



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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Conservationists Disappointed With Lack of Wilderness Offered in Allegheny Plan
Say it's a Step in the Right Direction, but More Needs to be Done

Warren, Pennsylvania – Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) and their many supporting organizations today expressed disappointment with the wilderness component of the newly published Allegheny National Forest (ANF) Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Forest Plan revision.

“While the DEIS does recommend four important parcels for wilderness protection and we warmly applaud the Forest Service for that, two known Roadless Areas and three other important areas we have proposed for wilderness designation have been unfairly eliminated from further wilderness consideration at this point,” said FAW executive director Kirk Johnson.

FAW's *A Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest* was published in the fall of 2003 to coincide with the beginning of the revision process. After two years of careful study, FAW identified eight parcels of the ANF – a total of 54,460 acres – as prospective wilderness. Once designated by an act of Congress, new ANF wilderness areas would augment America's National Wilderness Preservation System, which was established with the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act.

“Wilderness protection is a critical component of the ‘Multiple Use’ management of our national forests,” said Johnson. “While we fully recognize the importance of continued 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 DEIS, which offers four wilderness areas, does not go nearly far enough in rectifying that situation.”

The 1986 ANF Forest Plan itself states “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...the available supply in the regional area is low.” Wilderness areas play a significant role in attracting tourism and recreation users to a national forest. The ANF is contained within the Commonwealth's Pennsylvania Wilds tourism region, which seeks to highlight the natural beauty of northern Pennsylvania.

Wilderness designated under the Wilderness Act consists of significant parcels of federal public land left in their natural condition on a permanent basis for the benefit of wildlife and people alike. Hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, and other forms of non-mechanized recreation are permitted in wilderness. New roads, permanent developments, logging, and other forms of commercial extraction are not permitted. While only Congress can designate new wilderness areas, the Forest Service must evaluate, and has the ability to recommend new areas for wilderness protection during their Forest Plan revision.

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Across America today there are more than 106 million acres protected as wilderness, but only two wilderness areas totaling approximately 9,000 acres are in the ANF. This acreage equates to less than two percent of the Forest as a whole. Nationally, 18 percent of all national forest land is protected as wilderness. In the Forest Service's Eastern Region, of which the ANF is a part, the figure is 11 percent.

"We are disappointed that given this rare opportunity to rectify the wilderness shortage in the ANF, the DEIS identifies only a small fraction of what should in fact be designated," said David Saylor, a member of the FAW Board of Directors. "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," he continued. Mr. Saylor is the nephew of former Pennsylvania Congressman John P. Saylor (R-Johnstown), who originally introduced the Wilderness Act in Congress in 1956 – 50 years ago this June.

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 backcountry area along the Allegheny Reservoir known as Morrison Run which contains a popular 12-mile hiking trail loop and a 6-mile segment of the North Country National Scenic Trail. These and other areas have been prematurely eliminated from consideration for wilderness designation under the DEIS.

FAW does cautiously approve of the new Management Area 7.2 being proposed under the DEIS. Known as Remote Recreation Areas, MA 7.2 tracts would be somewhat analogous to the undeveloped nature of a wilderness area, albeit under a far from permanent administrative status. "For areas that do not ultimately achieve wilderness designation during this Forest Plan revision, Remote Recreation Areas are a step in the right direction," notes Johnson.

"FAW and our supporting organizations congratulate the Forest Service for all of the hard work they have done and for reaching this important milestone," concludes Johnson. "We recognize it is not easy to balance the needs and desires of all the users of the ANF, however we must also emphasize it is critically important that we remain vigilant that wilderness is not being 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 wilderness is ultimately properly represented."

In addition to the thousands of individuals who have written to the ANF and elected officials in support of FAW's *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*, the list of formally endorsing local, regional, and national organizations has expanded to 19. They are: 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 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.

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On the web: Friends of Allegheny Wilderness www.pawild.org
The Wilderness Society www.wilderness.org
National Wilderness Preservation System www.wilderness.net

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