

Mary Yonce  
North River District Ranger  
401 Oakwood Drive  
Harrisonburg, VA 22801

Re: Tillman Trail Trails Connectivity Project

Dear Ranger Yonce:

We are submitting comments on behalf of The Convener's Group for the George Washington National Forest Stakeholder Collaborative (SC), regarding the Tillman Trails Connectivity Project #58134, described in the scoping letter dated July 30, 2020.

The SC came together in 2010 to work on the Plan Revision for the George Washington National Forest. We envision a thriving, resilient, and well-connected forest ecosystem that supports healthy wildlife populations and provides important ecological, social, recreational, and economic benefits for people—now and into a changing future. We envision a mosaic of unfragmented, undeveloped forest core areas within a diverse landscape of actively managed areas, to provide a natural range of native forest species, age, and canopy conditions.

The SC supports the proposed relocation for a segment of the Narrowback Trail (Trail #432), which would move the western terminus of the trail to the Wolf Ridge Trail Parking Lot and relocate the segment onto a more moderate and sustainable grade.

As a Collaborative group, we are always eager to see partnerships where stakeholders leverage additional resources for work on our National Forest. This project is an example that could be replicated across the Forest where an organization, in this case, the Shenandoah Valley Bicycle Coalition, works closely with the agency and secures financial resources to cover costs associated with the project.

While the project still requires time, input, and consideration from agency staff, the majority of the resources come from the partner organization. Given the ever reduced capacity of the George Washington National Forest, a similar model could be replicated to continue meaningful projects across the forest.

As an SC, our previous comments on the Forest Plan Revision did not address recreation in the forest. We understand the importance of dispersed recreation and, specifically, trail-based recreation and encourage the Forest to continue exploring opportunities to partner with stakeholders to outline a vision for improved and increased dispersed recreation.

For this specific project, the proposed relocation will:

- Improve trail connectivity in the North River District.

- Increase visitor experience by providing a trail opportunity that is less steep and accessible to more people.
- Help establish more trails close to the Forest boundary to decrease drive time to trailheads.
- Add a trail that is less steep and constructed on a sustainable alignment. Such alignments will increase the accessibility of the trail (more visitors) and decrease the amount of maintenance required.
- Utilize an exiting parking lot to consolidate trail access and reduce traffic on Tillman road.

In conclusion, we are in full support of the project.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Al Bourgeois-DWR-ex-officio  
Lynn Cameron-Friends of Shenandoah Mountain  
John Hancock-Virginia Forestry Association  
Nelson Lafon-DWR  
Kyle Lawrence-Shenandoah Valley Bike Coalition  
Jean Lorber-The Nature Conservancy  
Mark Miller-Virginia Wilderness Committee  
Chris Scott-Shenandoah Mountain Touring  
Blair Smyth-The Nature Conservancy  
Wayne Thacker-Virginia Wildlife Habitat Coalition