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Southern Appalachian National Park Commission

# ANSWER TO GOVERNMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

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## CONCERNING

## PROPOSED SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN NATIONAL PARK

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1. Location; give States and Counties.

In Rappahannock, Page and Madison Counties, State of Virginia.

2. Furnish inexpensive sketch showing natural boundaries of proposed national park.

The size of the park not being known, the enclosed sketch shows the area lying between Thornton's Gap, through which the Lee Highway passes, and Fisher's Gap, through which the old Gordonville Turnpike passes. But the park could be extended to take in much more territory, by going farther in either direction.

3. Approximate area.

The approximate area would be a matter of mere guesswork until one knew just how much the Government wanted, but in the immediate vicinity of Skyland, where is located the most beautiful of the scenery, there would be about 25,000 acres available. Between the two turnpikes there would be anywhere from 50,000 to 100,000 acres according to how far down the eastern and western slopes of the Blue Ridge the Government would decide to purchase. Beyond these turnpikes the area extends indefinitely in both directions.

4. Give altitude, maximum and minimum, above sea level.

The minimum altitude is 1,500 feet; the maximum 4,060 feet.

5. Give special features, such as mountain peaks, gorges, waterfalls, caverns, varieties of timber, and plant growth and wild life.

The special features of this area are numerous mountain peaks over 4,000 feet high, a stream of water running for 8 miles through the district with such magnificent scenery that it far surpasses in beauty the famous Watkins Glen, many hundred beautiful trout pools, some of them 6 to 8 feet deep, over twenty beautiful waterfalls, seven of which approximate 100 feet in height between high cliffs. In addition to this stream, which flows through what is known as White Oak Canyon, there is the wonderful Kettle Canyon, with the Raven Rock Cliffs, hundreds of feet high, and many other cliffs, so that the entire canyon for several miles is one continuous panorama of wild and beautiful scenery. Then here is Dry Run Canyon, with two very beautiful waterfalls; the Hughes River, which runs through another mountain valley; Nigger Run, with about three miles of fine falls and cataracts; and numerous other wild valleys, canyons and gorges, many of them unnamed, with not less than 75 or 80 miles of fine trout streams within the area. As to the variety of timber, there are large quantities of very fine hemlock, spruce, oak, ash, poplar, and chestnut; all kinds of hardwood, which in large portions of this area have never been touched with the axe.

As to the floral and plant life, the location in the temperate zone is one that gives a succession of blossoms from early spring to late fall; there is never a time from the breaking of spring to the coming of winter that there is not a profusion of blossoms in great variety; the gorgeous purple trillium, which grows sparsely farther north, covers the glades in great masses. The succession of wild azalea, locust, and laurel, gives the visitor three weeks of spring in a single day. The great mass of laurel bloom on the mountainsides is unsurpassed by that of any other section of the United States. Photograph is attached showing ordinary clump

of blooming laurel twice the height of a horse. The district is a veritable spring fairyland. In autumn, with the profusion of fall flowers and berries everywhere and the varied and brilliant coloring of the giant trees, mass color effects greet the eye in every direction, indescribable in beauty and grandeur.

The wild life consists of the usual small game found in the Blue Ridge Mountains, except that there are no deer; but in bygone days, of course, the section was overrun with deer, as there is wonderful shelter and feed for them if introduced and properly protected. Being located along the direct line of migration north and south, the whole district is a natural bird refuge. It is visited in spring especially by the greatest variety of migratory birds, many of which breed here. One noted bird authority recently identified, in an early morning walk of one mile on Stony Man Mountain, forty distinct varieties of birds within an hour. Among these were such widely different kinds as robins, blue jays, chickadees, nuthatches, whipporwills, swallows, phœbes, humming birds, wood peewees, wood thrushes, catbirds, cedar waxwings, many varieties of sparrows, finches, also the red-eyed vireo, the downy woodpecker, many varieties of warblers and wrens, the kingbird, the flicker, the red-headed woodpecker, the sapsucker, and many others. Game birds are plentiful, and with adequate protection, could be increased a hundredfold. Many streams already abound in speckled trout.

The fern growth of this entire section is seen in great profusion of the different varieties at different altitudes. There are many trees which run over four feet in diameter, found along the banks of the mountain streams, especially hemlock and spruce. These trees are usually from 80 to 100 feet in height.

6. Does the area contain improvements such as towns, factories, mines, farms, quarries, hydroelectric power plants, or other developments?

