



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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Conservation Groups Decry “Great Outdoors Giveaway” Anti-Wilderness Bill FAW Concerned Over Implications for Tracy Ridge, Other ANF Areas

WARREN – The Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act (H.R. 1581/S. 1087) threatens to weaken protections for millions of acres of wilderness-quality lands across the United States, including special wild portions of the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) in Pennsylvania.

“This is the biggest attack on wilderness we have seen in the history of The Wilderness Society,” TWS policy analyst Paul Spitler said of the bill. “This proposal flies in the face of values Americans hold dear with respect to stewardship of our public lands. It also flies in the face of nearly fifty years of legislation designating new wilderness areas.”

A hearing on the House version of the legislation, H.R. 1581, is expected to take place on July 26th in the House Natural Resources Committee in Washington, D.C.

“This legislation would put in jeopardy our favorite hunting spots, fishing holes, horse trails and camping getaways,” said Mike Matz, director of Pew’s Campaign for America’s Wilderness. “Once they’re gone, they’re gone forever.”

If passed into law, this bill would weaken protections for 60 million acres of national forest land, including 25,000 acres of the Keystone State. ANF areas under threat include the proposed Allegheny Front, Clarion River, and Cornplanter Wilderness Areas; as well as the proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness Area – the largest Roadless Area in the Allegheny National Forest.

“While each of these four areas do currently enjoy special designations such as remote recreation area or national recreation area, providing good protection in addition to their formal Roadless Area status, passage of the Great Outdoors Giveaway bill would certainly whittle away at their protected status,” noted FAW board president Bob Stoudt. “It is patent that retaining formal Roadless Area recognition for these important areas is far more preferable than the alternative.”

For years, proponents of developing these ANF areas have pressured the U.S. Forest Service to allow actions that would damage their untrammelled roadless character. For example, in the 2007 ANF Forest Plan, Regional Forester Randy Moore explicitly stated that he rescinded a wilderness recommendation for Tracy Ridge out of concern for those who would like to see extensive “development of overnight facilities” within the area.

“Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is aware that in recent years developers have inquired with the Forest Service regarding the possibility of constructing a vast golfing resort in the southern end of Tracy Ridge – complete with 36 holes of golfing, townhouses, and attendant roads, facilities and other developments,” noted Kirk Johnson, executive director for FAW. “Who among us wants to trade away our last remnants of wild Pennsylvania in order to facilitate golfing for the affluent?”

FAW has been working with The Wilderness Society and others for months on this issue, and recently signed on to a letter of opposition, along with dozens of other wilderness organizations. The organizations are encouraging members of the public to call their two U.S. Senators to ask that they oppose the Senate version of the bill, and their U.S. Representative to ask him or her to oppose the House version of the bill.

The House version of the bill, H.R. 1581, was introduced by House Majority Whip Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), and currently has 31 cosponsors. One of the cosponsors is Glenn Thompson (R-State College), whose PA-5th Congressional district encompasses most of the ANF.

“My uncle John P. Saylor was a Republican member of Congress representing Johnstown and surrounding Western Pennsylvania counties for twenty-six years,” said FAW board member David Saylor. “He was the staunchest proponent in Congress for passage of the Wilderness Act in 1964, but he also understood the need for prudent stewardship of all the resources contained in our public lands.”

“I know my uncle would have rallied good people from both parties to oppose this blunderbuss ‘Release Act.’ Were he still in the Congress, I am confident he would have persuaded his colleagues from Pennsylvania and around the country that there is a better and more focused way to address these subjects. This unfortunate legislation’s radical striping away of vital protection from our precious remaining wildlands not yet officially designated as Wilderness Areas, as he would have explained, is harsh, unprecedented, and bad policy for Pennsylvania and the whole United States.”

“The position of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is that we would like to see Congressman Thompson – and indeed all of the cosponsors – rescind support for this misguided bill,” continued Saylor. “Further, we are asking that Congressman McCarthy withdraw H.R. 1581.”

Rep. McCarthy’s hometown newspaper the *Bakersfield Californian* recently editorialized against the bill, noting that “the rumbling sound you may have noticed coming from the general vicinity of the Sierra Nevada is Teddy Roosevelt rolling over in his grave.” Roosevelt was a two-term Republican president in the early 20th Century widely considered to be the strongest conservationist president in our nation’s history.

“Working together, we can preserve our right as Americans to leave some places just as they are for our kids and grandkids. Wilderness is too important a resource to squander. We can’t make more of it. We’re only losing it, and the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act would speed up that loss,” concluded Matz.

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The full texts of the Wilderness and Roadless Area Release Act can be found online:

www.pawild.org/pdfs/s1087.pdf

www.pawild.org/pdfs/hr1581.pdf