



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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America's Wilderness Turns 45

Conservationists celebrate Pennsylvania's wilderness, call for more protections

Warren — Tomorrow marks the 45th anniversary of a conservation landmark — the Wilderness Act. Signed into law on September 3, 1964 by President Lyndon Johnson, this historic legislation has been employed by citizens from coast to coast over those years to guarantee that future generations will be able to enjoy our nation's diverse wilderness areas in their natural condition.

Fellow Pennsylvanians Howard Zahniser, a native of Tionesta and executive director for The Wilderness Society from 1945 –1964, and former U.S. Representative John P. Saylor (R – Johnstown) made crucial contributions to establishing the National Wilderness Preservation System. Among the first national treasures that gained immediate protection in 1964 were the Bob Marshall Wilderness in Montana, the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness in Minnesota, and the Great Gulf Wilderness in New Hampshire.

Forty-five years later, the Wilderness Act remains one of the most important and effective conservation measures ever enacted, as Americans continue to push for additional wilderness protections where warranted. Today, the National Wilderness Preservation System is 109 million acres strong. Yet that remains less than five percent of America's landmass. And when Americans lose 6,000 acres of open space everyday, there is still much to be done.

Here in Pennsylvania, conservationists have worked to protect the Tracy Ridge, Cornplanter, and Allegheny Front areas, among other portions of the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) as wilderness so that future generations will always be able to enjoy our natural wonders.

"We have several amazing wild places that Pennsylvania residents will be enjoying this Labor Day weekend," said Joe Hardisky, board member for Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW). "But whether we will celebrate the continued growth of a rich, well-supported system of wild land is very much in the air. I can't think of a better way to celebrate this conservation capstone than by seeing more wilderness designations right here in Pennsylvania."

Citizens in Pennsylvania are working to protect the eight areas identified in the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest* in order to create a lasting legacy

for future generations. Only 9,000 acres – less than two percent – of the entire ANF is currently protected as wilderness, and none has been designated since 1984.

In total, FAW has proposed that 54,460 acres of the ANF be designated as wilderness under the Wilderness Act in their *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*, published in 2003. During the U.S. Forest Service's recently completed Forest Plan revision, more than 6,800 of a total of 8,200 public comments specifically advocated for FAW and the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*.

Protected wilderness in America provides clean air, clean water, recreational opportunities like hunting and fishing, habitat for wildlife, and spiritual wellbeing for those who visit or simply appreciate knowing such wild places still exist.

Recognizing the importance of the Wilderness Act to our nation, the U.S. Senate recently passed a resolution commemorating the 45th Anniversary of this groundbreaking measure. The resolution boasts that the Senate "recognizes and commends the extraordinary work of the individuals and organizations involved in building the National Wilderness Preservation System; and is grateful for the wilderness, a tremendous asset the United States continues to preserve as a gift to future generations of the United States."

"Thanks to the Wilderness Act, some of America's last few unspoiled lands have been protected as they are, for future generations to enjoy," said Doug Scott, policy director of the Campaign for America's Wilderness, and one of the nation's leading wilderness historians. "Americans of all ages, backgrounds and political affiliations are working together for protection of the wild places they love, wilderness protection truly is grassroots driven."

"In these times of heated town hall meetings and political arguing, one thing that brings people of all walks of life, all religions, all sides of the political aisle together is the goal of protecting more of our special wild places – our common ground – for those who will come after us," said FAW member Rodger Klenovich, whose family has owned a hunting camp near Westline in the ANF for generations.

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