



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.

For Immediate Release: October 4, 2007

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Wilderness Designations to Provide Benefits to Local ANF Economy

Warren – Wilderness protection for more of the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) could bring long-term economic benefits to local communities, according to a new economic analysis performed by The Wilderness Society (TWS) and Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW).

Allegheny National Forest Wilderness: Economic Benefits for Pennsylvania demonstrates that wilderness supports and augments diverse and significant economic opportunities, that new ANF wilderness areas would have a negligible effect on timber harvest, and that payments in lieu of taxes to Counties from the federal government would be just as high with wilderness designations as without.

“Wilderness provides economic benefits associated with recreational use, enhanced value for properties in close proximity to wilderness, amenity-based development, ecosystem services such as providing clean air and water, and passive use values – simply knowing that protected wilderness exists,” explained Spencer Phillips, senior TWS economist and author of the new ANF report.

Between 2001 and 2003 FAW extensively surveyed the ANF and identified eight special areas totaling 54,460 acres, proposing them for wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964 in the *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania’s Allegheny National Forest*. The areas include Allegheny Front, Chestnut Ridge, Clarion River, Cornplanter, an expansion of the existing Hickory Creek Wilderness Area, Morrison Run, the Tionesta old-growth forest, and Tracy Ridge.

Less than two percent of the ANF is currently designated as part of America’s National Wilderness Preservation System. This compares to 18 percent of all national forest land nationwide, and 11 percent in the East so protected. The public overwhelmingly supports the FAW position for wilderness expansion. Of the 8,277 official comments received on the ANF’s draft plan last year, more than 6,800 – over 80 percent – specifically favored the full *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal*.

Among his findings, Phillips notes that protected wilderness enhances property values, citing figures showing that in the area surrounding Vermont's Green Mountain National Forest, land values are more than 18 percent higher in townships that contain designated wilderness. Higher property values in turn allow municipalities to raise the same revenue with lower property taxes, which then help attract businesses and residents to the area.

"Wilderness protection is a critical component of the multiple use management of our national forests," said FAW's field representative John Bartlett. "While we recognize and support the importance of 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."

The *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* has little to no overlap with priority timbering lands on the ANF – known as "Management Area 3.0" – which makes up well over 50 percent of the forest's acreage. "Congress could designate the Friends' entire 54,460-acre package, and the Forest Service could still achieve timbering goals outlined in the new plan," notes Phillips. "There is no significant conflict between timbering interests and new wilderness protections."

The ANF is located within the recently established Pennsylvania Wilds region, an area of natural beauty in north central Pennsylvania being promoted as a tourism draw. A recent Pennsylvania Wilds study found that a third or more of all Pennsylvanians visit protected forest areas, such as a wilderness area, at least once every year. Maximizing wilderness opportunities in the ANF would augment the ongoing Pennsylvania Wilds program – bringing a perpetual influx of tourism dollars to the region's communities.

The ANF Forest Plan, released in March, recommends to Congress just two tracts – Chestnut Ridge and Minister Valley – totaling approximately 13,000 acres as wilderness. The final plan surprisingly reversed the draft plan's proposed recommendation of Tracy Ridge – the largest Roadless Area in the ANF at more than 9,500 acres – for wilderness despite overwhelming public support for that initial proposal.

"We are certainly glad to see portions of the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* recognized by the agency," said Kirk Johnson, FAW executive director. "However, all eight areas local citizens have recommended for wilderness designation should continue to be considered by the residents of the region and Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation. Permanently protecting these areas would bring real balance to the management of the national forest, and would be a tremendous long-term investment in the economy of the region."

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One the web:

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness: www.pawild.org

The Wilderness Society: www.wilderness.org