

Testimony of
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Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist
The National Wild Turkey Federation



Review of
HR 1011, The Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of
2007

Before The
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United State Senate

September 27, 2007

Introduction

Good morning, my name is Dowd Bruton. I am a Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist with the National Wild Turkey Federation. The National Wild Turkey Federation is one of the nation's leading non-profit conservation organizations.

The National Wild Turkey Federation is dedicated to the conservation of the wild turkey and the preservation of our hunting tradition. Growth and progress define the NWTF as it has expanded from 1,300 members in 1973 to more than 500,000 members today. NWTF has 2,200 chapters in all 50 states, Canada, Mexico and 14 other foreign countries. With that growth has come impressive strides in wildlife management as the NWTF has forged dynamic partnerships across the country. Together, the NWTF's conservation partners and grassroots members have raised and spent more than \$224 million on conservation projects. This investment has helped conserve and improve more than 9.6 million acres of wildlife habitat and uphold hunting traditions.

In our early existence, wild turkey restoration was our primary focus. Because of our efforts and partnerships with state and federal wildlife organizations, the re-establishment of the wild turkey has become one of the most exciting wildlife success stories of the 20th century. When the National Wild Turkey Federation was founded in 1973, there were only 1.3 million wild turkeys throughout North America. Since then, the number of wild turkeys has increased to nearly 7 million birds thanks to state, federal and provincial wildlife agencies, the NWTF, its members and partners.

With wild turkey populations firmly established, the NWTF has shifted its focus to wise and science-based active land management to provide habitat for turkeys and the thousands of wildlife species that exist in our forests across this great nation.

Trained wildlife biologists know that forest diversity is the key to proper management. There are four fundamental criteria that each forest species needs for survival. These are food, water, shelter and space. Depending on how a forest is managed, various amounts of each of these criteria become available to the animals that live there. When wildlife managers consider wildlife species and their habitat requirements, **active management** is the best solution to meeting the needs of the largest variety of species.

Consider wise forest management to be a giant puzzle. Each piece has its proper place, but without each individual piece, the puzzle can never be completed. **Wilderness** is in fact one of those pieces to the puzzle. With any puzzle, too many pieces that are exactly alike create problems in the final product. Our concern with HR 1011 is that it's overly aggressive in terms of adding additional wilderness in the Jefferson National Forest. HR 1011 proposes designating 38,898 acres of wilderness, 3,575 acres of wilderness study areas/potential wilderness areas, and 11,583 acres as National Scenic Areas. In fact, the Jefferson National Forest Plan already includes 23,463 acres proposed for wilderness designation in H.R. 1011.

Already 8% of the land (57,645 acres) is wilderness, with additional wilderness study areas (25,200 acres) and national scenic areas (23,500 acres) totaling 48,700 acres. HR 1011 would increase that acreage by 30,593 acres. Worse, in some of the proposed areas,

wilderness would increase to as much as 50% of the total area. Jefferson National Forest total acreage is 723,300. If the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2007 is enacted, new wilderness along with existing acreage, would total 136,938 acres. This would represent approximately 19 percent of the total forest area.

Passive vs. Active Management

I will just list a number of reasons why NWTF and my fellow wildlife biologists believe too much wilderness as prescribed in HR 1011 is a problem.

- First of all, any type of active management is restricted on wilderness areas.
- In Wilderness, natural succession of less desirable tree species (such as red maple or sugar maple) over-topping and killing black cherry severely hinders available food sources to wildlife during fall and winter months. Wilderness prohibits the creation of any new early successional habitat such as wildlife openings, linear wildlife openings (such as seeded log roads), cut-back edge borders to limit predation, savannahs or water holes.
- Active forest and wildlife management are inextricably woven together in regard to silvacultural treatments, forest age class distribution and diversity of habitat types to benefit wildlife populations within forest ecosystems and across the forest landscape. Wilderness designation prohibits these practices.
- Additionally, Wilderness is created by an act of Congress and can not be changed without federal legislation. Other management prescriptions can be adjusted or improved through the Forest Service planning process. Historically speaking, Congress does not remove land from Wilderness designation.
- Wilderness laws and regulations on federal lands can sometimes provide exceptions for doing various activities. However, history shows that nearly all management activities are virtually forbidden in designated wilderness, or are only allowed at the discretion of the Forest Supervisor. Historically, Forest Supervisors do not approve the various management activities.
- Forest management is not allowed to be used as a tool to create and perpetuate diverse wildlife habitats. Active management of important mast producing (nut and fruit) tree species that are critical to game populations throughout the fall and winter months is prohibited.
- There can be no timber harvest – even thinning - which is a great tool for creating early successional habitat that many species require for foraging, breeding, nesting, and even their survival.
- Active management of important timber types (i.e., oak-hickory, mixed hardwoods, northern hardwoods) to perpetuate these important forest

