



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.

From the Director

Greetings from the home region of Wilderness Act author Howard Zahniser! You hold in your hands the first newsletter of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, a new non-profit organization dedicated solely to the protection of wilderness in the Allegheny National Forest -- Pennsylvania's only national forest. 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. We will promote a positive message of wilderness values through our citizen's inventory of potential wilderness on the Allegheny, and we seek the establishment of an enduring grassroots commitment to Pennsylvania wilderness.

The next several years represent a critical juncture for wilderness in Pennsylvania. With one third of the nation's population within a day's drive of the Allegheny National Forest, there is a great need to designate new federal wilderness here, where wilderness representation is low. Only about 9,000 acres, or less than 2% of the Allegheny is designated wilderness. Nationally, 18% of national forest land is designated wilderness. The Allegheny Forest Service will begin revising their Forest Plan in the near future, providing an opportunity to reevaluate the wilderness situation on the Allegheny.

Our choice is clear: we can worry over the steady erosion of the wilderness legacy that makes Pennsylvania unique, or we can take positive action. We can inventory our

remaining wilderness, educate, and activate our fellow citizens so we can leave part of our natural heritage permanently protected for future generations.

On the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness website, you'll be able to get involved in a variety of activities. You'll be able to get information on wilderness issues, learn how to make donations of time and money, and take a tour through the remaining wild areas of the Allegheny.

Please take an interest in what is happening to our last wild areas in Pennsylvania, and commit to getting involved in whatever way your interests, talents, and schedules afford (we can use whatever you have to offer!). To find out how to get involved, email us at alleghenyfriends@earthlink.net, or log on to www.pawild.org. See you in the wild!

--Kirk Johnson

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness Formed!

by Kirk Johnson and Kelly Clark-Greer

On February 12, a coalition of interested citizens, including Pennsylvania wilderness veteran Peter Wray of the Sierra Club, collectively calling ourselves Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, huddled in a back room of Pittsburgh's Squirrel Hill public library to remember the Pennsylvania wilderness efforts that came before, and talk about what the future holds.

Efforts to protect wilderness under the federal Wilderness Act of 1964 on the Allegheny

National Forest (Allegheny), began in the early 1970s when the Sierra Club completed a study of the largest roadless areas here. Three tracts were recommended for wilderness as a result of this study -- Allegheny Front, Hickory Creek and Tracy Ridge roadless areas. A chance to give these areas wilderness status came in 1974 when Congress was debating the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act (EWAA). This legislation had strong support from Pennsylvania's two Republican Senators Hugh Scott and Richard Schweiker.

As Senator Scott said on the Senate floor on May 31, 1974 in regard to the EWAA, "Mr. President, I am proud to have played a role in developing this bill. I hope the Senate will approve it and pave the way for swift action in the House of Representatives."

Senator Schweiker followed Senator Scott in addressing the Senate, saying "This bill will help preserve for the millions of people in the eastern region of our country, now and in the future, unspoiled natural areas to be enjoyed in their original state. It is important that we act now to preserve these unique areas many of which are located within easy access of our most heavily populated areas. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this important legislation."

Unfortunately, despite the support of Senators Scott and Schweiker, inclusion of the Allegheny in the EWAA was blocked in the U.S. House by local Congressman Albert Johnson, who asserted in the October 22, 1974 *Warren Times Observer* that "if you fly from Pittsburgh to Harrisburg as I do, you'll realize Pennsylvania is nothing but wilderness."

Later, the Pennsylvania Wilderness Act of 1984 did designate the Hickory Creek and Allegheny Islands Wilderness Areas, but it also states that other areas of the Forest cannot be considered for wilderness while the 1986 Forest Plan is still in effect. It was clear to all of us at the meeting that it was time to pick up where the local Sierra Club had left off in 1984. We, thirty years later, still had time to advocate ideas that should have been implemented in

1974. In fact, right now seems the most opportune time, as the long-awaited Forest Plan revision process will begin soon with the hiring of a forest planner this fall.

Only 1.74% of the Allegheny, at Hickory Creek and Allegheny Islands, is designated wilderness. This is an abysmally low figure as compared to the national average, and even as compared to other eastern national forest land where wilderness is rare anyway. We need additional wilderness here for human recreation -- the Allegheny lies within a day's drive of one third of the nation's population! Even the Forest Plan acknowledges that "it seems obvious that the demand for wilderness designation on the forest is high, and the available supply in the regional area is low."

In the dark little library room we flipped through slides of green forest juxtaposed with the results of industrial extraction. We knew we needed more wilderness. The slides told us we needed more. In addition to human centered recreational purposes, we need wilderness to provide undisturbed refuge for many important Allegheny wildlife species such as the black bear, yellow bellied flycatcher, cerulean warbler, the reintroduced fisher, and perhaps the eventual recovery of the eastern cougar.

