



The

Highlands

Voice

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Big Run Bog vs. Corridor H?

by Bill Ragette (and friends)

Big Run Bog is located in Tucker County, a few miles east of Parsons, WV. It lies near the summit of Backbone Mountain, in a shallow basin forming the headwaters of Big Run, a tributary of the Blackwater River. Ranging in elevation from 3,190 to 3,620, Big Run Bog is one of two very unusual boreal (northern) bogs in WV. The other bog of this type being Cranberry Glades. Both reside within the Monongahela National Forest.

The WV Highlands are the southern extant for this type of boreal bog - a very old, species rich bog which is a remnant from the Pleistocene. Big Run Bog supports one of the richest bog floras in West Virginia with over 300 species, including six rare plant species.

Currently the bog is designated as a 1,500 acre 'National Natural Landmark' (NNL). To be so listed "a site must be one of the best examples of a type of biotic community...in its physiographic province," according to the literature from the National Natural Landmarks Program. The United States and territories are divided up into 33 physiographic provinces for this program.

Unfortunately this designation actually has little or no protection for the landmark. "NNL designation is not a land withdrawal...and does not dictate activity." "Federal agencies should consider the unique prop-

erties of the landmark in NEPA compliance...and the Secretary (of the Interior) is required to provide an annual report on damage or threatened NNLs."

Big Run Bog is listed in the Monongahela National Forest Plan as a Management Prescription 8. The purpose of this prescription is to emphasize the preservation of unique ecosystems or areas for scientific or recreational purposes, areas to conduct research and the protection of unique areas of national significance. The Monongahela Forest Service is in the process of considering whether to offer a bit more protection by designating it a Natural Research Area (NRA). This may keep the Forest Service, scientists and the public from doing more damage to the area, but what about Corridor H?

Oh No! Can it be that that infernal destruction of WV's Highlands has this rare bog in its sights? You guessed it. Not that

anyone outside of reviewing agencies would know though.

In the set of maps issued with the final Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Corridor H (January 1995), we see the 4 lane from hell skirting the Big Run Bog to the North, riding along the crest of Backbone Mountain (and heading for the edge of potential Cheat Mountain Salamander habitat.) But in the special edition of the maps circulated amongst Resource Agencies only (Oct. 2 1996), (and somehow ending up in our hands) the new preferred alignment for Corridor H skewers the headwaters of the Bog and the heart of the potential Cheat Mountain Salamander habitat!!!

The new alignment location may cause lots of trouble for the highwaymen. With this new routing, Corridor H goes outside the original 2000' corridor into areas never evaluated. Opponents of the highway are pushing (see page 6)

Canaan Fir

Will the Christians save it from the White Tailed Deer?
by Dave Saville

They call it Canaan Fir, at least that's how it is being marketed. Growers have found a new tree for the competitive Christmas tree market. This West Virginia native is proving to have the right mix of characteristics to satisfy the consumer as well as the grower.

Abies balsamea, Balsam Fir, is generally considered a northern species. A relic of the ice age, this fir once covered the mountains over a much broader area, well into the southern Appalachians. During the ice age, climates in the southeastern U.S. resembled that of Canada today. As the glaciers receded north, the climate gradually warmed and this northern species migrated northward along with them. High elevations in the southern Appa-

lachians allowed pockets of fir to persist.

While once a single species, the isolated pockets furthest south, gradually, over 10s of thousands of years, developed their own characteristics, and have been described a separate species by botanists. This new species is called *Abies fraseri*, or Fraser Fir (sometimes called Southern Balsam). Fraser Fir is native to just a few mountains in western North Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia.

The isolated pockets of Fir that persisted at high elevations in West Virginia as far south as Cheat Bridge are still considered Balsam. However, these trees also developed unique characteristics, enough so they have been given the subspecies name *phanerolepis*.

In the past 15 years, Fraser Fir has been the fastest growing



tree in the Christmas market. It is the Premier Christmas tree in North America. It has taken large shares of the market from such popular favorites as Balsam Fir and Douglas Fir. Rightly so. Its color, fragrance, form, and excellent needle retention make it a top choice with buyers, commanding a premium price.

The problem is, it won't grow

away from those mountains in the southern Appalachians. In fact, almost 90% of all Fraser Fir is grown in just 3 counties of North Carolina. This has left growers in other states scrambling for alternatives. Fraser needs those high elevations, cool temperatures, abundant rainfall and, most of all, well drained soil. The heavy clay (see page 6)

Inside

- Big Run Bog - pg 4
- Corridor H - pg 5
- Dams - pg 12
- Forests - pgs 7,10,11
- Monongahela - pgs 8,9
- New FS Chief - pg 3
- Plastic Trees - pg 3
- Public Radio - pg 12

The East Gauley Settlement - Forest Services Agrees to Pay Attorney Fees

The headline says it all (almost). After capitulating to all the demands of the plaintiffs in the East Gauley Lawsuit in an out of court settlement (see last issue of the VOICE), the US Forest Service originally had offered to pay only \$1,000 of the \$10,000 in legal expenses incurred. Instead of taking their chances before a judge on the awarding of attorney fees, the Forest Service agreed to paying the plaintiffs' costs in full. ♦

---from the heart of the plateau---

by John McFerrin

a closet wildlife hater?

So what is all the fuss about? Why did people send me letters about the wildlife amendments to the West Virginia Constitution that we voted on in November and, more specifically, the Conservancy and Bill Ragette's position on those amendments?

As we all know, there were two proposed Constitutional amendments on the ballot in November which had to do with wildlife. One would have allowed sale of a scenic license plate at a premium price. The extra cost for the plate would go to pay for programs to help non-game wildlife.

The other amendment would require (in effect) that all revenue from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses go to the Division of Natural Resources. In the past, there had been occasional rumblings in the Legislature that it should take that money and give it to the general revenue account where the Legislature could spend it for highways, schools, welfare, or anything else the government does. Although this has never actually happened, such rumblings make the Division of Natural Resources nervous enough that it wanted some protection for its license fees. The amendment would give that protection.

As regular readers of the Voice know, the Conservancy voted to support both amendments. Our name appeared along with the names of several other groups in several newspaper advertisements as supporters of both amendments.

While the organization supported both amendments, Bill Ragette did not. After announcing that the views were his own and not those of the organization, he argued in a Voice column against the amendment that would dedicate all license fees to the Division of Natural Resources.

In response I got a couple of grouchy letters suggesting that Bill was selling the state's wildlife up the river, undercutting everything the Conservancy stands for, etc.

The amendments passed. Regardless of anything Bill or anyone else said, over 70% of the voters approved the amendments.

So is it true, as my correspondents suggest, that the amendments are a good thing, a thing which only someone hostile to wildlife would oppose? Is Bill Ragette either hopelessly confused or (Horror of Horrors!) a closet wildlife hater?

The answer is that he is neither. Instead, he is the only one who published anything at all sophisticated about the amendments. He made the Voice the only publication of which I am aware that used the pending amendments to raise questions about the wildlife management policies of the Division of Natural Resources. While every paper in the state was taking a simple "Wildlife good; amendments good." approach, the Voice at least suggested the view that while wildlife may be good, the present policies of the Division of Natural Resources are not.

The wildlife management policies of the Division of Natural Resources are overwhelmingly skewed in favor of game animals. If you can hunt it or hook it, the Division likes it. If there is no season on it and no interest in hunting it, the Division is indifferent. The deer management programs get lots of funding and attention. The obscure section of the Division which tries to encourage the prosperity of non-game species has to scramble for money with gimmicks such as a check-off on the income tax form or a scenic license plate.

Given that virtually every male in the state takes to the woods for two weeks every fall and blazes away, this might be a sensible policy. If the first day of deer season is going to be a ritual of importance second only to Christmas, maybe we should have a whole Division dedicating itself to making sure that there are plenty of deer out there to be shot.

Many people, however, think that this is not a sensible policy. By spending all its resources encouraging game animals the Division ignores non-game animals. In the many instances where the interests of game and non-game species are in conflict, the policies of the Division damage those species.

In the discussion about the amendments, the Division (*see page 12*)

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A Tale of Two Letters

or Growing a Forest with Plastic Tubes

from the Gauley District Ranger, US Forest Service
Dear Beth;

On December 10, 1996, Bill Schiffer talked to you on the phone about some proposed tree planting and tubing that I would like to implement on four existing clearcut areas. The clearcuts are 7, 10, 10 and 15 acres in size and are within the Briery Knob (23.007) and Summit Lake (26.107) Opportunity Areas. Decision Notices along with their associated Environmental Assessments (EA) were signed on September 28, 1990 and May 3, 1990 respectively.

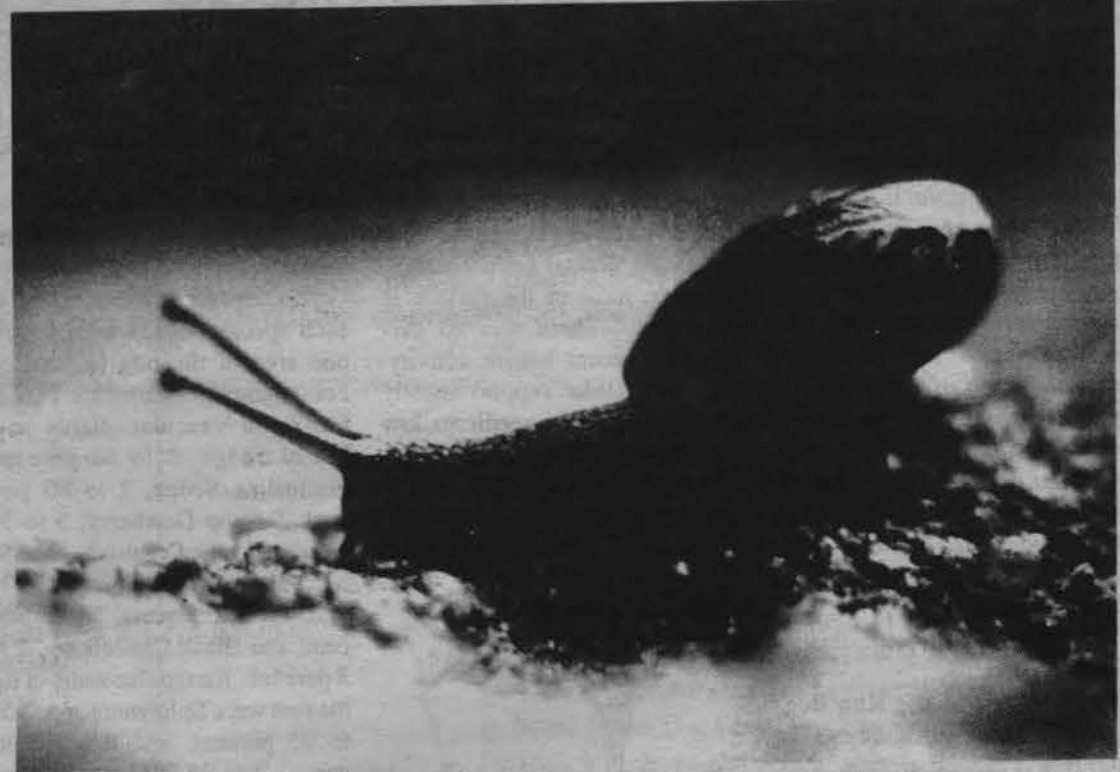
These EA's contain no discussion about planting trees to regenerate the clearcut areas. The intent was for natural regeneration to occur. This area of the district, however, is being impacted by deer browsing on the sprouting regeneration within these clearcuts. If this browsing continues, the areas may not be successfully regenerated or species composition of these clearcuts may be altered. I am proposing the planting and tub-

ing of 60 trees (mostly oak) per acre on these four areas to assure that the stand is regenerated and that a species composition similar to that prior to being harvested is achieved.

