

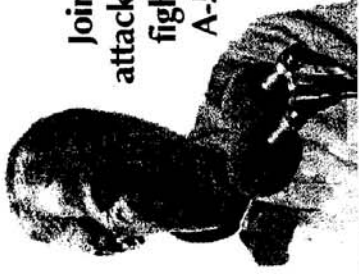
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# TIMES OBSERVER

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FRIDAY, AUGUST 27, 2004

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## Gaining wilderness designation for forest slow process

By VICTORIA BARONE

Times Observer Staff Writer

Rick Potts, manager of the National Park Service National Wilderness Program, spoke at Warren Public Library on Thursday evening on the possibility of more land on the Allegheny National Forest being designated as wilderness areas.

Less than two percent of the ANF is currently so designated under the federal Wilderness Act.

Kirk Johnson, Friends of the Allegheny Wilderness, which sponsored the event, addressed the group before introducing Potts. Johnson pointed out that the Wilderness Act was passed nearly 40 years ago, on Sept. 3, 1964.

"It swept about nine million acres of land into the system, mostly out west," Johnson said.

He said the ANF lags significantly behind other U.S. forests in the amount of land designated as wilderness, which is defined in the Wilderness Act as "untrammeled by man." That means it has not been significantly altered by anything manmade.

There are two existing wilderness areas on the ANF — Hickory Creek and the Allegheny Islands.

Areas which have been proposed for wilderness designation (54,000 acres, about 10 percent of the ANF) are the following areas: Tionesta, the Hickory Creek Wilderness addition, Complanter, Morrison Run, Allegheny Front, Chestnut, the Clarion River and Tracy Ridge.

Potts explained that wilderness areas are protected from such activities as commercial enterprise, permanent roads (except as specifically provided for in the act or those subject to existing private rights), and from motor vehicle and other mechanical use.

Potts noted that when the act passed in the U.S. House in 1964, it was by a vote of 373-1. The nation, he said, recognized the need to preserve a certain amount of land for people to enjoy. He said Tionesta native Howard Zahniser was one of the authors of the act, and Zahniser believed people needed a place to escape from the technology and mechanization of the modern world, and all of its stress factors.

"The Wilderness Act was written in the shadow of the (atomic) bomb," Potts said.

He quoted President Theodore Roosevelt,

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Times Observer photo by Victoria Barone

### Discussing wilderness designation

Rick Potts, National Wilderness Program manager for the National Park Service, Washington, D.C., addressed interested members of the public on wilderness designation Thursday evening at Warren Public Library.

# Wilderness...

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who said, "There are no words that can tell the hidden spirit of the wilderness."

A process was established for designating wilderness areas, one that made certain public input would be involved. Public input to the Forest Service goes on to that agency's director, then to the secretary of agriculture, before it reaches the president. From the president it goes to Congress as a recommendation.

"This can take 30 years," Potts said. "It's not a quick deal. It's a forever decision, or at least for a long time."

But there have been cases where it was decided that a designated area should not have been included in the act, and a change has been made, according to Potts.

The Forest Service is in the process of updating its forest plan, and is holding public meetings. That is an avenue for public opinion to reach the Forest Service in regard to the wilderness areas.

Potts also said the Wilderness Act is in tune with multiple forest use, since it recognizes other uses in the rest of the forest.

Jack Hedlund, executive director of Allegheny Forest Alliance, said, "There is a huge paradox with wilderness in populated areas." For an area to be "untrammelled by man," people must not leave their mark on an area, and must cease to make a living there, according to Hedlund.

Potts said his own friends in the timber industry have said they realize they have the rest of the forest to work with. Hedlund said that three of the eight areas being recommended for designation are currently used for recreation. If they are designated wilderness, other areas will likely be designated for recreation in their place, Hedlund said, leaving even less land available for commercial interests.

Potts responded that rural communities in the United States with designated wilderness areas have a higher standard of living and lower unemployment rate than those rural areas that don't have such designations.

A member of the audience who wished to remain unnamed said the designated areas are extremely important for those who do not have these locales close at hand.

"A lot of people in this country need to get what we take for granted," he said.

Don Payne, Kane, a timber purchaser, brought up the importance of bringing tourism into the area. There is a need, he said, to draw people to rural America.

According to Potts, the work designating wilderness areas is not a simple task. It has, he said, "a beautiful complexity. You can't do it in a hurry, and you can't undo it in a hurry."