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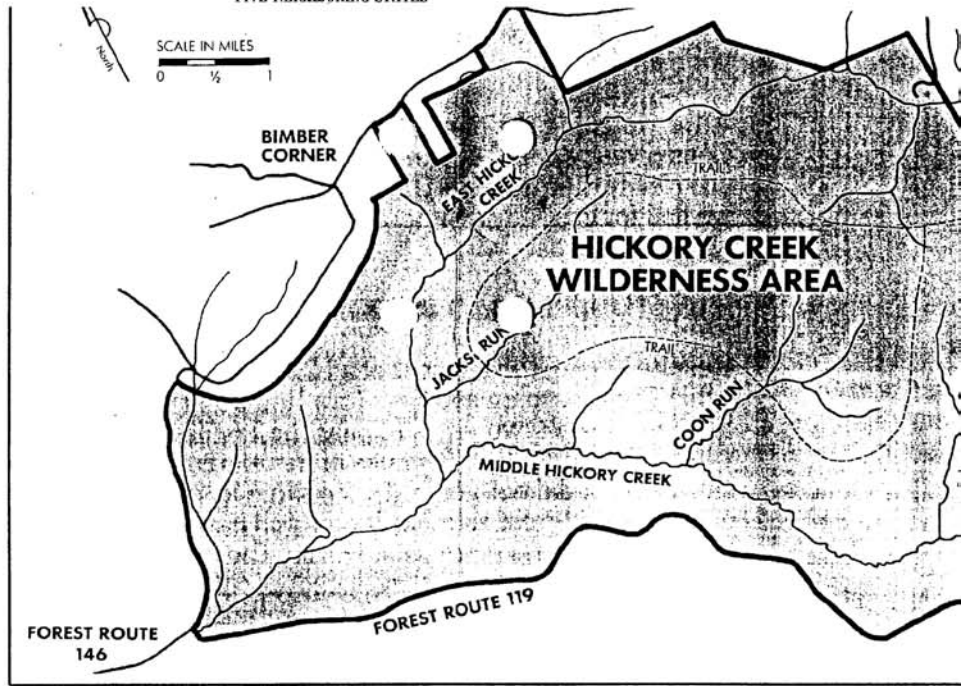
NUMBER 1

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CONSERVANCY RISKS \$2 MILLION
TO PAVE THE WAY

HICKORY CREEK DESIGNATED FEDERAL WILDERNESS AREA IN ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST

FIRST IN PENNSYLVANIA AND
FIVE NEIGHBORING STATES



Just east of Tidioute (Warren County), 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, there is a very special place—a true, unspoiled wilderness known as Hickory Creek.



Bill Ransdover

This exceptional wild area lies along the western edge of Allegheny National Forest. No highway cleaves the gentle, rolling hills around the Hickory Creek wilderness. Deer, wild turkey, beaver, black bear, and other wildlife go their own way through 9,425 acres of hardwood forest, open meadows, bogs, and beaver ponds. And in East Hickory Creek itself, the water is so pure that native brook trout abound without help from the hatcheries.

Now, thanks to the cooperation of conservationists and government and business leaders, Hickory Creek has been designated as wilderness—culminating a 10-year struggle for federal protection.

WHY HICKORY CREEK?

In addition to its many pristine natural qualities, four factors contributed to the value of this area as an eastern wilderness:

1 Accessibility

Hickory Creek is within easy reach of over 13 million people residing in five states.

2 Road locations

No vehicular roads bisect the land. All access is peripheral and the boundary roads have minimal traffic.

3 Surface ownership

All land within the boundary is owned by the U.S. Forest Service, so no additional acquisitions and displacements of private owners were necessary.

4 Need and demand for wilderness

Prior to Hickory Creek, there was *no* federal wilderness in Pennsylvania, nor in the surrounding states of Ohio, New York, Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland. Hickory Creek offered perhaps our last best chance to provide residents of this heavily populated region with an opportunity to experience a wilderness environment close to home.

POTENTIAL DESTRUCTION



Bill Ransdover

Despite the strong argument in favor of Hickory Creek's wilderness designation, a major problem overshadowed the project. As with most of the Allegheny National Forest land, all subsurface mineral rights in the Hickory Creek area were privately owned.

Given the volume of oil and gas thought to underlie this area, it was only a matter of time before exploration and drilling would begin. Such actions could have largely destroyed the wilderness values of the land.

While the Conservancy is *not* opposed to development and prudent removal of needed natural resources, we believe that such activity should be channeled around places of exceptional scenic, scientific, and recreational value—places like Hickory Creek.

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THE \$2 MILLION GAMBLE

Therefore, after much research and negotiation, the Conservancy obtained an option to buy most of the mineral rights in Hickory Creek. By reselling these rights to the Forest Service, we could prevent future despoliation of the land and help clear the way for federal wilderness designation.

In doing so, the Conservancy had to risk nearly \$2 million without any assurance that the mineral rights could be resold. At the time, federal funding for these rights simply did not exist.

After weighing the move very carefully, the Conservancy board decided to take the financial risk rather than lose the one, best hope we had for creating an important eastern wilderness area.

TOUGH ROAD IN CONGRESS

Despite having the support of all 23 Pennsylvania Congressmen and Senators Heinz and Specter, it took two years to pass the Pennsylvania Wilderness Bill. Because of its relatively small size, it did not generate the same level of national interest as other larger and better known wilderness proposals. During the long and hard negotiations, every aspect of the bill came under close scrutiny and was subjected to intensive debate.

Finally, on October 23, 1984, President Reagan signed the Pennsylvania Wilderness Bill into law and Hickory Creek officially became the state's first federal wilderness area.

ALLEGHENY ISLANDS WILDERNESS

In addition to Hickory Creek, the Pennsylvania Wilderness Act established the Allegheny Islands Wilderness. This comprises seven

islands in the Allegheny River totaling about 363 acres. Three of these islands had previously been acquired by the Conservancy and sold to the Forest Service as part of our ongoing Allegheny River project. Wilderness status will protect the interesting and diverse plant and animal life on the islands, which will be managed for appropriate recreation, conservation, and educational uses.

ALLEGHENY NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

The Pennsylvania Wilderness Act also designates four other parts of Allegheny National Forest as the Allegheny National Recreation Area. Totalling 23,100 acres, they include: the *Allegheny Front* along the Allegheny River; *Tracy Ridge* on the east bank of the Allegheny Reservoir; the *Cornplanter* area which lies on the opposite shoreline of the reservoir; and the northern part of the *Allegheny Reservoir*.

In these areas, conservation of scenic, wilderness, cultural, scientific, educational, and other values will be emphasized. Hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation is permitted. However, existing private rights in these places are fully protected. Owners of oil, gas, and mineral rights will be able to explore and develop their resources, provided they do so in a manner consistent with sound environmental practices.

A FAIR AND REASONABLE BALANCE

We believe that the Pennsylvania Wilderness Act of 1984 is good legislation that strikes a fair and reasonable balance on the tough issues of wilderness protection and national recreation area designation in the national forest. It sets aside the most pristine part of Allegheny National Forest, while allowing removal of needed resources in other, less sensitive areas.