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BACK PAGE

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## Saving a forest

### Expand wilderness protection for Allegheny

**T**he U.S. Forest Service has released a final 10-year management plan for Allegheny National Forest that doesn't go far enough in setting aside wilderness areas.

Only 2 percent of Pennsylvania's only national forest has protected wilderness status, one of the smallest percentages of any national forest.

The new plan would add 12,379 acres in two parcels for possible wilderness designation, which requires an act of Congress, on top of the existing 8,979 acres already protected. While any additions to the wilderness system are welcome, the plan excludes protection for the largest remaining old-growth forest in the state.

On average, 18 percent of a national forest is designated as protected wilderness, where trees cannot be cut and motorized vehicles cannot be used, with nature left to take its course. Most eastern national forests fall below that benchmark because, for the most part, they are utilized for timber, oil, gas and mineral extraction.

Nevertheless, the local non-profit advocacy group, Friends of the Allegheny Wilderness, has identified eight additional areas consisting of 54,500 acres, suitable for wilderness designation. We urge Pennsylvania's congressional delegation to finish the job, and protect what little wilderness is left to protect in the commonwealth.