

Contemporary Issues in Wilderness Recreation

BSA Mid-Atlantic Outdoor Ethics Community Event

February 10, 2019





**We protect wilderness and inspire
Americans to care for our wild places.**

About the Wilderness Society

- Founded in 1935 by some of the giants of conservation history (Aldo Leopold, Benton MacKaye, Bob Marshall, Harold Anderson, others).
- Mission is the protection and management of federal public lands.
- Three campaigns:
 - Land and water – Protecting land and advocating for sound land management decision-making.
 - Energy and Climate – Addressing the impacts of climate change and advocating for sensible energy development.
 - People Outdoors – Expanding recreation opportunities and getting more kids outdoors.

The TWS Recreation Program

- Increasing recreation access to federal lands (guided and unguided).
- Advocating for policy and programs that get more kids outdoors.
 - Federal policy advocacy (Outdoors Alliance for Kids).
 - Youth in Wilderness program.
- Managing recreation issues that arise in designated Wilderness.
 - Climbing.
 - Filming.
 - Bikes.
 - Large groups.

National Wilderness Preservation System



What is Wilderness?

- Land designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964.
- Most protective land designation in the federal estate.
- Requires an act of Congress and signature of the President.
- Designated areas make up the National Wilderness Preservation System.
 - Managed by four agencies (NPS, USFS, BLM, USFWS)
 - 767 Wilderness Areas
 - 110,025,309 acres (more than 50% is in Alaska).
 - 5% of total U.S. acreage, 2.7% of acreage in the continental United States.

Why Does Wilderness Exist?

“There is just one hope of repulsing the tyrannical ambition of civilization to conquer every niche on the whole earth. That hope is the organization of spirited people who will fight for the freedom of the wilderness.”

Robert Marshall, 1930

“Wilderness is a natural resource having the same basic relation to man’s ultimate thought and culture as coal and timber and other physical resources have to his material needs.”

Wilderness Society Platform, 1935

Historical Context

- Proliferation of roads and automobiles.
- Lots of dam construction.
- Widespread industrialization.
- Urbanization of the U.S. population.
- Shrinking pockets of undeveloped lands.

Purpose of The Wilderness Act

"In order to assure that an increasing population, accompanied by expanding settlement and growing mechanization, does not occupy and modify all areas within the United States and its possessions, leaving no lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition, it is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness."

The Wilderness Act, Section 2(a), 16 U.S.C. 1131(a)

What is Wilderness?

"A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are **untrammelled** by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain."

Wilderness Act, section 2(c), 16 U.S.C. 1131(c)

Trammel (*verb*) – to deprive of freedom of action

Elements of Wilderness Character

1. **Untrammeled** -- Wilderness is essentially unhindered and free from modern human control or manipulation
2. **Natural** -- Wilderness ecological systems are substantially free from the effects of modern civilization
3. **Undeveloped** -- Wilderness retains its primeval character and influence, and is essentially without permanent improvement or modern human occupation
4. **Solitude or Primitive and Unconfined Recreation** -- Wilderness provides outstanding opportunities for solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation
5. May also have features of **ecological, geological, scientific, educational, scenic or historic value**

Wilderness Prohibitions

- No roads.
- No use of motorized vehicles, equipment or motorboats (no chainsaws).
- No landing of aircraft.
- No other form of mechanical transport (no bikes, no wheelbarrows).
- No structure or installation.
- Exceptions:
 - Some nonconforming uses grandfathered in the original designation.
 - Some equipment (like chainsaws) may be used when agency determines they are the minimum equipment necessary for administration.



North Wilderness

Wilderness
4864 ft.

