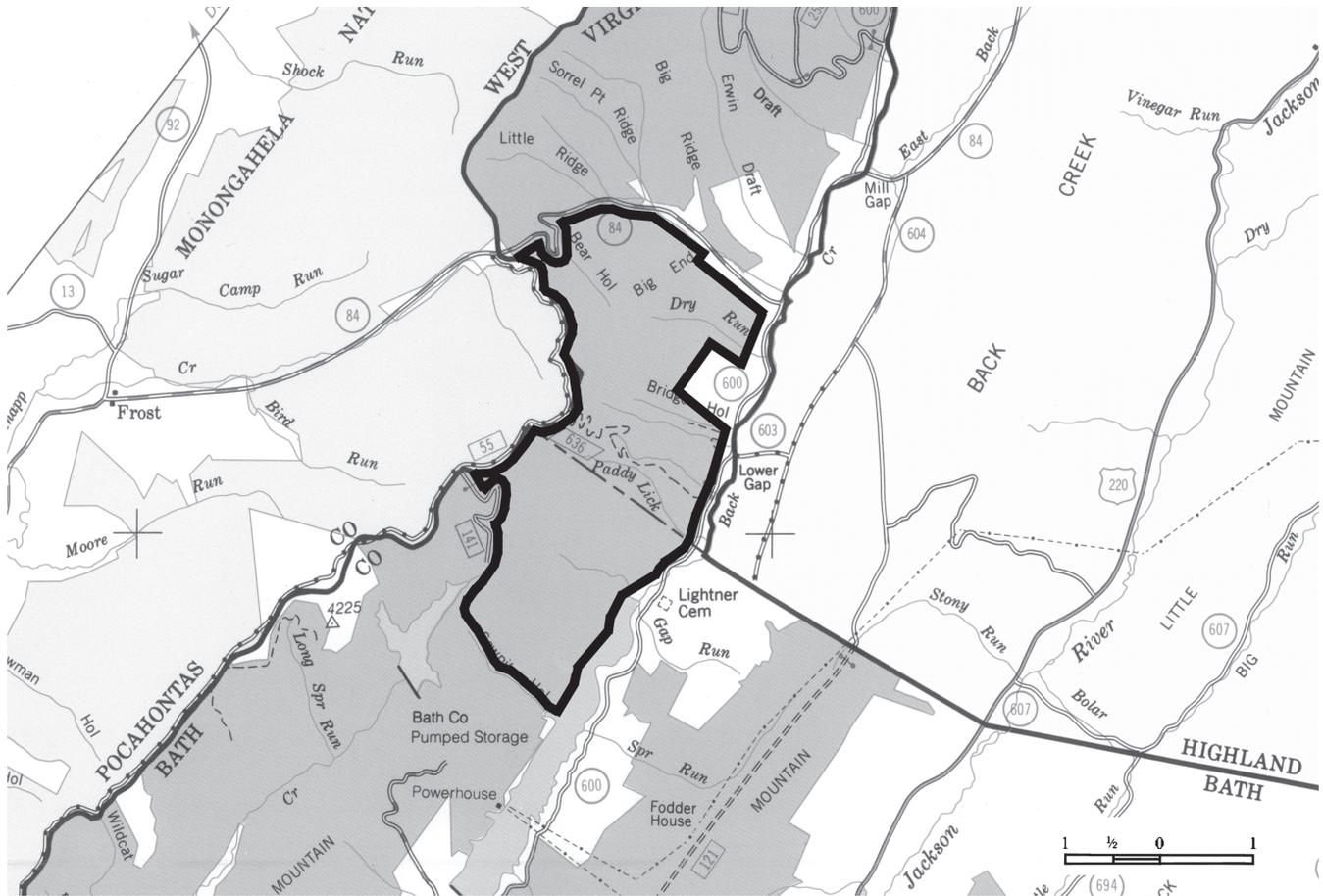


Trail riding on the GW

Photo by Nancy Johnson

Horseback riding is an enjoyable and unique way to observe our natural environment. Sharing the outdoors with a horse tunes a person into their surroundings in a way unlike any other. When seated on a horse, animals in the wild do not recognize a person as human, enabling one to get a close perspective of wildlife. Not only does horseback riding strengthen our awareness and appreciation of nature, it broadens our understanding and ties to our historical roots.

