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National Wildlife Federation endorses ANF *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*

Warren – On the heels of the passage of the federal Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009, National Wildlife Federation (NWF) supports expansion of Congressionally designated wilderness in the Allegheny National Forest (ANF).

The ANF wilderness proposal of Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) has the support of a rapidly growing, broad-based grassroots constituency that seeks protection for some of Pennsylvania's last parcels of remote, wild forestland.

FAW's *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest* advocates adding eight areas and 54,460 acres to America's National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS), which was established with the passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964.

"With passage of this important federal public land protection, it's now time to turn our attention in earnest to Pennsylvania's only national forest -- the Allegheny," said Anthony Caligiuri, Executive Director of NWF's Chesapeake Mid-Atlantic Regional Center, in Annapolis, Maryland. "Beyond the protection that this designation would afford individual species, wilderness designations help improve ecological health across an entire landscape."

"The ANF is a remarkable resource that deserves more protection. We look forward to working with FAW and our Ohio affiliate, the League of Ohio Sportsmen, to ensure that these ecologically valuable parcels retain their natural splendor for future generations while remaining open to non-mechanized hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation," said Nick Schroeck, Regional Representative with NWF.

National Wildlife Federation is America's oldest and largest private non-profit conservation organization, inspiring Americans to protect wildlife for our children's future. The president and CEO is Larry Schweiger. Schweiger previously served as president and CEO of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

"Friends of Allegheny Wilderness is honored to have the endorsement of such an historic and committed organization as the National Wildlife Federation supporting our carefully developed proposal for the Allegheny National Forest," said Ronald Simonsen, M.D., president of the board for FAW. "We look forward to further expansion of our wilderness coalition in the coming months with other practical-minded groups."

The *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* was published in 2003 to coincide with the revision of the ANF's long-term management plan, or "Forest Plan." Forest Plan revision lasted nearly four years, with the new plan being published by the Forest Service in March of 2007. Of the 8,200 public comments submitted on the draft Forest Plan in 2006, more than 6,800 (better than 80 percent) specifically favored the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*.

Originally encompassing nine million acres around the country, today there are nearly 110 million acres protected as part of the NWPS, but only two wilderness areas totaling 9,000 acres in the ANF – Pennsylvania's sole national forest. This acreage equates to a scant two percent of the 513,300-acre forest. Nationally, 18 percent of national forest land is protected as wilderness.

"While we certainly recognize the significance of continued timber production and other important uses of the Allegheny National Forest to the region's economy and way of life, it must also be acknowledged that there is an acute shortage of protected wilderness here," said Kirk Johnson, FAW's executive director. "We are grateful to the National Wildlife Federation for recognizing this unfortunate deficiency, and acting to help us rectify it."

Wilderness designated under the Wilderness Act consists of significant parcels of federal public land set aside to be left in their natural condition in perpetuity. Hunting, fishing, hiking, backpacking, cross-country skiing, and other forms of non-mechanized recreation are permitted within federal wilderness areas. New roads, motorized recreation, permanent developments, logging and other forms of commercial extraction are not permitted.

The addition of NWF to the list of endorsers grows the total number of local, regional, statewide, and national organization to over 40. Additionally, more than 100 businesses from around the region have endorsed the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal*, and 60 forest scientists have endorsed. The full list can be viewed online at www.pawild.org/supporters.html.

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On the web:

National Wildlife Federation: www.nwf.org (<http://www.nwf.org/>)

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness: www.pawild.org (<http://www.pawild.org/>)