



## Congress of the United States

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### **BOUCHER AND WARNER ALONG WITH SENATOR JIM WEBB AND OTHER VIRGINIA HOUSE MEMBERS INTRODUCE LEGISLATION TO PROTECT THE NATURAL AND SCENIC BEAUTY OF SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA**

#### *Legislation Would Designate New Wilderness and National Scenic Areas, Promote Tourism*

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Representative Rick Boucher and U.S. Senators John Warner and Jim Webb today joined together to introduce in both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007. If enacted, the legislation would create new Wilderness Areas, new National Scenic Areas and would expand six existing Wilderness Areas in portions of Bland, Craig, Grayson, Giles, Lee, Montgomery and Smyth Counties within the Jefferson National Forest.

**“Southwest Virginia possesses the state's best outdoor experience, with the highest mountains, most interesting rivers and superb hunting, camping, fishing, hiking and backpacking opportunities. If enacted, the legislation which Senator Warner and I are introducing today would not only designate nearly 55,000 acres of the Jefferson National Forest as Wilderness or National Scenic Areas, thereby protecting their pristine quality, but also would enhance the tourism economy of the region by enticing travelers to visit and enjoy the protected and untouched landscape which Southwest Virginia has to offer. I greatly appreciate Senator Warner’s continued leadership on this legislation, and I am pleased welcome Senator Jim Webb to our effort,”** Boucher said.

**“As a father and grandfather, I feel an obligation to ensure that our children have lasting opportunities to enjoy and explore Virginia's immense natural beauty. This bill will preserve some of our most pristine lands for future generations and add significantly to the natural attractions of Southwest Virginia,”** Warner stated.

**“I am pleased to co-sponsor this bill with Senator Warner and Congressman Boucher. We are fully committed to preserving Virginia’s land and waterways—some of the finest this country has to offer,”** said U.S. Senator Jim Webb, an original cosponsor of the legislation.

Designating a tract of land as Wilderness enables the U.S. Forest Service to preserve the scenic and undisturbed character of the landscape. Recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, camping, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, picnicking, backpacking, bird watching, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, spelunking, rock-climbing and many other outdoor activities would be continued and encouraged in the new Wilderness Areas. At the same time, motorized traffic and mechanized equipment would be banned to prevent any disruption to the ecosystems and diverse wildlife in the areas.

The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act would create six new Wilderness Areas and one new Wilderness Study Area within the Jefferson National Forest. The legislation would also create two new National Scenic Areas. The National Scenic Area designations in Southwest Virginia would protect the recreational, historic and natural resources in the delineated areas. Mountain biking would be permitted in the National Scenic Areas, and limited motorized access would be permitted in certain portions of the Scenic Areas.

Each of the proposed Wilderness and National Scenic Area designations has been endorsed by either the U.S. Forest Service or the Board of Supervisors of the County in which the area would be located. The proposed new Wilderness Areas are:

- ***Stone Mountain (Cave Springs)*** – The Stone Mountain proposed Wilderness Area is a 3,270-acre tract of land adjacent to the North Fork of the Powell River in Lee County. The property is considered to be one of the least disturbed forests in all of Southwest Virginia and is home to rich populations of two rare salamanders. The Stone Mountain and Payne Branch trails are included as part of the proposed Wilderness Area and provide convenient access for hikers and hunters wishing to visit the Wilderness Area. The trails are also connected to an adjacent campground at Cave Springs.
- ***Raccoon Branch*** – The Raccoon Branch proposed Wilderness Area is located in Smyth County in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area. The property contains 4,223 acres of extremely rugged country characterized by high ridges and low streams. Eight major trails provide excellent access for hunters, fishermen, hikers and horseback riders and two nearby campgrounds serve as convenient trailheads. In addition, 4.5 miles of the Appalachian Trail also traverses the proposed Wilderness Area.
- ***Brush Mountain*** – The Brush Mountain proposed Wilderness Area is located in Montgomery County, near the Town of Blacksburg and Virginia Tech. The area is 4,794 acres in size and extends approximately 8 miles along the northwest slope of Brush Mountain. The property is characterized largely by its remoteness, despite its proximity to the suburbs of Blacksburg, providing hunters and hikers with a feeling of true wilderness solitude.
- ***Brush Mountain East*** – The Brush Mountain East proposed Wilderness Area is adjacent to the Brush Mountain proposed Wilderness Area and is located in Craig County. This tract is 3,769 acres in size and shares many of the characteristics of its neighboring proposed Wilderness Area. Brush Mountain East also possesses excellent views along

