



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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100th Anniversary of Birth of Conservative Wilderness Advocate Recognized by Conservation Group

Warren – John P. Saylor (July 23, 1908 – October 28, 1973) was a conservative Republican member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Johnstown, Pennsylvania from 1949 until his death in 1973. Wednesday marks the 100th anniversary of his birth.

Saylor's views rarely strayed far from conventional Cold War conservatism, though he was immensely influential in environmental matters, and considered both a maverick and a pioneer in that arena. He was nicknamed "St. John" by conservation leaders for his dogged work toward broad environmental protections.

"Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is pleased and proud to recognize the 100th anniversary of the birth of Representative Saylor, a fellow Pennsylvanian whose contributions to conservation in America were and are immeasurable," said Ron Simonsen, president of the board of directors of the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW).

In his capacity in the Congress, Saylor introduced the Wilderness Act into the House on June 11, 1956 with these words: "We Americans are the people we are largely because we have had the influence of the wilderness on our lives." Companion legislation was introduced in the U.S. Senate by liberal Democrat Hubert Humphrey from Minnesota.

The Wilderness Act had been authored primarily by Howard Zahniser of The Wilderness Society, a friend of Saylor's and a fellow Pennsylvanian from Tionesta – a small town in the Allegheny National Forest (ANF).

Saylor was a fierce proponent of the Wilderness Act during the eight years it took to pass the Congress and be signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on September 3, 1964 – thereby establishing America's National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), which today protects more than 107 million acres of America's federal public lands in its natural condition.

"My father's work to establish an enduring resource of wilderness for the American people likely would not have borne fruit without the steadfast support and advocacy of John Saylor in the United States Congress," observed writer Ed Zahniser of Shepherdstown, West Virginia, the youngest of Howard and Alice Zahniser's four children.

Saylor also later fought for the passage of the Eastern Wilderness Areas Act, which when passed in 1975 definitively refuted the controversial efforts of some in the U.S. Forest Service to redefine the Wilderness Act as inapplicable to eastern national forest lands. Though he did not live to see this legislation become law, on January 11, 1973 Saylor exhorted the House:

“Mr. Speaker, I am the author of the Wilderness Act in this House. I know very well what it says and what it intended...I fought too long and too hard, and too many people in this House and across this land fought with me, to see the Wilderness Act denied application...by this kind of obtuse or hostile misinterpretation or misconstruction of the public law and the intent of the Congress of the United States.”

Saylor was born in Conemaugh Township, Somerset County. He graduated from Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster in 1929, and Dickinson School of Law in Carlisle in 1933. He was elected city solicitor of Johnstown in 1938 and served until 1940. He enlisted in the United States Navy on August 6, 1943 and served until January 1946.

David Saylor, nephew of John Saylor, also serves as a board member for FAW. “My uncle taught me a great deal about the outdoors, and cared very deeply about protection of wilderness and wildlands,” Saylor stated. “He would be extremely proud to know that citizens in his home state are working diligently to protect wilderness in the Commonwealth’s sole national forest for future generations to use and enjoy,” he concluded.

FAW is a non-profit organization based in Warren seeking to have the remaining qualifying areas of the ANF permanently protected as part of the NWPS. Their 2003 *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania’s Allegheny National Forest*, identifying eight parcels totaling 54,460 acres as prospective additions to the NWPS, has been endorsed by dozens of environmental organizations and businesses throughout Pennsylvania and beyond.

Currently, just two areas of the ANF – Hickory Creek and the Allegheny Islands – totaling approximately 9,000 acres are designated by Congress as wilderness. That is less than two percent of the 513,200-acre ANF. Nationwide, 18 percent of all national forest lands are protected as wilderness, and in the East the figure is 12 percent.

During his time in the Congress Saylor became dedicated to a number of environmental causes in addition to wilderness preservation, including the Ozark National Scenic Riverways Act, National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and in opposition to the construction of the Kinzua Dam and other hydroelectric projects proposed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Along with Zahniser, in 1957 Saylor began voicing his strong opposition to the construction of the Kinzua Dam on the Allegheny River near Warren, citing its high cost, the Corps’ refusal to study alternative plans, its destruction of one of the most scenic stretches of river in Pennsylvania, and particularly because of its breaking of the 1794 treaty with the Seneca Nation of Indians – the oldest federal treaty that was still in effect at that time.

In appreciation for his contributions to the opposition of the Kinzua Dam, the Seneca Nation of Indians made Saylor an honorary member on September 15, 1962 during a ceremony on the Cornplanter Land Grant property in Warren County.

“In working to preserve our nation’s wild lands and waterways as a conservative Republican, Congressman Saylor demonstrated that wilderness protection is an issue that can – and should – transcend party politics,” said John Bartlett, field representative for FAW. “It is the most fervent hope of FAW and our vast network of supporters that Saylor and Zahniser’s vision of wilderness protection will ultimately be fully exercised by the entire Pennsylvania Congressional delegation in the Allegheny National Forest,” he concluded.

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