



*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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### **Ecologists, Economists Call on Congress to Protect Pennsylvania Wilderness**

**Warren** – More than 50 scientists and researchers with intimate knowledge of Pennsylvania’s flora, fauna, and ecosystems have signed a letter to the state’s Congressional delegation endorsing the *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania’s Allegheny National Forest*.

The *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal*, developed by volunteers from throughout Pennsylvania and advocated by Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW), calls on Congress to designate as wilderness eight tracts totaling 54,460 acres on the 513,300-acre Allegheny National Forest (ANF). The ANF is Pennsylvania’s only national forest.

Wilderness designation under the federal Wilderness Act of 1964 is the highest level of protection that can be given federal lands, forever keeping them as natural areas free from road building, development, and motorized uses.

In their letter to Congress, the scientists stated that designating the areas recommended in the *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal* “would help to improve the ecological health across the entire landscape.”

They further note that the permanent protection of the areas identified by FAW as qualifying for wilderness would “provide a regionally rare attraction for hunters, anglers, hikers, birders, photographers and others, and prove a steady economic boon to the region for generations to come.”

“We urge the Pennsylvania Congressional delegation to act on this matter as expeditiously as possible,” they said in closing.

The signatories to the science letter supporting the FAW wilderness campaign represent Pennsylvania’s leading botanists, conservation biologists, ecologists, economists, herpetologists, mammalogists, and ornithologists, among others.

“We have always believed that wilderness designation would protect the best of the diverse values of the Allegheny National Forest,” FAW field representative John Bartlett said. “This

strong letter from these scientists makes that abundantly clear. They are asking Congress to act on behalf of all future generations to ensure the Allegheny's natural legacy."

The letter carrying the names of the initial 54 signatories was recently delivered to all members of Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation, including newly-elected 5<sup>th</sup> district Congressman Glenn Thompson and 3<sup>rd</sup> district Congresswoman Kathy Dahlkemper. Additional signatories are still being submitted from the scientific community.

Today, only two areas of the ANF – the 8,600-acre Hickory Creek Wilderness and the Allegheny Islands Wilderness composed of seven Allegheny River islands totaling 368 acres – are designated as wilderness. That is less than two percent of the ANF.

"This bold statement from the scientific community underscores the need to bring real balance to the multiple uses of the Allegheny National Forest," said FAW executive director Kirk Johnson. "We know that there will always be logging, motorized recreation, and oil development here, but by contrast 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 *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* was published in the fall of 2003 to coincide with the initiation of the ANF's Forest Plan revision process. Of the 8,200 public comments the agency received in response to their Draft Plan in 2006, more than 6,800 of them (over 80 percent) specifically favored the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*.

On average, 18 percent of all national forest lands are designated wilderness and included in the National Wilderness Preservation System established under the Wilderness Act. FAW's proposal would bring the total in the ANF to about 12 percent, which would be commensurate with other national forests in the eastern United States.

Volunteers with Friends of Allegheny Wilderness spent more than two years intensely evaluating the ANF to identify those areas that qualify for wilderness designation in preparing the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*.

A copy of the science letter with the current signatories is enclosed. To sign on to the letter, or to request a hard copy of the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*, scientists are encouraged to contact FAW at [info@pawild.org](mailto:info@pawild.org). The *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* can also be downloaded as a PDF document on the FAW website at [www.pawild.org](http://www.pawild.org).

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