



Beury Mountain Wildlife Management Area

By Todd Dowdy

The sounds of distant drumming will soon be heard more frequently on a mountain in Fayette County due to the ongoing management efforts of the Division of Natural Resources Wildlife Resources Section. Ruffed grouse and white-tailed deer are the featured game species on the newly expanded 7,645-acre Beury Mountain Wildlife Management Area. Squirrels, turkeys and bears also live throughout the area, located in southeastern Fayette County, a short drive from Beckley, Oak Hill, Fayetteville and Rainelle. The area boundary stretches from Babcock State Park to the north, to the National Park Service's New River George to the west, Chestnut Knob to the south, and Glade Creek to the east. Access to the area is provided by State Route 41 to County Road 19/31 at Landisburg and County Road 41/12 to County Road 25/2 from Layland. Access is also provided by County Road 25/2 from Thurmond on the New River, although this road is rough and steep and not recommended for two-wheel drive vehicles.

DNR purchased the original tract of 3,061 acres from the Thayer Coal and Coke trust in 1997, creating Beury Mountain Wildlife Management Area. The newest addition of 4,584 acres came in 2008 from The Nature Conservancy which had purchased it from Mountain Top Management. DNR Wildlife Resources

Section then purchased the property from The Nature Conservancy during 2008 and 2009. The area received its name from the Beury Family, specifically Lawton Beury, trustee for the Thayer Coal and Coke Trust, who contacted the DNR with the interest to provide the people of West Virginia an opportunity for outdoor recreation.

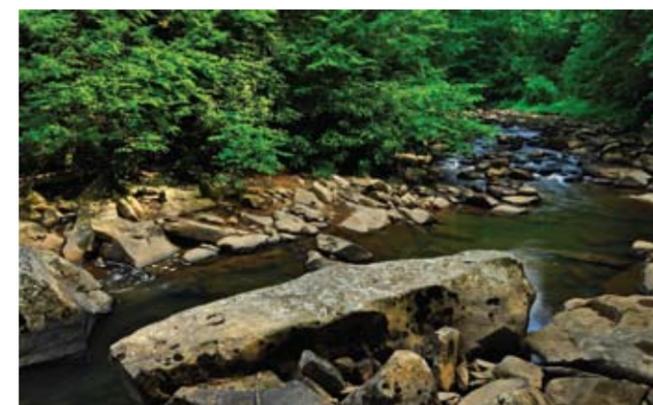
Large and broad mountaintop plateaus make Beury Mountain WMA unique from most of the public land in southern West Virginia. Hunters will find foot travel relatively easy on the gentle-sloping ridges and numerous logging trails. Aggressive logging practices in the mid-1980s left the area's oak-hickory forest in the pole-timber and early saw-timber age classes with numerous early succession tree and shrub species present. Squirrel hunters will find larger mast-producing trees in pockets and individual trees that loggers passed over located throughout the area. For deer hunters who seek the remote and rugged areas that hold those older bucks sporting the big head gear, don't worry, Beury has them too. Ephraim and Buffalo creek drainages are the largest and most rugged parts of the area, with elevations ranging from 3,000 feet above sea level atop the plateaus to 2,000 feet in the drainage bottoms. Buffalo Creek is also a brook trout stream for those die-hard trout anglers looking for an opportunity to fish a remote area.

Grouse hunters will be pleased to know that active grouse management is ongoing at Beury Mountain WMA. Gentle terrain features and good accessibility make the area a good candidate for grouse management. A majority of the area contained quality grouse habitat in the early 1990s with 5- to 15-year-old clearcuts. Now however, most of that habitat is past the prime age class that grouse prefer. Research has shown that a lack of suitable cover and nutritious foods are the limiting



Ruffed grouse on drumming log.

Jeff Craig



Glade Creek runs along part of the boundary of Beury Mountain Wildlife Management Area.

◀ One of many wildlife clearings created to improve wildlife habitat.
Photo by Steve Shaluta

Steve Shaluta



Larry Berry



Todd Dowdy



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From left to right: After the trees are cut, the fallen brush is cleared with a bulldozer, and the soil is fertilized with lime to prepare for seeding.

factors for grouse in the Mountain State. WRS personnel are improving these limiting factors with the help of the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Plan (WHIP) program. The Natural Resources Conservation Service WHIP program will assist the Wildlife Resources Section by providing cost sharing on habitat improvement projects. Beury Mountain was enrolled in WHIP in 2005 to improve the limiting factors for grouse and to provide habitat for other wildlife such as deer, bear and woodcock.

The plan designed to improve grouse habitat includes 600 acres split into five- and 10-acre blocks. The WHIP plan will cover 75 percent of the cost to create the first 80 acres of early successional habitat. The 600-acre grouse management unit is on an 80-year timber harvest rotation. Each cutting block has eight to 10 mast-producing trees per acre reserved as “leave” (won’t be cut) trees to provide food and seed for regenerating each block.

Between each clearcut block is a block of similar size that will receive a crop-tree release treatment. This

involves designating the best quality trees in the block as crop trees and removing the small trees with sparse crowns which compete with them for food, water and minerals. Releasing the crown of the designated crop trees will increase their growth and mast production. Crop-tree release has been proven in some areas to double the amount of mast produced in a stand. The blocks that received the crop-tree treatment will also receive a prescribed fire to remove the leaf litter and encourage the growth of herbaceous vegetation on the forest floor, improving feeding areas for both grouse and woodcock. The spacing of these cut areas with the crop tree blocks will provide a patchwork of cover, brood range, nesting and feeding areas all within a short traveling distance.

Another part of the WHIP plan is to create 30 acres of permanent clearings on the area. WRS personnel created 10 acres in the summer of 2008. Previous logging roads and landings were used to develop the clearings. Trees were cut along logging roads to provide more sunlight for winter wheat and clover which were seeded. Log landings were expanded into clearings ranging in size from one to five acres. All roads and clearings received winter wheat seed in the fall as a cover crop. Personnel applied white clover by frost seeding in the winter of 2009. All clearings on the area will be maintained in various species of clovers to provide turkeys, grouse and woodcock with brood range and feeding areas. The high-protein forage in these clearings will also attract white-tailed deer. WRS personnel plan to develop more clearings during the summer of 2009.

Due to the ongoing habitat management and property acquisition, Beury Mountain WMA has greatly improved hunting and outdoor recreation opportunities. No camping is allowed on the area, but visitors can camp at nearby Babcock State Park. You can contact the WRS District Office in Beckley at 304-256-6947 for more information.



Larry Berry

Six months after clearing, new growth provides nutrient-laden grass and feeding areas for various wildlife species.

Todd Dowdy is the wildlife manager at Beury Mountain WMA.