



Friends of Allegheny Wilderness seeks to foster an appreciation of wilderness values and benefits, and to work with local communities to ensure that increased wilderness protection is a priority of the stewardship of the Allegheny National Forest.

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December 2015

The Wilderness Would No Longer Be There For Anyone

By Tionesta native and Wilderness Act of 1964 author Howard Zahniser, 1957

*"...It is not for the sake of any privileged few that we are thus working so strenuously for wilderness preservation, but rather for all Americans. We feel that the privilege of a wilderness experience is something to which every American is entitled, including those who are not yet born. There is no person that we should like to see excluded. We are indeed trying to keep out buildings, roads, airplane-landing fields, mechanical vehicles...and all the things that make the wilderness **not** the wilderness. That often makes it look as though we are trying to keep out people because these 'things' would all bring people. But, as we see it, they would not bring them to the wilderness because the wilderness would no longer be there for anyone...."*

-From The Wilderness Writings of Howard Zahniser, Mark Harvey, editor, University of Washington Press, 2015.

The Keystone Hiker: the Newsletter of the Keystone Trails Association

December 2015

Major Mountain Biking Proposal Floated for Rare Pennsylvania Wildland

By Kirk Johnson, Executive Director
Friends of Allegheny Wilderness

Protecting wilderness in America's federal public lands under the Wilderness Act of 1964

is of course every bit as vital and relevant today as it was when Pennsylvania conservationists Howard Zahniser of Tionesta and The Wilderness Society, and Representative John P. Saylor of Johnstown, shepherded the bill to fruition in the U.S. Congress more than 50 years ago, establishing America's National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) for present and future generations to use and enjoy.



Tranquil summer evening at our Polly's Run campsite along the southern shoreline of the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area during a June, 2011 10th anniversary of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness backpacking trip. Photo by Tom Tefft of FAW.

Efforts to see wilderness protected in Pennsylvania date back to the early 1970s when members of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club and others began researching the possibilities for the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) in the northwest part of the Keystone State. Pennsylvania Senators Hugh Scott and Richard Schweiker subsequently supported the Sierra Club's efforts by initially including 30,000 acres of the ANF within the...

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...Eastern Wilderness Areas Act of 1975, which ultimately designated more than 200,000 acres of 14 eastern national forests as part of the NWPS. Unfortunately, local Congressman Albert Johnson blocked inclusion of the ANF acreage as part of the landmark bill, so that prime opportunity was lost.

One of the most notable areas that the Sierra Club identified for wilderness designation, and that our Senators then supported, was a sprawling 9,700-acre undeveloped roadless tract located along the eastern shore of the Allegheny Reservoir straddling the Warren County-McKean County line known as Tracy Ridge. Cloaked by a remarkable unbroken maturing forest of hemlock, white pine, and hardwoods, it is the largest and perhaps the most obvious wilderness candidate area in the entire ANF. It contains dozens of miles of hiking-only trails, including a nine-mile segment of the North Country Trail – a national scenic trail like the Appalachian Trail.

View the 1973 Sierra Club wilderness proposal for Tracy Ridge:

<http://www.pawild.org/pdfs/TracyRidgePratt1973.pdf>

Though other important areas of the ANF, known as Hickory Creek and the Allegheny Islands, were finally designated wilderness in 1984 under the Pennsylvania Wilderness Act, regrettably to this day Tracy Ridge still lacks this critical level of protection. This despite the fact that no management or developments have occurred in the area since the Sierra Club’s 1973 proposal – meaning,

axiomatically, that through the inevitable process of natural succession the area has grown only more wild and untrammelled in the intervening 40-plus years, and therefore nothing but increasingly qualified for wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act.

Areas of federal public land protected as wilderness are highly natural, “untrammelled” by man as the Wilderness Act states, and are to be left unmanaged in their natural condition in perpetuity. There are no roads, no permanent developments, and motorized and mechanized uses such as ATVs and mountain bikes are prohibited. Wilderness areas are in essence rare sacred nature reserves in which Leave No Trace principles must be practiced and only the lightest touch we can muster in everything that we do should be applied.



