



Thursday
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T-Storms
41°/43°



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Stewardship weekend set for Hickory Creek Wilderness

BY ROB ANDERSEN

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The Friends of Allegheny Wilderness will hold sponsor a trail stewardship project on the 13 mile Hickory Creek Wilderness Trail on April 19 through 21.

Participants will start at the trailhead on Hearts Content Road on Friday, April 19, spend two nights in the wilderness, and hike out on Sunday. Since straight lines do not appear in nature, axes are acceptable to clear obstacles, but no crosscut, bow saws, or power tools will be allowed to maintain the rustic nature and appearance of the trail.

In addition to clearing debris from the trail, volunteers should bring wire brushes to carefully remove illegal graffiti and trail blazes from tree trunks.

Wilderness, according to the 1964 Wilderness Act, is "an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which...generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature..."

From Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia, within wilderness areas, the Wilderness Act strives to restrain human influences so that ecosystems (the Wilderness Act, however, makes no specific mention of ecosystems) can change over time in their own way, free, as much as possible, from human manipulation. In these areas, as the Wilderness Act puts it, "the earth and its community of life



Photo submitted to Times Observer

Previous year volunteers

From left, Kirk Johnson, Kay Thompson and Tom Tefft participated in FAW Hickory Creek Wilderness Trail stewardship project last fall.

are untrammelled by man."

Because of this description, the Allegheny National Forest tries to keep the trail looking as natural as possible. Blowdowns are natural events, so they won't be cleared if the following conditions are met: they can be stepped over; they can be ducked under; and they can be by-passed without damaging the soil, sensitive plants, or existing archeological resources.

Additionally, there are very few federal personnel to maintain trails, and they frequently are needed for other areas of concern, so the ANF depends on volunteers to help as much as possible.

There is no charge to participate, although everyone will need to bring their own food, camping gear and come prepared for any weather condi-

tions.

Kirk Johnson, executive director of FAW said "We clean the trail twice a year, in the spring and fall, and as needed such as when a major storm hits." He also noted that a group of students from Clarion University Bios Club would be attending. When asked about the number of participants in the past, he said "Usually three to ten. There never has been more than ten, and that is good because (many more) would be unwieldy."

The FAW primary goal is working with communities to promote increased wilderness protection by the ANF, but they also do volunteer work including ecological restoration in the Hickory Creek Wilderness and removal of refuse from the Allegheny Islands Wilderness, in

addition to trail work.

The United States Congress designated the Hickory Creek Wilderness in 1984 and it now has a total of 8,630 acres. All of this wilderness is located in Pennsylvania and is managed by the Forest Service.

The trail is the only designated trail within the wilderness and is managed for foot travel only. The rolling 13 mile loop provides for easy day hikes as well overnight backpacking opportunities along flat to moderately steep terrain.

Hickory Creek Wilderness and the Allegheny Islands wilderness, composed of seven islands are the only two wilderness areas in Pennsylvania.

For more information or to register for the project, call (814) 723-0620 or email info@pawild.org.