



*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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## **Tionesta Native Howard Zahniser Subject of New Biography Local Wilderness Organization Works to Follow in Conservation Giant's Footsteps**

**Warren** – One of the nation's most important conservation leaders – Tionesta native Howard Zahniser – was the author of the 1964 Wilderness Act and is the subject of a new biography, published earlier this month. The Wilderness Act established America's National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), which today has permanently protected more than 106 million acres all across the country, including 9,000 acres in Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest (ANF).

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW), a Warren-based wilderness advocacy organization, is working to extend Zahniser's wilderness vision for his home national forest. Currently, less than two percent of the ANF is protected as wilderness, at the Hickory Creek and Allegheny Islands Wilderness Areas. FAW has proposed an additional eight areas of the ANF, totaling 54,460 acres, be added to the NWPS here.

Author Mark Harvey, a professor of history at North Dakota State University, began researching Zahniser's life work to establish a coast to coast system of permanently protected federal lands beginning in the mid-1990's, including spending 1996-1997 in and around the town of Tionesta. Harvey's tome, *Wilderness Forever: Howard Zahniser and the Path to the Wilderness Act*, was published by the University of Washington Press earlier this month.

"Too few Americans today have any knowledge of Howard Zahniser. Even among activists in the environmental movement his name is often unknown," explains Harvey. "Yet in his time he stood tall among Americans who professed an interest in conservation and wilderness preservation," the author says.

"Zahniser was a gifted literary craftsman, and was unfailingly polite in his dealings with others, even those who strongly disagreed with him. Confident of his own views, for him making room for wild lands was a matter of inclusion," says Harvey.

Zahniser was Executive Director of The Wilderness Society from 1945-1964, and wrote the first draft of the Wilderness Act in that capacity in 1956. Congressman John P. Saylor, a Republican from Johnstown, Pennsylvania introduced Zahniser's legislation in the House of Representatives. Democrat Hubert Humphrey of Minnesota introduced the companion version in the Senate.

Zahniser spent the next eight years shepherding the legislation through Congress, including attending all 18 public hearings on the bill and overseeing numerous rewrites. He died of heart failure in May of 1964, just months before President Lyndon Johnson signed the Wilderness Act into law in September of that year.

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“My father spent his formative years in Tionesta from early adolescence until he went away to college,” says Zahniser's younger son Ed. “He and his companions found great enjoyment roaming many of the lands that were so soon to become the Allegheny National Forest in 1923. He was emotionally very tied—all his life—to these landscapes and to their Allegheny River setting. His spirit must thrill to the knowledge that so many citizens are working so hard to see a reasonable amount of the Allegheny National Forest protected as wilderness.”

Zahniser grew up in a family of Free Methodist ministers in Tionesta along the banks of the Allegheny River, and although he later moved away from any specific denomination, a spiritual outlook and his Allegheny National Forest roots informed his thinking about wilderness. His love of nature was not so much a result of scientific curiosity as a sense of wonder at its beauty and majesty, and a wish to exist in harmony with all other living things. Zahniser is buried in Tionesta's Riverside Cemetery just a stone's throw from his beloved Allegheny River.

“It is an honor for everyone involved with the Friends of Allegheny Wilderness campaign to follow in Howard Zahniser's footsteps here in his home national forest,” says FAW executive director Kirk Johnson. “Our greatest hope is that we will be successful in permanently protecting the remaining wild areas of the Allegheny National Forest, under the timeless legislation that he crafted, to benefit future generation of Pennsylvanians, and indeed all Americans.”

“We hope this important new book will help rekindle broad interest in and passion for permanently protecting Pennsylvania's remaining special wild places,” Johnson adds.

Allegheny National Forest officials are currently revising their long-term management plan, providing an important but rare opportunity to reevaluate the ANF for its wilderness potential. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Forest Plan revision for the ANF is expected to be released early next year.

“If any one person is responsible for the 1964 Wilderness Act, it is surely Howard Zahniser,” says renowned environmental historian William Cronon. “He remains a towering figure in the history of American environmentalism, and Mark Harvey has written a first-rate biography that finally does justice to both the man and his contributions,” he continues.

*Wilderness Forever* is available through the University of Washington Press, Seattle Washington. It is also available through local bookstores, such as Waldenbooks at the Warren Mall in Warren.

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On the web:

University of Washington Press: [www.washington.edu/uwpress](http://www.washington.edu/uwpress)

America's National Wilderness Preservation System: [www.wilderness.net](http://www.wilderness.net)

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness: [www.pawild.org](http://www.pawild.org)

Allegheny National Forest: [www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny](http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegheny)