

Resolution in Support of Congressional Designation Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area (Proposed)

WHEREAS, Friends of Shenandoah Mountain, a local, broad-based coalition of organizations, businesses, faith groups, and individuals, has proposed Congressional designation of a 90,000-acre tract of George Washington National Forest (GWNF) land on Shenandoah Mountain between Rt. 33 and Rt. 250 as a National Scenic Area with four embedded Wilderness areas; and

WHEREAS, the City of Harrisonburg recognizes the natural assets afforded by National Forest resources on Shenandoah Mountain – clean water, scenic beauty, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, dark skies, and clean air – and wishes to preserve these assets for the benefit of all community members today and into the future; and

WHEREAS, the SMNSA proposal is fully consistent with both Harrisonburg’s 2018 Comprehensive Plan and its Environmental Action Plan; and

WHEREAS, the City of Harrisonburg supports protection of high-quality water resources on the GWNF (Nov. 25, 2008 resolution); and

WHEREAS, the City of Harrisonburg called for a moratorium on hydrofracking and mining on National Forest land (Sept. 30, 2010 letter to GW & Jefferson NF); and

WHEREAS, Wilderness designation of Skidmore Fork, a 5,228-acre portion of the watershed for Switzer Reservoir, would provide the strongest protection for:

- critical municipal water resources for the City of Harrisonburg,
- healthy aquatic ecosystems for Skidmore Fork, a key watershed for the Dry River,
- habitat for rare flora and fauna found in the upper Skidmore Fork watershed,
- a rare 1,400-acre old-growth forest that has never been logged, and
- seven Virginia Division of Natural Heritage Conservation sites, including Bother Knob- High Knob – 1,618 acres, and Skidmore – 2,313 acres; and

WHEREAS, Proposal boundaries will be set back from Harrisonburg’s Switzer Lake and Dam, which are located in part on land owned by the City and in part on National Forest land, at a distance recommended by the City to allow for flexibility to meet future needs; and

WHEREAS, Harrisonburg’s Dry Run Reservoir and its access road will be excluded from the SMNSA proposal; and

WHEREAS, National Scenic Area legislation will support:

- maintenance of and improvements to existing dams and reservoirs within the proposal area (Staunton Dam, Elkhorn Lake, Briery Branch Lake, Hone Quarry Lake, Todd Lake, Switzer Dam, and Dry Run Reservoir),
- tapping into existing reservoirs for municipal use,
- establishment of new reservoirs, if needed, for the public good; and

WHEREAS, the SMNSA would help keep municipal water treatment costs down by preventing development in the watershed for Switzer Reservoir; and

WHEREAS, designation of the SMNSA would directly support Harrisonburg's position as a premier destination for outdoor-recreation tourism by preserving magnificent nearby lands and raising the region's profile for eco-friendly tourism; and

WHEREAS, designation of the SMNSA would maintain critical habitat connectivity and preserve a major migratory corridor for birds, as well as for plant and animal species adapting to climate change; and

WHEREAS, protection of the mature forests on Shenandoah Mountain would help lower temperatures and sequester carbon to mitigate climate change; and

WHEREAS, outdoor recreation opportunities in the SMNSA, including hiking, mountain biking, swimming, scenic driving, nature study, rock climbing, hunting, fishing, camping, canoeing, and horseback riding, enhance quality of life and offer self-development opportunities for all Harrisonburg residents; and

WHEREAS, the SMNSA area has 150 miles of outstanding recreational trails, including Shenandoah Mountain Trail, Wild Oak National Recreation Trail, and a portion of the Great Eastern Trail; and

WHEREAS, trails may be maintained, and new trails constructed; and

WHEREAS, recreational facilities, such as High Knob Fire Tower, Hone Quarry Campground and Picnic Area, North River Campground, Todd Lake Recreation Area, Staunton Dam Picnic Area, and the parking lot on Reddish Knob, could be maintained; and

WHEREAS, the SMNSA would offer either free or low-cost access to a variety of recreational opportunities that appeal to a range of interests and abilities; and

WHEREAS, the 2014 GWNF Land and Resources Management Plan recommends the SMNSA for Congressional designation; and

WHEREAS, the SMNSA proposal has been endorsed by over 400 businesses and organizations, many of which are in Harrisonburg; and

WHEREAS, all current access roads would remain open within the proposal area; and

WHEREAS, pests and non-native invasive species may be controlled, as determined necessary by the Forest Service; and

WHEREAS, National Forest fire and rescue procedures and policies for both Wilderness and National Scenic Area would protect life and adjacent private property; and

WHEREAS, designation of the SMNSA pertains to National Forest land only and would in no way restrict private property rights of landowners adjacent to or within the area; and

WHEREAS, designation of the SMNSA would support and enhance the local tourism economy and quality of life for City residents; and

WHEREAS, should, at some future date, the local governing body determine that negative, unintended consequences are occurring because of these designations, the local government body has the authority and right to seek removal of these designations by all means at their disposal.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that Harrisonburg City Council supports Congressional designation of the Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area and embedded Wilderness areas.

Adopted: _____ day of _____, 2021

MAYOR

ATTEST

CITY CLERK