



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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Allegheny gets push for wilderness

By Don Hopey

Stephen Robar, a political science professor at the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, enjoys hiking and snowshoeing in the Allegheny National Forest and wants to see wilderness opportunities for those recreational pursuits preserved and expanded.

That's why Dr. Robar joined 53 other scientists and academics last week in endorsing a proposal to designate eight new wilderness areas totaling 54,640 acres on the national forest in Elk, Forest, McKean and Warren counties.

"This is a very reasonable effort to bring balanced wilderness values to the Allegheny National Forest, where the inclusion of some additional wilderness uses is warranted," said Dr. Robar, who is also director of the environmental studies program at Pitt Bradford. "I'm in full support of the various, multiple uses of the forest, but sportsmen, recreationalists and backpackers could all benefit from more wilderness."

The six-page letter signed by Dr. Robar and a host of botanists, biologists, herpetologists, ecologists and economists supports the wilderness designation proposal of the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, a group formed eight years ago to advocate for more wilderness in the state's only national forest, 100 miles northeast of Pittsburgh.

Wilderness designation, according to the letter, would help improve ecological diversity and health on the entire Allegheny Plateau, protect

endangered species and preserve forest landscapes threatened by timbering, expanding oil and gas drilling and road building.



Winter camp in the interior of the proposed Clarion River Wilderness Area. Photo by R.J. Mauk.

The 513,000-acre forest has just two wilderness areas totaling 8,979 acres, or less than 2 percent. On average, 18 percent of all national forest land in the U.S. is designated wilderness and protected from road building and development in the National Wilderness Preservation System. That system includes a total of 107 million acres, but very little – two-tenths of 1 percent – is located in the Northeast.

The proposal by Friends of Allegheny Wilderness would increase the amount of wilderness designated in the Allegheny to 63,619 acres, about 12 percent of the forest and in line with other national forests in the eastern part of the nation.

"This bold statement from the scientific community underscores the need to bring...

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...real balance to the multiple uses of the Allegheny National Forest," said Kirk Johnson, executive director of the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness. "We know that there will always be logging, motorized recreation and oil development here, but the continuing integrity of our remaining wild areas is very much in jeopardy and requires the swift action of the Congress to alleviate the threat."

The letter and a new 15-minute video produced by the group and highlighting the forest's proposed wilderness areas were sent to the state's congressional delegation and are part of a reinvented effort to gain congressional support for wilderness expansion in the forest.

Pennsylvania's senators and U.S. Reps. Glenn Thompson, R-Centre, and Kathy Dahlkemper, D-Erie, two first-term members of Congress representing districts that include the forest, would have to support and introduce legislation to expand the forest's wilderness acreage.

Jordan Clark, chief of staff for Mr. Thompson, said the new congressman received the letter but hasn't had a chance to review the group's wilderness proposal. Ms. Dahlkemper was unavailable for comment.

"The Allegheny is unique. It's a multiple-use forest, with recreation, oil and gas drilling and timbering, so it's the economic engine for four or six counties," Mr. Clark said. "It's very complicated because anytime anyone proposes anything in the forest, it affects everything else. A proposal like this would have to be looked at very thoroughly."

Since the federal Wilderness Act became law in 1964, only the 8,600-acre Hickory Creek

Wilderness and seven islands in the Allegheny River totaling 368 acres were declared wilderness in 1984. Proposals to establish more wilderness areas in the Allegheny have been opposed by timbering, oil and gas industries that view wilderness designations as an unnecessary restriction on economic development.

The Allegheny Forest Alliance, a group representing the timber industry, school districts and municipalities near the forest, has said expansion of wilderness there isn't justified by use or economics.

"Wilderness on the Allegheny is a very polarizing idea," Mr. Johnson said. "Black cherry timbering is profitable and there's a strong constituency that says all the land should be available for that use and it's unacceptable to set aside 12 percent of the forest for protection."

The Friends of the Allegheny Wilderness' proposal, made after its members conducted a two-year forest inventory, was published in the fall of 2003 to coincide with, and attempt to influence, a revision to the forest's 10-year management plan. During that planning process the U.S. Forest Service received 8,200 public comments with more than 6,800 favoring the group's wilderness proposal.