Planting would be done using hand tools. Tubes are placed around each seedling to protect them from animal damage and to create a green house effect that provides a longer growing season. A stake is used to hold the tube in place.

Planting and tubing trees is a common practice throughout the Monongahela National Forest. Past input to these projects indicates that there is little concern. Based on this information I plan to consider these projects as actions excluded from documentation (Categorical Exclusions (CE)). With this scoping letter I am asking you to help me determine if there are any extraordinary circumstances that would direct me to prepare an EA instead...

Sincerely,
Donald Kinerson
Gauley District Ranger



Graphic credits

Ric MacDowell - photos
- pgs 1,3,10
Core & Strasbaugh,
Flora of WV - Botanical
drawings - pgs 6,8
Vince Packard - Hawk,
Fleur

Ragette' Responds for WVHC

Dear Bill Schiffer,

Beth passed on the request for input on the planting of oak seedlings on the Briery Knob and Summit Lake OAs. I certainly would like to see an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the project if you are serious on going through with it. Evidently the original EA was flawed, failing to correctly determine the true impacts of the project. This is not the type of analysis that federal law requires.

As far as I'm concerned the Forest service caused the problem with its management - clearcutting and other activities that increase deer population.

I'm sure that you are aware that pure Oak stands (or nearly so) are an unnatural occurrence in this area. The only reason the previous stand was so oddly composed was due to the clear cutting that preceded it. Attempting to recreate the previous stand may not be in the best interests of the forest or the public.

I would like to see some studies to show what the natural forest was like here and what would occur if nothing was planted.

Several possibilities come to mind. Perhaps the deer browse

will be so heavy as to create an open 'savannah' type of habitat. Often the FS, in other areas, goes to extra expense to create this type of habitat. Here we might get it for free.

The absurdity of having to use plastic planting tubes to create a forest should be obvious to anyone, except those whose main concern is delivering commodities from our public lands.

Another possibility is that trees species not palatable to deer would take over the areas. Most likely they would not be Oak, but the area might be closer to a natural succession than this planting of oaks with the unsightly plastic tubes. What value would this forest have for recreation, water retention, wildlife and biodiversity on various levels?

You see the problem as Oaks not being able to regenerate. I see the problem as poor management practices that have favored commodity extraction - Oaks for lumber and deer for WV DNR's income.

The absurdity of having to use plastic planting tubes to cre-

ate a forest should be obvious to anyone, except those whose main concern is delivering commodities from our public lands. If we are serious about ecological management of National Forests, we

would focus on managing with nature and not against it.

We feel very strongly that an Environmental Assessment is needed to see just what type of forest would grow here in these new circumstances and the impacts (recreational, on biodiversity) of trying to create an artificial stand. We should also look at the possibility of managing our forest for less deer and less clearcuts.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed project.

Bill Ragette'
Co-Chair, Public Lands Comm.
West Virginia Highlands
Conservancy

Forest Service Gets New Chief

or every silver cloud has a dark lining

Part I

from the Society of American Foresters

Dr. Michael P. Dombeck, 48, will become the 14th Chief of the Forest Service on January 6, 1997.

He was born on September 21, 1948 in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. It was here in northern Wisconsin's lake country that his appreciation for natural resources was cultivated. Dombeck worked as a fishing guide in the region for 11 summers. He earned undergraduate and graduate degrees in biological sciences and education from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and the University of Minnesota. He earned his doctorate in fisheries biology from Iowa State University and is noted for research contributions on muskies and lake habitat management. In addition, Dr. Dombeck has authored numerous scholarly publications and made frequent national as well as International scientific presentations.

Dr. Dombeck taught biology, chemistry, science, zoology, and fisheries management at public schools and universities. He spent 12 years with the Forest Service primarily in the Midwest and West. In his last Forest Service post as National Fisheries Program Manager in Washington, DC, he was recognized for outstanding leadership in developing and implementing fisheries programs and forging partnerships. He also spent a year as a Legislative Fellow working in the United States Senate with responsibility for natural resource and Interior appropriations issues.

Dr. Dombeck was named Acting Director of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in February 1994. He has focused on two major objectives: creating a long-term BLM vision to improve the health of the land and reinventing the agency to reduce red tape, streamline functions and improve customer service.

As Acting Director, Dr. Dombeck has overseen BLM's management of 270 million acres of surface land and over 570 million acres of mineral estate. He also has managed a budget of more than \$1 billion and a work force of about 10,000.

Part II

Never Mind NEPA

from - Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

The federal BLM "routinely violates federal environmental laws, falsifies documents and blocks public access to its timber sales," according to a report issued today by PEER, Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility. Using former timber sale planners to "walk sites" and inspect files for 30 sales, PEER concluded that "virtually all BLM timber sales examined were illegally prepared." The PEER report, entitled "Never Mind NEPA," is one of a series of white papers which have been critical of BLM timber practices. **Acting BLM director Michael Dombeck was just named new chief of the Forest Service.**

Big Run Bog - the Biology



I've adapted and translated (from the Latin) a Forest Service paper on Big Run Bog entitled *Botanical Reconnaissance of Big Run Bog Candidate Research Natural Area* by *Rose-Marie Muzika, Robert Hunsucker and Tom DeMeo*. The map of the bog and photos of the habitats are from the paper. Plant drawings are from *Flora of West Virginia* by *Strasbaugh and Core*. For your own copy of the paper - General technical report NE-223
USDA Forest Service
Publications distribution
359 Main Road
Delaware, Ohio 43015

-bill r

The Habitats of Big Run Bog

The forest surrounding Big Run Bog is second growth. Vegetation of the area is placed in three cover types: Bog, Northern Hardwood Forest, and Spruce Forest. A fourth type was defined as a transition zone from bog to forest.

Bog

The bog covers an estimated 44 acres and is approximately 1.2 km long and up to 180 m wide. The bog is an irregular mosaic of several plant communities grow-

ing on hummocks (small elevations above the level surface) and in the valleys between. There is a considerable amount of surface water in two beaver dam ponds, in small streams entering the bog, and in the central main channel; however, most of the surface is vegetated. There was no evidence of recent beaver activity. The hummocks support mostly dwarf trees, shrubs, seedlings, low



Pogonia ophioglossoides

heaths, perennial ferns, and several non vascular species.

Characteristic vascular plant species are Great Laurel, Winterberry, Red Spruce, Red Maple, Wild Raisin, Mountain Holly, Mountain Laurel, Black Chokeberry, Creeping Snowberry, Low Sweet Blueberry, Velvet Leaf Blueberry, and Cinnamon Fern. Dominant mosses are species of *Polytrichum* and *Sphagnum*. Lichens are chiefly species of *Cladonia*.

In the intervals or valleys between the hummocks the dominant plants are perennial sedges, rushes, low-growing heath shrubs, dewberry, and mosses. The characteristic species of vascular plants are various sedges, Cottongrass, White Beakrush, a

Bulrush, Three-way sedge, Large Cranberry, Small Cranberry, Creeping Snowberry, Swamp Dewberry, Black Chokeberry, 2 Rushes, Northern Bog Goldenrod, Narrow-leafed Gentian, and Sundew.

Estimated percent cover of each species varied widely from one area of the bog to another. For example, abundance ranges for some vascular plants are: Hoary Sedge, 2 to 60 percent; Folliculate Sedge, 2 to 80 percent; Swamp Dewberry, 5 to 30 percent; Large Cranberry, 2 to 50 percent; Small Cranberry, 2 to 70 percent; Cottongrass, 2 to 5 percent; and Black Chokeberry, 2 to 3 percent. Ranges for some of the mosses were *Sphagnum* spp., 50 to 95 percent, and *Polytrichum* spp., 2 to 95 percent. Percent cover for shrubs 1.0 to 2.0 m tall ranged from 3 to 12 percent. The herbaceous layer (<1 m tall, ex-



Carex canescens

cluding mosses) ranged from 30 to 95 percent, and the moss layer from 25 to 95 percent.

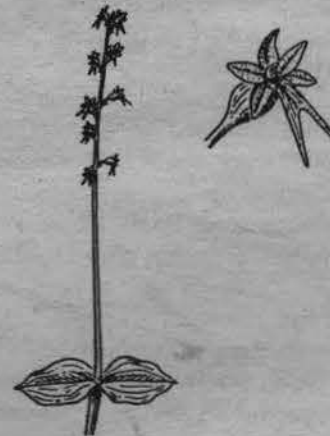
Northern Hardwood Forest

The Northern Hardwood Forest occupies the upland slopes and ridges and contains the largest area (234 ha) of Big Run Bog cRNA. This forest has been characterized as a "Black Cherry-Maple type with small inclusions of Sugar Maple-Beech-Yellow Birch and Hemlock-Yellow Birch".

At Big Run Bog the characteristic species of trees are dominants Wild Black Cherry, Red Maple, American Beech, Yellow Birch, Black Birch, Hemlock, and Fraser Magnolia, and associated species Red Oak, Sugar Maple, Cucumber Magnolia, and Smooth Sarvisberry.

