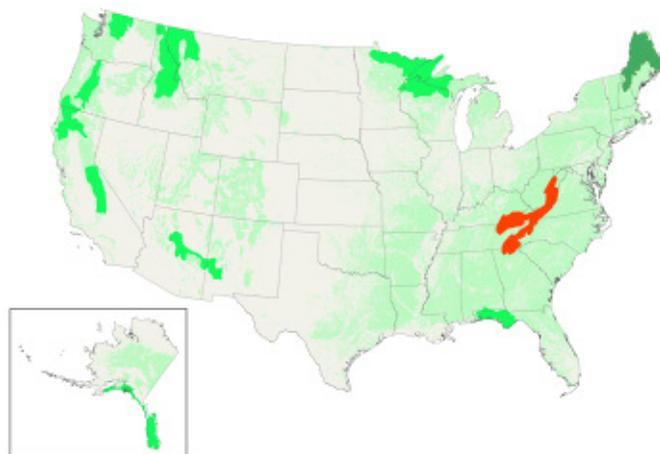


KEYSTONE FOREST



Physical Description

The Blue Ridge-Appalachia Keystone Forest overlaps both the larger Appalachian mixed mesophytic forests and the Appalachian Blue Ridge forest ecoregions. They are some of the oldest and most biologically diverse temperate forests in the world. Due to the geologic and climatic stability of this region over the past 65 million years, a great number of plant and animal species have evolved specifically in this region, creating an environment rich with endemic species. The region also contains some of the last holdouts of

unlogged native forest in the eastern United States, including 130 hardwood tree species such as oaks, red maple, tulip poplar, chestnut and hickory. Also living in these forests are more than half the flowering plants and ferns in North America (more than 2,000 species). Coniferous trees also characterize this region with an overstory dominance of red spruce or Fraser fir. This region provides much-needed habitat for endangered species such as black bears, bald eagles and flying squirrels. Today, these forests contain more than 50

species of plants and animals formally listed as endangered or threatened, and more than 280 imperiled fresh water species.

The Appalachia forests have long been a major tourist destination for outdoor recreation activities such as fishing, hunting, hiking, kayaking and backpacking. Recreation in this area contributes a significant number of jobs and income to the region. Well-known recreation areas that contribute a significant number of jobs and income to the region include Great Smokey Mountain National Park, Big South Fork Recreation Area, and the George Washington-Jefferson and Monongahela National Forests.

Threats

This forest region is threatened by destructive logging practices (especially for woodchip demand), road-building and gas exploration. Air pol-

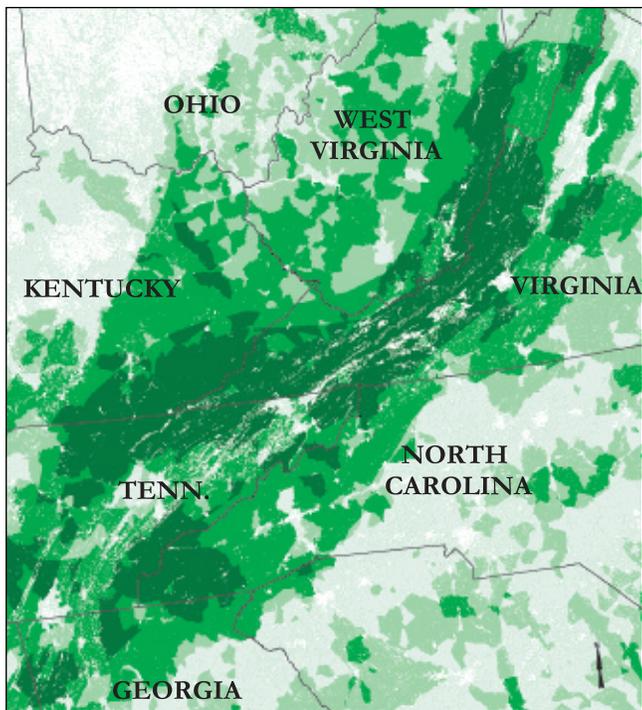
George Washington-Jefferson National Forest, Virginia.



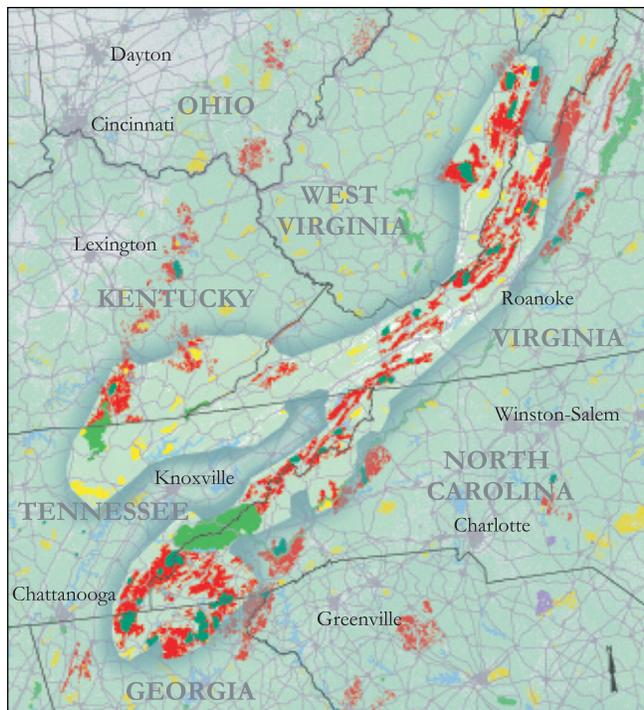
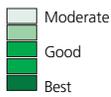
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Forested BLM Lands (non-wilderness)	0
Forested National Forest Lands (non-wilderness)	3,554,663
Forested National Wildlife Refuge Lands (non-wilderness)	504
Forested National Park Lands (non-wilderness)*	634,380
Forested Wilderness	343,923
Forested miscellaneous public and private preserves	559,803
Privately owned, unprotected forest lands	10,500,639
Total Forested Lands	15,593,912

*Available data did not necessarily distinguish wilderness from non-wilderness within national parks, so some wilderness within national parks may be included within this statistic.



Forest Quality



Forest Ownership



lution, acid rain, invasive species and increasing urban sprawl heighten the immediate need for greater protected areas. Although the region has experienced more than a century of industrial logging, small remnants of native old-growth remain and much of the forest in the region that was clearcut a century ago are once again reaching maturity. Very little of this keystone forest is under wilderness or national park status.

Efforts to Increase Protected Areas

There is a current proposal to create a new Blackwater Canyon National Park, which includes private lands in the canyon and key portions of the adjacent Monongahela National Forest.

The Ridge and Valley Wilderness and National Scenic Area Act of 2004, introduced by Representative Rick Boucher (D-VA) and Senator John Warner (R-VA) on April 22, 2004, would provide lasting protection for some 40,000

acres by establishing four new wilderness areas, two new scenic areas and expanding five existing wilderness areas in the Jefferson National Forest.

There are two other wilderness areas proposals. One proposal is the addition of 10,900 acres to the Laurel Fork Wilderness, and the second is the Little River Wilderness Proposal which would designate 28,000 acres as wilderness. The proximity of the Little River proposal to the Ramsey's Draft Wilderness would create a large, relatively continuous natural area. Acreage from both proposals would come partially from the George Washington National Forest.

The West Virginia Wilderness Coalition has identified areas throughout the Monongahela National Forest that warrant protection, including places such as Seneca Creek, Spice Run and Roaring Plains.

*Written by Greenpeace
For more information, visit Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition
www.safc.org*