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 to Coudersport**
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Wilderness group files objection regarding Tracy Ridge trail plans

By JOSH COTTON

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 Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is fighting back.

FAW was one of roughly 10 people and organizations to file objections to a proposal by Allegheny National Forest officials to open up some of the trails at Tracy Ridge to mountain bikers.

"We believe that this bizarrely handed development scheme for one of the Keystone State's exceedingly rare and untrammeled wildlands ultimately will not stand," FAW Executive

County News

Director Kirk Johnson said.. "It represents an existential threat to the stunning 9,700-acre proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area, and to the long-term integrity of the ubiquitously cherished North Country National Scenic Trail," Johnson concluded.

In a Facebook post in response to our story on the objection period closing, FAW outlined several specific areas on which its objection is based.

"The ANF's failure to prepare a full Environmental Impact Statement

for the project (as opposed to the cursory Environmental Assessment that they rotely and hurriedly prepared) was arbitrary and capricious."

"The ANF failed to seek meaningful input from wilderness advocates from the beginning of the process while adopting a temerarily patronizing and dismissive posture toward that demographic, while by stark contrast openly and enthusiastically courting mountain biking groups. There was never even the slightest air of objectivity."

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Tracy Ridge...

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- “Opening the hiking-only trails at Tracy Ridge to mountain biking may have the practical effect of permanently barring a wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964 for this eminently qualifying area.”

- “The proposed Mountain Biking On Hiking Trails project puts the integrity of the non-motorized foot-traffic-only North Country National Scenic Trail at risk.”

- “The advent and exploding popularity of stealth motorized mountain bikes (e-bikes) means that no mountain bikes at all may be permitted on any non-motorized trails anywhere in the ANF — particularly at the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area — due to the fact that it is impossible to distinguish motorized mountain bikes from traditional mechanical mountain bikes without closely inspecting each machine. Motorized trespass will occur with regularity everywhere mountain bikes are allowed to go.”

The group cited a previous study in the ANF in support of their conclusions.

“Remember that by the ANF’s own extensive 2006 analysis, the entire proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area is ‘natural and untrammled,’ provides abundant opportunity ‘for solitude and serenity, self-reliance, adventure, challenging experiences, and primitive recreation,’ and has ‘high potential to provide the wilderness attributes and values appropriate for wilderness designation.’”