The characteristic species of shrubs are Striped Maple, Witch

Hazel, Mountain Holly, and Rhododendron. The latter species often form dense, nearly impenetrable thickets. The herba-



Listera smallii

ceous layer of vegetation (both herbs and woody plants) has a rich diversity of lycopods, ferns and seed plants.

Characteristic species of vascular plants are 4 sedges, Tree Clubmoss, Running Pine, Southern Ground Cedar, Mountain Sorrel, Common Greenbrier, New England Fern, Intermediate Shield Fern, Nodding Trillium, Teaberry, Indian Cucumber Root, Trout Lily, Carolina Spring Beauty, Hay Scented Fern, Beechdrops, Partridge Berry, Wild Lily of the Valley, Star Flower, Autumn Bent, wood Anemone, Round Leafed and Sweet White Violet.

Spruce Forest

Spruce Forest occurs in patches on the north and north-northwest borders of the bog and occupies an area of about 10 acres. Red Spruce is dominant or codominant with Red maple, Black



Menyanthes trifoliata

Birch, Yellow Birch, Black Cherry, and Hemlock.

The shrub layer is dominated by Rhododendron with minor Mountain Holly. The herbaceous layer supports a sparse growth of

Mountain Sorel, Partridge Berry, Stiff Clubmoss, Wild Lily of the Valley, Weak Sedge, and Creeping Snowberry.

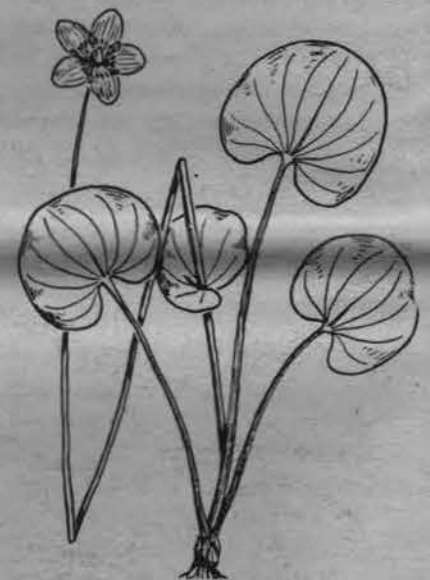
Frequent mosses are *Bazzania trilobata* and species of *Sphagnum*.

Transition Zone

One aspect of the Transition Zone, the distinctive irregular narrow band between the bog and forests around it, occurs mostly along the north-northeast to south side of the bog where several plant species achieve their best growth.

The dominant trees are Red maple, Red Spruce, Black Cherry, and Hemlock. The dominant shrubs of the shrub layer characterize this zone: Wild Holly, Black Alder, and Wild Raisin.

Other species of woody plants include Witch Hazel, Rhododendron, mountain Laurel, American Yew, low Sweet



Parnassia asarifolia

Blueberry, Sourtop, Highbush Blueberry, Swamp Dewberry, Tree Clubmoss, Cinnamon Fern, Interrupted Fern, and a sedge. Mosses here are chiefly species of *Sphagnum* and *Polytrichum*.

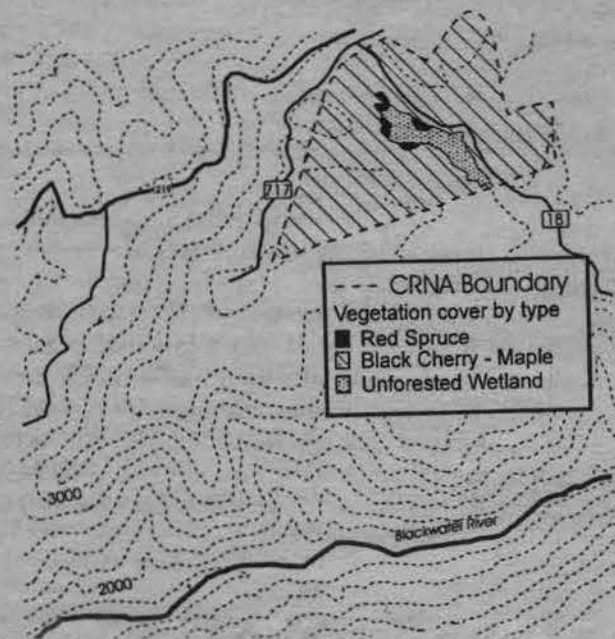
Plants of Special Interest

Of special interest are six species of vascular plants that are rare in West Virginia but are found in Big Run Bog. They are:

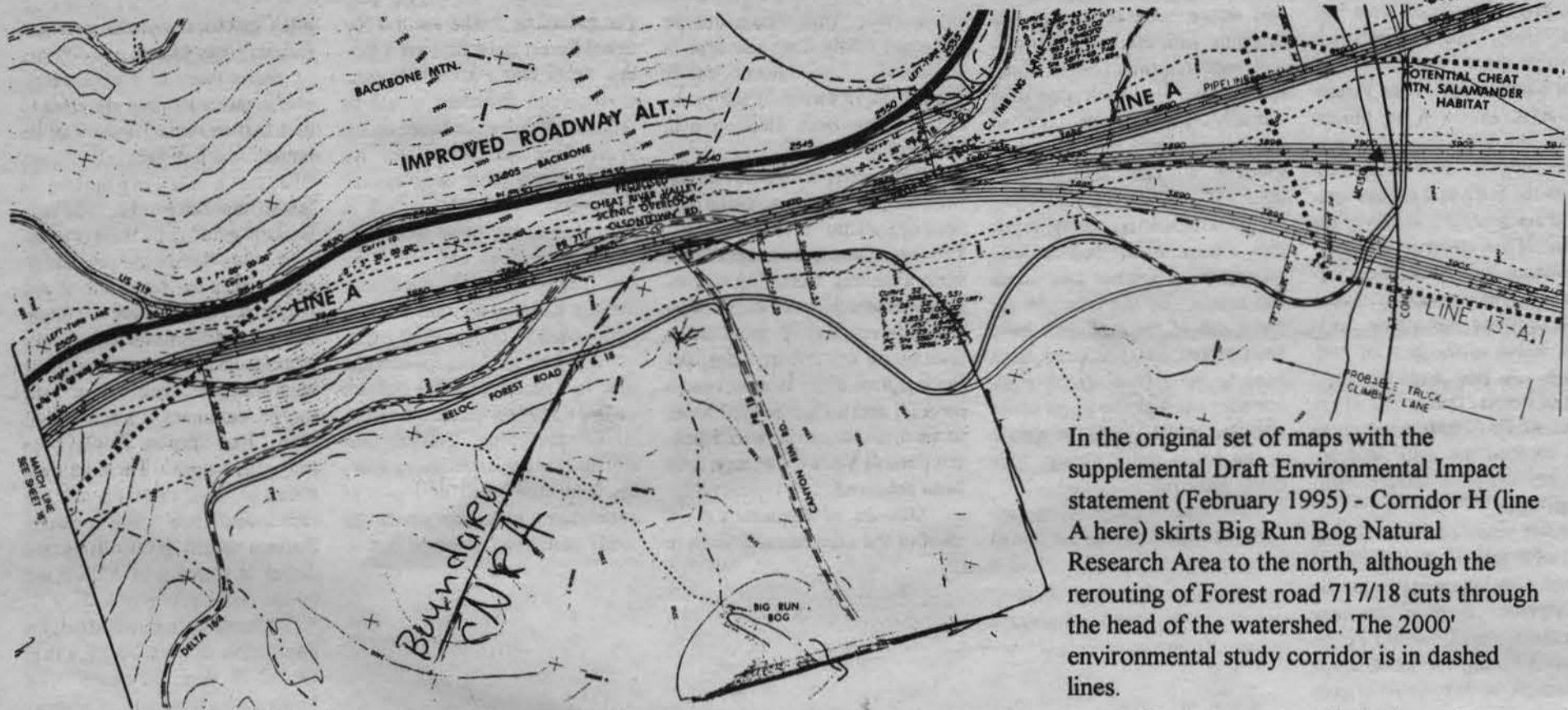
Grass Pink (*Calopogon tuberosus*). This wide-ranging species of orchid extends from Canada south to Florida and Texas in acid bogs and swamps. In West Virginia, grass-pink has been reported in Hampshire, Hardy, Mineral, Pocahontas, Tucker, and Webster Counties. Several dozen plants grow on the east side of Big Run Bog.