Hiking the North Country National Scenic Trail in the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area, June 2011. Photo by Kay Thompson of FAW.

In 1993, ANF personnel embarked on a major trail analysis for Tracy Ridge to determine which trails could be upgraded, and, importantly, they also asked whether or not mountain biking should be allowed in the area. During the subsequent public comment period, essentially everyone who wrote in supported the Forest Service’s efforts to upgrade the Tracy Ridge hiking-only trail system – including the North Country Trail – for hiking use only. All of the major hiking groups, including Keystone Trails Association

(KTA), opposed mountain bike use in the area.

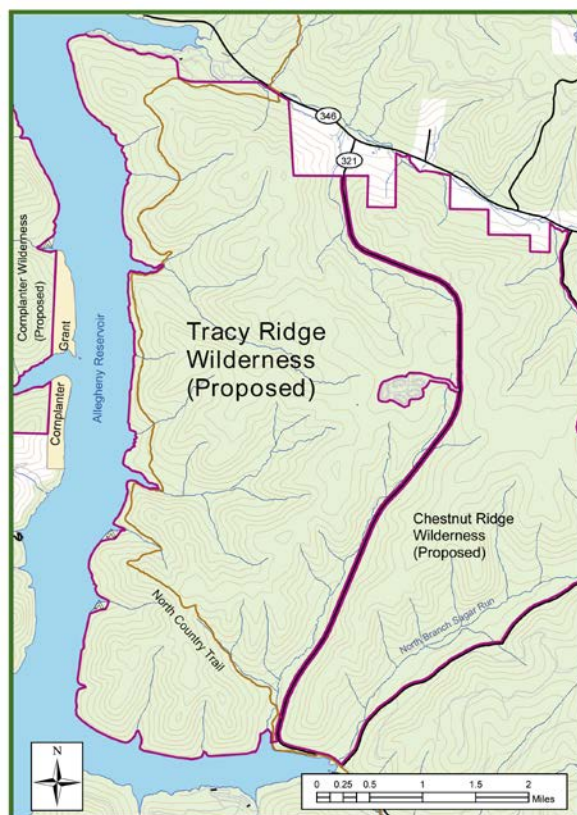
In his Tracy Ridge comment letter, former KTA president Hugh Downing wrote “I especially support your proposal to exclude mountain bike use of the trails in this area. There are numerous forest roads within the ANF suitable for bicycle use. Please keep them off the hiking trails.” In a later letter, following the agency’s decision to not allow mountain biking in Tracy Ridge, Downing wrote “I’m in full support of your decision to exclude...mountain bike use on these trails. I’m sure you’ll receive complaints, but I’m also sure that there are other areas of the Forest where their presence would be acceptable.”

North Country Trail Association (NCTA) executive director Patricia Allen also wrote to express her concerns on behalf of the NCTA, stating “We sincerely appreciate your efforts to upgrade the trail and for designation of the section for hiking use only. This is consistent with our efforts to assure that the trails for hiking be built and maintained so that they will not need constant repair due to erosion.”

Locally well-known leaders of the Allegheny Outdoor Club (AOC) Merl Caldwell, Donald Dorn, and others, also contacted the Forest Service on behalf of AOC in opposition to allowing mountain biking on the hiking-only Tracy Ridge trails. AOC co-president at the time Marcia Ziki wrote “I would strongly urge you not to consider allowing use of the trail by mountain bikes.”

The ANF agreed with the reams of public comment received on this project, and ruled mountain biking (and horseback riding) on the Tracy Ridge hiking-only trails untenable, due primarily to concerns over erosion issues and user conflicts. ANF Bradford District Ranger Stanley Kobielsky wrote in his June 10, 1994 decision notice that the “soils and topographic conditions of the area will not

support equestrian and mountain bike use...the channeling effects of tire tracks would create additional erosion problems. These effects could be mitigated but not without extensive shoring up of our sideslopes and hardening of the tread with additional surfacing material. These actions would be expensive, are likely to change the character of certain trail segments, and would add additional maintenance costs to the system. I also believe that adding...