The resulting Forest Service management plan, released in March 2007, proposed two new wilderness areas totaling 12,379 acres. That's not as much as Mr. Johnson would like, but he'd take it.

"Only a small percentage of the Allegheny qualifies for wilderness and unless we act soon," he said, "these areas of the forest could be lost to development, oil and gas drilling, timbering and roads."

Don Hopey can be reached at dhohey@post-gazette.com or 412-263-1983.

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Wilderness and the Loving Eye

By Ed Zahniser

The federal Wilderness Act of 1964 recognizes, as the poet William Bronk writes, that we humans

live—*always*—in what Bronk called “the permanence of ignorance.” Human knowledge is temporal and provisional. *Temporal*: Human knowledge is bound by the *time* in which we know what we know, and *provisional*: it is only true *provided* that most everything else we think we know is also true. The Wilderness Act applies this humility about how we know things to the land and its community of life.

This essence of the Wilderness Act lies in its use of *untrammelled* to define the essential character of wilderness, its wildness. To leave land untrammelled is to refuse to project onto that land our human desires. To leave land untrammelled is to leave it free from getting enmeshed in our thinking and our propensity to manipulate.

It is to honor the land as it is, to let it be self-willed, and to let it live by its own inherent processes, free of manipulation. Wouldn't that be a lovely outcome for the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest*?

Guardians, Not Gardeners

As Bill McKibben writes, the question about human knowledge is at least as old as the Hebrew Scriptures' *Book of Job*. In it God questions Job's knowledge and understanding. “Where were you when I drew a circle on the face of the deep?” God asks Job. “Where were you when I laid the foundations of the Earth?” “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the cords of Orion?” Human knowledge is temporal and provisional.

The question that *untrammelled* asks is similar: *To what imminent future are we the past that will be contradicted?* Having no sure answer, we must be guardians of wilderness and not gardeners. We must protect wilderness at its boundary, not by manipulations inside it. Humility is the portal for entry into any wilderness.

My father Howard Zahniser (1906–1964) is credited as the primary author and chief lobbyist for the Wilderness Act. He wrote that one potential benefit of experiencing wilderness is that it can convey to us the reality that we are *dependent* and *interdependent*—as well as *independent*—members of the whole community

of life on Earth that derives its existence from the Sun. And we may recognize that *we* truly prosper *only* as the whole community of life on Earth prospers.

“The Loving Eye Knows the Independence of the Other”

The Wilderness Act asks of us a profound humility before wilderness and the wildness it protects. As theologian Sallie McFague suggests, we need not stay stuck in our subject-to-object relationship with the world's otherness. We have the option of relating subject-to-subjects (plural) with that wonderful Otherness, the whole community of life on Earth.

McFague promotes an “attention epistemology,” a way of knowing that feminist Marilyn Frye likens to the loving eye: “The loving eye knows the independence of the other . . . It is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination.”

The fate of wilderness used to be subject to the whim of federal land managers. But under the Wilderness Act, it now takes an Act of Congress to designate wilderness—or to change its boundaries or protected status. The Wilderness Act casts a loving eye on the land. It knows and honors the land's independence.

Ed Zahniser lives in Shepherdstown, W.Va. The Wilderness Act created the National Wilderness Preservation System, which now protects more than 109 million acres of federal public lands, including 9,000 acres in two areas in Pennsylvania. To learn how you can support new wilderness proposals for Pennsylvania go to www.pawild.org. Learn more about wilderness at www.wilderness.net.

Wilderness Overnight Backpacking May 30-31

FAW weekend backpacking trip in the proposed Hickory Creek Wilderness addition and the existing Hickory Creek Wilderness Area. Approximately eight miles most of it off-trail. You will need to bring your own gear, food, and water. Contact Joe Hardisky of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness at hardis123@msn.com for more information or to RSVP.

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Mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) is a flowering evergreen shrub native to the eastern United States from southern Maine south to northern Florida. It is the state flower of Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Grows to 3-9 m tall, blooms between May and June. Mountain laurel is found on rocky slopes and mountainous forest areas, often in large thickets covering large areas of the forest floor.

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

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