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Working Together On The ANF - First In A Series

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness works with USFS on conservation projects

By BEN KLEINbklein@timesobserver.com

Friends of the Allegheny Wilderness and the Allegheny National Forest Chapter of the North Country National Scenic Trail Association are two local groups working tirelessly in the Allegheny National Forest.

FAW has an expansive network with a mailing list of 4,900 with additional email contacts that continues to reach followers through Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/friends-of-alleghenywilderness>.

"Nearly 50 local, statewide, and national organizations represent together hundreds of thousands of people have formally endorsed our Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest: <http://www.pawild.org/supporters.html>," FAW Executive Director Kirk Johnson said. "FAW and our supporters have substantially influenced protections for wild areas of the ANF. For example, during the last Forest Plan revision, more than 6,800 out of 8,200 public commentators on the draft Forest Plan wrote specifically in support of FAW and our Citizens' Wilderness Proposal."



Photo by Luke Bobnar

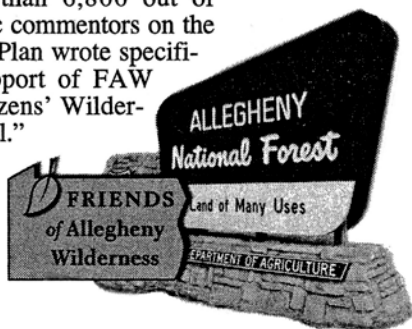
An FAW backpacking trip in March of 2010 in the Hickory Creek Wilderness.

As a direct result of this work, two new wilderness areas (Chestnut Ridge and Minister Valley) were recommended by the Forest Service in their revised Forest Plan which was published in 2007. Further, several thousand additional acres from the Citizens' Wilderness Proposal were also allocated by the Forest Service as "Remote Recreation Areas" in the new Forest Plan.

"Remote Recreation Areas are well-protected, almost like de facto wilderness areas, albeit on an administrative level and not legislated," Johnson said.

"In addition to our primary mission of working to permanently protect wilderness areas under the Wilderness Act of 1964, FAW has also since 2001 been the formal adopting stewardship organization for the 13-mile Hickory Creek Wilderness trail, keeping the trail clear of brush

and tree limbs for other wilderness hikers to enjoy," Johnson said. "We typically do two or three trail stewardship projects per year, with our next one slated



for the weekend of April 11th through the 13th. Over the years, dozens of FAW volunteers have participated in these trail stewardship weekends."

FAW members also participate in the Allegheny River Cleanup every year helping to remove trash from the Allegheny Islands Wilderness between Buckaloons and Tidioute.

Members are also on the lookout in the ANF for any sign of the hemlock wooly adelgid — a non-native invasive insect that is deadly to eastern hemlock trees.

In order to reach their goals, FAW has to work extensively with the forest service.

"FAW and our volunteers have always had a very good working relationship with all ANF personnel from the Forest Supervisor to the two District Rangers, and everyone else on down the line. I can't think of anyone at the ANF who is not friendly and helpful," Johnson said.

We look forward to cooperating with the ANF right along years into the future, with a number of different projects already



Photo by Tim Tefft

Taken during the FAW's annual spring stewardship project on the Hickory Creek Wilderness trail last April.

lined up in 2014, the 50th anniversary year of the Wilderness Act of 1964. FAW is a formal partner group of the National Wilderness Stewardship Alliance, which works to develop citizen stewards of designated wilderness areas all around the country. So we work not only with the local ANF, but with Forest Service personnel on a national scale as well."

FAW like any small non-profit organization, has found funding a "perpetual concern," Johnson said.

"When the economy took such a terrible downturn toward the end of 2008, many small non-profits around the country began to find it more of a challenge to keep the coffers full. FAW has

been no different in that regard," he said.

FAW's annual spring stewardship weekend on the Hickory Creek Wilderness trail will be held over the weekend of April 11 through the 13. There is no charge to participate, but participants are asked to bring all of their own food and camping equipment, and come fully prepared for whatever weather conditions we might encounter.

People can contact FAW at info@pawild.org to get more information or to sign up for the weekend.

Next week: The North Country Trail Association.