9,705 Acres

Map of the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area from the ubiquitously-supported Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania’s Allegheny National Forest. The nine-mile segment of the North Country National Scenic Trail contained within the proposed wilderness is shown.

...mountain bike use to the existing trail system would increase the number of user contacts, which in turn, would adversely effect the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum, (ROS), class of semi-primitive non-motorized, (SPNM). Such changes would not be acceptable. Based on these factors, equestrian and mountain bike use will be prohibited on

designated trails within...Tracy Ridge.”

A bit later, in 2001, Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) was formed specifically to advocate that as much acreage as possible be identified for wilderness designation as part of the ANF’s formal 2003-2007 Forest Plan revision process. Our detailed *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania’s Allegheny National Forest...*

www.pawild.org/pdfs/CitizensWildProp.pdf

...objectively delineates more than 50,000 acres that should be made part of the NWPS, including the wildly popular Tracy Ridge. Of the 8,200 public comments the agency received during the Forest Plan revision process, more than 6,800 – greater than 80 percent! – specifically supported wilderness designation for Tracy Ridge, FAW, and the *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal* in general.

KTA strongly supported FAW and the *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal* during this Forest Plan revision. In 2005, Hugh Downing stated “Keystone Trails Association and Friends of Allegheny Wilderness share the same values when it comes to preserving land for minimal-impact recreational purposes. One of the nation’s premier hiking trails, the North Country Trail, traverses the ANF. That’s just one of the reasons Keystone Trails Association is happy to join Friends of Allegheny Wilderness in advocating the preservation of these unique areas of the ANF.”

See the 2005 joint KTA/FAW press release:

www.pawild.org/pdfs/Keystone_Trails_Association.pdf

When the Forest Service published the draft version of their Forest Plan in 2006, Tracy Ridge was included in their “preferred alternative” as a recommended wilderness area. Naturally, they found that it was highly qualified for wilderness designation. In the

final Forest Plan published in March of 2007, however, to the surprise of most wilderness consideration for Tracy Ridge had been arbitrarily and capriciously removed by the agency. Not because it was not qualified for wilderness designation, but simply because some special interests wanted to retain the possibility of establishing uses in the area that are not consistent with wilderness designation.



Along the North Country Trail near Nelse Run toward the southern end of the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness. Photo by David Johnson of FAW.

FAW is of course *not* opposed to mountain biking in general in the ANF. Over the years, FAW, The Wilderness Society, and others have made concessions to and agreements with mountain biking groups such as the Northern Allegheny Mountain Biking Association and the International Mountain Biking Association for important areas of the ANF.

For example, we have back-burnered advocating wilderness designation for the Morrison Run area because the Morrison trail is now used and maintained for mountain biking. We have adjusted our proposed addition to the Hickory Creek Wilderness and proposed Allegheny Front Wilderness to accommodate mountain biking on the Tanbark Trail in those areas. We also publicly support the proposed Jake’s Rocks 40-mile epic mountain biking trail that is not far from coming to fruition.

Unfortunately, we have recently learned that another group is now preparing a proposal for mountain biking on the hiking-only trails

within the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness. Once mountain biking is established in this important area, designating it as wilderness would become far more difficult because mountain biking as a mechanical use is (correctly) not allowed in wilderness. Also, the erosion and user conflict concerns identified by so many experts in 1993 are still relevant and applicable today.

So far the Forest Service has not started any planning on this mountain biking proposal, but if and when it moves forward (quite possibly in early-to-mid 2016), there will be formal scoping and a full NEPA process. It would be better if the idea of mountain biking on the hiking-only trails in the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness was simply withdrawn and never even gets to the point of formal planning.



Winter backpacking in the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area, March 2014. Photo by Kirk Johnson.

You can help! Please contact the ANF's Bradford District Ranger Rich Hatfield a.s.a.p. and *respectfully* impress upon him why permanent wilderness protection under the Wilderness Act for the entire 9,700-acre Tracy

Ridge is so important to you, why the hiking-only character of all of the trails in the area should be perpetuated, and therefore why he should no longer entertain mountain biking ideas for the area. Mr. Hatfield has only been on the ANF for less than six months, so may not yet fully appreciate the vast and deep-rooted love for Tracy Ridge and the North Country Trail that is out there. That is where you come in!

