

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE JOHN A. MUFFO
MONTGOMERY COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS
H.R. 1011, THE VIRGINIA RIDGE AND VALLEY ACT
MAY 10, 2007**

Chairman Grijalva, Ranking Member Bishop and members of the Subcommittee, I am John Muffo, a member of the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors, and I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 1011, the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.

It is easy to understand why Montgomery County's slogan is "Naturally good for business." We are located along Virginia's Technology Corridor in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Our county is home to Virginia's largest and most technologically oriented university, Virginia Tech. The nationally renowned Virginia Tech Corporate Research Center is home to a college of osteopathic medicine and over 100 companies engaged in leading-edge technology research.

Amidst this growing development, Montgomery County is blessed with beautiful mountains and valleys and streams. Hiking, fishing, hunting, mountain biking and other outdoor activities are enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. The Blue Ridge Parkway is easily accessible. The nearby Claytor Lake State Park is one of the most popular parks in the entire state. The New River, which is the second oldest river in North America, is a popular destination for canoeing, fishing, and tubing. Hiking and mountain biking trails abound and are widely used. And most importantly, over 19,000 acres of the Jefferson National Forest are located in Montgomery County.

During the Forest Service Planning process in 2003, the Montgomery County Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution supporting wilderness designation for portions of Brush Mountain in Montgomery County. This resolution was adopted after a series of public meetings by the Board and with significant public input. While the Forest Service did not include our recommendation in the final plan, I am pleased that Senator Warner and Congressman Boucher did listen to the citizens and the Board of Supervisors and did include the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area in the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.

The Board considered a number of factors when we voted to support a Brush Mountain Wilderness Area. First and most importantly, we believed that the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area would enhance the quality of life for our constituents. The designation of portions of Brush Mountain as wilderness area ensures that this section will be enjoyed by current and future generations in its natural state.

The protection of viewsheds is a high priority for the Montgomery County Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors. Brush Mountain is a natural scenic backdrop for Blacksburg and nearby communities and should be preserved to the extent possible.

The County Comprehensive Plan recognizes and promotes the fundamental notion that the County's natural resources are vital to the County's quality of life and provide substantial economic and recreational opportunities for the citizens of Montgomery County.

Eco-tourism already benefits Montgomery County and has the potential to grow. It is a key element of the county's Economic Development Plan. The Brush Mountain Wilderness Area, along with other outdoor activities, would certainly enhance Montgomery County as an attractive destination for outdoor enthusiasts.

Looking at those factors, it is clear that the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area is a good investment for our community.

Mr. Chairman, we in Montgomery County appreciate our national forest lands and support responsible stewardship of those lands. Certainly timber harvesting is an integral part of the forest plan, but so too should be other activities and considerations such as recreation and watershed preservation.

As a member of the Board of Supervisors, I have learned that as our county grows at a rate of approximately 1,000 people per year, so do the demands for more recreational opportunities. The Jefferson National Forest offers a wide variety of outdoor activities that my constituents enjoy every day. Whether it is hiking, hunting, birdwatching, fishing or just enjoying nature, this area is what makes Montgomery County special.

That is why the designation of the Brush Mountain Wilderness Area is so important. Favorable Congressional action would set aside a small portion of the forest for all to enjoy. I urge that the Committee pass the Virginia Ridge and Valley Act.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions that you may have.