

Conservation Leadership and Bi-Partisan Alliances: Strong SELC Partnerships in Congress are Key to Southern Appalachian Forest Protection

Over the past decade the Southern Environmental Law Center has formed strong alliances in Congress, successfully reaching out on both sides of the aisle to inform the southern delegation about the special values and needs of our region, and to highlight the existing strong public support for core conservation issues that cross party lines. A fraction of SELC's efforts is "lobbying"—developing and advocating for specific legislation—but the majority of the time we spend on the Hill is informing members and staffers more broadly about the ecology and threats to specific regions or ecosystems and possible steps that can be taken to protect them.

"I remember my first meeting with Senator John Warner back in 1997," says David Carr, head of SELC's National Forest Protection Project. "I showed him a graph illustrating how the Forest Service spends much more

money on logging than on recreation—even though recreation creates greater economic benefits than logging. He really sat up and took

"As a father and a grandfather, I feel an obligation to ensure that our children have lasting opportunities to enjoy and explore Virginia's immense natural beauty."

—Senator John Warner (R-VA)
about the proposed Virginia wilderness bill that he co-sponsored in April

notice, outraged by the fiscal irresponsibility." Since that first meeting, SELC has worked closely with Senator Warner (R-VA) as he has co-signed a bi-partisan group letter endorsing a moratorium on logging and road-building in roadless areas in 1997; played a lead role with Rep. Virgil Goode (R-5th District) in securing permanent wilderness protection for Virginia's Priest and Three Ridges areas in 2000; and co-sponsored



legislation in 2003 advocating for strong continued federal protection for national forest roadless areas.

Most recently, Virginia lawmakers once again stepped forward to champion the cause of Southern Appalachian forest conservation: on April 28, Senator Warner and Representative Rick Boucher (D-9th District) introduced into both houses the "Virginia Ridge and Valley Act of 2005," a bill that proposes permanent protection for 55,000 acres of remote and pristine wilderness in the Jefferson National Forest. We expect hearings on the bill this summer.

"Proactive efforts by Congress, and state-level action by state leaders and governors, are increasingly important as the Forest Service attempts to roll back federal standards and weaken its own forest management practices and enforcement," continues Carr. "We are pleased to have some steadfast and hard-working allies in D.C. and among the leadership in our six focus states to ensure that our southeastern mountain forests remain wild and available for public enjoyment."