Nancy Johnson resides near Warm Springs, Virginia
She is retired but is a substitute van driver for the Valley Program Aging Services
Member of the Backcountry Horsemen of America



Paddy Lick

Located on the Virginia and West Virginia border, Paddy Lick lays claim to some of the highest elevations in the George Washington National Forest. Located on Allegheny Mountain, Paddy Knob has an elevation of over 4477 feet.

This steep ridge is dissected by many small intermittent and year round streams. Some of these include Paddy Lick, Mud Lick Run, and Dry Run, all of which feed into Back Creek. This small stream provides some of Virginia's finest whitewater paddling, but only after significant rain events.

A 728 acre portion of this area is listed as the Paddy Knob Special Biological Area and is home to species such as Bald Eagle, Mourning Warbler, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Roughhead Shiner, Southern Rock Vole, and Southern Water Shrew.

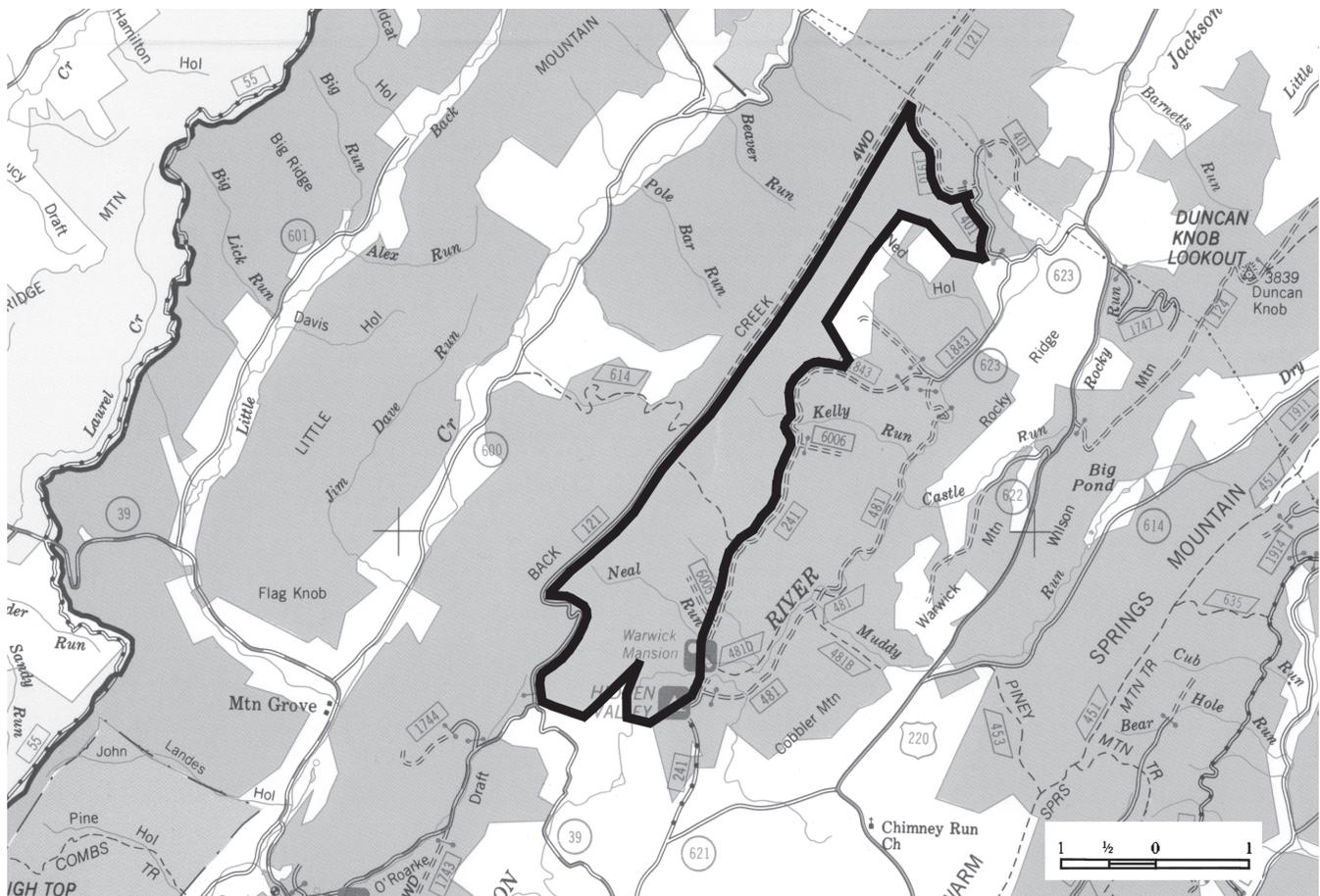
Due to the nature of the terrain of Paddy Lick much of the area is undeveloped. The only existing trail is the Paddy Knob Trail which climbs over 2300 feet from Back Creek to the summit.