communities is prohibited. There would be no dispersed age classes of these forest types or a continuous supply of important and critical mast producing tree species.

- Combating nonnative, invasive forest insect and disease problems will be difficult to implement under Wilderness designation. Currently, many of the recommended Wilderness areas have such problems. Two striking examples are the beech bark scale disease and hemlock wooly adelgid, which are killing nearly all of the American beech and eastern hemlock trees that they infect.
- Vegetation management can not be used to create vistas (viewing areas) or alter the natural environment.
- Only horse or foot travel is permitted; wheeled vehicles cannot be used at anytime (e.g., carts, wagons, mountain bikes, etc...). Motorized vehicles, motorized equipment, motor boats and other forms of motorized use or mechanical transport are not allowed, which restricts wildlife managers from developing food and water resources in the form of food plots, linear wildlife openings, and water holes.
- No permanent structures can be constructed in Wilderness areas, such as limestone treatment facilities used to restore trout streams, without federal legislation.
- Only hand tools are allowed for existing wildlife openings and trail maintenance.
- The collection of any forest product is prohibited (e.g., mushrooms, ginseng, etc.).
- Fish stocking is allowed only in those streams or portions of streams where a history of such use exists. Stocking must be by non-mechanical means only, e.g. horseback and backpack.
- Motorized use and mechanized transport may be used for life-threatening situations in search and rescue operations – but is up to the discretion of the Forest Supervisor. However, in reality Forest Supervisors do not necessarily allow this, even in removing a deceased person deep within a Wilderness area. For example, on July 20, 2003 the Monongahela National Forest denied permission for rescuers to remove a deceased person from the Otter Creek Wilderness by wheeled motorized vehicles. A total of eight people were used to carry out the deceased over a distance of three miles taking over 2 1/2 hours!
- Wilderness standards dictate that wildfires will be suppressed and that prescribed fire can occur only with an approved burn plan. Perversely though, prescribed fire is actually not a *realistic* management option because there can be no use of equipment to create fire lines and no mechanical options for fire control - only the use of hand tools are allowed for control.

- Tractors, tractor/plows, tracked or wheeled motorized equipment, chainsaws, portable pumps, or fire retardants from aircraft can not be used for fire suppression unless approved by the Forest Supervisor.

What do other scientists say about active management?

Active Management is Preferable to Passive Management

In addition to the above, there is a significant amount of science available demonstrating the compatibility of active management for early successional wildlife habitat with goals for mature forest species. This includes the need for both types of forests by some songbirds and many species of mammals.

(Vitz, Andrew C. Vegetative and Fruit Resources as Determinants of Habitat Use by Mature-Forest Birds During Post Breeding Period. *The Auk*, 4/1/07.)

“The alternative to active management is reduced productivity, many dead trees, and fuel conditions favorable to severe and potentially destructive wildfires...[however] public policies tend to inhibit active management of national forests.”

(O’Laughlin, J., and P.S. Cook. 2003. Inventory-based forest health indicators: implications for national forest management. *Journal of Forestry* 101(2):11-17.)

