

Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area

Economic Benefits to Harrisonburg

The scenic National Forest lands just west of Harrisonburg are vital to the city's economic well-being. Securing land-use protections via Congressional designation of the proposed Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area (SMNSA) will preserve and magnify those benefits and build prosperity for Harrisonburg's citizens and economy for generations to come.



Photograph by Brad Striebig

The proposal would designate 90,000 acres of Shenandoah Mountain in the George Washington (GW) National Forest – much of it just minutes from Harrisonburg – as a National Scenic Area with four embedded Wilderness areas, which afford the highest level of land protection. Designation as a National Scenic Area ensures that special lands are managed cohesively to protect their natural, recreational and scenic attributes while still providing economic opportunity for local communities and respecting private property rights.

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Switzer Reservoir

Photograph by Meredith Wilson



Dry River

Photograph by Brad Striebig



High Knob Fire Tower Photograph by Lynn Cameron

Key economic benefits of the SMNSA include:

Tourism. The beautiful mountains and clear streams of the GW National Forest are a major draw for tourists to Harrisonburg, who injected about \$125 million into the city's economy in 2017, directly employing 1,170 people there, and generating \$4.7 million in local tax receipts.¹ The tourism sector has grown steadily in recent years, and multiplier effects of tourist spending mean additional jobs and income for city residents. Establishing the SMNSA will raise Harrisonburg's tourist profile and position it as a gateway to one of the East's premier outdoor recreation destinations. Future growth will be propelled as visitors – campers, weekenders, hikers, mountain bikers, hunters, fishermen, birders and others – are attracted to the Harrisonburg region and its world-class outdoor recreation opportunities in growing numbers.

Clean Water Supply. Harrisonburg's supply of clean water from streams flowing off Shenandoah Mountain would be permanently protected from industrial development, such as fracking for natural gas. The SMNSA proposal calls for Wilderness designation of the 5,200-acre Skidmore Fork watershed, which supplies Switzer Dam, ensuring a reliable supply of pure water for future generations of both residential and business users. Protection of the watershed would also keep water treatment costs low.

Broad-Based Economic Value. In addition to the direct benefits to Harrisonburg's tourist and other businesses, JMU scientists estimate that lands within the SMNSA proposal already generate \$13.7 million per year in other local benefits, including the value of the water supply, energy savings, and carbon dioxide sequestered by forested hills. Designation of the SMNSA would grow this value and also sustain less quantifiable natural values – like the beauty of the forest, the native trout streams, and the rich variety of wildlife – all of which help make Harrisonburg such a healthy, vibrant, and desirable place to live and raise a family.

More than 100 Harrisonburg businesses have endorsed enactment of the Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area, not only because they are good environmental stewards, but because they recognize the value of effective conservation to their bottom lines. More information on the SMNSA and a full list of its supporters are at www.friendsofshenandoahmountain.org.

¹ Source: Virginia Tourism Corporation