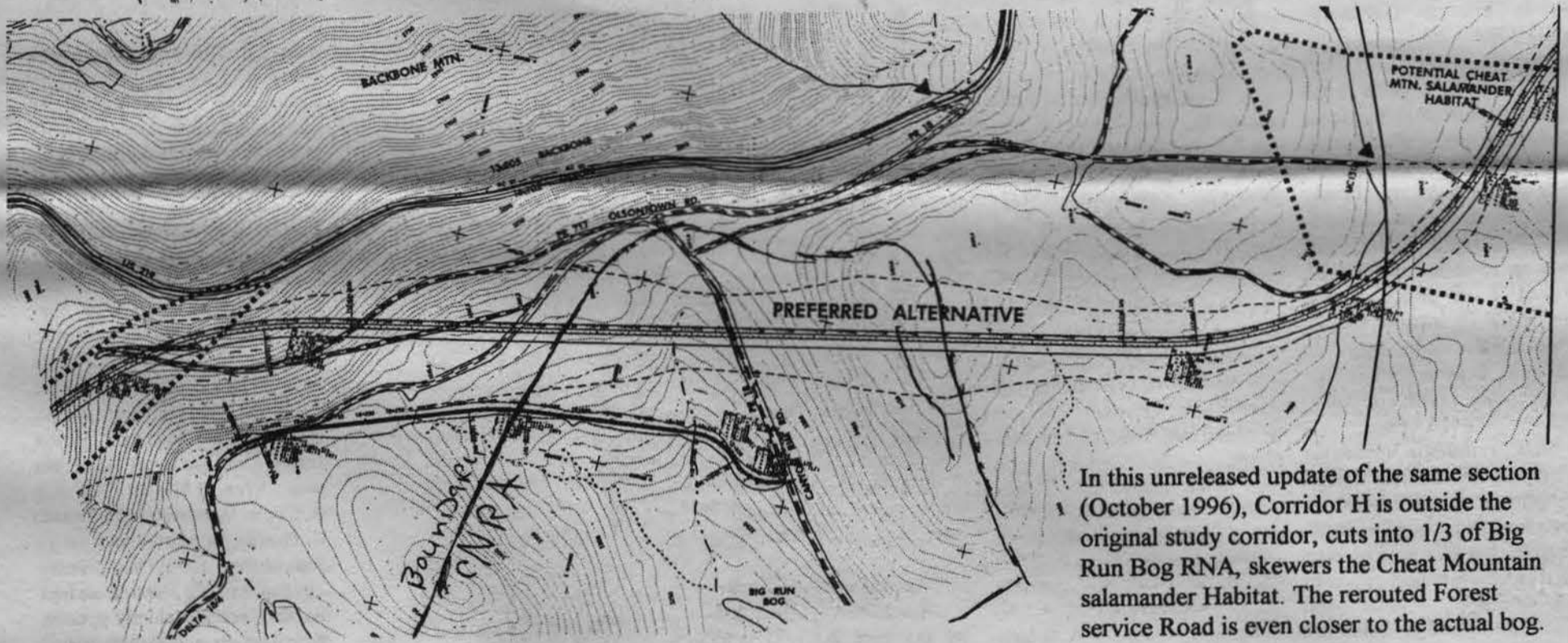
Calopogon pulchellus



The Corridor H Shuffle



In the original set of maps with the supplemental Draft Environmental Impact statement (February 1995) - Corridor H (line A here) skirts Big Run Bog Natural Research Area to the north, although the rerouting of Forest road 717/18 cuts through the head of the watershed. The 2000' environmental study corridor is in dashed lines.



In this unreleased update of the same section (October 1996), Corridor H is outside the original study corridor, cuts into 1/3 of Big Run Bog RNA, skewers the Cheat Mountain salamander Habitat. The rerouted Forest service Road is even closer to the actual bog.

Hoary sedge (*Carex canescens*). This northern plant extends from boreal regions south to Virginia, Ohio, Minnesota, Arizona, and California. In West Virginia, hoary sedge is found in acid sphagnum bogs at high elevations in Pocahontas and Tucker Counties.

woods and thickets at elevations of 2,000 to 3,000 feet. It has been reported in Pocahontas, Mercer, Randolph, and Tucker Counties. At Big Run Bog, six plants were growing on the east side of the bog under great laurel (rhododendron).

Big Run Bog, about 50 plants were growing in a small area about midway on the east side of the bog.

in a small area on the east side of Big Run Bog.

Appalachian twayblade (*Listera smallii*). This species of orchid is found in the Appalachian Mountains from southern Pennsylvania and West Virginia to eastern Kentucky, and south to Georgia, South Carolina and east Tennessee. In West Virginia Appalachian twayblade is found in damp

Buckbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*). This northern species extends from boreal regions south to New Jersey, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri, and California. In West Virginia buckbean populations were reported at several sites in Pocahontas and Tucker Counties. At

Grass-of-Parnassus (*Parnassia asarifolia*). This chiefly mountain species extends from Virginia and West Virginia to Georgia, and west to Arkansas and east Texas. It grows in bogs, springs, and along small streams. In West Virginia, Grass-of-Parnassus is found in Greenbrier, Pocahontas, Randolph, Tucker, Upshur, and Webster, Counties at elevations mostly above 2,000 feet. Fewer than a dozen plants grow

Rose pogonia (*Pogonia ophioglossoides*). This wide-ranging orchid grows in bogs and wet meadows from Newfoundland to Minnesota, and south to Florida and Texas. In West Virginia, rose pogonia is found in sphagnum bogs in Fayette, Hampshire, Monongalia, Pocahontas, Preston, Randolph, Tucker, and Upshur Counties. More than 50 plants were growing on the east side of the bog.

Big Run Bog vs Corridor H

(from page 1) to have the federally mandated NEPA process reopened since the FEIS alignment maps show several changes, one being this new impact to Big Run Bog, that came out 2 months after the ROD was signed! The agencies never got to look at them and provide comment as required by NEPA.

Canaan Fir - the demise

(from page 1) soils of West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania just won't grow Fraser.

Enter Canaan Fir. West Virginia's Balsam grows in wet places. Places like Canaan Valley and Blister Swamp. But the Canaan Fir has the form and foliage similar to its southern relative, the Fraser. It has attracted the interest of researchers from West Virginia University, Ohio State, North Carolina and Maine. It is being billed as the best of both worlds. A tree with the good traits of Fraser, that grows where Fraser won't. These researchers have scoured the state studying the trees and their unique, individual traits.

After years of research and successful test plots, these trees are just now beginning to hit the marketplace. Some of you may have encountered Canaan Fir on the tree lot this year. Look to see much more of this West Virginia native at Christmas tree lots in years to come.

Seed Savvy

What are the impacts to the natural stands of West Virginia's Balsam from this newfound commercial interest?

With the growing demand for the genetic material found in West Virginia's Balsam Fir, comes an increased demand for the seed of this prized species. One old time grower of Canaan Fir was the late Red Cooper. He grew these trees in Canaan Valley for years, until his recent death.

Now his fields of Canaan Fir have grown tall under the careful management of commercial interests from Ohio. Not for Christmas trees, but as a seed production area. Balsam only produces seed once every 4 or 5 years. When it does, seed collectors are out in force, picking balsam cones. The demand for Canaan Fir seed is so great, just about anyplace in West Virginia Balsam grows, seed collectors follow.

Fir cones are unique in that they stand upright, on top of the branch. When they ripen in late August, the seeds and bracts dislodge from the central axis of the cone and shower to the ground. The whole, intact cone, never falls off the tree. Years after the seed crop, cone axes still remain on the branch.

Gathering seed from trees is a messy business. The resin in balsam is among the stickiest substances known. The tree tops

and dense cone crops are just dripping with the stuff. To collect seed requires one to climb the tree and pick each cone individually. This isn't fun. With so much resin, each cone becomes glued to your hand after you pick it.

Making matters worse, as you pick a cone, it disintegrates into thousands of feather like seeds and bracts. By the time you get down out of the tree, you have been tarred and feathered from head to toe. It is also a risky business because the stems of the trees are brittle. With the weight of the cones and a person, tops easily snap off.

Because of the problems associated with climbing the tree to

untouched. That which can be accessed easily from the road is impacted. The Canaan Valley State Park is aware of the problem but has been ineffective in preventing it.

The newly formed National Wildlife Refuge now owns one area of Balsam on Freeland Run. I've seen, not only evidence of cone poaching there, but Christmas tree poaching as well. Elsewhere in the Valley, most of the Balsam is on Power Company lands where there is easy access by ATV and no protection. Even in the most remote areas of northern Canaan Valley, tree tops have been removed.

Outside of Canaan Valley, most of the remaining Balsam in

one gathering seed from the National Forest must first get a permit from the Forest Service. Commercial gatherers would be required to pay a fee based on the value of the seed they collect. No such permits have been issued. No permits would be issued in protected areas, these would include Wilderness and MP 8 areas. That would leave the Blister Swamp stand as the only permittable stand to collect seed from.

The next time you spend some time in Canaan, or other Balsam swamps, look up and see the trees missing their tops. You can usually find the carcasses laying nearby, sometimes next to a pile of cone axes and bracts where the seeds have been screened out.

often grows alongside, deer eat Balsam, they like it.

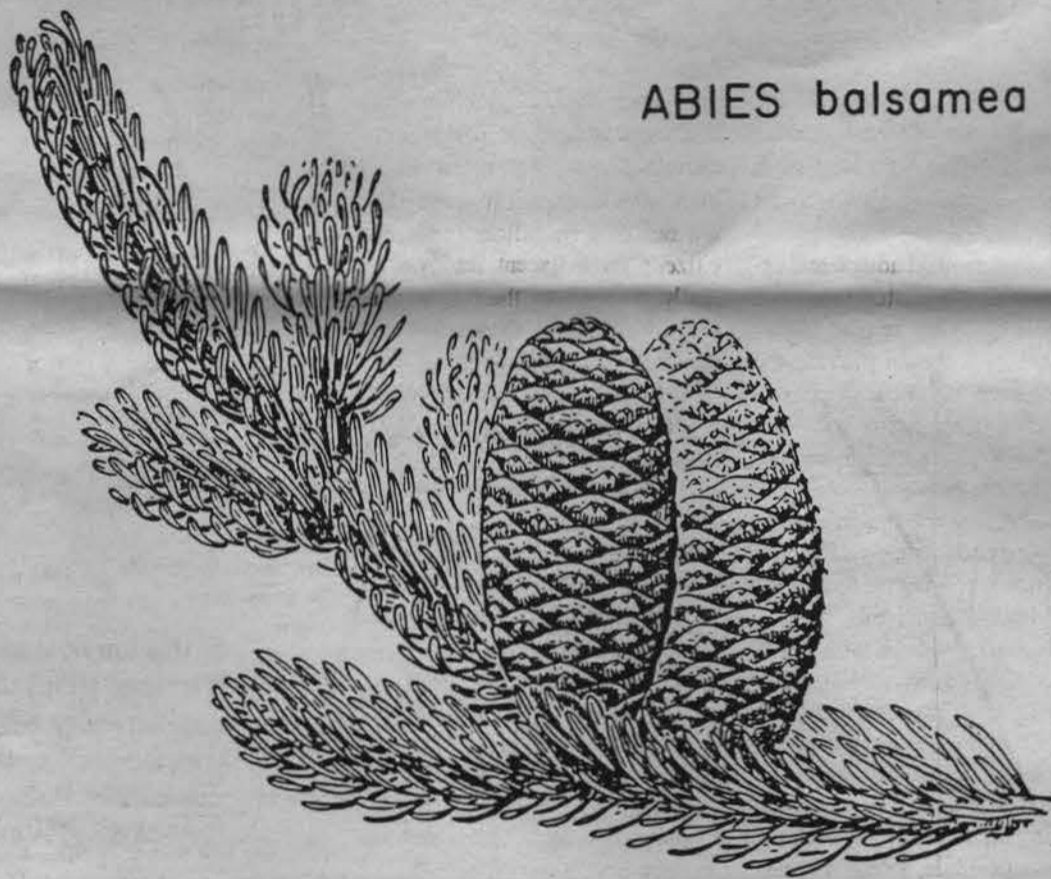
After years of studying Balsam in this state, it is alarming to find that no young trees can be found. If a tree isn't tall enough now, that a deer can't browse its leader, it never will be. The only Balsam growing in West Virginia grew up before the population explosion in the deer herd. If you look down in the grass you might find some Balsam seedlings. Take a closer look. They probably have stems bigger around than your thumb, but are only a few inches high. They may be 10 years old but never outgrow the grass from being browsed each year. It is a rare occurrence when a young Balsam might grow up in the center of a clump of Alders, out of the deer's reach.

