

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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Among the old-growth

By Cindy Ross

In the midst of a deep forest, where the floor is so thick and spongy that my feet cannot touch hard ground, gigantic downed trees force me to climb over them on all fours. As I maneuver over a tree, I spy tiny eastern hemlocks and birch trees growing on the moss-covered back of the fallen giant. The downed tree is serving as a "nurse log," providing food and protection for the seedlings. This natural occurrence is found only in extremely rare pockets of native old-growth areas, such as the 4,100-acre Tionesta Scenic and Research Natural Areas in the Allegheny National Forest, where I am visiting today.

Here, 500-year-old eastern hemlocks, more than 40 inches in diameter, tower 125 feet above the forest floor. Tionesta shelters the largest old-growth forest between the Great Smoky Mountains and the Adirondacks in the eastern United States, and it lies within a day's drive of hundreds of thousands of wilderness-starved Americans.

The forest is a living classroom for scientists. In the Allegheny National Forest of northwestern Pennsylvania, usually a dozen different research projects are going on at any given time. More than 100 scientific papers have been written on the Tionesta Research Natural Area alone. I have come to this area to learn how a tree that has fallen provides value as it decays and rots away.

Some modern-day foresters believe that when a tree's vigor deteriorates, so does its ability to provide benefits. But, as I learn, downed giant trees provide some of the most valuable

elements in the fragile ecosystem of an old-growth forest.

Decomposing nurse logs transform into a moist, elevated pile of fertilizer, which makes an ideal environment for seeds and sprouts to grow. On top of these huge logs, tiny seeds do not have to compete with faster-growing seedlings on the forest floor, are not smothered by leaf litter, and are safe from fungus pathogens to which they are susceptible. The nurse log also provides greater warmth and longer snow-free periods.



Ancient eastern hemlock tree (*Tsuga canadensis*), Allegheny National Forest. Photo by Dean Wells.

It's not unusual to see an entire line of mature trees growing along the path of a fallen nurse log that has since rotted away. In some forest

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systems, these downed trees are the only place where new woody plants are able to start.

Animals, too, benefit from a fallen tree. Because the logs hold moisture like a sponge, amphibians, such as wood frogs, depend on the trees for survival. The logs provide hiding places for squirrels and songbirds, drumming sites for grouse, preening locales for birds, sunning spots for turtles and other reptiles, and runaway areas for mice and voles. The centipedes, beetles, fungi and ants that feed on the nurse logs become food for such animals as skunks, bears and woodpeckers.

When a large tree falls into a stream, it plays a critical role in that aquatic environment. The trees create deep pools, shady areas and shelter, and thus diversify the habitat for a greater variety of fish, invertebrates, algae and other organisms.



The Allegheny woodrat (*Neotoma magister*) is listed as a threatened species in Pennsylvania and has been considered for the federal endangered species list. Unlike the more common non-native Eurasian rat, the Allegheny woodrat is a lover of wilderness, making its home in caves, rocky cliffs, ridge crests, and boulder fields.

Throughout my day here, I feel at peace, but it's a different kind of peace than when I am visiting a state park or forest. This rare remnant of

Eastern old-growth forest, an area virtually untouched by humans, exudes a sacredness that I've never experienced before. It reminds me that when the natural cycle of life is allowed to occur without any interference, our planet still thrives, just as it has done for billions of years. Places like Tionesta serve as a powerful reminder that we are not the only species on earth.

Designations of Allegheny National Forest Areas to be Decided Soon

Over the next year, the U.S. Forest Service will make important decisions about how the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) lands will be used in the future. As required by law, the resource management plan of a national forest must be examined every 15 years or so.

Although the United States has vast wilderness areas, only 0.2 percent of them can be found in the 11 eastern states between Maine and Maryland. With less than 2 percent of the land base of the Allegheny National Forest protected as wilderness as part of America's National Wilderness Preservation System, the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness and their many supporting groups are promoting a plan to ask Congress to significantly expand the wilderness area in the ANF.

Every species of mammal found in Pennsylvania wilds, including river otters and fishers, can be found in the Allegheny National Forest. Five threatened or endangered species, including the bald eagle, also make their home in or near the ANF.

To find out more about the Allegheny National Forest, contact the USDA Forest Service at 814-723-5150 or www.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny.