In a speech at the Wilderness 2000 Conference in Denver last fall, former Forest Service Chief Michael Dombeck stated that "In revising our forest plans, we must specifically look for areas suitable for wilderness designation...We need millions of additional acres of wilderness." We have a lot of unfinished wilderness business in the Allegheny!

During our meeting, we reviewed tracts that still retain high-quality wilderness attributes including areas outlined in the early 1970s but were never designated, as well as others. These areas include:

Tionesta Scenic and Research Natural Areas. This 4,100-acre tract of old-growth forest and surrounding Forest Service land should be a priority for wilderness designation. This is an extremely rare and ecologically invaluable

remnant of eastern old growth forest, but it is threatened by oil and gas drilling and timber harvesting around and within its borders. The Forest Service stated in 1997 that the Tionesta Research Natural Area is "one of the most valuable old-growth remnants in the eastern U.S. This fact is evidenced by the 10-fold increase in research activity on the Area over the past decade." The North Country Trail, a National Scenic Trail like the Appalachian and Pacific Crest Trails, passes through the Tionesta Scenic Area, and would be a major attraction to the new Tionesta Wilderness Area.

Allegheny Front National Recreation Area. This 7,393 acre area was identified as being roadless during the RARE II surveys, and designated as a National Recreation Area with the passage of the Pennsylvania Wilderness Act in 1984.

Tracy Ridge National Recreation Area. Like Allegheny Front, this 9,000 acre tract was one of the roadless areas suggested for wilderness in 1974 during the EWAA debate.

Expansion of the Hickory Creek Wilderness Area. In 1984, most of the Hickory Creek roadless area was designated wilderness. This wilderness area is approximately 8,600 acres. By expanding the existing wilderness to the north, the headwaters of Hickory Creek itself could be annexed.

Minister Valley Roadless Area. This RARE II roadless area stands at 1,417 acres. For wilderness designation, several thousand acres of contiguous land adjacent to the established Minister roadless area should be included to the west and north.

Clarion River Roadless Area. This area stands at 3,777 acres of roadless land with the potential to expand it beyond 5,000 acres. As its name implies, it lies along the picturesque Clarion River, this segment of which was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River in 1996.

We discussed the compelling fact that if all of these areas were to be designated wilderness,

the Allegheny would be approaching 50,000 acres of wilderness, or nearly 10% of the area of the national forest. While still far below the national average for Forest Service land, this figure is more in line with other eastern national forests.

At this point in the meeting it was almost 7:30 and we were all on a strict schedule. We looked at each other and at the photograph of the Allegheny forest on the slide projection screen. We knew that it was going to be difficult, but it was worth it.

If you have thoughts about these or other areas of the Allegheny that you would like to see designated wilderness, please send us your ideas! Or join Friends of Allegheny Wilderness as we begin our citizen's inventory of these and other areas. You can also join the efforts to gain additional wilderness on the Allegheny by getting involved in the Forest Plan revision process early on. Let the Forest Service know early and often that the Allegheny desperately needs a significant amount of new federal wilderness! To contact the Forest Service to get involved with the Forest Plan revision process, write to Forest Supervisor Kevin Elliot, Allegheny National Forest, P.O. Box 847, Warren, PA, 16365 or call (814) 723-5150.

*Wilderness Act Author & PA Native
Howard Zahniser Honored*

Howard Zahniser, executive director of The Wilderness Society from 1945 to 1964 and author of the federal Wilderness Act of 1964, was from Tionesta, Pennsylvania located on the southwest border of the Allegheny National Forest. On August 13, Zahniser's legacy will be honored with the dedication of a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker near Tionesta along the Allegheny River. Local residents, members of the Zahniser family, Congressman John Peterson and other interested folks will be on hand to pay homage to this great Pennsylvanian. The Forest County Historical Society, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, The Wilderness Society, and Pew

Wilderness Center are joining Friends of Allegheny Wilderness in sponsoring the event. Look for a review of the ceremony in the next Friends of Allegheny Wilderness newsletter!

FAW Receives Seed Money

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is grateful to the Huplits Wildlife Fund Committee of the Sierra Club who recently unanimously

approved a start up grant in the amount of \$7,000 for FAW. This will contribute significantly to the early success of the new effort to designate additional wilderness in the Allegheny National Forest.

FAW is also grateful to the Allegheny Group Sierra Club, our first official donor, who recently approved a donation of \$50 to FAW.

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 all checks payable to 'Friends of Allegheny Wilderness'

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

E-mail _____

Send to:
Friends of Allegheny Wilderness
220 Center Street
Warren, PA 16365

Website: www.pawild.org

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