



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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Keystone Trails Association Endorses Wilderness Proposal Historic Trail Society Joins Growing List of Supporters

Warren -- At their April 2nd board meeting, the historic Pennsylvanian hiking group Keystone Trails Association (KTA) voted unanimously to endorse an Allegheny National Forest (ANF) wilderness proposal published in 2003 by Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW), a non-profit Warren-based wilderness advocacy organization.

KTA was established in 1956 to coordinate the efforts of walking and outdoor groups in and around Pennsylvania; to build and maintain and use trails, shelters and campsites; to aid in the conservation of wild lands and wildlife; and to protect places of natural beauty and interest.

The ongoing mission of KTA is "...dedicated to providing, preserving, protecting and promoting recreational hiking opportunities in Pennsylvania, and to representing the interests and concerns of the Pennsylvania hiking community." KTA consists of 60 different hiking and outdoor organizations in and around Pennsylvania, and also has more than 1,400 individual members.

The FAW document that KTA is supporting, *A Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest*, was published to coincide with the revision of the ANF's long-term management plan, commonly known as the "Forest Plan." ANF Forest Plan revision has been ongoing for nearly two years. The U.S. Forest Service is required by the 1976 National Forest Management Act to review the wilderness potential for the ANF as part of Forest Plan revision.

After two years of careful study, FAW identified eight undeveloped parcels of the ANF - a total of 54,460 acres - as potential wilderness. Once designated by an act of Congress, new ANF wilderness areas would augment America's National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), established with the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

Wilderness designation is consistent with the "Multiple Use" management philosophy, which includes timbering and other uses that Congress has established for our national forests. FAW does not oppose this Multiple Use management regime.

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

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“While we recognize the importance of continued timber production and other multiple uses of the Allegheny National Forest to the region’s economy and way of life, it must also be acknowledged that there is an acute shortage of protected wilderness here,” said Kirk Johnson, executive director of FAW.

Wilderness designated under the Wilderness Act consists of significant parcels of federal public land - most often 5,000 acres or more in size - set aside to be left in their natural condition on a permanent basis. Hunting, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, and other forms of non-mechanized recreation are permitted within federal wilderness areas. New roads, permanent developments, logging and other forms of commercial extraction are not permitted.

Three of FAW’s proposed wilderness areas incorporate long segments of the North Country Trail (NCT), a National Scenic Trail that runs for 95 miles through the ANF. The tracts are: the proposed Tracy Ridge, Morrison Run and Tionesta Wilderness Areas. Also, FAW supports the continued blazing – periodic visual reminders of the trail’s location in the forest - of the NCT in any newly designated wilderness areas.

“Keystone Trails Association and Friends of Allegheny Wilderness share the same values when it comes to preserving land for minimal-impact recreational purposes,” noted Hugh Downing, President of KTA. “One of the nation’s premier hiking trails, the North Country Trail, traverses the ANF. That’s just one of the reasons Keystone Trails Association is happy to join Friends of Allegheny Wilderness in advocating the preservation of these unique areas of the ANF.”

KTA sponsors up to ten Trail Care weekends per year, where volunteer trail maintainers work on trails all over the state to keep them in good shape for all hikers. In 1999, for example, volunteers from KTA member clubs devoted more than 42,300 hours of time to building and maintaining trails in Pennsylvania. KTA has bought and maintains all of the loppers, paint and other equipment needed to do this work.

“Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is honored to have the endorsement of such a committed, historic and extensive organization as the Keystone Trails Association supporting our carefully wrought proposal for the Allegheny National Forest,” said FAW leader and Erie resident David Sublette. “We look forward to further expansion of our fair-minded, broad-based and dedicated wilderness advocacy coalition in the coming months,” he continued.

In addition to the KTA, other organizations supporting FAW’s proposed wilderness areas include Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, the Butler Outdoor Club, Campaign for America’s Wilderness, Finger Lakes Trail Conference, Howard County Maryland Bird Club, Lake Erie Group Sierra Club, Pennsylvania Chapter of the Sierra Club, Pennsylvania Native Plant Society and The Wilderness Society. This past weekend at their board meeting in Pleasant Gap, the Pennsylvania Chapter of Trout Unlimited also voted to add their name to this growing list.

Organizations and businesses interested in endorsing *A Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania’s Allegheny National Forest* are invited to contact FAW to sign up. For more information, go to: www.pawild.org.

To contact the KTA, log onto their website at: www.kta-hike.org

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