

Position Statement of the Elk Township Historical Society on the  
Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest

Overview: In 2012, ETHS endorsed the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest*, but our primary focus is the areas located in Elk Township, known as the proposed Cornplanter Wilderness Area and the proposed Scandia National Recreational Area. Our purpose is to preserve and protect this pristine forestland, by an act of Congress, from destruction and commercial development.

The Present Allegheny National Forest: Of the total 513,300 acres of Allegheny National Forest, only 1.74 % is presently designated as wilderness. This is the Hickory Creek and the Allegheny Islands Wilderness areas, which total 9,000 acres.

Facts about the Relative Size of the Acreage: ANF has a disproportionately small amount of land devoted to Wilderness when compared to national forest land in other states. The proposed Cornplanter Wilderness and the proposed Scandia National Recreation Area combined comprise 7,774 acres. This combined acreage is only 1.52 % of the Allegheny National Forest and only 0.02638 % of the area of the state of Pennsylvania.

Why This Proposal is a Concern of ETHS: The ETHS Board voted to endorse the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* because it is in keeping with our objective to preserve the heritage of Elk Township. We believe that preserving our heritage extends beyond restoring wooden school buildings, but also includes the preservation of a small area of our pristine surrounding hardwood forests and good water supply, the major reason why Europeans settled this region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Our hardwood forestland is why they came because it sustained their existence by providing building materials for their homes, fuel for their stoves, game for their tables and a source of income for many who were engaged in lumbering and the harvest of hemlock bark for the tanneries. To designate the 7,774 acres of the Cornplanter National Recreation Area as Wilderness and part of the Allegheny National Forest as the Scandia National Recreational Area would provide needed protection for this area by an act of Congress. To protect this relatively small area of pristine forestland from further destruction and commercialization seems to be the business of a historical society devoted to preserving the heritage of Elk Township. Saving this small amount of unblemished forest can promote an appreciation of nature's heritage to future generations, as well as leave them a forest unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness.

Pennsylvania's Critical Role in the History of Wilderness Legislation in the U.S.

Pennsylvania has a unique and vital connection to the establishment of Wilderness legislation. The author of the Wilderness Bill itself was Howard Zahniser, who grew up and is buried in Tionesta. Howard was its tireless advocate to the end. Former Pennsylvania congressman to the U.S. House of Representatives, John P. Saylor, a Republican from Johnstown, was an original sponsor of the Wilderness Act. Saylor stated, "We Americans are the people we are, largely because we have had the influence of the wilderness on our lives." It is that heritage in Elk Township that ETHS is concerned about preserving.

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