Almost the entire Balsam Fir population in West Virginia is in the 30-70 year old range. Not being a long lived tree in general, many have reached maturity and are dying. This would be considered normal for trees of this age class. The alarming problem here, is the total lack of any young trees growing up to take their place. Overall there is a serious decline in the natural stands of Balsam in this state.

Historically, White Tail Deer were not very common in the mountain counties of West Virginia. Consider these figures. During a 16 year period from 1917-1932 a total of 19 deer were killed in Tucker County (where most of West Virginia's Balsam lives). That's just over 1 Deer per year. Even as late as 1961 only 207 deer were killed (harvested) in Tucker. Compare this with the figures from 1995. 1691 Bucks, 1218 antlerless, 337 muzzleloader, 884 archery, in Tucker County. And even now hunters are complaining there aren't enough!! At the turn of the century there were estimated to be 1 million White Tail Deer, now it has risen to 20 million.

Until the State DNR becomes responsible to all West Virginians and West Virginia, and not just to hunters, we can count on the same misguided management of this pest species. Since changes won't, apparently, be happening anytime soon, I think we can all watch Balsam Fir disappear from the mountains of the Mountain State. Because of this, perhaps, should we be happy this unique native gene pool is being preserved and perpetuated by the commercial Christmas tree industry? ❖

ABIES balsamea



the very top, to pick the cones (which is where they grow), some less ethical seed gatherers have been cutting the tops out of the trees and removing the cones while on the ground. This is much easier for the seed collector, but obviously devastating to the tree. Aside from this, having the beautiful spires in a stand of Balsam cut short, is not a pretty site.

Unfortunately, much of the Balsam in West Virginia is not well protected. Some is found in the Canaan Valley State Park and, mainly from its inaccessibility, is

West Virginia is on Forest Service lands of the Monongahela National Forest. The Blister Run stand is a registered National Natural Landmark. Administratively designated a Botanical Area, it has a management prescription 8, which emphasizes the preservation of unique ecosystems or areas for scientific research. Some Balsam is found in the Dolly Sods Wilderness. The Blister Swamp stand is Management prescription 6.1 (mix of forest products).

Commercial gatherers have been to all of these places. Any-

Deer Dining Canaan Fir's Greatest Threat

Faced with a decreased amount of available seed, due to commercial gathering, how are these few remaining stands of Balsam going to survive into the next century? The answer is, they aren't. Could it be possible that so much seed is gathered, not enough remains to sustain the stands? Not likely. Balsam Fir in West Virginia will much more likely succumb to the overpopulation of White Tail Deer in the few areas where Balsam still exists. Unlike Red Spruce, which

The Forest for the Trees - The Charleston Gazette

Public involvement key to protecting forests

By Ken Ward Jr.
Charleston Gazette

West Virginia activists think they might have found a better way to handle the state's forests: Get more public input, consider forest uses other than logging and, above all, talk a lot more about it.

Ironically, the possible model emerged from a lawsuit filed to stop the largest timber sale in the history of the Monongahela National Forest.

The U.S. Forest Service proposed to cut 16 million board feet of century-old, national forest trees on the east side of Gauley Mountain north of Marlinton.

Six individuals and two environmental groups filed a federal court lawsuit to stop the logging. They said the Forest Service did not fully consider the effects the cut would have on Elk River tributaries, wildlife and forest biodiversity.

The Forest Service, as required by law, heard public comments on the logging proposal before it was approved.

Cindy Schiffer, the district forest ranger in charge of the project, met with citizens and hiked through the proposed timbering areas with some of them.

But the Forest Service's efforts at listening to citizens only kicked into high gear once the lawsuit was filed, according to those involved.

Eventually, the two sides agreed to a settlement which reduced the amount of timber to be cut by 21 percent.

The settlement eliminated proposed helicopter logging that would have been closest to private homes and near areas where an endangered species of bat lives. It includes requirements for no-cut zones of up to 300 feet along streams. And it requires an extensive timber monitoring program that will allow citizens to be involved in checking on the cutting's effects on the environment.

"We feel we've accomplished our objectives in this suit," said Bill Turner, a Lewisburg lawyer who represented the citizens who sued. "We wanted to reduce the volume of the cut and protect the streams and sensitive wildlife."

Perhaps more important, environmentalists who sued over the logging said they learned that the Forest Service can, when it wants to, listen to citizens.

"They went many extra miles and really listened," said Beth Lit-

tle, a Sierra Club activist who lives near Hillsboro.

Steve Hollenhorst, who teaches land use policy at the West Virginia University forestry school, contrasted the Gauley Mountain settlement with the battle over logging at Kumbrow State Forest.

At Kumbrow, Hollenhorst said, the Forestry Division ignored citizen concerns that logging would ruin the forest for hiking, camping and fishing.

Forestry Division Director Bill Maxey, Hollenhorst said, creates conflict by insisting he and his staff know best how to manage forests and don't need public input.

Maxey, who worked for the timber industry before joining the Forestry Division, is an outspoken critic of allowing only professional foresters - those trained in how to grow trees as a crop - make decisions about forest management.

In an article in the August issue of the Society of American Foresters newsletter, Maxey criticized the U.S. Forest Service for replacing foresters in agency management positions with landscape architects, botanists, archaeologists and engineers.

"Foresters need advice and assistance from other natural resource managers," Maxey wrote. "However, foresters should provide the leadership in this area, in consultation and collaboration with (not under the direction of) professionals from other disciplines."

In the December SAF newsletter, outgoing Forest Service Chief Jack Ward Thomas responded to Maxey's criticism.

"I hate to see SAF involved in some sort of struggle about purity of who is an appropriate member of SAF and who is an appropriate chief of the Forest Service," said Thomas, a graduate of the West Virginia University forestry school.

"For example, I read a recent editorial ... where Bill Maxey asked why should we let wildlife people and other disciplines in SAF while we're not allowed in their organizations?"

"This is not a time for backing off into little subspecialties and building shells around ourselves," Thomas said. "We're looking for the best natural resources and conservation leaders in the world."

"They are not going to be concentrated in wildlife, forestry, ecology, or anywhere else," Thomas said. "We need to be more inclusive and less exclusive. Exclusion is definitely not going to solve anything."

Hollenhorst said, "Note the

stark contrast between this broad, inclusive, participatory, and outward view of forestry presented by Dr. Thomas and the narrow view of Bill Maxey in which only "experts" indoctrinated into his view of forestry have a say.

"While I believe Maxey is genuine and well intended, his command and control view of forestry is increasingly out of touch with both public and professional sentiment about what constitutes good forestry," Hollenhorst said.

"This 'Forestmeister' view in which decision authority is vested in an elite of government, academic and industry experts is simply unacceptable today," Hollenhorst said.

"The public want more democratic processes," he said. "They want to participate. They want opportunities to get involved in government policy."

"As a case in point, note the way the Monongahela National Forest dealt with the Gauley timber sale," he said. "While they might be faulted for not seeking enough input prior to the draft plan, after controversy arose, they got out of their offices, met with citizens and adjacent landowners, really listened to their concerns, and incorporated those concerns into the final plan."

"Good forestry involves meaningful public involvement, identification of a broad spectrum of alternative actions and assessment of the environmental and social benefits of each alternative," Hollenhorst said. "We've yet to consider such for public land in West Virginia."

"That might be a way we can get this kind of input way up front in the process," she said. "We might not be able to do that on every occasion. Our differences in philosophy may be so deep that we can't on every issue."

Patrick C. McGinley, a WVU law professor who represented citizens who sued over the Gauley Mountain timbering, said state and federal agencies need to pay attention to citizens - without the citizens having to sue them.

"While the negotiations directed at settling the lawsuit were productive, with both sides recognizing the concerns of the other, these types of productive conversations ought to come during the planning process," McGinley said.

"They should not be limited to those occasions where citizens are forced to file a lawsuit to get the Forest Service's attention and respect," McGinley said. ♦

As many readers know the Charleston Gazette has just finished a series of over 20 articles on the state of WV's forests. I decided to add the extra pages to the VOICE to carry three of them that Conservancy members might most be interested in.

I feel an urge to apologize for including so much material from the Charleston Gazette, which many Charleston and in-state Conservancy members have very likely read already. But I'm sure that the many VOICE readers who haven't seen these yet would benefit from the information in this exceptional series. - You can find all the articles at their website - <http://www.wvgazette.com>. - bill r

Much of state's forests in hands of very few people

By Ken Ward Jr.
Charleston Gazette

More than 260,000 West Virginians own a share of the state's nearly 11 million acres of forest land. But just a half of 1 percent of those owners control more than a third of the forests. Just 100 corporations own more than 18 percent of the forests.

West Virginia timber industry backers like to tout the fact that the state's timber land is owned by tens of thousands of private citizens. To hear Bill Maxey, director of the state Division of Forestry, talk, all of the state's trees are owned by elderly couples or working-class people who inherited land from their grandparents.

Efforts to regulate the timber industry, timber backers say, amount to interference with private property rights of those citizens. Some environmental extremists want to regulate what individual landowners can do with their own property, says a newspaper ad published by the West Virginia Forestry Association. These anti-business radicals would actually require all landowners to obtain permits to use any trees on their own property.

A U.S. Forest Service report, released last month, paints a different picture of who owns West Virginia forests. It shows the well-known pattern of most of West Virginia's resources being concentrated in the hands of a few people.

You've got a very large number of owners who own a small portion and a very small number of owners who own a large portion, said Tom Birch, a Forest Service analyst who wrote the report. That's the general pattern. Among the findings of Birch's report:

- West Virginia has about 10.7 million acres of private forest land. About 80 percent of the state is forested.

- The state's forests are owned by 260,400 individuals, corpora-

tions, families and trusts. About 250,000 of those owners are individuals. Another 3,800 are corporations. The average ownership per owner, whether private individual or corporation, is about 41 acres.

