

**What is Wilderness Trail?** Wilderness Trail is a backpacking ministry. That means that our primary focus is ministry and we use backpacking as a tool for discipleship. Backpacking is overnight hiking, carrying everything you need in a pack. It means setting up a different camp every night and then hiking to a new camp the following day. We do this in small groups of about a dozen hikers including our Servant Leaders.

**No Experience Necessary.** You don't need to know anything about backpacking in order to participate with Wilderness Trail; we provide everything and instruct in all areas. If you (and/or your youth) are out of shape and have never even seen a mountain before, you can do it. We promise. If you're an avid backpacker, you won't be disappointed. The routes we choose are designed to be challenging but possible for all of our wide range of participants. Our promise for unlikely candidates to find success with the backpacking experience is based on intentionality in bearing one another's burdens and living into our hiking people logo.

**Who Can Participate?** Youth ages 12 and up are eligible to participate. Rising seventh graders through college students are welcome on our Summer Events. We accept registrations from both groups (youth groups, children's homes, etc.) and individuals. Rising 9th graders and up (14 and older) may participate as individuals (i.e. - arriving without an organized group or dropped off by Mom or Dad). Ages 12 to 13 must have an adult chaperone in order to participate.

**The Schedule of a Summer Event.** A Wilderness Trail Summer Event is 8 days long. Besides playing in the rain, overcoming challenges, seeking God in the wilderness, and experiencing the Body of Christ, here's what happens in a week's time:

**We begin with a two-day retreat at our Property.** Participants arrive between 3 and 5pm on the first day of the event. We spend the next 36 hours getting ready for the journey. These preparations are threefold – logistical: getting food, equipment, and learning Trail Etiquette - the “dos” and “don'ts” of hiking; group – deciding upon a group name, flag, and skit, working dynamics of trust, communication, and teamwork on the low-ropes “Group Building Course”; and spiritual – three worship sessions, celebrating communion at the Outdoor Chapel, and hiking group discussions on a biblical theme.

**The following five days are spent on trail.** We wake up early on our third day together to pack up, eat breakfast, and be at the trailhead by 9:00 (if not earlier). During the four full days on trail groups hike an average of 10 miles per day, stopping to rest, eat lunch, and enjoy vistas along the way. Once at camp, hikers set up tents, rest, gather firewood, help pump water, and play. After dinner together, the group gathers for campfire and Wilderness Trail story-telling traditions such as "Little Foxes" and "Holy Grounds," as well as a devotion or discussion. The exact schedule and activities on trail are in the hands of the Staff and individuals in each group, which is part of what makes Wilderness Trail an experience worth repeating.

**We close our week with a day back at the Property.** Hiking groups are picked up between 8am and 11am on their 5th day of backpacking. After cleaning and returning equipment, hikers take a much needed shower and then we enjoy a nice, big lunch as a large group. During the afternoon we meet in our hiking groups, play wiffle ball and other games, and have free time before the closing activities after dinner. The following morning, hikers are free to wake up and leave (or get picked up) as early as they like, but no later than 9am. A continental breakfast is offered (no matter how early).

**Registration Fees.** Each Summer Event costs \$280/person. This price is all-inclusive: backpacking equipment (tent, pack, etc.); all meals and some snacks for the full week; staffing; full programming; and a souvenir T-shirt. Many hikers bring personal favorite snacks. Need-based scholarships are available; participants may complete and return an application prior to the summer to be considered.

**The Wilderness Trail Property – Our “Base Camp.”** The opening and closing retreats take place at Wilderness Trail 60-acre hillside property in Troutdale, VA, affectionately known as “The Property.” Hikers gather for meals, worship, games, and fellowship at our lodge – “The Sweeper’s Place.” Eight open faced sleeping shelters modeled after those along the Appalachian Trail offer rustic accommodations. The "Group Building Course" provides opportunities for each hiking group to overcome preliminary challenges and establish a group dynamic. We worship and have communion at our Outdoor Chapel – an altar and rugged cross in a clearing atop our Property. Horseshoe pits, a basketball court, volleyball court, four square, and rocking chairs on the porch of our lodge provide entertainment and fellowship during free time. The infamous Weaver Field is the best wiffle ball field this side of the Mississippi. Staff cabins, an equipment shed, and two bathhouses round out our facilities.

**Where we go backpacking.** We count ourselves blessed to hike in the mountains of southwest Virginia. This area, referred to as the "Montana of the east," witnesses to the power and beauty of our Creator before we even say a word. Our hikers spend the majority of their journeys on the Appalachian Trail, a national footpath that runs from Georgia to Maine. We are located just minutes from many access points to this 2,175-mile, internationally known trail. We also travel on the Iron Mountain, Pine Mountain, and Feathercamp Trails, among others. Most hiking groups will summit Whitetop Mountain, the 2nd highest peak in Virginia, and walk in the shadow of Mt. Rogers, the state's highest point. Places like Grayson Highlands State Park, the Virginia Creeper Trail, Elk Garden, and Rhododendron Gap are other well-loved landscapes along the way. Hikers are likely to see deer, wild ponies, wild turkey, crowdads, and more. We are fortunate to have a very small bear population in the area; it's possible to hike for years and never see one.