Spruce Knob Nat'l Rec Area

NORTH FORK MOUNTAIN
South Branch Potomac River
North Fork Shenandoah River

Shenandoah National Park

Ramseys Draft Wilderness

West Augusta

Washington National Forest

Virginia Ave

Staunton (City)

Stuarts Draft

Waynesboro (City)

Crimora

Grottoes

Spotswood Trl

Middle River

S East Side Hwl

Harrisonburg

Rockingham

Elkton

Shenandoah

New Market

Broadway

Timberville

Mt Jackson

George Washington National Forest

Shenandoah Wilderness

Luray

Shenandoah National Park

BLUE RIDGE MOUNTAINS

Madison

Culpeper

Orange

Orange

Gordonsville

Albemarle

Crozet

Charlottesville

Louisia

Lake Anna

Louisia

Warrenton

15

66

903 ft

522

462 ft

260

4460 ft

42

42

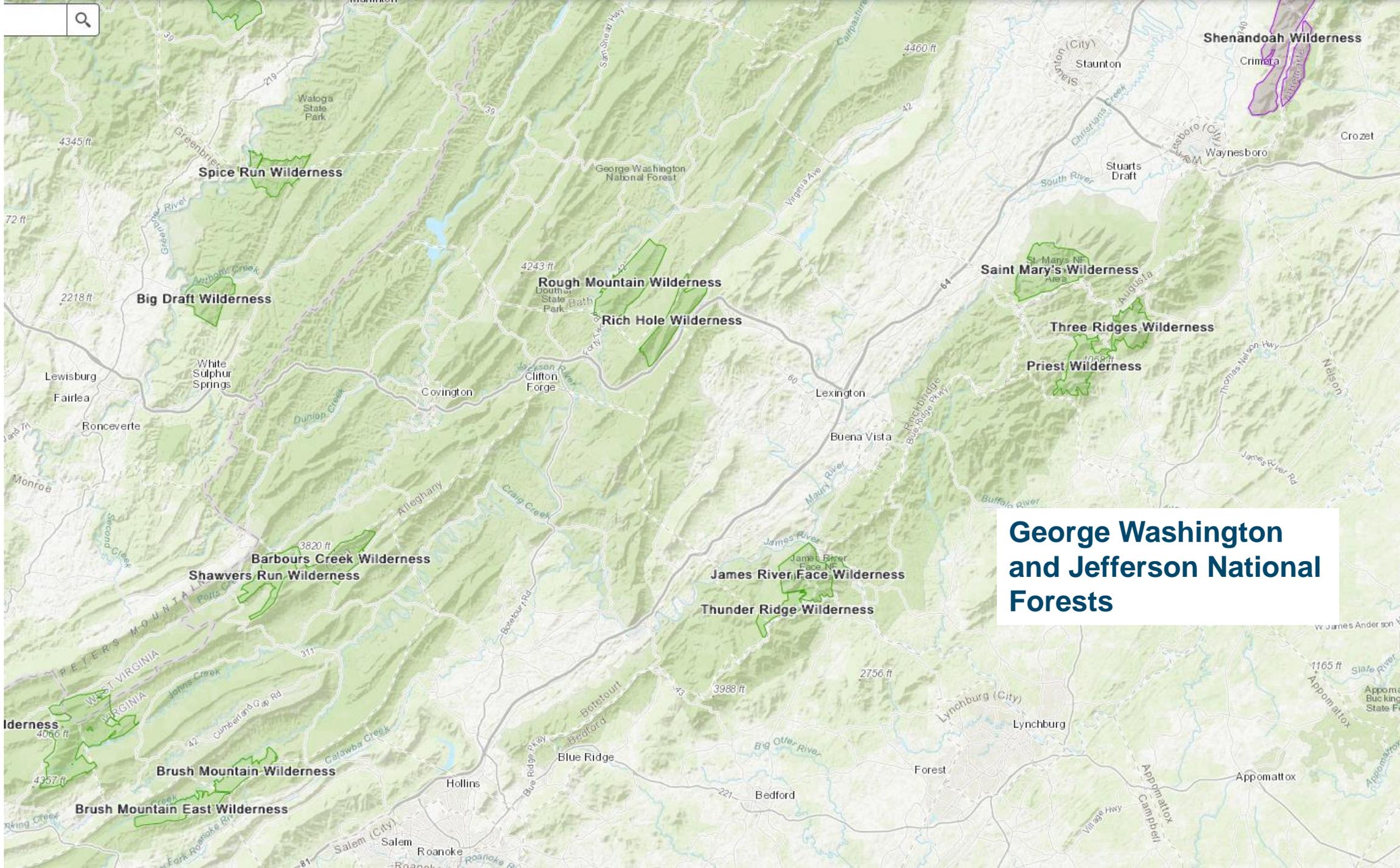
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4460 ft