- Owners - individual and corporate - who own 1,000 acres or more of forest land control 3.2 million acres. They constitute only 0.19 percent of owners, but hold more than 30 percent of the state's forests.

- More than 142,000 of the individual owners hold less than 10 acres of forest land each. Another 91,400 individual owners hold less than 100 acres each. Another 11,400 individual owners control between 100 and 199 acres each.

- Overall, 251,400 individual owners, about 97 percent of all owners, control 7 million acres of forest, about 67 percent of West Virginia's timber land.

- About 800 individuals own more than 500 acres of forest each. They own a total of 818,000 acres, about 8 percent of the state's forests.

- If you add in all owners who own 500 acres or more, 1,500 owners control 3.8 million. This 0.5 percent of landowners control nearly 36 percent of West Virginia's forests.

- West Virginia has 3,800 corporate forest owners that control nearly 2.6 million acres of forest, about one quarter of the state's timberland.

- There are 100 corporate owners who own 5,000 acres or more of timberland. This 0.04 percent of forest owners holds nearly 2 million acres of forest, more than 18 percent of the state's total timberland.

- There are 200 corporate owners who hold 1,000 or more acres of timberland. They control 2.3 million acres of forest, or more than one-fifth of the state's timberland. ♦



(Y) Project Name: Shock Run Timber Analysis

Project Type: Vegetation Management (NEPA)

Description: Timber harvesting analysis to regenerate hard mast tree species. Proposed projects may include: timber harvesting through regeneration cuts (for example, clearcuts and two-aged cuts), thinning of intermediate aged stands, designation of mature habitat for wildlife, woods roads management, road construction/ reconstruction, road closures, tree planting, and treatment of striped maple by application of the herbicide triclopyr, hand culling, or prescribed burning.

Status: Team evaluation being conducted for proposed action statement.

OA: Shock Run (#46.106)

Contact Person: James Heinle

Scoping Starts: January 1997

Comments on Scoping Due: - February 1997

EA out for public review: Not Set

(Z) Project Name: Lockridge Mountain Timber Analysis

Project Type: Vegetation Management (NEPA)

Description: Timber harvesting analysis to regenerate hard mast tree species. Proposed projects may include: timber harvesting through regeneration cuts (for example, clearcuts and two-aged cuts), thinning of intermediate aged stands, designation of mature habitat for wildlife, woods roads management, road construction/reconstruction, road closures, tree planting, and treatment of striped maple by application of the herbicide triclopyr, hand cutting, or prescribed burning.

Status: Team evaluation being conducted for proposed action statement.

Opportunity Area: Knapp Creek (#46.108) and Rimel (#46.115)

Opportunity Areas

Contact Person: James Heinle

Scoping Starts: November 1996

30 Day Comment Period Ends: January 15, 1997

Potomac Ranger District

Telephone : (304) 257-4488

FAX (304) 257-2482

HC 59 Box 240

Petersburg, WV 26847

(CC) Project Name: Red Creek Stables Outfitter Guide

Project Type: Special use permit
Description: Red Creek Stables, near Laneville, provides horse and guide services in the Flat Rock Run area and occasionally into the area north of Dolly Sods Wilderness under informal agreements with

the Forest Service and private landowners. This is a commercial activity requiring a permit.

Status: A revised application was received from the stable operators in October 1995.

The Forest Service is in the process of mapping the proposed trails. The authorization of a temporary permit for some of the trails is being considered.

OAs: Weiss Knob (#53.001)

Dolly Sods Scenic Area (#58.031)

Red Creek (#56.102)

Flat Rock-Roaring Plains (#56.203)

Dolly Sods North (no number)

Contact Person: Julie Fosbender

Scoping Starts: 1996

Comments Due: 1996

Decision Date: 1997

(5) Project Name: Spruce Mountain East Road Extension

Project Type: Road construction
Description: The effects road construction north of Spruce Knob into the Brushy Run drainage, for the purpose of harvesting timber stands will be analyzed. The decision to harvest the timber stands was made in the Spruce Mountain East Opportunity Area decision notice in 1991. The current analysis will compare the approved access (which includes crossing privately owned lands) with other alternatives.

Status: Alternative access routes have been analyzed. Possible easements with private landowners are being studied.

OA: Spruce Mountain East (#53.006)

Contact Person: Richard Vander-noot or Sara Schell

Scoping Starts: Complete

Comments Due: Complete

Decision Date: 1998

(6) Project Name: Timberline Ski Area/Salamander Run

Project Type: Ski Run permit re-authorization

Description: Since the issuance of a special use permit for a ski run on Cabin Mountain, the Cheat Mountain Salamander has been listed as a 'Threatened Species'. Monitoring has determined that construction of the ski run has had effects on a colony.

Monitoring and mitigation efforts are continuing. This analysis will review the effects of various options including reauthorization and termination.

Status: Environmental Assessment is complete

OA: Weiss Knob (#53.001)

Contact Person: Sara Schell

Comments Due: completed

Decision Date: November 1996

Implementation: January 1997

(7) Project Name: South Branch Recreation

Project Type: Recreation improvements

Description: Growing recreational use and deteriorating facilities are to be addressed in this analysis. Included will be rehabilitation of Big Bend Campground, resource protection/site improvements at Jess Judy, and other projects as determined during site reviews currently underway.

OAs: Smoke Hole (#56.202)/Eagle Rock (#56.105)

Contact Person: Sara Schell

(8) Project Name: Hunting Ground Mountain

Project Type: Vegetation management

Description: Timber harvesting and road construction will be considered for analysis.

Status: Preliminary analysis began April 1996.

County: Pendleton

OA: Sawmill Run (#53.01 1)

Contact Person: Sara Schell

Scoping Starts: November 1996

Comments Due: December 1996

Decision Date: March 1997

(9) Project Name: East of the Plains
Project Type: Vegetation management/wildlife management

Description: Timber harvesting and road construction will be considered for analysis.

Status: Preliminary analysis began in 1996.

OA: Smith Mountain (#53.002) and High Ridge (#56.103)

Contact Person: Julie Fosbender

Scoping Starts: 1997

(10) Project Name: Turkey Knob and Falls South

Project Type: Vegetation management

Description: Timber harvesting

and road construction will be considered for analysis.

Status: Preliminary data collection has begun.

OAs: Pharis Knob (#53.008) and Osceola (#53.009)

Contact Person: Jim Knibbs

Scoping Starts: 1997

(11) Project Name: Red Creek Plains Project Area

Project Type: Vegetation management/recreation/wildlife management

Description: Timber harvesting, recreation projects, fishery and wildlife projects, and related support activities such as road and trail construction will be analyzed. Status: Preliminary data is being collected to develop a proposed action for public comment.

OA- Red Creek (#56.102)

Contact Person: Julie Fosbender

Scoping Starts: 1997

(12) Project Name: Smith Mountain Project Area

Project Type: Vegetation management/recreation/wildlife management

Description: Timber harvesting, recreation projects, fishery and wildlife projects, and/or related support activities such as road and trail construction will be considered for analysis.

Status: Preliminary analysis began in 1995.

OA: Smith Mountain (#53.002)

Contact Person: Sara Schell

Scoping Starts: 1998

Resources Group

Supervisor's Office

(304) 636-1800 (Voice and TTY)

200 Sycamore Street

Elkins, WV 26241

Project Name: Columbia Gas-Glady Gas Storage Field Enhancement

Project Type: Gas Well Drilling and Gas Pipeline replacement

Description: Columbia Gas Transmission Corp. proposes to drill 3 gas wells to improve the efficiency and performance of the existing gas storage field. Gas wells would be drilled by enlarging 3 existing gas well sites to accommodate drilling operations. A total of about 1.1 miles of existing gas pipeline is proposed for replacement within existing cleared pipeline right-of-way.

Status: Under analysis

OAs: Little Beech Mountain (36.103), Fox Run (36.108), and May (36.110).

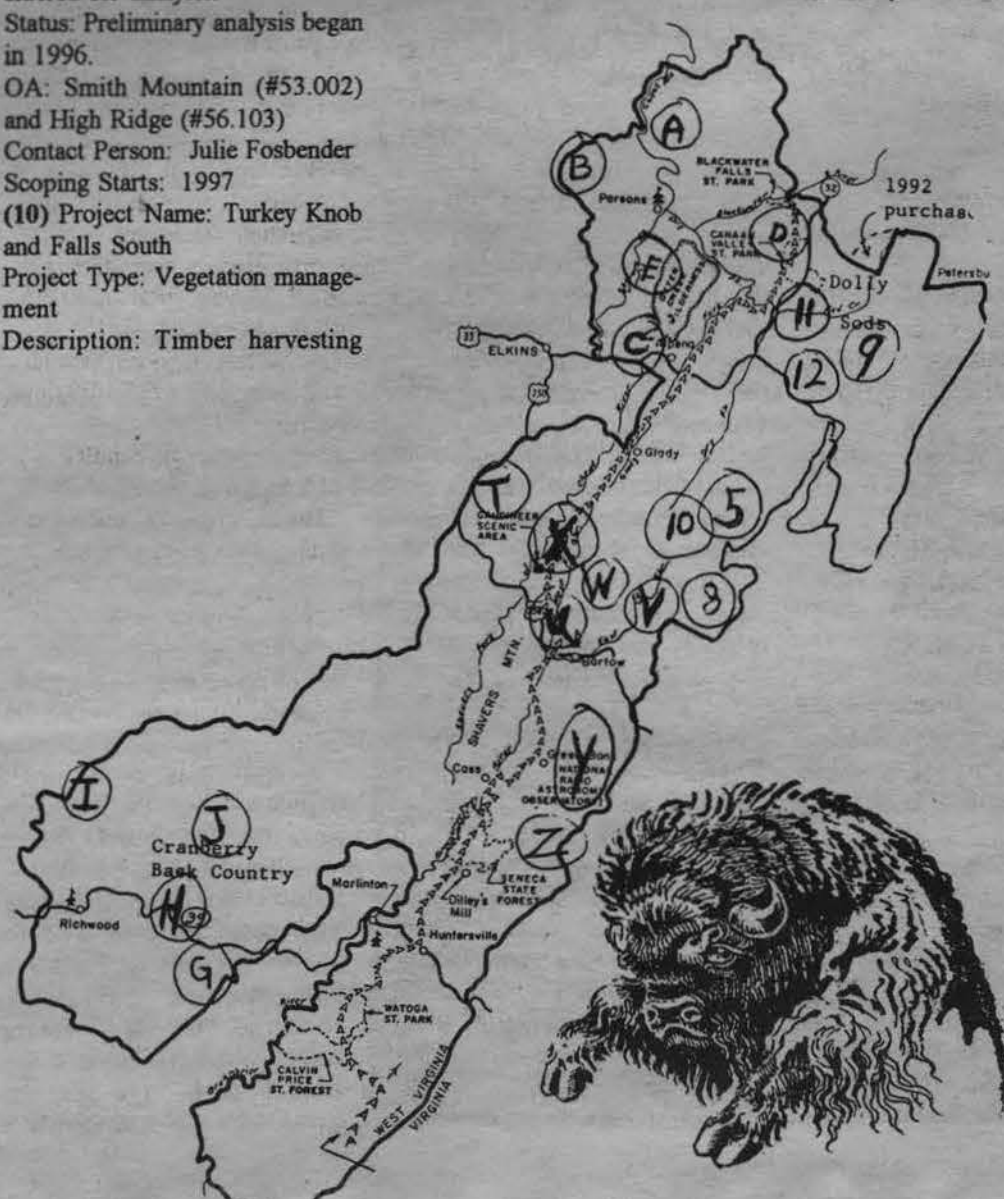
Contact Person: Linda Tracy

Scoping Starts: 11/96

Comments due: 12/96

Decision Date: 02/97

Implementation: 1 well-6/97; 1 well-1998; 1 well-1999. ♦



Is W.Va. Running out of Trees?