Forest Service scientists concluded in their integrated assessment of resources in the interior Columbia River basin region that when compared with traditional approaches, “active management appears to have the greatest chance of producing the mix of goods and services that people want from ecosystems, as well as maintaining or enhancing long-term ecological integrity”. A reserve-based passive management strategy was one alternative approach evaluated by these scientists. Passive management simply would not be as effective as active management in restoring desired conditions on federal lands in the region. (Quigley, T.M., R.W. Haynes, and R.T. Graham, tech. eds. 1996. *Integrated Scientific Assessment for Ecosystem Management in the Interior Columbia Basin*, PNW-GTR-382, USDA Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland, OR.)

Many people believe that wilderness protects the forest and its wildlife species from man. Science simply does not corroborate that belief, in fact the studies above and many more prove that active forest management, including prescribed fire, reduces the build-up of fuel levels within the forest and protects against catastrophic wildfires and protects biodiversity. It is scientifically documented that there is an oak decline occurring in eastern Oak Forest. There are many suspected reasons for this decline. Old growth forests (**wilderness**) are at the highest risk. If some unforeseen catastrophic event occurs, such as an insect outbreak, there are no young oak seedlings on the forest floor that would reforest the area. This would lead to reforestation by undesirable species such as maple, poplar, and locust, with a total loss of the oak component. Active management, using a variety of techniques, including prescribed fire and forest thinning, are the only wide-

scale solutions to allowing sunlight to reach the forest floor and promoting the development of oak seedlings from acorns.

(Loucks, Orié L., The Epidemiology of Forest Decline in Eastern Deciduous Forest, Northeastern Naturalist, 1998, and O'Brien, Joseph G, Mielke, Manfred E., Oak, Steve, and Moltzan, Bruce, Sudden Oak Death. USDA-Forest Service, Pest Alert, January 2002)

Benefits of Active Forest Management vs. Wilderness

Wildlife has been managed by God and man since creation. Lightning strikes, forest wildfires, and windstorms have existed for all time. They create openings in the forest for wildlife. In the days before European Settlers came to America, native Americans cleared land for their livestock and crops to support their families. They used prescribed fire to clear the underbrush in the forest and promote the growth of grasses and forbs on the forest floor, which they used in their day to day life. Wildlife also benefited from this clearing and burning. When the settlers arrived, many accounts from those settlers indicate the overwhelming species diversity and actual numbers of species. Those early settlers simply expanded what native Americans had been doing for thousands of years. As a result, they fed their families and understood the value of forest management and biodiversity.

Only recently have certain factions begun to think that no management is best. I urge you to consider what is proven to happen when a forest becomes wilderness. The forest matures into an old growth forest. The trees are tall and the canopy of the forest closes in. This in turn restricts the sunlight that reaches the forest floor. Many of the grasses, forbs, and shrubs that are dependent on that sunlight can no longer exist. Plant species diversity suffers. In good years, this old growth forest will produce huge amounts of hard mast in the form of acorns, hickory nuts, beechnuts of other hard mast. These favored wildlife foods will provide a bountiful food option for many species of wildlife.

But, in bad years, there will be mast failure and this same forest becomes a virtual desert, void of food and void of shelter because the grass, forb, and shrub layer has been removed due to the loss of sunlight. Where is the gray squirrel, or the small rodents, or even the deer, turkey, grouse, or bear to go for food? Animals caught in the middle of thousands of acres of food-barren wilderness will suffer.

Even in the springtime, when hard mast doesn't have as great an importance to most species, the grasses, forbs, and shrubs that provide food and cover for wildlife are not present. These same grasses and forbs attract high numbers of insects. Grouse chick and turkey poults are very dependent on insects in the spring and early summer. These insects provide the high protein diet that these young animals require. High protein translates into rapid body growth. Rapid growth means an increased ability to escape predation. Even species like black bears, which are usually associated with mature forest, depend heavily on soft mast in the spring and early summer months. This is the time when most of the hard mast crop has been depleted. Sow bears, needing highly nutritious diets to offset the energy requirements of lactation and feeding their cubs, suffer without this soft

most component provided by active management. As with the puzzle we talked about earlier, everything is interrelated. One piece missing eventually affects the entire product.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Chairman, the NWTF believes that wilderness certainly has its place in the Forest Plan and in forest management. We cannot support, however, the overreach in HR 1011 and would urge a more limited approach that does not imperil biodiversity and forest health. We urge the Committee to propose some adjustments to HR 1011 that move the wilderness designations closer to being consistent with those in the Forest Plan. NWTF is confident that a balance can be achieved that provides additional wilderness but still benefits wildlife, people, and the economy. Please know that NWTF stands ready to work with you to craft these adjustments, and to continue to invest our own funding and sweat equity into National Forest conservation efforts.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our comments with you today.

