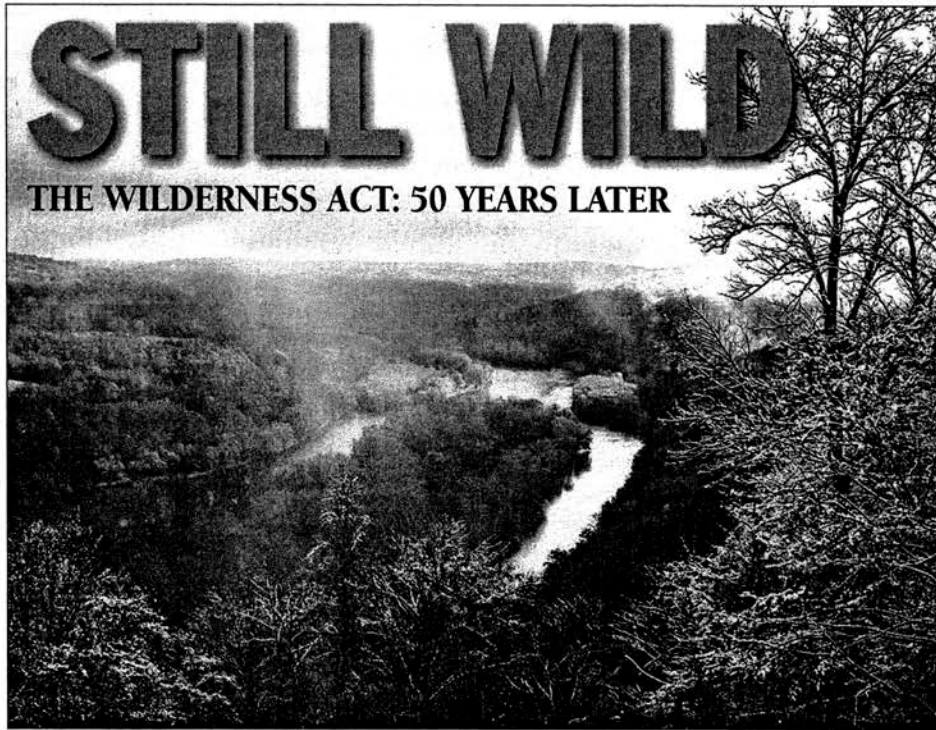


Erie Times-News

Breaking News: GoErie.com

Monday, September 8, 2014

\$1.00



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/Piper VanOrd

A photograph called "First Frost" shows Courson Island in the Allegheny National Forest. It is part of the exhibit "Wilderness at 50: Photographic Reflections on the Legacy of Tionesta Visionary Howard Zahniser." It will show at the Cray Art Gallery, 511 Market St. in Warren, through Sept. 28

By **RON LEONARDI**
ron.leonardi@timesnews.com

Howard Zahniser didn't live to see President Lyndon Johnson sign into law the Wilderness Act on Sept. 3, 1964.



Howard Zahniser

Zahniser, a Tionesta resident and a fervent conservationist, was the principal author and lobbyist of the six-page landmark conservation bill. He died at age 58 of heart failure in early May 1964 after spending eight years crafting and recrafting his original proposal in 1956.

Zahniser's grandson, Justin Duewel-Zahniser, 33, of Silver Spring, Md., believes his grandfather knew before his death the passage of the bill was a certainty.

"It's unfortunate that he died before the signing, but I believe he knew at that point it was all over but the signing," Justin Zahniser said.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/
Mark Hulings



ABOVE: "Beginning of Time," featuring East Hickory Creek in the Allegheny National Forest, was photographed as part of the "Wilderness at 50" exhibit.

LEFT: "Autumn Aura" is another photo that is part of the exhibit in Warren.

See a gallery of photos at GoErie.com/photos

► Please see **WILDERNESS, 4A**

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/Judy Cole Blank

Wilderness: 50 years later

Continued from 1A

"I don't think he would really have any deep regret over it because he did the piece that was important, which is get it to the point where it was just action," he said. "I don't think of him as having missed out on it. It would have been fantastic for him to be there at the signing, but I think he knew that it was done and that was the important thing."

The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System, which permanently protects more than 109 million acres of federal public land.

As the nation commemorates the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act, many people are learning of Howard Zahniser for the first time and realizing the prevalent role he played in implementing the national wilderness policy, his grandson said.

"There are a lot of names that people know, like Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau and all these different characters in American conservation and environmentalism," Justin Zahniser said. "Then there's Howard Zahniser, who did one of the most significant things in the last century as far as conservation is concerned and a lot of people aren't really aware of him."

Justin Zahniser presented a lecture on Wednesday at the Erie Art Museum in which he discussed his grandfather's background and Pennsylvania roots, his conservation legacy and his role in creating the Wilderness Act.