42

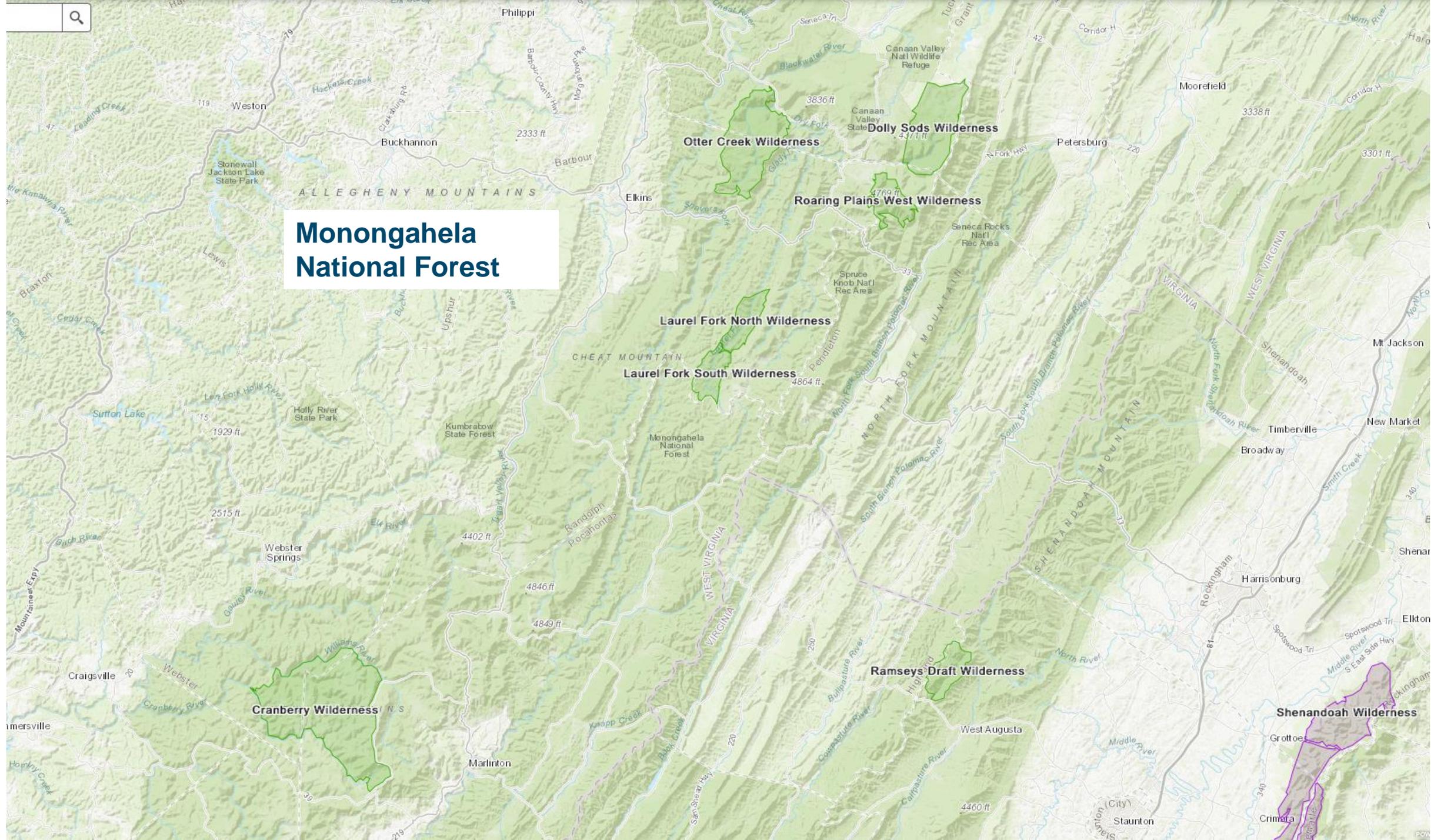
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4864 ft.



