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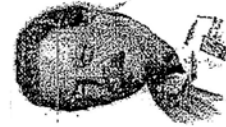
Crawford County edition 50¢

Despite designation debate, Tracy Ridge still wild

Tracy Ridge was one of eight areas proposed for Wilderness Study Area designation by Friends of Allegheny Wilderness.

It also had been one of the areas designated for further study as a wilderness area in the original preferred alternative of the new Forest Plan but was removed when the same alternative appeared in an amended form.

"I was very surprised," said Kirk Johnson, executive director of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness. "Tracy Ridge is the largest roadless area on the Allegheny National



Mike Blech

Forest and it's an obvious candidate for wilderness designation.

Tracy Ridge covers roughly 9,700 acres and stretches about 6 1/2 miles north to south along the eastern shores of the Allegheny Reservoir between Willow Bay

and Sugar Bay and about 2 1/2 miles from the reservoir to Route 321. This is some of the most rugged and most beautiful land on the ANF, rising nearly 900 feet in elevation. Here you will find rock outcrops, mature timber and a long section of the North Country National Scenic Trail.

Also strongly supporting Tracy Ridge as a potential wilderness is the fact that there is no known oil or gas underground. The greatest obstacle to wilderness designation on the ANF is that 83 percent of the subsurface rights are privately owned.

Acquiring 10 percent of the subsurface rights is part of the new Forest Plan goals.

Tracy Ridge was removed from Wilderness Study Area designation because of public concerns over the ability to maintain public recreation opportunities, and because of the necessity to conduct controlled burns to maintain the oak component of the forest, said ANF planning officer William Connell.

What kind of recreation opportunities could there be on a National Recreation Area but not on a Wilderness Area?

"There are quite a few," said Stephen Miller, ANF public affairs officer.

An example might be a biking trail or any other trail involving mechanization, although it could not be for motorized use. And the construction of a trail or anything else on a Wilderness could not be done with anything but hand tools.

Controlled forest burns are still under study by the Northeastern Forest Experimental Station at Lyric, but if it is determined that they are beneficial, their Tracy

Ridge would be a likely place to do it.

An Allegheny Reservoir Master Plan could accommodate some potentially interesting development in that area, Miller said, "but we don't know exactly what it is."

But in light of Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II roadless rules, and the Pennsylvania Wilderness Act that apply to Tracy Ridge, any serious development seems unlikely and it will remain wild if not Wilderness.

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