"It's been really interesting to see people celebrate wilderness and the work of my grandfather, and really look on it with reverence and what can we do with this going forward, and having just this life connection to that is really interesting to me," said Justin Zahniser, a director of product management for a Washington, D.C., information technology firm.

A monthlong wilderness photography exhibit in Warren honoring Howard Zahniser opened Aug. 30 and is scheduled for viewing through Sept. 28 at Crary Art Gallery, 511 Market St.

The gallery and the Warren-based Friends of Allegheny Wilderness are presenting the exhibit, "Wilderness at 50: Photographic Reflections on the Legacy of Tionesta Visionary Howard Zahniser."

"We worked on curating some of the biggest names in nature photography and wilderness photography," said Kirk Johnson, executive director of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness.

There are currently 758 designated wilderness areas in the nation, managed by four federal land management agencies: the National Park Service, the U.S.

GOERIE Online extras:
See a gallery of more photos. Go to GoErie.com/photos

Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management.

Pennsylvania's designated wilderness areas encompass two tracts — Hickory Creek and Allegheny Islands — totaling 9,000 acres in the 513,000-acre Allegheny National Forest.

"The show and the anniversary honoring his work are important because this (Allegheny National Forest) was his home national forest, and there are many other roadless, untrammeled areas in the Allegheny National Forest that qualify for wilderness designation," Johnson said.

The Warren exhibit features photos from 11 professional and three amateur photographers.

"My grandfather was sort of behind the scenes doing the lobbying work on the Wilderness Act bill," Justin Zahniser said. "Working on the bill wasn't the sexiest thing in the world, but it was crucial and very effective."

Justin Zahniser said 50th anniversary commemorations of the Wilderness Act have enabled people "to get connected to it."

"My grandfather had a real philosophy and a passion for it," he said. "He literally poured his life into this, and to bring people to that passion and that way of thinking, and to really introduce them to how he thought about wilderness and how important it was to us as a nation and a people, I think, is really fantastic. It's too bad it's not 50 years every year."

Justin Zahniser said he is trying to "carry the torch" and continue educating the public on his grandfather's legacy.

"I grew up spending every summer in the Adirondacks, and my dad worked for the National Park Service for many decades," Justin Zahniser said. "I grew up climbing mountains, hiking and going on park tours with him out west. I've definitely grown up with that respect for the environment and an understanding of the impact we have on it."

Howard Zahniser, the son of a minister, was born in Franklin in 1906, but grew up in Tionesta along the banks of the Allegheny River and near the Allegheny National Forest.

His love for nature and wilderness was further cultivated in the fifth grade when one of his teachers steered him toward joining the Junior Audubon Club, Justin Zahniser said.

"His parents honored books and education," Justin Zahniser said.

Later in life, Howard Zahniser developed a love of the Adirondack Mountains.

From 1930 through 1943, he worked for the U.S. Bureau of Biological Survey, and in 1935 he began writing a monthly book review column for Nature Magazine.

In 1945, he joined the Wilderness Society as executive secretary and later served as the organization's executive director.

He served as editor of the Wilderness Society's magazine,

"The Living Wilderness," from 1945 to 1964.

"My grandfather made a leap from a lucrative civil service career to go to the Wilderness Society, take a big pay cut and a big cut in his future and security," Justin Zahniser said.

Justin Zahniser said it was during the early 1950s when his grandfather began to realize the need to craft a national wilderness policy into law.

Howard Zahniser drafted the original Wilderness Act in 1956.

Later that year, the bill was introduced in Congress. U.S. Rep. John P. Saylor, of Pennsylvania, introduced it in the House of Representatives and Minnesota Sen. Hubert Humphrey introduced it in the Senate.

