

History, habitat & nature's diversity

(continued from page 8)

Birds and small mammals associated with forest ecosystems and forest interior are present in abundance.

Birding Prospects: This area offers excellent walk-in and hike-in birding opportunities, and maintained access roads and trails provide good walk-in access to interior parts of the WMA. The majority of the area is covered by mid- to late-successional closed-canopy mixed hardwood and pine forest, but areas of young forest and wildlife openings provide cover diversity for some less common species. Acadian Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, Great Crested Flycatcher, Pine Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Hooded Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, American Redstart, Red-eyed Vireo, Blue-headed Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Wood Thrush, and Hermit Thrush are forest bird species typically present in abundance, but diligent birders who find appropriate habitat patches may encounter uncommon species such as Blue Grosbeak and Yellow-breasted Chat. Many other bird species not mentioned may also be found on this WMA.

Recreational Facilities: There are no facilities or developments on the area other than maintained roads and trails. This area is generally maintained as walk-in only, and terrain can be challenging off-trail. Recreationalists need to wear appropriate clothing and be sure they are in adequate physical condition before they attempt any off-trail hiking on this area. Activities such as mountain biking, camping, and horseback riding are not permitted on the WMA.

Access to the property is off Milo School Road, Magnolia Road or Detour Road in the Largent area west of Great Cacapon.

Sleepy Creek WMA

Acreage and Acquisition: Current acreage exceeds 22,618. The original 21,239-acre tract of Sleepy Creek WMA was purchased - using funds primarily derived from hunting license sales - by the Conservation Commission of West Virginia in December 1950. Additional tracts

were added by purchase, condemnation, quitclaim, gift deed, donation, and exchange. The most recent addition to Sleepy Creek WMA was completed in 2018; five acres of land and a right-of-way were purchased on the Morgan County side of Sleepy Creek Mountain for better public access and to manage forest lands for wildlife habitat. Accessibility of the WMA from the Morgan County side had hampered large habitat improvement projects on this part of the WMA. The DNR is now actively conducting forest and timber management in Morgan County to improve habitat for Wild Turkeys, Ruffed Grouse, Cerulean Warblers, and many other wildlife species.

History: Evidence of human use of the area that now comprises Sleepy Creek WMA dates back perhaps as far as 10,000 BCE: cherts and points are occasionally discovered along the shores of Sleepy Creek Lake (artificial impoundment-1962).

Credible historic reports of pictographs, long since destroyed by time or the acts of vandals, on rock formations along Sleepy Creek Mountain are also strong indicators of indigenous settlement. The history of indigenous peoples on the land that now comprises the WMA is poorly-understood, but information recorded by early missionaries and colonial explorers (John Lederer, for instance) regarding peoples that inhabited Berkeley County from the late 1600s until the close of the American Revolution provide some information.

Late pre-European peoples that inhabited the area were likely members of tribes such as the Tutelo and Saponi, both of which were either absorbed by other tribes or driven out by the early 1700s.

The historic records of early European explorers in the area -- Thomas Batts, Robert Fallam, Pierre Le Moyne d'Iberville, etc. -- suggest that, between 1671-99, the Shawnee held considerable sway in the Shenandoah Valley and surrounding areas. It's likely the Shawnee maintained their hegemony until they emigrated from West Virginia's eastern panhandle ca. 1754.

The first permanent white settler in the Meadow Branch Valley, encapsulated by Sleepy Creek WMA,



View from High Rocks

did not arrive on the area until the early 1800s.

"Hunter John" Myers (1765- ca. 1835) made a living as a frontiersman, hunter, and trapper along Sleepy Creek Mountain and across much of the area that now comprises the WMA. No remains of the Myers homestead exist, but one of the original clearings made by the Myers family during settlement is the current site of the Myers' Place Campground. Most of the clearings, pastures, and the site of the old homestead are now barely recognizable as places formerly inhabited by humans.

Myers' life inspired a number of books and stories across the centuries since his death; most notable among these is probably 19th Century novelist John Esten Cooke's first published book, *Leather Stocking and Silk*, rooted in vivid portraits of Myers, his family, and his home along Meadow Branch. The descendants of Hunter John Myers resided

in Meadow Branch Valley until 1915, and some reside in Berkeley County to this day.

Historic land uses following the close of the frontier include anthracite coal mining (very limited-1833 to ca. 1920) and timber production. Timbering dated from 1835, with limited white oak harvest for use in naval shipbuilding, especially for sloops-of-war, frigates, and ships of the line that needed solid and durable sides to withstand the punishment of close-range cannonades. It continued to 1934, when the last virgin timber was removed from the area to produce railroad ties and mine props for the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. Following clear-cutting in the early 1900s, several severe wildfires burned over the area, and dry tops and woody debris from past landscape-scale clearcuts blazed with such intensity that much of the area was burned down to mineral soil.

(continues on page 16)



Sleepy Creek Lake