Forest study shows alarming trends

A new study by the West Virginia Division of Forestry suggests some bothersome trends about the amount of timber being cut.

By Ken Ward Jr.
SUNDAY GAZETTE-MAIL

Back in August, West Virginia Division of Forestry officials declared that a new study had found state forest growth was "in the green."

They concluded that "timber volume in West Virginia forests grew from 67.1 billion board feet in 1987 to an impressive 70 billion board feet in 1995."

Forestry Division Director Bill Maxey said, "West Virginians can be encouraged that by using sound forestry practices, this renewable resource has the capacity to support the current rate of harvest."

Sounds great, right? There's just one problem. Maxey's conclusions weren't the truth - at least not the whole truth.

Maxey's two-page news re-

lease and an accompanying, three-page list of "background information" put the best possible spin on the study.

Maxey barely mentioned the fact that in 1987, 3.7 trees were growing for every one that was cut. But by 1995, only 1.3 trees were growing for every one cut.

Some foresters consider this statistic, known as the growth-to-removal ratio, a crucial measure of forest health. The closer the ratio gets to 1 to 1, the closer the state moves toward cutting too many trees.

The change in ratio between 1987 and 1995 didn't get much publicity. But it sparked concern among foresters, the timber industry, the U.S. Forest Service and the few citizens who knew about it.

"You can't sustain that kind of change over the next four or five years," said John Peters, project leader for forest inventory analysis at the U.S. Forest Service experiment station in Radnor, Pa. "I wouldn't say it's not a problem. I'd be concerned."

"It's a warning sign," said Rory Fraser, a West Virginia University forestry professor. "The ratio that we have at the

moment is not as optimistic as they projected."

Indeed, a closer examination of the Forestry Division report shows troubling trends the agency doesn't talk much about. In some ways, West Virginia forests are already being cut faster than they can grow back:

- Seven of the 18 hardwood species studied declined in volume over the seven years examined. Three of seven softwood species included in the study also declined in volume.

The 10 species dropped by an a total of more than 190 million board feet per year, or about 1.3 billion board feet over the seven-year study period.

- Three of four classes of oaks - trees that are valuable for making lumber and furniture and for sustaining wildlife - declined the most.

Overall, oak volume statewide declined an average of more than 140 million board feet a year. The volume of oak trees that died or were cut down was nearly 1.2 times oak growth.

- Statewide, logging accounted for more than 57 percent of the timber lost. Trees that died from fires, insects, disease or were cut down to make way for shopping malls or subdivisions accounted for the rest.

- In the most heavily logged part of the state, the northeastern region, the problem is most pronounced. Logging accounted for 65 percent of the timber decline there.

In that region, total growth to removal of all species is just 1.14 to 1. For every board foot of oak growing in the northeastern part of the state, 1.6 board feet are lost

Industry growth

In early 1995, public concern over a New York company's proposal to build a \$1 billion pulp and paper mill in Mason County was reaching its peak.

Mill critics turned their attention more and more from the project's dioxin emissions to the mill's huge appetite for wood.

According to Parsons & Whittemore Inc., the mill developers, the facility would chew up more than 2 million tons of wood a year. That amounts to about 2,000 acres of forest - an area roughly the size of Blackwater Falls State Park - every month.

Gov. Gaston Caperton strongly supported the mill. Caperton also backed three other chipboard mills that had already lo-

cated or were in the process of opening in West Virginia.

Together, the three chipboard plants and the pulp mill would require an 80 percent increase in the amount of timber cut in West Virginia. They would need the equivalent of nearly 50,000 acres of forest a year. At that rate of cutting, an area the size of Putnam County would be cleared in less than five years.

Forestry Division officials also supported the new projects. Their agency is charged, in part, with promoting growth of West Virginia forest products industries. So division officials have been eager to assure residents that the state has plenty of timber for the new mills.

But even Maxey, a former Westvaco Corp. forester, expressed concern about the industry growth. So Maxey ordered his agency to conduct a study of timber growth, logging rates, and tree mortality from insects and disease.

Normally, such studies, called inventories, are conducted only about every 12 or 15 years by the U.S. Forest Service. The last such inventory for West Virginia covered data through 1987 and was released in 1989. It showed that West Virginia grew 3.7 times the amount of timber logged.

The amount of timber cut annually in the state, however, doubled between 1987 and 1995.

"I'm guessing that the growth rate is about 2-to-1 now," Maxey said when he announced the Forestry Division's study in February 1995. "But it's time to quit guessing and start getting a better handle on what's out there."

"I'm concerned about keeping tree growth and timber harvesting in balance," said Maxey. "The last growth survey by the Forest Service was done in 1988, and the next one won't be taken until 2002 or 2003."

"We ought to be able to maintain a sustainable harvest even with these new developments," Maxey said. "But I've suggested to the governor's office that there's no longer any reason to give incentives to primary forest industries. Any incentives should be going to value-added industries" that process West Virginia wood within the state.

A positive trend?

In one way, the new study showed a general positive trend. The amount of sawtimber, those trees 9 inches in diameter and

larger, increased. Sawtimber is the kind of trees that can be cut and shipped to sawmills to be made into lumber, furniture or other products.

Between 1987 and 1995, the total volume of sawtimber in West Virginia increased 4.4 percent, from 67.1 billion board feet to 70 billion board feet.

"The state's forests are still very productive," the Forestry Division said. "Growth and, therefore, productivity, are recognized as a major indicator of forest health, even though removals due to harvesting, land conversion, insect, disease, and weather phenomena have increased during the last seven years."

But three species of trees accounted for nearly three-quarters of the net increase in timber volume over the last seven years.

Red maple increased by nearly 100 million board feet per year. Ash increased by more than 78 million board feet per year. And yellow poplar - the main species that will be used by chipboard mills that have started up in the last year - increased by more than 120 million board feet per year.

The Forestry Division study also examined the growth-to-removal ratio of sawtimber. It showed that West Virginia grew 420 million more board feet of sawtimber than was logged. For every tree that was cut, 1.34 trees were grown.

"A 1:1 ratio of net growth to removals is considered sustained yield," the Forestry Division report said.

"This means that the forest renewal growth will support the current rate of harvest perpetually," the report said. "The current net growth to removals ratio reflects a positive annual board foot volume increase in sawtimber."

Maxey launched the Forestry Division study because he thought that the growth-to-removal ratio had decreased from 3.7-to-1 to 2-to-1. So the results were worse than he feared.

Asked about that, Maxey had a new explanation for why the 1.3-to-1 ratio wasn't that bad.

"We had a lot of new mills and the existing in-state mills have increased their production," Maxey said. "It's what you would expect in a maturing forest."

"Think of this inventory as your bank account, and the growth is your interest," Maxey said. "If you're getting 3.7 percent inter-





est, you're making money. If you're getting 1.34 percent interest, you're making less, but your bank account is still growing. You're still flush. You're not losing money."

Forestry Division officials are also quick to point out that West Virginia has about 6,000 board feet of timber for every acre of forest. That's far more than some surrounding states, like Ohio, which has about 4,000 board feet per acre, they say.

"Even if we overcut more than 1-to-1 and got down to 5,000 board feet per acre, we'd still have more than Ohio," said assistant administrative forester Ed Mur-riner.

"What do we want to sustain it at?" Maxey asked. "We can sustain it at 6,000 or 4,000."

"The public has said that on Forest Service land, it wants more, but on the private land, it's really up to the private landowner to decide. They can do what they want with their private lands."

What about the oaks?

Oak trees, especially red oaks, are among the most valuable commercial trees in West Virginia. Oaks are also important for wildlife, providing plenty of acorns for animals to eat. And most people enjoy walking in the woods and just looking at big, old oak trees.

But oaks are among the trees that could be in trouble, according to the Forestry Division's study.

Foresters separate oaks into four classifications. They are select red oaks, select white oaks, other red oaks, and other white oaks.

Between 1989 and 1995, three of the four classes of oaks declined in volume. Total oak volume dropped by nearly 1 billion board feet over the period, or more than 140 million board feet a year.

One oak classification, select white oaks, showed an average annual increase in volume. That increase, however, was only 33 million board feet a year. The growth-to-removal ratio for select white oaks, meanwhile, was 1.19-to-1, slightly less than the statewide average for all trees of 1.34-to-1.

Select red oaks appeared to be in the greatest danger. They dropped by about 82 million board feet per year, or about 574 million over the seven-year study period. About 1.38 board feet of oak was harvested or died for every board foot that grew during the period.

In the northeastern region, the oak problem was even more dramatic. Overall, oak trees were cut or died at a rate 1.6 times faster than they grew. Nearly three-quarters of the oak decline in the region was from logging.

The Forestry Division report called for more examination of these volume reductions. But the agency also suggested the problem was insects, disease and weather, not timber cutting.

"The state must scrutinize current mortality to determine if it is temporary

due to recent disasters," the Forestry Division report says. "Natural competition within the maturing forest is also contributing to tree mortality. Since 1989, slightly more than 4.5 billion board feet was lost because of mortality.

