



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED TO COMPLETE HICKORY CREEK WILDERNESS TRAIL

Stewardship project will continue on October 28th and 29th

Warren, Pa. - Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) and the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) are again asking for volunteers to help complete a new segment of hiking trail for the Hickory Creek Wilderness Area, on the weekend of October 28th and 29th.

Over the weekend of October 14th and 15th, FAW and the ANF organized a volunteer trail crew to establish new trail from a new trailhead into the Hickory Creek Wilderness. A strong turnout of volunteers from as close as Tidioute and Ridgway, and as far away as Pittsburgh and Ohio, all participated.

The new parking lot and trailhead is located along Legislative Route (LR) 2002 approximately a half mile north of the Hearts Content picnic area. The Bradford Ranger District recently constructed the new trailhead for the wilderness on the west side of LR 2002 (Sheffield-Hearts Content Road). The new route eliminates a road crossing and realigns the trail away from the developed recreation areas at Hearts Content.

According to Eric Flood, Allegheny National Forest Wilderness Ranger, the weekend project was a great success. "I was hoping to get a good start on establishing the 1.5 miles of new trail," Flood said, "but by the end of the day on Sunday we found that we had actually completed more than half of the route."

"Kirk Johnson of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness and I had tentatively planned another work weekend on October 28th and 29th, with the intent of finishing the work in the spring. Now it looks like we will finish early on the afternoon of the 29th," Flood noted.

"We will work backward from the end point for this next project, and join the completed trail at one of the main attractions of the new route – a beautiful rock outcrop on the edge of the East Hickory Creek Valley," Flood stated. "We are planning an informal 'golden spike' ceremony by using the spot for our lunch break when we join the two sections to complete the new trail."

The new trail has already seen use by its first "official" hikers, a backpacking party consisting of Dwight Epling, Andrea Borowiel, and Wayne Unger from Akron, Ohio. The group had been taking a cross country route when they came across the work party. Seizing on the opportunity to inaugurate the new trail, the group hiked back to Hearts Content by following the new trail back to the newly constructed trailhead whereupon they used the Tanbark Trail and Toms Run Trail to reach their vehicle.

Flood says this brings up two important points: "First, the new trail route is flagged from the new parking area to where the loop trail begins, so anyone wishing to take the new route is welcome to do so – with a degree of caution, and of course, a map and compass. As a matter of fact, hikers following the new trail route will help to establish it with each footstep they take. Second, folks who still wish to begin their

hike into Hickory Creek Wilderness by way of the Hearts Content day-use area may continue to do so by using the Tanbark Trail.”

For now, the long-existing trail from the Hearts Content parking lot to the Hickory Creek Wilderness boundary remains open, but early next year it will be decommissioned and restored to a natural condition.

“Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is pleased to assist the agency with this historic project,” noted Johnson. “In addition to our primary mission of permanently protecting qualifying areas of the Allegheny National Forest under the Wilderness Act, we consider it a civic duty to help with the stewardship of existing wilderness areas,” he concluded.

Work is planned to start at 9:00 a.m. on both Saturday the 28th, and Sunday the 29th, and finish early in the afternoon both days. Volunteers will receive a free FAW/Hickory Creek Wilderness Area t-shirt. Please contact FAW at 723-0620 or alleghenyfriends@earthlink.net to register for this event so the appropriate number of tools and t-shirts can be arranged in advance.

You do not have to be of lumberjack proportions or of wrestling strength to volunteer your time. You should be steady on your feet and able to use hand tools without difficulty. Wear sturdy boots, gloves to protect your hands, long pants and a long-sleeved shirt, and bring a lunch and beverage of your choice. Tools, hardhats, and an explanation of how to use the tools will be provided.

If some people indicate a willingness to brave the October nights and camp in the wilderness, FAW would like to know that in advance so a campout can be planned. Volunteers can also camp at the nearby Hearts Content Campground.

People are attracted to wilderness for many reasons, and with wilderness comes the need for wilderness stewardship. Visitors to wilderness leave ‘footprints of use,’ intended or not. With designated wilderness comes the need to provide safe parking at a trailhead, information to enhance the wilderness experience and to minimize the number of lost hikers, and good walking access into the wilderness as mechanized travel is prohibited. Your vounteer time will help some of these objectives happen!

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Note to reporters: (in bold) explains an attached photo, person to call for special expertise, etc.