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Wild and wonderful

45 years ago, a blow was struck for conservation

With suburban sprawl encroaching on many parts of America and the pressure for oil drilling threatening others, it is worth pausing to appreciate the nation's wild places where nature has not succumbed to development — and to praise those who protected them. The great stretches of wilderness that sit as jewels on the American landscape were not saved by accident.

Forty-five years ago on this date, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Wilderness Act, which not only protected the first 9 million acres in 54 statutory wilderness areas but also set the stage for other milestone wilderness legislation in the decades to follow.

President Johnson had strong bipar-

tisan support for the bill and, while the environment has not always been every politician's friend, the support for wilderness has occurred under both

Republican and Democratic administrations. Indeed, as the Campaign for American Wilderness points out, President Ronald Reagan was particularly active, signing wilderness laws affecting 22 states in a single year.

Western Pennsylvania can take pride in what was done 45 years ago today. The late U.S. Rep John Saylor, a Republican from Somerset

County, was a prime sponsor of the Wilderness Act, which was drafted by the late conservationist Howard Zahniser from Venango County. Whole forests stand as testaments to their memory.

