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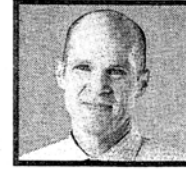
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GOOD MORNING

*Keep the
wild in
wilderness*



Matt Martin

The bicycle in my garage is a mountain bike only in theory.

It has knobby tires and a thick frame. But it's also a 1990s off-the-rack model with a stiff frame, no suspension and rim brakes.

In short, it has zero utility on a real off-road trail, and it looks nothing like the customized models some adventurous co-workers and friends own. I try to keep such connoisseurs in mind when I consider the present fight over wilderness use in the Allegheny National Forest.

Wilderness is what most of us would consider some of the forest's wilder tracts. But wilderness is a legal definition, one designated by an act of Congress, and by those terms there are just two wilderness areas totaling 8,979 acres in the 517,000-acre U.S. Forest Service-managed land.

The Warren-based Friends of the Allegheny Wilderness has for years advocated for protection for as many as eight areas. The prospects of one, the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness, figure to be defeated for good if a shared-use proposal on that land goes into effect.

The ANF, at the behest of regional mountain biking groups, proposes opening more than 12 miles of the 34-mile Tracy Ridge Hiking Trail System to bikers.

See WILD, B2

WILD

Continued from B1

Conservation and hiking groups oppose the idea. They further want a full environmental impact statement prepared before any decision.

The author Wallace Stegner gave wilderness a definition in 1960 that still stands: "The geography of hope."

Biking at Tracy Ridge would not mean the end of hope. But is it necessary? The forest's

snowmobile and ATV trails, gated roads and roads open to mechanized travel already are available for biking. So too, this year, is the first section what will be a 40-mile-plus trail at Jake's Rocks supported by the Friends.

As far back as the 1980s the ANF publicly supported wilderness protection efforts inside its borders. Mountain biking then wasn't the widespread activity it is today. But that piece of the forest was largely the same 30 years ago as it is today. I come out

on the side of leaving it intact for visitors 30 years from now.

Comments can be made through by Monday, by fax to (814) 362-2761, or by email to comments-eastern-alleggheny-bradford@fs.fed.us (enter Tracy Ridge Trail System on the subject line and include your name and home mailing address).

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