

History:

The Laurel Forks were once private industrial land, owned by the Laurel River Lumber Company. Logs were hauled down the mountainsides to the river by horses. Before the railroad came, the logs were floated downstream during the spring high water season, but this was risky since it was easier to start them floating than to stop them. It also made for a lot of timber waiting until the proper season before it could be taken to the mill. The advent of the railroad up the Laurel Fork River made logging a year-round operation. The company finished logging the virgin timber by 1921 and sold it to the United States government shortly thereafter, to become part of the newly created national forest. Fires burned in the dried out logging slash after harvest was completed, just as they did all over the state.

In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps had a camp located at the site of the present Laurel Fork Campground, and was responsible for controlling wildfires and building the Middle Mountain Road (FR 14). After the Civilian Conservation Corps was disbanded, the area received only occasional use from hunters. It was designated as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System in 1983 with the passage of the Monongahela National Forest, West Virginia, Land Designations law.

Laurel Fork North is 6,055 acres in size, and has 9.5 miles of trails within the wilderness boundary. Laurel Fork South is 5,997 acres and has 9 miles of trails within its boundary.

Wildlife:

Common animals in the area include whitetail deer, wild turkey, bobcat, beaver, and other water-associated species. A small number of black bear may be seen as well. Small mammals such as chipmunks, squirrels, and raccoons are common. Many songbirds use the area for nesting, migration, and over-wintering. Laurel Fork also provides native brook trout and brown trout for fishing. Short fly rods and spinning gear are recommended.



Laurel Fork Campground bordering the Wilderness

For additional information, contact:

**Greenbrier Ranger District
Box 67
Bartow, WV 24920
(304) 456-3335, Extension 0**

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/mnf/>

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Elkins, West Virginia 26241
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Laurel Fork Wilderness



Description: The Laurel Fork of the Cheat River is characterized by its narrow valley floor with regularly dissected slopes and long narrow ridges. The continuous forest cover of primarily Beech, Maple, Birch, and Cherry is occasionally broken up by beautiful meadows along the river. Within the combined 12,052 acre Wilderness Area the elevations range from 2,900 feet to over 3,700 feet.

Ecology:

The Laurel Fork area is known for its Northern Hardwood Forest, cold mountain streams, and diversity of flora and fauna. The forest cover mainly consists of Beech, Birch, Cherry, and Maple, with young Red Spruce making an occasional appearance. The forest floor is lush and green when not covered with snow, and in some locations may be dominated by several species of ferns and lycopodium. There are also planted stands of Red Pine and Norway Spruce within the Wilderness.

Location:

The Laurel Fork North and South Wildernesses are accessible from the north via U.S. Route 33 east from Elkins or west from Harman to the top of Middle Mountain. Take Forest Road 14 south. This road is the western boundary of both Wildernesses. From the south, take WV 28 east from Bartow to FR 14, and follow Forest Road 14 to the Wilderness area.

Weather Considerations:

Freezing temperatures can occur anytime of the year. Snow can be expected from October through April. Forest Roads are not maintained during the winter.

Area Rules:

- Groups over 10 persons are prohibited in the Wilderness.
- Mountain bikes and mechanical devices such as carts are not allowed on Wilderness trails.
- Removal of plants, stone or moss is prohibited.
- Pets must be under your control at all times.
- Motor vehicles are restricted to roads and parking areas.
- Stock is not permitted in the Laurel Fork Campground.

Trail System:

Laurel Fork Wilderness has 18.5 miles of trails, many of which follow old railroad grades and logging roads. Listed below are several possible loop hikes. Fords indicate streams that may be a problem to cross during high water events. There may be additional small stream crossings. Level of difficulty is based on people in average condition. Wilderness trails are **not** blazed and have very little signage. Good map and compass skills are recommended.

- Practice Leave No Trace outdoor ethics: do not camp within 200 feet of trails and streams.
- Stay on established trails even when wet, muddy, or rutted.
- Know the weather forecast; carry a map and compass, first aid kit, food, water and warm clothing.
- Wear proper footwear.
- Purify all water before drinking, or bring your own.
- During hunting seasons, wear blaze orange clothing and remain on trails.
- Always let someone know where you are going.
- Conflicts can be avoided by showing courtesy and respect to other trail users.

Laurel Fork North Wilderness:

Laurel River North – Stone Camp Run – FR 14

Trails: 306 – 305 – FR 14
Starts at: Off FR 14 at Beaver Dam Run
Length of loop: 10.5 miles
Fords: 2 on Laurel Fork
Difficulty: Moderate.

Laurel Fork South Wilderness:

Forks-Laurel River South-Beulah-FR 14:

Trails: 323 -306 – 310 – FR 14
Starts at: Forks Trailhead
Length of loop: 3.25 miles
Fords: 0
Difficulty: Moderate.

Camp Five Run – Laurel River South – FR 97 – FR 14

Trails: 315 – 306 – FR 97 – FR 14
Starts at: Middle Mountain Cabins
Length of loop: 4.75 miles
Fords: 2 on Laurel Fork
Difficulty: Moderate.

Beulah – Laurel River South – Camp Five Run – FR 14

Trails: 310 – 306 – 315 – FR 14
Starts at: Beulah trailhead
Length of loop: 6.25 miles
Fords: 2 on Laurel Fork
Difficulty: Moderate.

Forks – Laurel River South – Camp Five Run – FR 14

Trails: 323 – 306 – 315 – FR 14
Starts at: Forks trailhead
Length of loop: 10.25 miles
Fords: 2 on Laurel Fork
Difficulty: Moderate.

Forks – Laurel River South – FR 97 – FR 14

Trails: 323 – 306 – FR 97 – FR 14
Starts at: Forks trailhead
Length of loop: 12 miles
Fords: 4 on Laurel Fork
Difficulty: Moderate.