Craig Creek and Brush Mountain's steep mountain face and is near the Audie Murphy Monument lookout near the top of the ridge.

- ***Garden Mountain*** – The Garden Mountain proposed Wilderness Area is located in Bland County. The tract is 3,291 acres and extends along the rugged south face of Garden Mountain. Lick Creek lies at the foot of this steep ridgeline. There are two developed trails associated with the proposal. The Appalachian Trail parallels the northern boundary along the summit of Garden Mountain, while the Lick Creek Trail provides access to the valley bottom.
- ***Hunting Camp Creek*** – Hunting Camp Creek proposed Wilderness Area (8,470 acres) in Bland County is adjacent to the proposed Garden Mountain Wilderness. The valleys of Hunting Camp Creek and Little Wolf Creek provide excellent opportunities for solitude and a true wilderness experience. The valleys of both creeks show evidence of the past workings of beaver including old dams and long chains of marshy areas. The Appalachian Trail traverses this wild, scenic area.
- ***Lynn Camp Creek*** - The Lynn Camp Creek proposed Wilderness Study Area (3,226 acres) is located in Bland County. Lynn Camp includes the northern slope of Brushy Mountain. This steep ridge descends to the tranquil Lynn Camp Creek. North of Lynn Camp Creek lies the Lynn Camp Mountain. Two trails traverse this gem. The Appalachian Trail moves from south to north, while the Lynn Camp Trail follows the course of Lynn Camp Creek from east to west. The proposed Lynn Camp Creek Wilderness Study Area will be studied by the Forest Service for possible designation by Congress as wilderness. Until Congress acts, this area will be managed as wilderness.

The proposed National Scenic Areas designated in the legislation are:

- ***Seng Mountain*** – The Seng Mountain proposed National Scenic Area is 6,455 acres in size and is located in the Mount Rogers National Recreation Area in Smyth County. Rowland Creek Falls, a 45-foot cascading waterfall, is a major scenic attraction in the area. The area also includes a network of recreational trails, and convenient access is provided to visitors via the Hurricane Campground and Skulls Gap Picnic Area.
- ***Bear Creek*** – The Bear Creek proposed National Scenic Area is located in Smyth County and includes 5,128 acres. The area extends from the crest of Walker Mountain southward to the crest of Brushy Mountain and includes the enclosed valley between the two mountains. An extensive network of trails is included in the proposed area, including more than four miles of the Appalachian National Scenic Trail.

In addition, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act will expand six existing Wilderness Areas to protect the unique and undisturbed landscape of the region. The Mountain Lake Wilderness Area in Giles and Craig Counties will be expanded to include an additional 5,476 acres; the Lewis Fork Wilderness Area in Smyth and Grayson Counties will be expanded an additional 308 acres; the Little Wilson Creek Wilderness Area in Grayson County will be expanded by 1,845 acres; Shawvers Run Wilderness Area which is located in Craig County will be expanded to

include an additional 2,249 acres of Wilderness; Peters Mountain Wilderness Area which is located in Giles County will be expanded to include an additional 1,203 acres of Wilderness; and the Kimberling Creek Wilderness Area in Bland County will be expanded by 612 acres.

U.S. Representatives Bobby Scott (VA-03), Jim Moran (VA-08), Frank Wolf (VA-10), Tom Davis (VA-11), and Jo Ann Davis (VA-1) are original co-sponsors of the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.

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