

Shenandoah Mountain National Scenic Area

Economic Benefits to Highland County

The scenic forested mountain areas in and around Highland County are already vital to the county's economic well-being. Strengthening 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 Highland'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 National Forest – over 6,000 acres of this in Highland County – as a National Scenic Area. The proposal includes four embedded Wilderness areas, including Lynn Hollow (3,382 acres) in Highland County, 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.

Hundreds of regional 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.

Key economic benefits:

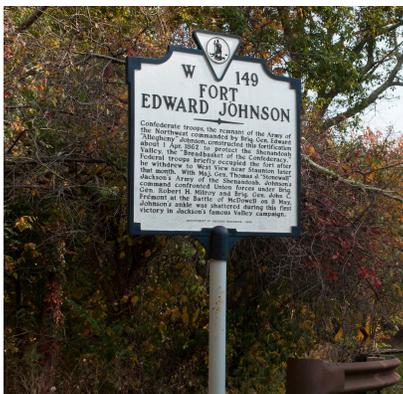
Tourism. The beautiful mountains and clear streams of the GW National Forest are a major draw for tourists to Highland County, who injected almost \$18 million into the county's economy in 2017, employing 20 percent of the county workforce, and generating over half a million dollars in local tax receipts. The tourism sector has grown steadily in recent years, and multiplier effects of tourist spending mean additional jobs and income for county residents. Establishing the SMNSA will raise the region's tourist profile as one of the East's premier outdoor-recreation destinations. Future growth will be propelled as visitors – campers, weekenders, Civil War enthusiasts, hikers, mountain bikers, hunters, fishermen, birders and others – are attracted to Highland County's world-class scenery, biodiversity and historical sites in growing numbers.

Clean Water for Agriculture. Farming is vital to the economic health of Highland County, and farmers depend for their livelihood on the clean water. Farmers along Shaw's Fork would enjoy a water supply permanently protected from the effects of industrial development such as fracking for natural gas. The SMNSA would also help ensure a reliable supply of pure water for future generations of residential and business users.



Photograph by David Wendelken

Broad-based Economic Value. In addition to the direct benefits to Highland'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. The SMNSA would grow this value and produce less quantifiable benefits from diverse recreational opportunities, the beauty of native trout streams, and protecting endangered species of wildlife. The SMNSA would cost the Highland County nothing but would generate new tax revenues from tourism expansion.



Photograph by Amber Davis



Photograph by Brad Striebig