Contact info:

Bradford District Ranger Rich Hatfield
29 Forest Service Drive
Bradford, PA 16701
814-363-6098
rhatfield@fs.fed.us

Thank you very much for taking action on this important issue!

Kirk Johnson is executive director for the Warren-based non-profit Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, www.pawild.org, and a board member for the North Country Trail Association, www.northcountrytrail.org.

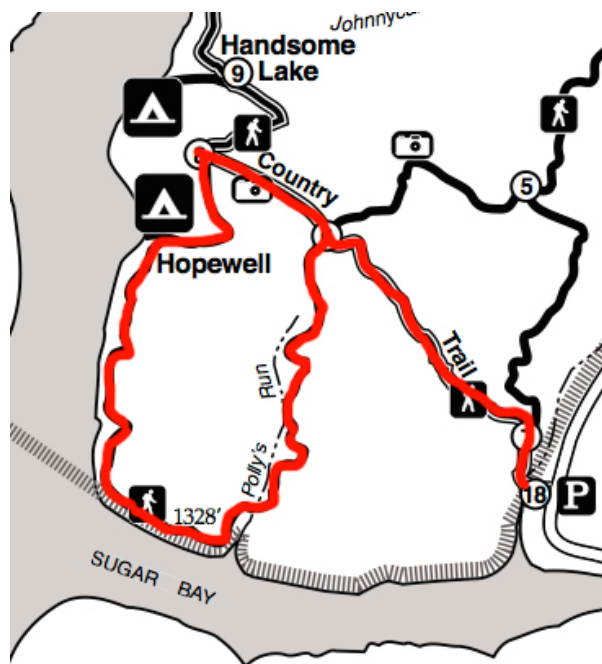
Article reprinted with the permission of the Keystone Trails Association.

FAW Winter Backpacking Into the Proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness January 30th - 31st

The dates and location for the annual Friends of Allegheny Wilderness winter backpacking trip have been selected. During the weekend of January 30th and 31st, we will be backpacking nine miles into the remote, untrammelled backcountry of the southern end of the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area. We will camp Saturday evening near Polly's Run, a picturesque stream that flows south into Sugar Bay.

This route, which includes part of the North Country Trail, is an old favorite of FAW's and

one on which we have taken several backpacking trips over the years. It is just the right length for an overnight trip, and provides a wide diversity of terrain and scenery over the course of the hike. Polly's Run is a peaceful, secluded south-facing valley and a wonderful place to camp for a night. The starting and ending point will be the North Country Trail trailhead on State Route 321 near the east end of Sugar Bay.



There is no charge to join in this backpacking trip, but all participants must bring all of their own food and camping gear, and come fully prepared for any weather conditions that we may encounter. A good cold-weather sleeping bag is highly recommended, for example. If you would like additional information about this trip, or would like to sign up, please email us at info@pawild.org.

Thank you and hope to see you on the trail!

Tracy Ridge Beginner Backpacking Weekend Next June With FAW and Chapman State Park

It is obviously quite early, but you can definitely put this neat event on your 2016 calendar now if you are interested! Friends of

Allegheny Wilderness and Chapman State Park confirmed back in October that we will team up next summer to facilitate a beginning backpacking weekend into the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area on June 18th and 19th. We will be joined by Jen Moore, environment educator for Chapman State Park.



Backpacking the remote, undeveloped hiking-only Tracy Ridge trails, June 2011. Photo by Kay Thompson of FAW.

Beginning orientation will be at Chapman State Park first thing on Saturday morning, June 18th, where we will describe what to bring in your backpack and how best to pack it, how to dress, other basics, etc., and then we'll all shuttle up to Tracy Ridge. The hike will be kept relatively short for our beginner backpackers — there are a lot of trail options on the beautiful interconnected hiking-only trails of the Tracy Ridge trails system. It will certainly be less than ten miles round-trip, and perhaps closer to five miles. We will camp within the proposed wilderness on Saturday night and hike out on Sunday.

