



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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Keep our wild areas wild, wilderness areas wilderness

By Mike Bleech

Do not let their foot in the door. There are people who would prefer that all forms of outdoor recreation be allowed on all public lands. These people, I believe, are a small minority even within their user groups, and probably driven by business interests.

We see it beginning in our area with a proposal to allow mountain bikes to use trails in the Tracy Ridge area, and in the western states where there has been a proposal to allow mountain bikes to use designated wilderness areas.

This is simple opinion given realizing the risk of alienating groups I would rather not alienate because I am strongly in support of these groups, specifically timber interests, mountain bikers, even motorized trail use. Each has its place and deserves support because each is good for the economy and each gets people outdoors.

Most important among these are the timber companies. The timber industry is vital to our area. To tree huggers I would suggest they consider that we would not have the high quality forests we now have without timber management on private lands. To those in the timber industry who allow public access, thank you, thank you, thank you.

To mountain bikers I offer support for many more miles of trails. There is plenty of room for them. These mountain bike trails, allowing for relatively minor mishaps, make a big contribution to public health by building physical fitness. Mountain bike

trails bring in tourism dollars.



Lifelong Warren, PA citizen, sportsman, outdoors columnist, and wilderness advocate Mike Bleech.

Several lightly used areas would be perfect settings for mountain bike trails. Forest planners certainly could come up with an ideal mountain biking trail location, with input from mountain bikers. Sensitive headwaters streams could be avoided, while at the same time allowing people to use mountain bikes to access excellent fishing streams.

But not at Tracy Ridge, nor in any designated wilderness area. Easing access into a wild area through the use of machinery immediately takes away the wild part of it.

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Tracy Ridge is the most logical area on the Allegheny National Forest for future wilderness designation. In its current state, it is the largest and maybe the best wild area on the ANF.

Should the ANF have more wilderness area?

I think, yes. Some more would be good for the local economy. Designated wilderness areas attract visitors. This fits the multi-use concept on the ANF.

Even during winter we see vehicles parked at trailheads that access the Hickory Creek Wilderness. Often, judging by the types of vehicles, groups from colleges hike and camp on this wilderness area.

Spending time in wilderness is an experience that can not be replicated elsewhere. The longer one is in a wilderness, the more natural human feelings and senses reappear. The mind clears. Thought processing improves. Imagination intensifies. Primal fears surface, which is not a bad thing since fears are vital to avoiding troubles.

By the time a person has been in a wilderness long enough, howling coyotes spice the adventure. Sing back at them.

Listen to all of the wild sounds. With enough time you can hear the plants. Listen to the wild silence.

In a wilderness a person gains appreciation of little things and the overall picture.

Clearly I recall an experience in an Adirondack wilderness area when I watched a confrontation between a frog and a toad of equal size. It evolved from a stare-off into a jumping for height contest. Fascinating, especially viewed in the light of a small campfire.

Many among us feel the urge to spend time in wild surroundings. Many, many more should try

it. There is no greater cure for the stresses of modern life than spending time in wilderness. But do it the right way. Do not civilize the wilderness.

Nowhere can a person relax better than in a wilderness area, without the numbing effects of artificial stimulation such as television, computers, radio and music. Leave portable radios and DVD players at home. Take only the bare essentials.

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Warren Times Observer

Friday, June 17, 2016

Allegheny's Tracy Ridge prime example of wilderness in east

By Kirk Johnson

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 an 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.

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 untrammeled Allegheny National Forest acreage at Allegheny Front, Hickory Creek, and Tracy Ridge in the Senate version of the bill.



Joe Hardisky of the North Country Trail Association and Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (left), and Gary Thornbloom of the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club (right) survey the wild, untrammeled landscape next to an American chestnut tree (*Castanea dentata*) along the North Country National Scenic Trail within the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area.

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, perpetually 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 untrammeled...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.”

Kirk Johnson is executive director for the Warren-based non-profit organization Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (www.pawild.org).

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Indiana bat (*Myotis sodalis*) is a medium-sized bat native to the hardwood forests of North America. The Indiana bat is gray, black, or chestnut in color and weighs less than half an ounce. As an insectivore, it will eat both terrestrial and aquatic flying insects. The Indiana bat is formally listed as an endangered species by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area is considered to be high-quality Indiana bat habitat.

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 \$_____

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