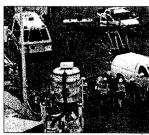
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## More wilderness, more jobs, says advocates' study

By CHUCK HAYES

Staff Writer

More wilderness would translate into more jobs and more revenue for communities within the Allegheny National Forest, according to a recently released study.

The author of the study is Spencer Phillips, senior economist for The Wilderness Society. The study was performed by The Wilderness Society and Friends of Allegheny Wilderness.

Both groups have endorsed the creation of considerably more wilderness study areas than the U.S. Forest Service proposed in its revised Forest Plan for the Allegheny National Forest.

In all, the groups have supported designating 54,460 acres of the 520,000-acre forest as wilderness study area.

The report concludes that the additional wilderness would not significantly diminish timber harvest rev-

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## Study released...

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timbering interests and

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Spencer Phillips

tions."

enues and would have a small impact on timber supply and the forest products industry.

The report states, "If sawlog stocking on the proposed wilderness acres is about the same as on the 279,00 other acres slated for even-age management, then the wilderness proposal could affect as much as four-tenths of one percent of sawlog supply in the ANF region or four-one hundredths of a percent of Pennsylvania's sawlog supply."

As for the wood products manufacturing industry, the report concludes, "If the tiny shift in timber supply that could

accompany further wilderness designation does affect the forest products industry at all, the relatively small size of the industry suggests that impact on the overall regional or commonwealth economy would be small."

The reduction in timber supply

caused by additional wilderness, said the study, could be compensated for through the use of private forest lands and process efficiency improvements.

"There is no significant conflict between timbering interests and new wilderness protections," Phillips said.

The report stated that payments which local governments receive from the national forest are now based on acreage rather than timber harvesting and Secure Rural Schools Act payments are also not tied to timber harvest figures.

More wilderness, the study states, provides more recreational experiences closer to home and Phillips said that one "very tangible economic benefit" is that the value of private property in the area increases.

In the Green Mountain National Forest of Vermont, said Phillips, land values are 18.7 percent higher and land values decrease .33 percent with every kilometer a township is removed from the wilderness boundary.

Higher property values, said Phillips, help keep taxes lower, which can help attract additional residents and businesses. Studies in the Adirondacks and in Maine, he said, show towns with more protected open space have lower tax rates.

Qualities such as scenic beauty, recreation and environmental entities were among the criteria which resulted in Warren County being rated the second "Best Place to Live in Rural America" by *Progressive Farmer* magazine earlier this year, Phillips observed.

A 2001 study, Phillips said, found wilderness in the eastern United States provides about \$4 per acre in "passive use" benefits. In the case of the Citizens Wilderness Proposal for eight wilderness areas on the ANF, he said, that would translate into \$218,000 in economic benefits generated each year "even before the first angler casts a fly into a wilderness-nourished stream or the first hiker steps

onto a wilderness trail."

The 2001 study cited by Phillips estimated the value of e as tern wilderness in terms of visitors is about \$44 per acre and each visitor

senior economist,
The Wilderness Society

in terms of visitors is about \$44 per acre and each visitor generates an additional \$44 per acre in spending in nearby communities. That level of spending would support one job for every 550 acres of wilderness, he said.

If 54,460 acres of additional

100 new jobs in the region.

Kirk Johnson, executive director Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, said the study demonstrates that wilderness designation would be an "investment."

wilderness were designated on

the ANF, said Phillips, that could

be expected to support nearly

"Permanently protecting these areas would bring real balance to the management of the national forest," said Johnson, "and would be a tremendous long-term investment in the economy of the region."

John Barlett, field representative for Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, said, "Wilderness protection is a critical component of the multiple use management of our national forests. While we recognize the importance of timber production and other uses of the ANF to the region's economy and way of life, it must also be acknowledged that there is an acute shortage of protected wilderness here."

While the Forest Service can recommend areas for wilderness study, the final decision on what areas are included in the wilderness system is made by congress.