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Times Observer

Opinion / Commentary

Wednesday
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Our opinion: ADP complaint marginal

Get serious.

There's something more than a little disingenuous about complaints from the Allegheny Defense Project (ADP) that Congressman John Peterson is holding "secret meetings" to determine future management of the Allegheny National Forest.

That histrionic claim was advanced last week by Bill Belitskus, a veteran environmental activist from Kane and a member of ADP. Belitskus maintained that since Peterson is meeting with forest industry interest groups and a number of environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, and Friends of Allegheny Wilderness, that he is trying to circumvent the Forest Service's process for revising the management plan for the Allegheny National Forest.

Excuse us, but hasn't it been the ADP which has been trying to circumvent, undermine and generally sabotage forest planning on the ANF for the past several years through a strategy of lawsuits and legal challenges. ADP's strategy for trying to create its own private version of a national forest has involved virtually no public involvement; instead it is a vision shared by virtually no one except the relatively small active membership of the group. While Belitskus excoriates Peterson for having ANF personnel supply digitalized maps for his meetings at public expense, the ADP activist completely ignores the enormous cost his group's lawsuits have imposed on the public.

As ADP itself has proven, anyone can hold "secret" meetings to envision changes in the way the ANF is managed. That it neither illegal or unethical. The fact that Peterson and a variety of interest groups, ranging from extractive industries to environmental groups, are trying to reach some sort of consensus on wilderness designations on the ANF is neither underhanded nor sinister. In fact, it is a welcome development that the two sides are talking.

We suspect, when all is said and done, that the ADP's ire springs from the fact that it is not included in the talks. It's little wonder. Over the course of its history, ADP has adopted an all-or-nothing strategy in its vision for the ANF. That unwillingness to compromise has marginalized the group to the point where it's difficult to take either it or its complaints seriously.