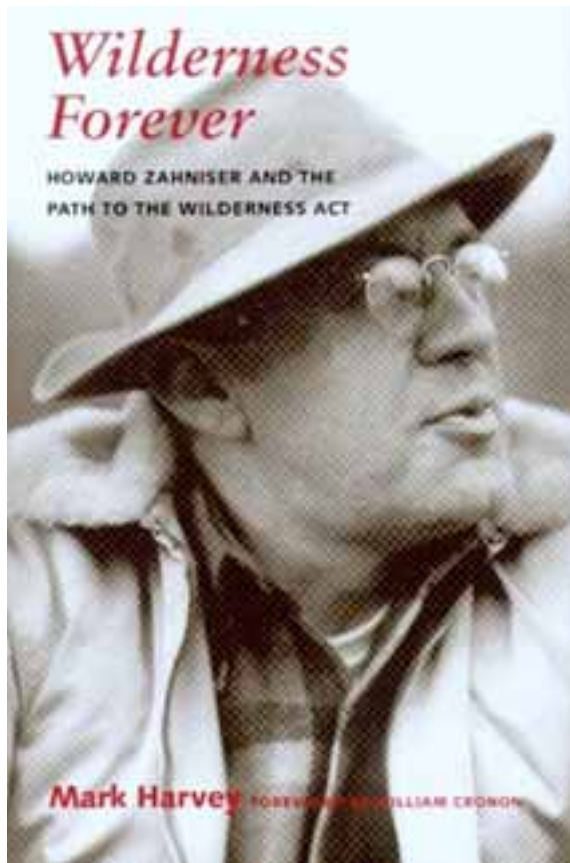
The Friends of Allegheny Wilderness have proposed to the Allegheny National Forest that the Tionesta Scenic and Research Natural Areas be considered for wilderness study areas. For information about this effort, contact the Friends at 814-723-0620; www.pawild.org; alleghenyfriends@earthlink.net.

This article is reprinted with permission from the Sept./Oct. 2005 issue of Pennsylvania Magazine. If you'd like to receive a free sample of the magazine, send an email request to PaMag@aol.com with "old growth" in the subject.

New Biography of Tionesta Native & 1964 Wilderness Act Author Published!

Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act By Mark Harvey

As a central figure in the American wilderness preservation movement in the mid-twentieth century, Howard Zahniser (1906-1964) was the person most responsible for the landmark Wilderness Act of 1964. While the rugged outdoorsmen of the early environmental movement, such as John Muir and Bob Marshall, gave the cause a charismatic face, Zahniser strove to bring conservation's concerns into the public eye and the preservationists' plans to fruition. In many fights to save besieged wild lands, he pulled together fractious coalitions, built grassroots support networks, wooed skittish and truculent politicians, and generated streams of eloquent prose celebrating wilderness.



Zahniser worked for the Bureau of Biological Survey (a precursor to the Fish and Wildlife Service) and the Department of the Interior, wrote for Nature magazine, and eventually managed the Wilderness Society and edited its magazine, Living Wilderness. The culmination of his wilderness writing and political lobbying

was the Wilderness Act of 1964. All of its drafts included his eloquent definition of wilderness, which still serves as a central tenet for the Wilderness Society: "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain." The bill was finally signed into law shortly after his death.

Pervading his tireless work was a deeply held belief in the healing powers of nature for a humanity ground down by the mechanized hustle-bustle of modern, urban life. Zahniser grew up in a family of Free Methodist ministers in Tionesta, Pennsylvania, and although he moved away from any specific denomination, a spiritual outlook informed his thinking about wilderness. His love of nature was not so much a result of scientific curiosity as a sense of wonder at its beauty and majesty, and a wish to exist in harmony with all other living things. In this deeply researched and affectionate portrait, Mark Harvey brings to life this great leader of environmental activism.

Mark Harvey is professor of history at North Dakota State University in Fargo. He is the author of *A Symbol of Wilderness: Echo Park and the American Conservation Movement*.

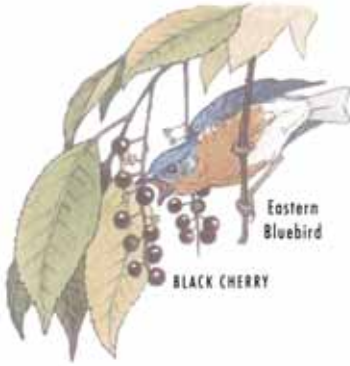
Wilderness Forever is available the University of Washington Press:
www.washington.edu/uwpress/index.html

Join Our E-mail List!

FAW maintains an active email listserve on which subscribers are regularly updated on developments regarding efforts to designate additional wilderness in the Allegheny National Forest. This is an informational list, with relevant newspaper articles, event announcements and action alerts being the typical fare. Over the last two years, there has been an average of about two emails a week sent to subscribers. If you would like more frequent updates on FAW's efforts than this newsletter provides, please send an email to alleghenyfriends@earthlink.net and ask to be subscribed to our listserve. We will not share our email list with other organizations or businesses, so you will not receive unwanted "spam" email as a result of subscribing.

View A Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest online at: pawild.org/exec_summary.html

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*Illustration from: Peterson's Field
Guide to Eastern Forests (1998)*

Your Contribution to Friends of Allegheny Wilderness Goes Directly to Saving Wilderness!

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