No—absolutely free.

7. State if area is held in small or large holdings and if possible give names of owners of large tracts.

This area is mostly held in large holdings of from 3,000 to 5,000 acres. That portion of it which lies near the valley has been timbered over, but most of it being very inaccessible without building of roads, which would have been expensive, remains exactly as nature made it. It is because of this condition that this area is available now for national park purposes, because had the timber lying in the fastnesses of these mountains been accessible, nothing would have been left. There is one holding of 4,000 acres, by G. Freeman Pollock, who resides on the property; another holding of about 5,000 acres, known as the Christodoro Tract, owned by the Christodoro heirs, who are represented by Mr. William Cooke, of Madison Courthouse, Virginia; another tract of about 5,000 acres, known as the Cedar Run Tract, owned by the Fray Brothers, of Culpeper, Virginia; the Dark Hollow Tract, etc., etc., running north and south of Stony Man Mountain. The rest of the area is almost altogether owned in large blocks. The tracts above mentioned are contiguous. There are within this area, of course, a few small mountain farms, of no great value. The remarkable thing about this area is that 3,500 feet above sea level, for almost twenty miles, there is a succession of plateaus, sufficient to make thousands of acres of practically level land, bountifully supplied with wonderful springs, and from which in all directions one can, within a few minutes' walk, step out on high cliffs and obtain marvelous views of the valleys and gorges, 3,000 feet below. Sometimes these views are west into the Shenandoah Valley; sometimes east into the Piedmont Valley, stretching eastward to the sea. Then again the peaks, which in the Stony Man section appear to be volcanic, rise abruptly several hundred feet above this high plateau, giving gorgeous views in all directions that are unsurpassed in the Appalachian Mountains.

8. Has area been lumbered or burned over; if so, to what extent.

Except for sporadic fires of a few acres in extent, which have not destroyed big timber, there has been no devastation by fire throughout this entire region. No evidences of fire appear anywhere within view. Except along the lower fringes of the area the timber is fine, and has not been lumbered. In some sections the chestnut bark was peeled many years ago, but even evidence of this is seldom noticeable. This now

makes no difference, because the chestnut blight, which is universal, would soon have destroyed this anyway. No groves of timber as such have been destroyed or devastated. One important reason why this area should be at once taken over by the U. S. Government, from the standpoint of public policy, is that most of it has a great deal of commercial timber on it, and negotiations are active for its exploitation in the immediate future.

9. What assistance might be expected from gifts and low prices of land?

Probably no assistance might be expected from gifts, although this is not known. The price of land is most reasonable. No natural resources exist, with the exception of timber noted above.

10. Give such other information as you believe would be of interest to the committee in connection with its consideration of your request.

The following public advantages would follow the location of a national park in this section:

a. Preservation of virgin forest area, permanent bird and game refuge.
b. Insurance of water supply to District of Columbia.
c. Accessibility to cities of Washington, Baltimore, Richmond, Petersburg, Norfolk, Newport News, Wilmington, Philadelphia, New York, Elizabeth, etc., etc., serving a population of over *twenty million within a few hours' and few dollars' journey.*
d. Only a three-hour ride from nation's capital.
e. Only eighty miles in direct line from District of Columbia.
f. Lee Highway, a great thorofare, passes through it.
g. Has the highest peaks in the Blue Ridge in Virginia.
h. Trout streams, mountains, deep valleys, views of 100 miles.
i. General altitude is over 3,200 feet.
j. Stony Man is 4,031 and Hawksbill 4,060 feet.
k. Adjoining the Shenandoah National Forest in the Massanutten Mountain area.
l. High altitude provides winter sports rivalling those of Montreal or Chamonix.
m. The cheapness, quickness and comfort of accessibility make this an ideal *all-year-round* playground, doubling the value of the Government's investment.

Under Question 7, the answer described three particular tracts of land, which lie adjacent to each other, making a total of about 14,000 acres. This small area contains the greatest number of natural features of beautiful scenery. It contains no less than 15 mountain peaks, two of them over 4,000 feet high, also the White Oak Canyon with its waterfalls, 50 miles of trout streams, and probably no less than 1,000 acres of plateaus over 3,000 feet in altitude, supplied by many abundantly flowing springs. This area also contains the choicest of the timber, and if the small outlying tracts near the foot of the mountains were taken in, the area would contain in all about 25,000 acres, thus forming a wonderful nucleus for future park development and extension.