Significant stands of old growth have been identified. Paddy Lick may contain 2649 acres of possible old growth.

Approximate Size: 5444 acres

Location: Bath and Highland Counties, Virginia in the Warm Springs District

Topos: Paddy Knob, Sunrise



Back Creek Mountain

This area lies on the east face of Back Creek Mountain. The ridge is narrow, steep, and rugged. The elevation ranges from approximately 2000 feet near the Warwick Mansion in Hidden Valley to over 3700 feet on the crest of the ridge.

The ridge is deeply incised by many small feeder streams, the most notable being Limekiln Run and Neal Run. These two creeks are both tributaries of the Jackson River.

The area is adjacent to and partially includes the 351 acre Star Chapel Special Biological Area and an

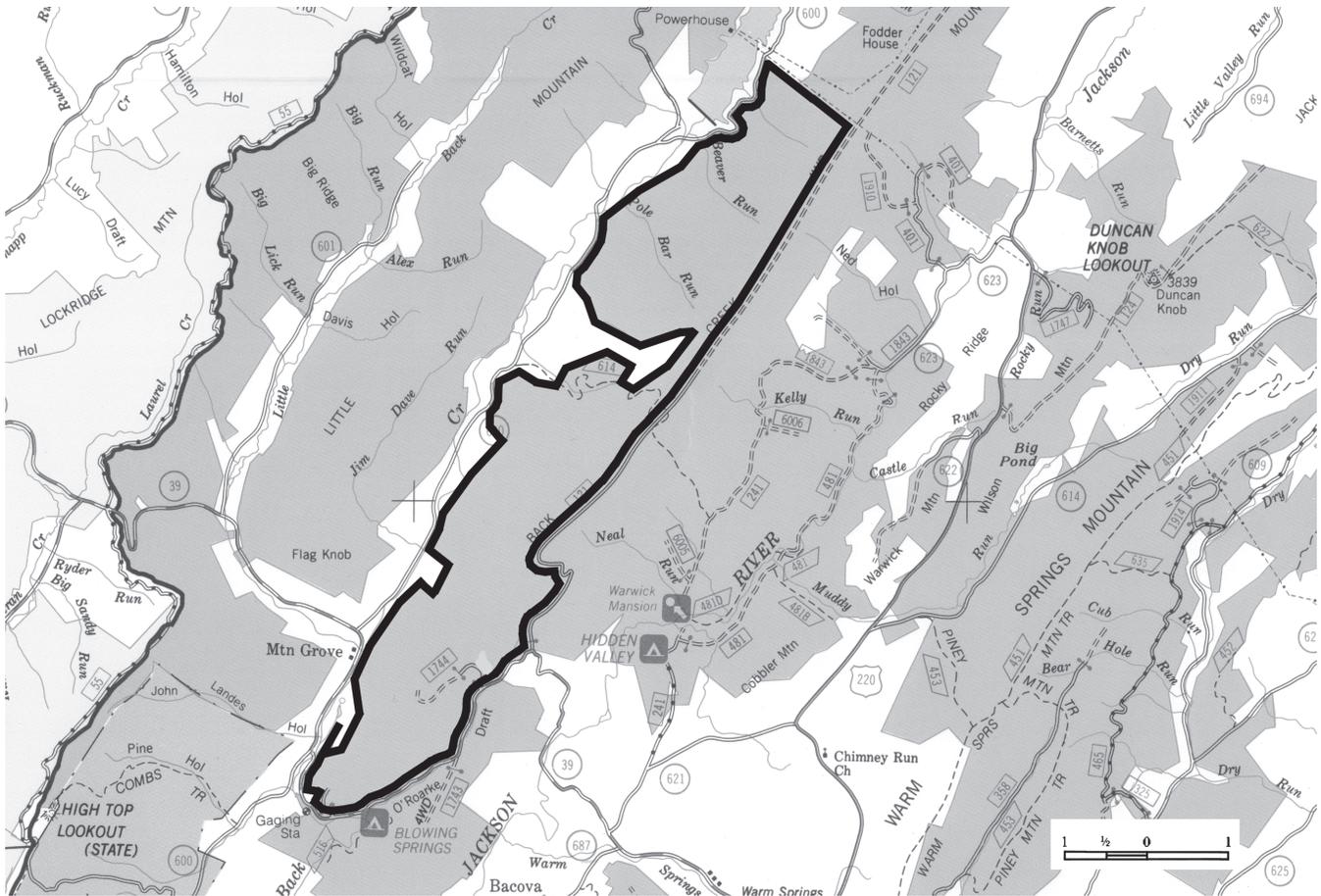
Indiana Bat hibernaculum. The Special Biological Area is located in the northern portion of the roadless area. There is one significant stand of old growth covering over 550 acres.

