On September 18th the U.S Forest Service released their Final Management Plan for the Monongahela National Forest. In doing so, the Forest Service has ignored the will of the owners of the forest by changing almost nothing from the draft plan released for public comment in August 2005.

During that comment period a record number of nearly 13,000 people commented on the draft plan with over 90% calling for more wilderness designations than what the Forest Service recommended. The public overwhelming rejected the Forest Service’s “preferred” Alternative 2, which is essentially the same as the final plan, because it opens up several areas that qualify for wilderness designation to logging and road building.

Fortunately, the decision to protect wilderness, which only happens through federal legislation, is in the hands of West Virginia’s Congressional Delegation. Please write a letter or make a phone call to your Senators, Representative, and Governor Manchin! Now is your chance to have an impact on what special places will be protected through legislation, as these decisions may be made in the next couple of months.
• The U.S. Forest Service has ignored the will of the public in its final management plan for the Monongahela National Forest, and West Virginia needs you to get involved.

• It is critical that we protect not only the areas recommended by the Forest Service, but also areas that citizens’ groups and the public at large have identified as important and in need of protection. Key areas like Seneca Creek, East Fork of Greenbrier, the Dolly Sods Expansion, Spice Run and Big Draft have been ignored by the Forest Service, but must be protected permanently.

• The Forest Service plan does not recommend any wilderness in the Greenbrier Watershed which currently has no designated wilderness and is a source of drinking water for many West Virginians.

• Protected public land like wilderness helps diversify and stabilize economies by attracting and retaining new businesses, residents, and a local workforce, in addition to generating travel and tourism, one of the fastest growing sectors of West Virginia’s economy.

• Wilderness provides unparalleled outdoor recreation opportunities, such as hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, horseback riding, birding, whitewater rafting, kayaking, skiing, and much more.

OTHER WAYS TO HELP PROTECT THE MON:

1. Send your letter to your local newspaper as a letter to the editor.

2. Encourage 3-5 friends or family members to write letters.

3. Host a ‘Wild Mon’ letter writing party—contact us for a free copy of our DVD and party kit.

4. Get involved with one of the West Virginia Wilderness Coalition Chapters —Contact Matt to find a chapter near you.