

November 24, 2014

Waterkeepers Chesapeake Commends The U.S. Forest Service Plan to Prohibit Fracking on George Washington National Forest Land

Waterkeepers call for a fracking prohibition on all public lands.

(Washington, DC) Last week, the U.S. Forest Service released its final management plan for the 1.1 million acre George Washington National Forest, revising the 1993 plan. The plan includes the decision to make a majority of the forest unavailable for oil and gas drilling, except for a portion of the forest already under gas lease or subject to private mineral rights. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is pleased that the Forest Service's plan makes it clear that industrialized oil and gas drilling does not belong in a national forest and is not compatible with protecting the health of our natural resources and waterways.

An oil and gas company already leases about 10,000 acres within the forest and mineral rights on additional 167,000 acres are privately owned. That land will remain open for drilling. If a company wants to drill on land it leases, it must first obtain federal and state permits. A private owner of mineral rights must obtain only a state permit.

Waterkeepers Chesapeake argues that all public lands should be protected from hydraulic fracturing or fracking for natural gas and oil no matter the status of mineral rights ownership. We call upon local, state and federal officials to protect our natural resources, waterways, and local and regional economies by prohibiting fracking on all public lands. We ask that Governor McAuliffe follow up on his opposition to fracking in the national forest by denying permitting for fracking.

Fracking uses huge quantities of water and undisclosed toxic chemicals to break up shale formations deep underground to release natural gas. Fracking is exempt from key provisions of all landmark environmental laws, including the Clean Air Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Water Act, and laws regulating hazardous wastes. Tens of thousands of forest acreage has karst topography made up of rock formation that can be dissolved. In these conditions, leakage of methane or toxic fracking chemicals could poison drinking water supplies.

The Forest Service finalized this plan after receiving and considering over 53,000 comments from the public and several letters of opposition to fracking in the forest from local governments and businesses, state and federal elected officials, and several public water suppliers in the Washington DC metro region. The George Washington National Forest is a direct source of local drinking water to more than 329,000 people living in and around the Shenandoah Valley, and it lies in the watersheds of the James, Shenandoah, and Potomac Rivers—which ultimately provide water to over 4.5 million people downstream in cities such as Washington, D.C. and Richmond, VA.

The Forest is the largest federal landholding in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Local and regional governments and businesses have expressed widespread concern that opening the lands to fracking would negatively affect local economies, particularly adjacent farms and the local recreation and tourism economy, which are the economic engines of the area. Agriculture is Virginia's largest industry, and the national forest region provides more than two-thirds of the value of the Commonwealth's agricultural production.

Dominion's [proposed natural gas Atlantic Coast Pipeline](#) also threatens the George Washington National Forest. It is critical for the future health of our families, local rivers and streams, and public drinking water

supplies that we transition from fossil fuels to clean, renewal energy sources. The demand for fracked natural gas will increase as liquefied natural gas export facilities open such as Dominion's [LNG export facility at Cove Point](#) located on the Chesapeake Bay. Fracking benefits private oil and gas companies at the expense of our public lands, private property, waterways and communities.

For more information:

Forest Service website on GWNF plan: <http://www.fs.fed.us/gwjef/index.php>

SELC & Shenandoah Valley Network [11/18/2014 press statement](#)

Food & Water Watch's report: [The Urgent Case for a Ban on Fracking](#)

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Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a coalition of eighteen independent programs working to make the waters of the Chesapeake and Coastal Bays swimmable and fishable. The coalition amplifies the voices of each Waterkeeper and mobilizes our organizations to fight pollution and champion clean water. The members of Waterkeepers Chesapeake work locally, using grassroots action and advocacy to protect their communities and their waters, as well as regionally to expand each Waterkeeper's capacity for on the water, citizen-based enforcement of environmental laws in the Chesapeake region. Waterkeepers Chesapeake is a member of Waterkeeper Alliance.

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