



# TIMES OBSERVER

Warren, Pa.

www.timesobserver.com

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## Allegheny's Tracy Ridge prime example of wilderness in east

In the May 17th edition of the *Times Observer*, a letter writer furnished the subjective claim that "wilderness still lies in the western states, not the eastern states," and that Pennsylvania has no "real wilderness." I thank the writer for providing the opportunity to remind readers of the manifest applicability of the Wilderness Act of 1964 to federal lands throughout the east, including right here in Pennsylvania.



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The Wilderness Act has of course applied to the Allegheny National Forest, and to all federal lands in the east, since the moment President Lyndon Johnson put pen to paper on September 3rd, 1964 and signed this landmark bill into law. However, in the early 1970s, even though it had already been repeatedly applied to thousands of acres in the east, some in the U.S. Forest Service sought to redefine the Wilderness Act as being somehow inapplicable to eastern national forest lands with their "Wild Areas East" campaign. The Wild Areas East legislation would have established a separate, significantly less protective version of the Wilderness Act for eastern national forests - something that those who find it

difficult to abandon their deep-seated compulsion to "manage" every square inch of forest on Earth could more readily live with.

The U.S. Congress's resounding and definitive response to the agency's nefarious obfuscation was to pass the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1975, which explicitly states that "in the more populous eastern half of the United States there is an urgent need to identify, study, designate, and preserve areas for addition to the National Wilderness Preservation System."

When signed into law by President Gerald Ford, the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act established 16 new wilderness areas in 12 eastern states, totaling 206,988 acres. Then-Pennsylvania Senators Hugh Scott and Richard Schweiker were enthusiastic cosponsors of the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act, and had included qualifying untrammelled Allegheny National Forest acreage at Allegheny Front, Hickory Creek, and Tracy Ridge in the Senate version of the bill.

Eastern wilderness champion and U.S. Congressman John P. Saylor of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (who first introduced the Wilderness Act in the House of Representatives in 1956) stated on the House floor on January

11th, 1973 in opposition to the Wild Areas East canard, and in support of the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act:

"I know very well what the Wilderness Act says and what it intended...I have fought too long and too hard, and too many good people in this House and across this land fought with me, to see the Wilderness Act denied application...by this kind of obtuse or hostile misrepresentation or misconstruction of the public law and the intent of the Congress."

Today there are nearly 200 wilderness areas encompassing millions of acres created by the actions of multiple Congresses and Presidents on federal lands east of the 100th meridian, including some - but not nearly enough - here in the Allegheny. The spirit and intent of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (which provides for the "establishment and maintenance of areas of wilderness"), the Wilderness Act, the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act, and other relevant federal statute on this issue should be enthusiastically respected, embraced, and indeed celebrated by everyone. All Allegheny National Forest staff, and all U.S. Forest Service Region 9 staff, are charged by law with supporting and implementing the Wilderness Act for all lands in the Allegheny that qualify (as opposed to, for example, per-

petually looking for ways to avoid doing so).

A prime example of such an eminently qualifying area right in our own backyard is the wildly popular 9,700-acre proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area - which Senators Scott and Schweiker had included in the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act - and its 30-plus miles of undeveloped hiking-only trails (including nine miles of the spectacular North Country National Scenic Trail), located along the eastern shoreline of the Allegheny Reservoir.

In recommending this rare and important Keystone State wildland for wilderness designation in their 2006 Draft Forest Plan, Allegheny National Forest staff wrote of Tracy Ridge that "the majority of the area appears natural and untrammelled...characterized by steep rugged terrain leading to high plateau uplands set in a wooded landscape intermixed with streams and continuous forest cover," with "a mix of opportunity for solitude and serenity, self-reliance, adventure, challenging experiences, and primitive recreation," supplying "high potential to provide the wilderness attributes and values appropriate for wilderness designation."

They concluded by writing "there are few places on the Forest that offer as high quality scenery, natural integrity and wide scale ecosystem function as Tracy Ridge."

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