

Talking Points for the George Washington National Forest Plan Revision Meetings

Background

At 1.1 million acres, Virginia's George Washington National Forest (GWNF) is the largest National Forest in the eastern United States. The GWNF stretches along both sides of the Shenandoah Valley and portions of the central Blue Ridge, and can be reached in less than two hours from both Washington, D.C. and Richmond.

The 1993 GWNF Plan, which is currently being revised, called for new trails.

The GWNF provides some of the best recreational opportunities in the nation, especially for mountain biking. For many years, mountain bikers have been working to protect and preserve the natural resources, beauty and mountain bike trail access of the GWNF.

Some trails in the GWNF have unsustainable alignments and use old extraction routes. These do little to showcase the landscape of the forest and often result in resource damage from erosion caused by poor design. Long term replacement of unsustainable trails with sustainable, shared trails would reduce maintenance costs and provide a higher quality recreation experience.

Recommendations

- We strongly urge that there be no net loss of trails, and that the Forest Service consider increasing total trail mileage
- Increase novice and beginner-oriented trails on the edge of the forest to provide positive, front country trail experiences. This leaves the core of the forest for primitive recreation. Developing or re-locating parking areas on the edge of the forest has the effect of reducing vehicle traffic, shortening the travel time to the forest and reducing pollution. Easier / more access to trails for recreational use means more opportunities for nearby residents to maintain a healthier lifestyle.
- Create stacked loop trail systems which offer varying levels of difficulty.
- Locate primary trailheads on two lane state roads to facilitate access for visitors and volunteers, while reducing USFS road maintenance costs.
- Increase shared-use loop trail opportunities.
- Create new trail connectors to link existing trails to form loops. (Feel free to give examples of future trails that could be connectors to form such loops).

- Support the Friends of Shenandoah Mountain agreement. Increase protection for the area between US 250 and US 33, east of Shenandoah mountain with the aim of preserving its backcountry aspects while allowing shared use trail recreation. This includes adjusting the Ramseys Draft Wilderness Area Boundary to allow bike access on the entire Shenandoah Mountain Trail, a critical part of the Great Eastern Mountain Bike Trail route.

- Support backcountry areas, especially the 12D designation for "remote backcountry, non-motorized recreation, allows for mechanized management (Chainsaws and trail restoration mechanics)".
- Manage all Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) under the 2001 Roadless Rule.

- Increase funding for recreational trails to reflect their benefit to the local economies.
 - Mountain bike tourists come from all over the Atlantic seaboard to the GWNF for primitive backcountry mountain biking experiences.
 - More and better trails improve quality of life which increases the ability of local businesses to recruit high quality employees. Examples: SRI, Merck
 - More and better trails increase property values for local residents.

- Adopt Great Eastern Trail (GET) corridor as a shared-use trunk trail that connects the western GWNF ranger districts.
- Provide viewshed protection for National Recreation Trails (NRTs) in GWNF. Example: Wild Oak Trail
- When conducting Fire Management Operations, please restore to previous or desired condition (with Fire Management funds) any recreation facilities, including trails, damaged during fire management ops. The cost of restoration should be part of the fire management cost analysis and planning.
 - Hand-built singletrack trails have been bulldozed into 8-foot wide fire breaks with no restoration. Example: Hone Quarry, Shenandoah Mountain Trail.
 - Trails have a construction cost of \$15,000 to \$30,000 per mile.

- Close roads seasonally during wet seasons or during the freeze/thaw cycle to reduce road maintenance costs.

- Follow sustainable design principals for all new trails and roads. These include following contour alignments, average grades under 10%, and frequent grade reversals.
 - This will result in reduced maintenance costs and reduced resource impact.
 - This will increase the trails' sustainable carrying capacity, improve accessibility, and create a higher quality recreation experiences.
- Partner with volunteers for trail management by assisting with chainsaw certification and continuing and adopting new volunteer agreement