More details to be decided when Jen gets back

to work at Chapman in March following her winter break. There may be a small charge to help with the facilitation of this beginning backpacking program, but likely not very much. If you have ever wanted to try your hand at backpacking but have needed a little nudge to get out there and give it a shot, this might be just the opportunity for you!

Get it on your calendar now, and watch for more details in March!

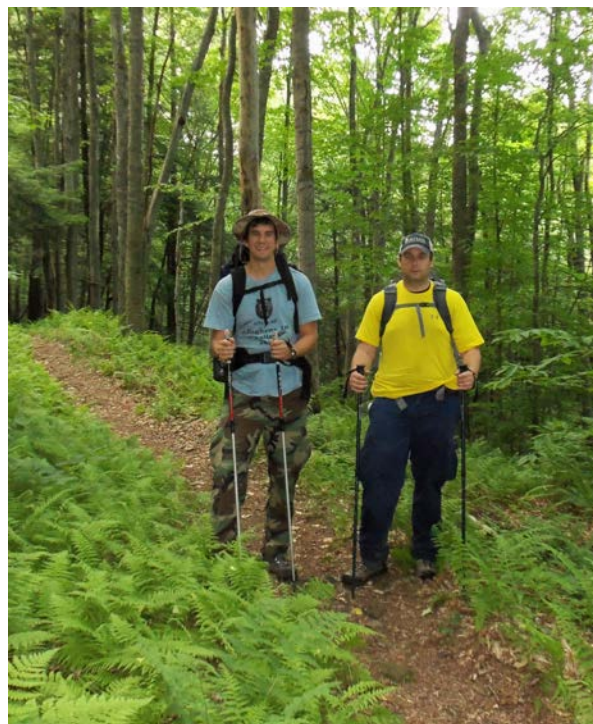
Hike 100 Challenge on the North Country National Scenic Trail

In 2016, the National Park Service – the federal agency that oversees the North Country National Scenic Trail – is celebrating their centennial anniversary, and everyone can take part in the celebration. The centennial will kick off a second century of stewardship of America’s national parks and engaging communities through recreation, conservation, and historic preservation programs.



To commemorate this special centennial year, the North Country Trail Association will be promoting a *Hike 100 Challenge*. 100 miles for 100 years of the National Parks!

Anyone who hikes 100 miles on the North Country Trail during the 2016 calendar year – in aggregate or all at once – will be eligible for a special patch and certificate. Every time you go out on the North Country Trail, whether you’re by yourself, with friends, or doing trail work as a volunteer, keep track of those miles. They will add up fast!



Adam Beveridge (right), and his brother, of Sharon, Pennsylvania in the proposed Minister Valley Wilderness Area during the annual A-100 North Country Trail event, June 2012. Photo by Kirk Johnson.

The North Country Trail runs for 95 miles through the Allegheny National Forest, including through areas FAW has proposed for wilderness designation such as Tracy Ridge, the Tionesta old-growth forest, and Minister Valley.

Click here for more information about the *Hike 100 Challenge*:

<https://northcountrytrail.org/get-involved/special-events/hike-100-challenge>

Congratulations to the National Park Service on 100 years of protecting some of America’s most spectacular wildlands!

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Chicken of the woods (*Laetiporus sulphureus*) is a bracket fungus found growing on tree trunks throughout North America. It is sulfur-yellow to bright orange in color, and is eaten by both wildlife and humans. Some say it tastes like chicken. Anyone who has spent time hiking in the ANF's wilderness has likely seen chicken of the woods, probably sometimes in abundance. Photo by Luke Bobnar.

Your contribution to Friends of Allegheny Wilderness goes directly to saving wilderness!

Yes, I want to support Friends of Allegheny Wilderness and help protect Pennsylvania's Wilderness.

Yes, I want to contribute! Here is my donation of (circle one):

\$20 \$35 \$50 \$100 \$500 \$1,000 \$_____

Please make checks payable to "Friends of Allegheny Wilderness." Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is an IRS 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. Donations are tax deductible. The official registration and financial information of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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