Back Creek Mountain is adjacent to the Hidden Valley Recreation Area. The Neal Run Trail climbs Back Creek Mountain near the recreation area. The Bogans Run Trail climbs the ridge to the crest and then descends the west slope of Back Creek Mountain.

Approximate Size: 5713 acres

Location: Bath County, Virginia in the Warm Spring District

Topos: Warm Springs, Sunrise



West Back Creek Mountain

This area is located on the west slope of Back Creek Mountain, a long narrow ridge that dominates the landscape between Back Creek and the Jackson River. It is separated from the Back Creek Mountain Treasure by FDR 121 along the crest of the ridge.

The elevations of West Back Creek Mountain range from just less than 2000 feet near the lower reservoir of the Back Creek pumped storage facility to almost 3700 feet on the crest of Back Creek Mountain.

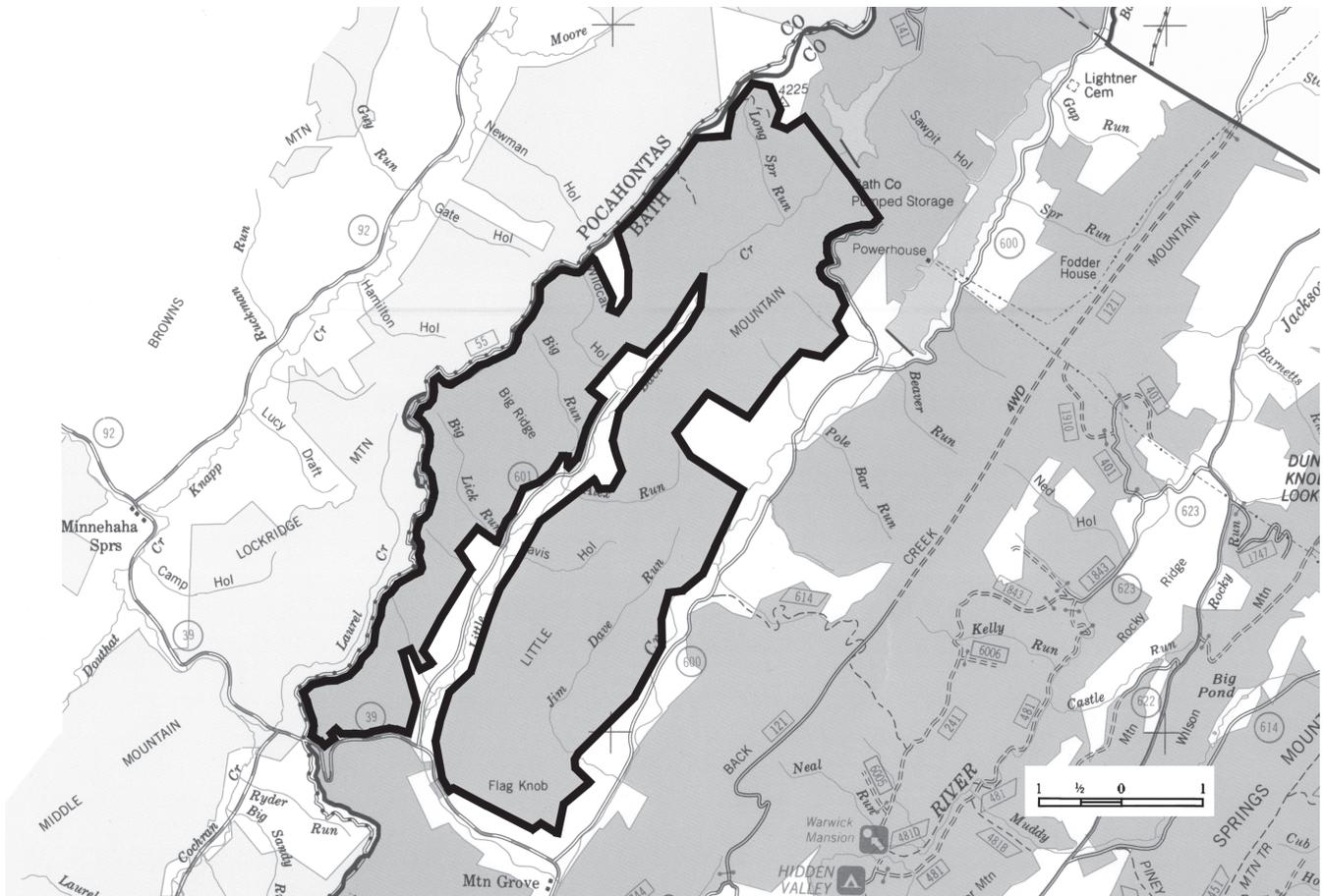
Numerous small streams dissect the steep slopes of this area. Pole Bar Run, Ford Run, and Beaver Run all flow into Back Creek, a major stream in the Jackson River watershed.

