



*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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**PENNSYLVANIANS FAVOR CITIZENS' WILDERNESS PROPOSAL OVER DRAFT PLAN**  
***Public Overwhelmingly Supports More Allegheny Wilderness***

**Warren, Pennsylvania** – The vast majority of people who commented on the draft Allegheny National Forest (ANF) management plan asked the U.S. Forest Service to recommend more wilderness protections in the final revised plan than are offered in the four alternatives of the draft plan, according to a final tabulation of the public comment.

Of the 8,277 official comments received on the ANF's draft plan more than 6,800, or over 80 percent, were in favor of more protected wilderness for future generations to use and enjoy. Virtually all of those respondents specifically favored all eight areas identified in the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest*, published in 2003 by the non-profit Friends of Allegheny Wilderness. Just 875 comments were in opposition to more wilderness, with remaining comments specific to other components of the plan.

Less than two percent of the ANF is currently designated as part of America's National Wilderness Preservation System under the Wilderness Act of 1964. This compares to 18 percent of all national forest land nationwide, and 11 percent in the East. The acute ANF wilderness shortage is highlighted on page 5 of chapter 2 of the now under revision 1986 ANF Forest Plan: "It must be concluded that the demand for wilderness experience on the ANF is very high, given that half the country's population lies within a day's drive of the Forest...It seems obvious that the demand for wilderness designation on the Forest is high, and the available supply in the regional area is low."

The ANF is located within the recently established Pennsylvania Wilds tourism region, an area of natural beauty in north central Pennsylvania being promoted as a tourism draw. A recent Pennsylvania Wilds study found that nearly a third of all Pennsylvanians visit protected forest areas in the state, such as a wilderness area, at least once every year. Maximizing wilderness opportunities in the ANF would augment the ongoing Pennsylvania Wilds program – bringing a steady influx of tourism dollars to ANF communities such as Bradford, Ridgway, Tionesta, and Warren.

"Wilderness protection is a critical component of the multiple use management of our national forests," said David Sublette, an active member of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness. "While we recognize the importance of timber production and other uses of the ANF to the region's economy and way of life, it must also be acknowledged that there is an acute shortage of protected wilderness here. Even Alternative D of the draft plan, which offers four wilderness areas, does not go far enough in rectifying the situation."

Between 2001 and 2003 Friends of Allegheny Wilderness extensively surveyed the ANF and identified eight special areas, proposing them for wilderness designation in the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*. The

areas include Allegheny Front, Chestnut Ridge, Clarion River, Cornplanter, an expansion of the existing Hickory Creek Wilderness Area, Morrison Run, the Tionesta old-growth forest, and Tracy Ridge. An additional three areas were identified as potential National Recreation Areas: Minister Valley, Hearts Content, and Cornplanter South.

The Forest Service's preferred Alternative C of the draft plan recommends only two of these areas for wilderness study – Chestnut Ridge and Tracy Ridge. Alternative D does recommend four of these areas for wilderness study – Allegheny Front, Chestnut Ridge, Minister Valley, and Tracy Ridge. However, even Alternative D does not consider a number of highly deserving areas.

"The thousands of comments that poured into the Forest Service's office specifically in favor of the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* clearly illustrate just how important our remaining wild places are to people here in Pennsylvania, and throughout the country," said Kirk Johnson, Friends of Allegheny Wilderness executive director. "With public opinion now abundantly clear, we hope the Forest Service will listen to the people and recommend protection for all of the ANF's remaining wild places that all Americans enjoy equal ownership of."

Twenty separate local, regional, and national organizations have formally moved to support the proposed areas in the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*. They are as follows: Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, Butler Outdoor Club, Campaign for America's Wilderness, Eastern Native Tree Society, Explorer's Club of Pittsburgh, Finger Lakes Trail Conference, Howard County Maryland Bird Club, Keystone Trails Association, Lake Erie Group Sierra Club, Lehigh Valley Audubon Society, Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club, Pennsylvania Native Plant Society, Pennsylvania Republicans for Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania Trout Unlimited, Pine Creek Headwaters Protection Group, PrimalNature.org, Roger Tory Peterson Institute, Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education, Tiadaghton Audubon Society, and The Wilderness Society.

"We are disappointed that given this rare opportunity to rectify the wilderness shortage in the Allegheny, the draft plan identified only a fraction of what should in fact be designated," said David Saylor, a member of the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness Board of Directors and the nephew of former Pennsylvania Congressman John P. Saylor (R-Johnstown) – who originally introduced the Wilderness Act in Congress in 1956. "It is critical that we permanently protect what is left of the wonderful wilderness resource on this forest and to be bold with our wilderness efforts – not take baby steps," said Saylor.

"Friends of Allegheny Wilderness and our supporters congratulate the Forest Service for all of their hard work on the plan and for reaching this important milestone," concludes Johnson. "We recognize that it is not easy to balance the needs of all the different users of the ANF. However, we must also emphasize that it is critically important we remain vigilant that the overwhelming public demand for wilderness is not shortchanged, overlooked, or arbitrarily sifted to the bottom of the barrel during this process. We look forward to working constructively with the Forest Service and other stakeholders to ensure that ANF wilderness is ultimately properly represented."

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Online:

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness: [www.pawild.org](http://www.pawild.org)

Allegheny National Forest: [www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny)