

# The Post-Journal

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## Wildlife Expansion Is A Good Thing

This week marks the 48th anniversary of the signing of the 1964 federal Wilderness Act.

The law directed that parts of existing federal wild lands be set aside — protected forever from development — for the benefit of Americans today and always. The United States was the first nation in the world to set aside pristine lands for permanent protection in their natural state.

Our region is lucky to have two forever-wild areas within the nearby Allegheny National Forest. The Allegheny Islands Wilderness consists of seven islands in the Allegheny River between Buckaloons Recreation Area and 56 miles down river to Tionesta.

Just east of one of the islands near Tidioute is the Hickory Creek Wilderness — a 8,630-acre tract that will forever offer opportunities to hike and backpack in an undisturbed dense northern hardwood forest with a tall canopy that enables flowers, ferns, shrubs and mosses to grow in abundance.

The designation does not bar humans from enjoying those lands. Rather, it means no development will ever be allowed. Further, unless Congress specifically says it is OK in a particular area, no motorized equipment nor equipment used for mechanical transport is allowed on federal lands designated as wilderness. Camper, hikers and day visitors are encouraged to follow the seven standards of the Leave No Trace principles.

Today, the National Wilderness Preservation System contains 109,501,022 acres — more than half of that in Alaska. There are 757 designated federal wilderness areas in 44 states and Puerto Rico. The excellent website [www.wilderness.net](http://www.wilderness.net) notes that only about 2.7 percent of the contiguous United States — an area about the size of Minnesota — is protected as wilderness.

Although recreation and scenic beauty are obvious benefits, they are by no means the only — nor most important — wilderness values.

Wilderness areas protect watersheds for many cities and rural areas. They serve as critical habitat for threatened wildlife. They improve air quality because of the filtering action of green plants and forests. They maintain gene pools to provide diversity of plant and animal life.

And wilderness areas are simply good for our nation's collective soul.

We salute the wilderness preservation system and support its continued reasonable expansion.