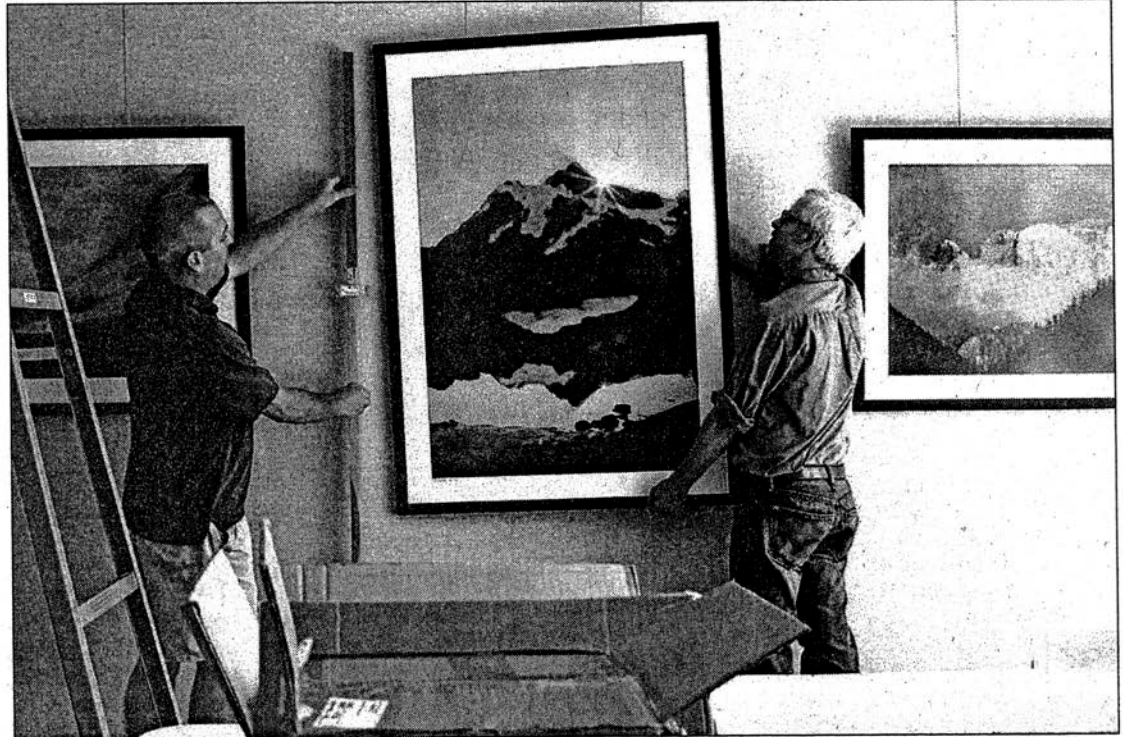
From 1956 to its passage in 1964, Howard Zahniser wrote 66 drafts of the Wilderness Act and attended all 18 public hearings on the bill.

He also personally lobbied nearly every member of Congress in support of the legislation.

"He even had my dad and his siblings lobbying on the weekends," Justin Zahniser said. "They would go into Capitol Hill on the weekends. Back in those days, the senators and Congress people couldn't afford to fly home every weekend, so they'd be in the offices unprotected by staff, so my dad and his siblings would go in and leaflet them and tell them about their wilderness experience."

"His perseverance and persistence were part of the equation, but what he also did is he had a very pragmatic approach to lobbying," Johnson said. "He did not have an adversarial relationship with anybody who opposed his legislation. He sets a high example of how other conservationists should and could model their own wilderness advocacy work."

Howard Zahniser died of a massive heart attack on May 5, 1964.



CONTRIBUTED/Ben Klein, The (Warren) Times Observer

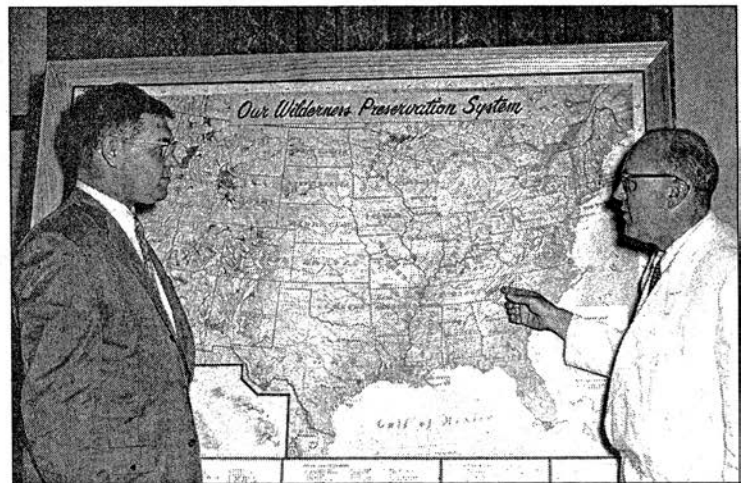
Friends of Allegheny Wilderness Executive Director Kirk Johnson and Crary Art Gallery board of directors Vice President Thomas Paquette hang a photo by Kevin Ebi as part of the exhibit: "Wilderness at 50" at the Crary Art Gallery in Warren.

"He knew it was coming," Justin Zahniser said. "There's a remark where he was testifying before, I think, a Senate subcommittee. He had labored breathing and was sweating and it was really tough. He made some comments where he felt like his days were a bit numbered. He said something to the effect that, 'The passage of the bill seems much more guaranteed for survival than me at this point.'"

Howard Zahniser is buried at Tionesta Riverside Cemetery, which overlooks the Allegheny River.

"He worked on every single draft of the bill and he testified at every hearing nationwide," Justin Zahniser said. "Even in failing health, he never gave up."

RON LEONARDI can be reached at 870-1680 or by e-mail.



CONTRIBUTED/Denver Public Library, Western History Conservation

A photo from the 1960s shows U.S. Sen. Lee Metcalf, D-Mont., left, and Howard Zahniser looking at a map of U.S. wilderness areas. Zahniser, a Tionesta native, was instrumental in the writing and passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, which set aside federal land that would remain undeveloped for recreational use.