

Testimony of Congressman Rick Boucher
On Behalf of HR 1011
The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests & Public Lands

May 10, 2007

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the subcommittee.

I appreciate the opportunity to testify this morning in support of bipartisan wilderness legislation for Virginia.

All of the proposed wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, and national scenic areas designated in the bill are in the district I represent.

But I am pleased to be joined in cosponsorship of the measure by a bipartisan majority of Virginia's House delegation, including Democratic colleagues, Bobby Scott, and Jim Moran, and Republican colleagues Frank Wolf, Tom Davis, and Jon Ann Davis.

An identical bill has been introduced in the Senate with the authorship of both Senators Warner and Webb, with whom we have worked closely in constructing the legislation.

The bill designates 43,000 acres of wilderness or wilderness study areas and designates 12,000 acres as National Scenic Areas.

The bill has been constructed over a number of years in a careful process involving conservation organizations, civic organizations, business owners, local governments and scores of interested citizens.

It has been broadly endorsed by those with whom we have worked to construct it. It carries the recommendation for wilderness designation of either the Forest Service or the local governing body of each county in which wilderness is designated.

I have attached to my prepared written statement 8 pages containing a lengthy list of endorsing organizations and individuals.

I would note that the bill has been endorsed by Virginia's Governor Tim Kaine and is the only wilderness bill to be endorsed by the International Mountain Bicycling Association.

All of the acreages protected in the bill have unique features that merit preservation. The Appalachian Trail traverses several of the proposed wilderness areas. Most of the terrain is rugged and not well suited for timber extraction.

I believe, and the local governments endorsing the bill believe, that these new protected areas will produce broad economic benefit for our region in which tourism is our fastest growing industry.

While we will not rely on wilderness to attract large numbers of travelers, we know from experience with our existing wilderness areas that wilderness

experience is a valuable part of the outdoor recreation component of our overall tourism development strategy.

The areas we propose to designate for protection, will provide solitude and wilderness recreation opportunities for hiking, hunting, fishing, camping bird watching, backpacking, and horseback riding.

Thousands of people travel to our region each year to enjoy the outdoor experience in the Jefferson National Forest. The passage of the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act will enhance that experience.

Senator Warner and I over that past 2 years have worked extensively with the Forest Service to address some concerns the Forest Service has expressed.

We have revised our legislation from the last Congress in an effort to address those concerns.

Today, the Forest Service may express further reservations about the legislation and I ask that a point-by-point answer to these reservations, which I have prepared, be made part of today's record.

I thank the committee for conducting today's hearing and hope it will be your pleasure to report our legislation.

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