There is potential for significant old growth on West Back Creek Mountain. The area may contain 2167 acres of possible old growth.

Approximate Size: 7959 acres

Location: Bath County, Virginia in the Warm Springs District

Topos: Warm Springs, Sunrise



Little Allegheny Mountain

This large roadless area includes portions of Wildcat Ridge that were excluded from the Forest Service roadless inventory. The slopes of Little Allegheny Mountain contain rock rubble and ledges with bands of solid rock walls running parallel to the slope. On Little Mountain, shaly surface is common, and rock and ledge barriers are rare. In general, the area is steep, rugged, and relatively isolated.

The elevation ranges from 1850 feet near Sapling Woods Hollow to over 4200 feet on Mad Sheep Ridge. Mad Tom Ridge also climbs to over 4000 feet. Both of these ridges are on Big Allegheny Mountain. Elevations on Little Mountain do not rise over 3400 feet.

Jim Dave Run is a small creek that lies in a long valley almost totally within the the confines of the roadless area. Many smaller streams and hollows, including Rattlesnake Hollow and Gill Gum Hollow, drain the steep ridge slopes.

Due to the rugged terrain and topography, an abundance of primitive recreational opportunities occur. There are no maintained trails within the roadless area. Several informal campsites exist along the crest of Big Allegheny Mountain and are utilized during hunting season.

Little Allegheny Mountain may contain 4161 acres of possible old growth.

Approximate Size: 15,991 acres

Location: Bath County, Virginia in the Warm Springs District

Topos: Minnehaha Springs, Mountain Grove, Sunrise



A Wood Turtle

Photo by Steve Krichbaum

My hobby and my professional career are both immersed in the study of amphibians and reptiles (Herpetology). As a native Virginian, I have spent most of my life traveling throughout the Commonwealth in search of these animals. I have witnessed the loss of many natural areas to urban sprawl. Each time a patch of forest is cleared for a parking lot, a housing development, or a road, populations of the amphibians and reptiles in that patch are destroyed. The land clearing operations kill them by crushing with heavy equipment, burying them forever, or burning them in brush piles. I have also observed places where these animals are free to live out their lives without fearing that their homes will be destroyed, such as national wildlife refuges and national parks. However, even within these places, these animals are subjected to human pressures. Thus, there are few places in Virginia where our native amphibians and reptiles are not subjected to human pressures.

Protection of roadless areas on public lands is one of the most important ways we can ensure that the wildlife native to Virginia will survive for our descendants. The mountains in the Commonwealth harbor many amphibian species found nowhere else on Earth. They often occur in small areas of land and at high elevations. I strongly support wilderness legislation that will help protect these sensitive animals for our future generations to enjoy and study.

Joseph C. Mitchell, Ph.D.
Mitchell Ecological Research Service, LLC
The Reptiles of Virginia, Smithsonian Inst. Press, 1994
Co-founder and co-editor *Banisteria*, Journal of the VA Natural History Society