

Remarks to Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and
Public Lands of the House Natural Resources Committee

Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5151: The Wild Monongahela:
A National Legacy for West Virginia's Special Places

John Manchester
Mayor
Lewisburg, West Virginia

February 26, 2008

Good morning.

My name is John Manchester, and I am mayor of Lewisburg, West Virginia, a small city of 3700 people, a few miles from the southern end of the Monongahela National Forest in the southeastern part of the state. I am speaking in favor of House Bill 5151, The Wild Monongahela Act. I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today.

As I am sure you have heard regularly from Congressman Rahall and the other members of the West Virginia Congressional delegation, West Virginia is a unique place with unique people. My city, Lewisburg, is a good example. Founded in 1782, we are one of the oldest towns in West Virginia and the county seat of Greenbrier County. Our lifeblood is tourism, and we have been careful to preserve our historic downtown which is thriving. Our vibrant downtown stands in marked contrast with many other downtowns throughout West Virginia and across the country which have not recognized the value of the asset that an historical downtown represents. It is something special, something in which we take pride, something that forms a strong foundation for our local economy, and something we can pass on to those who follow. As an elected official, I believe it is my charge to maintain assets entrusted to me and to pass them along in as good or better condition to my successors.

I feel the same way about the wild areas of the Monongahela National Forest that would be protected under this legislation. The wilderness areas described in this bill are special places to my city, to West Virginia and to the rest of the nation. They are natural assets that should be valued and protected as they are—not only for the value they offer us today but for the even greater value they will have for future generations. Roadless areas are scarce in the eastern United States, and if we do not take steps now to recognize their value and protect them, I fear they will disappear, year after year in small increments until they no longer have real value as wild areas—areas where man truly is a visitor amidst the natural world and not the dominant feature.

The scarcity of roadless, wild areas that would be protected in this bill creates specific value to communities like Lewisburg which serve as access points to them. Several months ago I had the pleasure of exploring one of the wild areas covered in this bill—

the area known as Big Draft—with the Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, Congressman Rahall. Big Draft is fourteen miles from Lewisburg. The proposed Spice Run Wilderness Area is about 30 miles away.

Lewisburg is a natural staging area for visitors and residents alike who seek out designated wilderness areas. Just as having a well preserved, historic downtown helps our local economy, so too does having designated wilderness areas at our doorstep. The added economic stimulus to our tourism based economy is one reason why both Lewisburg City Council and the Greenbrier County Convention and Visitors Bureau support additional wilderness areas in the Monongahela National Forest, especially those proposed for Greenbrier County, which currently has none, despite having nearly 108,000 acres of the national forest within the county.

Lewisburg also supports the protection of Big Draft and Spice Run in particular because they are part of the headwaters of the Greenbrier River, the source of Lewisburg's water system, the largest water utility in Greenbrier County, providing top quality water to over 10,000 people in our valley.

Lewisburg is not alone in local government support for additional wilderness areas. The following cities and towns have passed resolutions in support of designating additional wilderness areas in the Mon--Montgomery, Morgantown, Nitro, Nutter Fork, Shepherdstown, Weston, Renick, White Hall, Grafton, and Mataoka—as well as the Fayette County Commission. I submit into the record Lewisburg's wilderness support resolution. The other resolutions are very similar.

I think House Bill 5151, The Wild Monongahela Act, is a very good bill and a great start toward protecting many of the special places within the national forest in West Virginia, and I hope you will support it.

Thank you.

RESOLUTION

9-231

A RESOLUTION BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LEWISBURG, WEST VIRGINIA TO SECURE PERMANENT PROTECTION FOR THE WILDEST PARTS OF WEST VIRGINIA AS WILDERNESS FOREST AREAS.

WHEREAS, wilderness forest areas protect the value of backcountry recreation, clean water and air, scenic beauty and wildlife habitat; and

WHEREAS, wilderness forest areas encompass the development of rural communities as people are attracted to, or stay in, places that are clean, beautiful and where they have ample opportunities to connect with nature; and

WHEREAS, wilderness forest areas encourage economic development in West Virginia because of tourists that are drawn to these wild areas to hike and camp; and

WHEREAS, people and businesses locate where the quality of life, based in part on a clean natural environment and high quality recreational opportunities is high; and

WHEREAS, public lands represent natural assets that provide communities with a comparative advantage over other rural areas in diversifying their economies; and

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LEWISBURG:

That the Mayor and Council of the City of Lewisburg support the protection of additional wilderness forest areas in the Monongahela National Forest.

On motion duly made my Councilperson McClure and seconded by Councilperson Caever, the City of Lewisburg, West Virginia does hereby approve and authorize the adoption of said Resolution to become effective immediately.

Adopted this 18th day of November, 2003

John Manchester
John Manchester, Mayor

STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA

COUNTY OF GREENBRIER

MUNICIPALITY OF LEWISBURG: to wit,

I, Pat Johnson, CITY RECORDER of said municipality do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true, correct and complete copy of a Resolution adopted by the Council of the City of Lewisburg at a regular meeting held on November 18, 2003, in accordance with law, and that such Resolution has not been repealed, revoked, rescinded or amended, but is in full force and effect on the date hereof.

Witness my hand and the seal of the City of Lewisburg, West Virginia, this 18th day of November, 2003

Pat Johnson, CMC
Pat Johnson, CMC, Recorder