

Subject: PABIODIV: WTO: Group backs proposal for wilderness on ANF  
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Group backs proposal for wilderness on ANF  
By DEAN WELLS, Times Observer Staff Writer

The Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) has gained another endorsement for its wilderness proposal for the Allegheny National Forest.

The Pennsylvania Native Plant Society (PNPS) voted unanimously on Feb. 12 to endorse FAW's proposal, which was published in 2003. The society, based in State College, sponsors field trips throughout the state for people interested in identifying and preserving native plants.

"We've been in contact with them for several years," FAW's Kirk Johnson said Thursday. "Their board of directors have been talking about this endorsement for at least a year that I'm aware of."

According to Johnson, PNPS president Maggie Harlan visited the Tionesta Scenic Area prior to the group voting on its endorsement.

The FAW's proposal, titled, "A Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest," was published to coincide with the U.S. Forest Service's revision of the ANF's long-term management plan. The Forest Service is required by the 1976 National Forest Management Act to review wilderness potential for the Allegheny National Forest as part of the revision.

FAW has identified eight undeveloped parcels in the Allegheny National Forest - a total of 54,460 acres - as potential wilderness areas. The areas would have to be designated by an act of Congress to make them official wilderness areas.

Currently, there are two wilderness areas in the Allegheny National Forest totaling approximately 9,000 acres -- less than two percent of the ANF. Nationally, 18 percent of Forest Service land is protected as wilderness. The figure is 11 percent in the Forest Service's eastern region.

"The proposal of FAW is reasonable, conservative and based on sound science," Harlan said in a press release Thursday. "We appreciate that it was developed with first hand knowledge of the ANF lands and with consideration for the needs of all user groups. Kirk Johnson of FAW has done an admirable job of communicating with both the ANF officials and the concerned public."

Last month, Johnson attended a meeting of the Niagara group of the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club to present FAW's wilderness proposal for possible endorsement. On Tuesday, he made a proposal to the Niagara Frontier Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club asking for its endorsement.

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