

## **The long road to Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area designation:**

Led by Sen. Joe Manchin, WV and co-sponsored by Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, WV, Sen. Ben Cardin, MD, and Sen. Chris Van Hollen, MD the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area designation bill was included in the 2018 S 47 bipartisan lands bill. The companion House bill was sponsored by Rep. David McKinley, with co-sponsors in the previous session from Rep. Evan Jenkins, Rep. John Delaney, and Rep. Alex Mooney, and in the 2019 session adding co-sponsors Rep. Carol Miller and Rep. David Trone. The Natural Resources Management Act, including AFNHA designation, was passed by a strong bipartisan majority in both Houses of Congress, and signed into law (<http://www.afha.us/docs/AFNHA%20Designated.pdf>) as the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act on March 12, 2019.

## **History of the AFNHA initiative**

An initiative of West Virginia University's Davis College of Agriculture, Forestry and Consumer Sciences and the WVU Extension Service, Appalachian Forest Heritage Area project was originally funded by a USDA "Fund for Rural America" grant. It was coordinated by a project team from West Virginia University (WVU) and Canaan Valley Institute (CVI), with active partnership from state and federal agencies, non-profit organizations, and communities throughout the area.

After its October 2001 inception, the AFHA project convened large-group stakeholder meetings and numerous task group sessions. A broad range of participants with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints participated to guide the project's course. The work of building a consistent theme and integrated network went hand-in-hand with communities committing to local projects. This grassroots approach helped ensure local community successes and balanced direction.

The initial AFHA grant expired in the fall of 2005. In order to carry on these efforts beyond the initial grant, a non-profit organization called Appalachian Forest Heritage Area, Inc. was created in 2003 to assume responsibility for the future. A non-profit Governing Council representing communities, interest groups, and involved stakeholders and partners defined a vision and a plan for the project. Task groups were active on a number of fronts: identifying assets, interpretation, business development, communications, marketing, and organization. Three pilot communities -- Webster County, WV, Randolph County, WV and Garrett County, MD -- implemented projects in model communities.

The Stakeholders participating agreed on Core Values emphasizing voluntary partnerships from a broad range of interest groups, balanced interpretation, forest sustainability for industry, communities, and ecosystems, working forests and cultural heritage tourism as components of economic development, and that AFHA was not a land management organization. The enthusiasm and participation level in the existing AFHA project indicated the success of this collaborative approach respecting diverse points-of-view.

## **History of Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area designation effort**

AFHA began seeking National Heritage Area (NHA) designation with the approval of our Feasibility Study by the National Park Service in 2006. (*repeat links to Feasibility Exec Summary and Feasibility study, attached*)

More than 190 different private, government and non-profit agencies as well as individuals wrote in support of this designation, for the Feasibility Study and following efforts. See the list of AFNHA designation supporters. (*AFHA Support letters for NHA, attached*)

Starting with leadership from Senator Jay Rockefeller, Senate Bill 1641 "West Virginia National Heritage Area Act of 2013" was introduced in November 2013 by Senators Rockefeller, Manchin, Cardin, and Mikulski. This bill would have designated the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area and extended the funding eligibility for the existing National Coal Heritage Area and Wheeling National Heritage Area. The bill was reported out of committee in 2014, but was not passed. National Coal Heritage Area and Wheeling National

Heritage Area were reauthorized as part of an omnibus bill in December of 2014, but no new National Heritage Area designations were included.

In the next legislative session, House Resolution 693 – to designate Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area - was introduced February 3, 2015 by Congressman David McKinley (WV-1) with co-sponsorship from Congressmen Evan Jenkins (WV-3), Alex Mooney (WV-2) and John Delaney (MD-6). It was referred to the House Committee on Natural Resources, but no hearing was held. This was the first time that the AFNHA bill had been introduced in the House.

Senate Bill 3167, the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area of 2016, was introduced on July 12, 2016 by Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) co-sponsored by Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Sen. Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), and Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD). The bill was considered by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on September 22, 2016, with favorable comments from Sen. Manchin, Sen. Capito, and the Department of the Interior. No National Heritage Area bills passed in that legislative session.

Senate Bill 401 - Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area of 2017 was introduced by Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) on February 15, 2017, co-sponsored by Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD), and Sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD). The bill was considered by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and approved through the committee, under the leadership with Senator Manchin. It was also at various times included in bills with other proposed National Heritage Areas, including, in the fall of 2018, inclusion in S. 47 Natural Resources Management Act.

The House bill was introduced on June 30, 2017, by Congressman David McKinley (R-WV1.), as H.R. 3142 - the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area Act of 2017. Originally co-sponsored by Rep. Evan Jenkins (R-WV3) and Rep. John Delaney (D-MD6), with Alex Mooney (R-WV-2) also joining as a co-sponsor.

In the winter of 2019, S. 47 was reintroduced in the new session as a whole bill, and the AFNHA House bill was reintroduced by Rep McKinley, adding the co-sponsorship of newly elected Representatives Carol Miller (R WV3) and David Trone (D MD6).

Sen. Manchin, now Ranking Member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, helped shepherd the omnibus lands bill, including AFNHA designation, through to passage, where it was approved by the Senate on a 92-8 bipartisan votes on February 12. The House voted to pass it by a 353-63 bipartisan majority on February 26. Now renamed the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act of 2019, it was signed into law on March 12, 2019 - thus officially designating the Appalachian Forest National Heritage Area.