**George Washington
and Jefferson National
Forests**

Monongahela National Forest



Issues in Wilderness Recreation

Group Size Limits in Wilderness

- Limits on the number of people who can travel and camp together.
- Most Wilderness Areas have a limit – typically 8 to 12 people.
- Meant to limit impacts to wilderness character.
 - Exceeding the limit expands campsites, creates social/user trails.
 - Degrades natural conditions and eliminates opportunities for solitude.
- Limits need to be observed and respected.
- Recommendations:
 - Treat Wilderness trips as a special opportunity.
 - Break you troop into sections and take multiple trips.
 - Avoid high travel times (weekends, holidays).

Social and User-Defined Trails

- Created when users leave trails, cut switchbacks, walk directly to a feature or landmark.
- Violates LNT Principle 2 - Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces.
- Impacts:
 - Damage to soils, increased erosion/runoff, impairs water quality.
 - Search and rescue – unmapped trails, opportunities to get confused.
- Teaching opportunity:
 - Communicate to scouts about the purposes of Wilderness designation.
 - Encourage them to respect the resource and help maintain Wilderness character.

Vandalism and Wildlife Interaction

- Increased instances of visitors marking trees and other natural features
- Undermines Wilderness character and violates LNT principles.
 - LNT Principle 4 – Leave what you find
 - LNT Principle 7 – Be considerate of other visitors
- Increased wildlife interactions that distort natural animal behavior.
 - LNT Principle 6 – Respect wildlife.
 - Food storage is the biggest issue!
 - Human interaction sometimes leads to the destruction of animals.

Social Media Posting

- Popular activity – taking pictures and geotagging the location.
- Can have adverse impacts.
 - Can trigger heavy use of an area – may be good or bad.
 - Off trail photo may draw others off trail, magnifying the impacts.
- Can degrade the Wilderness experience
 - Robs people of the sense of wonder in Wilderness.
- That said, it is difficult to control this behavior.
- Consider having a conversation with your troop about geotagging in W.

Use of Drones in Wilderness

- An emerging issue.
- Drones are fun but they must be managed.
- Use of drones prohibited in Wilderness.
 - Takeoff/landing in Wilderness violates the Wilderness Act.
 - Drones have motors.
 - Motors are prohibited in Wilderness.
 - Overflight of Wilderness without takeoff/landing violates US Forest Service Policy.

Other Recreation Activities

- Horses are allowed in Wilderness.
 - Historical use that predates the Wilderness Act
 - Sometimes causes confusion because horses can have a lot of impact.
- Climbing is allowed in Wilderness.
 - Limited use of fixed climbing anchors is allowed in NPS wilderness.
 - Climbing bolts should be “occasional” and “rare,” preapproved.
- Skiing is allowed in Wilderness.
- Bicycles are not allowed in Wilderness – mechanical transport.

A Conversation About Wilderness

- Overview of the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- Discussion of why Wilderness exists - an opportunity to teach HUMILITY.
- Five elements of Wilderness character.
- Types of recreation allowed in Wilderness.
- Prohibitions and limitations that apply in Wilderness.

Coming soon – The Wilderness Society’s Public Lands Curriculum

Questions and Comments

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