I will be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Required Witness Disclosure Form

House Rules* require nongovernmental witnesses to disclose the amount and source of Federal grants received since October 1, 2004.

Name: Dowd Bruton
Address: P.O. Box 184, Traphill NC 28685
Telephone: 336-957-5023
Organization you represent (if any): National Wild Turkey Federation

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract. House Rules do **NOT** require disclosure of federal payments to individuals, such as Social Security or Medicare benefits, farm program payments, or assistance to agricultural producers:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

2. If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants and subcontracts) the organization has received since October 1, 2004, as well as the source and the amount of each grant or contract:

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Source: _____ Amount: _____

Please check here if this form is NOT applicable to you: _____

Signature: Carey D. Bruton

* Rule XI, clause 2(g)(4) of the U.S. House of Representatives provides: *Each committee shall, to the greatest extent practicable, require witnesses who appear before it to submit in advance written statements of proposed testimony and to limit their initial presentations to the committee to brief summaries thereof. In the case of a witness appearing in a nongovernmental capacity, a written statement of proposed testimony shall include a curriculum vitae and a disclosure of the amount and source (by agency and program) of each Federal grant (or subgrant thereof) or contract (or subcontract thereof) received during the current fiscal year or either of the two previous fiscal years by the witness or by any entity represented by the witness.*

PLEASE ATTACH DISCLOSURE FORM TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.

**NATIONAL WILD TURKEY FEDERATION
FEDERAL GRANTS or CONTRACTS
SINCE OCTOBER 1, 2004**

<u>Source</u>	<u>Amount</u>
United States Department of Agriculture	\$2,339,577
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	\$1,560,477
Housing and Urban Development	\$ 497,050
United States Fish & Wildlife Service	\$ 306,763
Institute of Museum and Library Services	\$ 248,000
Forest Service/National Forest Foundation	\$ 25,000

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Objective Career as a Wildlife Biologist

Experience December 2002-present National Wild Turkey Federation Edgefield, SC
Senior Regional Wildlife Biologist (NC, VA, KY, WV, TN)

- Administered all NWTf Regional programs in a five state area.
- Provided support for Federal, State, and Local Forestry, Wildlife and Conservation Agencies
- Provided guidance and support for NWTf volunteer membership.

June 1989-December 2002 NC Wildlife Resources Commission Traphill, NC
Wildlife Management Crewleader, (Land Manager)

- Supervised Wildlife Management Crew in 11 county area.
- Managed state, federal, and privately leased public hunting areas.
- Implemented wildlife management techniques that provided optimal wildlife and habitat diversity.
- Provided public with information concerning management of property for wildlife.
- Provided guidance to State, Federal and Local conservation organizations to promote sound wildlife management.

January 1983-May 1989 NC Wildlife Resources Commission Franklin, NC
Wildlife Management Technician II

- Managed state, federal, and privately leased public hunting areas.
- Implemented wildlife management techniques that provided optimal wildlife and habitat diversity.
- Provided public with information concerning management of property for wildlife.
- Provided guidance to State, Federal and Local conservation organizations to promote sound wildlife management.
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Education 1979-1982 North Carolina State University Raleigh, NC
• B.S., Wildlife Biology.

Certifications

- Certified Wildlife Biologist, The Wildlife Society, March 15, 2004
- Professional Award, North Carolina State Chapter, The National Wild Turkey Federation, 1991.
- Award of Excellent, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, 1991.
- Management Excellence Award, Southeastern Section, The Wildlife Society, 2002.
- Award of Excellence, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, 2002