"The gypsy moth continues its onslaught," the agency said. "Deer herds are reducing the young tree regeneration in some parts of the state. Droughts, windstorms, ice and snow damage have also taken a heavy toll.

Actually, a large percentage of the loss in oaks can be attributed to timber harvesting, according to the Forestry Division study.

Timber cutting caused more than 62 percent of the decline in total volume of all oaks, according to the study. For select white oaks, the percentage was even higher, nearly 75 percent.

Timber cutting accounted for two-thirds of the decrease in select red oak volume and nearly 65 percent of the decrease in other red oak volume, the study said.

John Peters, the Forest Service inventory chief, said, "It would seem reasonable that maybe the bulk of that change was due to the harvest."

Fraser, the WVU forestry professor, has examined these numbers. He said, "The inference is that we are cutting down trees faster than we are growing them.

"What the numbers indicate is that the rate of removal of oaks is greater than the rate of growth of the oaks," Fraser said. "We need to be careful that we don't deplete the stock. We need to be concerned about this."

Is positive growth enough?

Timber industry officials, and some government agency foresters, cling to West Virginia's positive growth-to-removal ratio as proof logging can continue to grow. As long as more trees are grown than are cut down, they say, the forests are in good shape.

Timbering is sustainable, they say. "When it starts becoming a problem, then we'll address it," Maxey said. "I'm not saying you don't start looking ahead or planning ahead. I just don't see growth and removal colliding."

Bob Whipkey, an assistant administrative forester for the state, said, "We are aware that there is a limited potential on the harvest. You want to reach a balance at some point. We're saying we're not there right now."

Tom Frieswyk, a forester with the U.S. Forest Service, said, "The growth-to-removal ratio declined quite a bit during the period, but it's still a positive. As long as it's still a positive, it's sustainable as far as total volume."

But Steve Hollenhorst, who teaches land-use policy and recreation management at West Virginia University's forestry school, said he believes the growth-to-removal ratio doesn't tell the whole story.

"Looking at cut-to-growth ratios is

not enough," Hollenhorst said. "It's a good start, but we have to look at what we need to sustain tourism or wildlife populations, too.

"Not all values are compatible," Hollenhorst said. "Not all biodiversity is compatible with a maximum sustained yield of the resource. Not all tourism values are compatible with a maximum sustained yield of the resource."

Rick Landenberger, a WVU forestry doctoral candidate and environmental activist, agreed. Landenberger said the state needs to look at questions beyond the simple calculation of growth and removal rates.

"It seems to me that the more meaningful question is what we as a society want from our forest resources," Landenberger said.

"Perhaps a low-diversity landscape of young forests is not so appealing, particularly when one considers the environmental and social costs associated with such a scenario," he said. "Yet that is basically where we are heading if the cur-

rent harvesting trend continues. This is an unavoidable mathematical fact, since it is impossible to both continue to increase harvesting as we've been doing and maintain the current proportion of older forests."

Landenberger said the state might be able to maintain a positive growth ratio over the next few years, if timber companies grow lots of fast-growing poplar and pine for pulp mills and chipboard plants.

"But what about sustainable native wildlife?" Landenberger said. "Young, rapidly growing stands of disturbance-loving species such as poplar and red maple are much less valuable as habitat than older red and white oak forest - any deer, turkey or bear hunter knows that.

"What about the value of older forests for many non-game species?" Landenberger said. "What about the other, equally important human values of forests, such as water quality, flood control, aesthetic value, or recreation?"

"The growth-to-removal ratio says absolutely nothing about these." ❖

Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide

The Monongahela National Forest Hiking Guide, 6th edition, is bigger and better than ever, with 368 pages, 96 pages of maps, 49 photographs, 177 trails totalling 812 miles, and a full color cover. West Virginia Highlands Conservancy is the publisher. Authors are Allen de Hart and Bruce Sundquist (same as edition 5). Allen has hiked all the trails of the Monongahela N.F. over the past few years. Bruce was the editor for the first four editions. The hiking community and the U.S. Forest Service provided trail reports and photographs. The Guide also provides information for ski-touring and backpacking.

The growing throngs of visitors and the public at large regard the Monongahela National Forest as a 'Special Place'. And indeed it is. The hiking, backpacking, and ski-touring opportunities it provides are among the best in the eastern U.S. The more outstanding areas are becoming known far and wide - Otter Creek Wilderness, Dolly Sods Wilderness, Flatrock Plains, Roaring Plains, Blackwater Canyon, Spruce Knob, North Fork Mountain, Shaver's Mountain, Laurel Fork Wilderness, Cranberry Back Country, Cranberry Wilderness, among others.

Profits from the sale of these guides support a wide variety of worthy environmental projects in the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

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Maier Settles Defamation Suit Against Public Radio



by Tom Rodd

Highlands Conservancy Board member Andrew Maier has successfully settled the defamation lawsuit he brought eighteen months ago against West Virginia Public Radio. Maier was removed as a commentator on the radio network in February 1995, after he criticized former Division of Environmental Protection chief Dave Callaghan.

The case was scheduled for trial in December 1996. Maier agreed to the settlement after Public Radio agreed to replace him with a new commentator, who will provide "a voice for West Virginians having a special con-

cern for the environment". Public Radio also disavowed charges by a former program director that Maier didn't get his facts straight. Maier also received an undisclosed financial payment as part of the settlement. For his part of the settlement, Andrew praised the diligence and dedication of Public Radio staff, and the role they have played in covering environmental issues.

Way to go, Andrew! You did a bang-up job for five years, delivering eighty-seven wonderful commentaries. You were there as a voice for dozens of citizen groups, on issues from garbage to gravel pits, deer herds to dioxin.

You were funny, succinct, pungent and potent. Did I mention alliterative and illuminating?

Then, Andrew, you took a shot, but you didn't give up. You worked for a year to try to get an apology and a new environmental commentator, behind the scenes. When that effort failed, you got a good lawyer - Bill Byrne from Morgantown - and put your case on in the legal system. And because it was a strong case, you negotiated a settlement that vindicates your reputation, and puts a voice for the environment back on the air.

Personally, I think Public Radio is a remarkably good West

Virginia institution, and I feel very much at home, as a member and citizen of the community of Public Radio listeners. It was terrible when they let Andrew go, to have to hold back in my support. I know a lot of other people - a lot! - who felt the same way.

Well, that old stuff is behind us. And for this settlement, we can praise, which is always good for the soul. In fact, you can call Public Radio at 1-304-558-3000, and tell them you are glad and

appreciative that they resolved the case with Andrew. And that you're looking forward to their new "environmental voice" commentator.

As the mass media gets more concentrated, we need more and more the sort of non-commercial, diverse and plain-spoken voices that commentators like Andrew Maier exemplify. And these upcoming years are going to need to have those voices speaking out fearlessly. Thanks Andrew and congratulations on sticking with it! ♦

from the heart of the plateau

(From page 2) (with the complicity of all newspapers except the Voice) glosses over this distinction. It leaves the false impression that its purpose is to benefit wildlife in general. It isn't.

Many of its game enhancing activities do, of course, help non-game species. Should a species be so fortunate that it needs the same type of habitat as deer, then the Division's activities will incidentally help that species. While any conflict between deer and non-game species is resolved in favor of the deer, those who enjoy a peaceful coexistence with deer are benefitted by the Division's policies. The real focus of the Division's efforts, however, is the growth and prosperity of game animals.

The passage of the funding amendment is one more step in validating this policy. Its passage offers one more argument in favor of those who think that the Division should be managing for the benefit of game animals. If, as a matter of Constitutional law, the money from the sale of hunting and fishing licenses must go to the Division then this must mean that the Division is supposed to manage for animals which can be hunted and fished.

After the passage of the amendment, those who think otherwise will have one more obstacle to overcome.

Perhaps the passage of the amendments is a good thing. Perhaps the Division should manage wildlife in the interests of game animals and the people who hunt them.

Taking the opposite position does not, however, make someone a closet hater of wildlife. On the contrary, taking the opposite position makes someone a more sophisticated critic of the current policies of the Division of Natural Resources. Taking the opposite position identifies the writer as someone who does something other than uncritically accept the policies of a government agency.

So what is all the fuss about? The fuss is over whether the Division of Natural Resources' policy of favoring game species is a prudent one. It is a question that someone should raise and keep raising. While sensible people might give different answers, it is a question that should be asked. If the Conservancy can see that it continues to be asked then good for us. ♦

Dam Fights of The 1990's: Removals

from 'River Voices' via the Greenbrier Watershed Associations newsletter

"Removing dams is a realistic goal that is gaining momentum in river restoration," writes Rita Haberman in 'River Voices'. River conservation had been largely defined by dams. Thousands of fights against dam construction have been led by the environmental movement for decades.

The results have been grim: More than 68,000 large dams, two stories or higher, and about two million small dams choke American rivers. 600,000 once free-flowing miles lie behind stagnant dams.

Although proposals for new dams are still made, the tables are beginning to turn with regard to how the nation views dams. The old reasons for building them such as clean energy, recreation, flood control, water supply, are

proving to be unfounded.

The Oregon Natural Resources Council recently reported, 'Historically questions about dams have been limited to where or whether to build them in the first place. Given what we now know ... it is time to ask whether or not existing ones should be allowed to remain.'

Many river conservationists are focusing their energies on dam removals as an essential and practical river restoration strategy. A few of these efforts have received significant national press such as the hydroelectric dams on the Elwha River in Washington and the Kennebeck River in Maine.

The National Park Service has removed more than 100 dams on rivers and streams affecting our national parks. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has been involved in the removal of 15 dams from that state's rivers and streams.

Some reasons for dam removals are low safety ratings; a new understanding of the real impact of hydro projects on recreation, fish and wildlife; the high long term costs of dam maintenance; and the obsolescence of many dams built during the last century.

In regard to safety issues, 32% of the dams in the National Dam Inventory have a 'high' or 'significant' downstream hazard potential. The majority of these dams do not have an emergency plan in event of failure. According to recent articles in the Charleston Gazette, there are many small dams in West Virginia that are near failure.

Removing dams is still a novel idea. It marks a profound shift in America's philosophy of river management. Yet it is beginning to happen across the world, and the rivers are coming back to free-flowing life. (Rita Haberman, 'River Voices') ♦

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