

August 14, 2026

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: Letter of Support — West Virginia Forest Legacy South Branch Project

Dear Chief Schultz,

On behalf of The Wildlife Society, the professional scientific organization representing more than 10,000 wildlife biologists, managers, scientists and students globally, I am writing to express our support for the West Virginia Forest Legacy South Branch Project, which would place permanent conservation easements on approximately 2,101 acres across six properties in Hampshire, Grant, and Pendleton Counties. As an organization grounded in sound science and evidence-based wildlife management, we view this project as a well-supported, landscape-scale investment in habitat connectivity and species conservation.

Habitat fragmentation is among the most documented drivers of wildlife decline, and this project directly addresses this threat in this region. By permanently protecting forest adjoining the Nathaniel Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and the Monongahela National Forest, the project extends existing blocks of managed and conserved habitat, reducing edge effects and expanding the effective habitat base available to many species of wildlife using these public lands.

The properties support documented use by ruffed grouse, a species experiencing well studied, habitat driven declines linked to the loss of young forest structure; continued active forest management under this easement, consistent with current science on early-successional habitat, supports the kind of vegetative diversity this species requires. The project area also provides forest roosting and riparian



foraging habitat for multiple bat species, including the federally endangered northern long-eared bat and tri-colored bat, both documented on the adjoining WMA through acoustic monitoring. Protected stream frontage, including two native brook trout streams and reach on the South Branch of the Potomac River, secures cold, forested headwater habitat essential to a genetically distinctive brook trout population and to downstream water quality.

This project also reflects an approach The Wildlife Society consistently supports: science-informed, active forest management on working lands, conducted in partnership with willing private landowners, that sustains both wildlife habitat and rural livelihoods. This model of permanent, voluntary conservation is an effective, evidence-based tool for addressing habitat loss at the scale wildlife populations require.

For these reasons, The Wildlife Society and the Northeast Section of TWS, which encompasses West Virginia, urges approval of the West Virginia Forest Legacy South Branch Project.

Sincerely,

Edward B. Arnett, Ph.D. and Certified Wildlife Biologist®
Chief Executive Officer
The Wildlife Society

Valorie Titus, Ph.D.
President
Northeast Section of The Wildlife Society