



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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Potential Wilderness System Additions Identified in Commonwealth's Only National Forest
Friends of Allegheny Wilderness Releases Study Results for Allegheny

Warren, PA – Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW), a non-profit organization based in Warren, Pennsylvania, has released a proposal for designating new wilderness areas under the 1964 Wilderness Act in the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) to permanently benefit hunters, anglers, hikers, tourists, as well as the wildlife which uses the Forest.

The FAW publication, *A Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest*, is intended to coincide with the revision of the ANF's Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) which formally commences this fall. The Forest Plan, which outlines management priorities for the entire ANF, was last revised in 1986. The Forest Service is required by the 1976 National Forest Management Act to review the wilderness potential for the ANF as part of Forest Plan revision.

After two years of study, including hours of on-the-ground inventory work, analysis of computerized Geographic Information Systems data and other information, FAW has identified eight individual areas of the Forest, a total of 54,440 acres, as potential wilderness. The Wilderness Society, whose executive director from 1945-1964 was Tionesta native and Wilderness Act author Howard Zahniser, is supporting the FAW proposal.

The process for designating wilderness on America's public lands typically takes a significant amount of time and detailed negotiations amongst members of the public with widely ranging viewpoints on the subject. The FAW report is intended to inform discussion among interested individuals, and provide an objective recommendation to the Forest Service as they revise their Forest Plan.

If designated by act of Congress, new ANF wilderness areas would augment America's National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) which was established with the passage of the Wilderness Act. Originally encompassing approximately nine million acres, there are now more than 105 million acres in the NWPS, but only two wilderness areas totaling approximately 9,000 acres in the ANF – the Commonwealth's sole national forest. This acreage equates to less than 2 percent of the Forest as a whole. Nationally, 18 percent of Forest Service land is protected as wilderness and in the Forest Service's Eastern Region, of which the ANF is a part, the figure is 11 percent.

"While we recognize and applaud the importance of continued timber production and other multiple uses of the Allegheny National Forest to the region's economy and way of life, it must also be acknowledged that there is an acute shortage of protected wilderness here," said Kirk Johnson, executive director of FAW.

Wilderness protected under the Wilderness Act consists of significant parcels of federal public land, most often 5,000 acres or more in size, set aside to be left in their natural condition permanently. Hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and other forms of 'primitive' recreation are permitted in federal wilderness areas. Mechanized recreation such as use of bicycles, ATV's, and snowmobiles is not. New roads, permanent developments, logging and other forms of commercial extraction also are not permitted.

In the early 1970's former Pennsylvania Senators Hugh Scott and Richard Schweiker, both Republicans, advocated for the inclusion of more than 30,000 acres of ANF wilderness in the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act (EWAA), legislation which designated 16 new wilderness areas in 14 national forests in 12 eastern states.

According to the EWAA, "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." However, despite the strong support of Senators Scott and Schweiker, no ANF wilderness was designated under the 1975 EWAA due to action in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Areas proposed for wilderness under the FAW proposal include the 4,100-acre Tionesta old-growth forest west of Kane, the Clarion River roadless area near Ridgway along the National Wild and Scenic portion of the Clarion River, and a ridge-top in the northern panhandle of the ANF known as Chestnut Ridge which is being naturally recolonized by hundreds of American chestnut (*Castanea dentata*) trees.

"Our proposal is not an all or nothing proposition. We have objectively identified the most wild, undeveloped areas of the Forest with the fewest conflicts for their potential inclusion in America's National Wilderness Preservation System," Johnson stated. "Our proposal is intended to inform the public process of Forest Plan revision here on the Allegheny National Forest with regard to wilderness."

Johnson concluded, "We hope to ultimately win the support of Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation to designate substantial new wilderness in Pennsylvania's only national forest, which is located within a one-day drive of half of the nation's population."

On the web:

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness: www.pawild.org

Allegheny National Forest: www.fs.fed.us/r9/allegheny

The Wilderness Society: www.tws.org

Wilderness Information Network: www.wilderness.net

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