

Thursday
June 29, 2017
Partly cloudy
83°/66°

Warren County
4th of July
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A salute to the paddlers

"Some good percentage of the land must be kept free from exploitation of its commodity resources and commercial exploitation of its recreation resources."

On Thursday evening, June 22, Friends of Allegheny Wilderness executive director Kirk Johnson provided a presentation to the Allegheny Outfitters and Penn Soil RC&D Allegheny River Sojourn canoeists on the history of the Wilderness Act of 1964, America's National Wilderness Preservation System, and efforts to have all qualifying portions of the Allegheny National Forest permanently protected as wilderness — such as at the 9,700-acre proposed Tracy Ridge Wilderness.

This was one of several informative presentations the paddlers heard during their trip, but this one included a personal greeting from Ed Zahniser — son of the 20-year leader of The Wilderness Society, Wilderness Act author, and Tionesta-native Howard Zahniser.

Ed Zahniser's salute to the paddlers, as read by Johnson (pictured) near R. Thompson Island — one of the seven Allegheny Islands Wilderness islands — follows:

"Greetings from eastern West Virginia where as I write this, today is headed for 94 degrees. I hope you are faring better weather-wise on your trip! My name is Ed Zahniser and I'm a great fan of wilderness and of letting rivers run free.

No doubt the indomitable Pennsylvania wilderness advocate Kirk Johnson has or will tell you that my

mother and father, Alice and Howard Zahniser, who died respectively in 2014 and in 1964, camped on one of the islands in 1937 that are now part of the Allegheny Islands Wilderness. They were on a 100-mile trip from Olean NY to Tionesta - and so evidently was my older brother Mathias, who would be born in January 1938!

The trip my parents took from Olean to Tionesta can no longer be duplicated, because the Kinzua Dam was built on the Allegheny River. This was during the mid-20th Century mania for building dams in the United States. So I hope you will make it a point for the rest of your lives to protect rivers and wilderness to the best of your ability.

I am quite certain that, as a school child in Tionesta, Pennsylvania in the early 1900s, my father had no clue he would end up in Washington, D.C., working the halls of Congress. For more than eight years he walked the marble floors of Congress to get the 1964 Wilderness Act passed and signed into law. You too can begin to advocate protection of wilderness and rivers right now, in fact.

After this trip you can go as an experienced canoeing group to visit your members of Congress and local officials. Just share with them your stories from your trip. Let them know what the running river and the wilderness islands made you feel. What they made you think. Your stories can capture the hearts and minds of your members of Congress and state and local official for wild wilderness and clean rivers.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know that now - more than ever, and perhaps more than ever since the late 1800s - nature needs more and stronger citizen support for its protection. And this is especially true for nature in its wild state. Some good percentage of the land must be kept free from exploitation of its commodity resources and commercial exploitation of its recreation resources.

Private citizens and forward-thinking politicians have been working to protect tracts of wild nature since the early 1800s. On their canoe trip, my parents had a copy of Henry David Thoreau's book *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*. This year is the 200th anniversary of Thoreau's birth in 1817. He was an early supporter of wildness and nature. It was he who wrote that "in Wildness is the Preservation of the World." And note that he isn't saying there that we preserve wildness, which we DO try to do, but rather that wildness preserves us, the world, the cosmos. And Thoreau - who read French, Latin, and Greek as well as English - specifically says that in Greek the word cosmos means not only world, but also beauty (as in cosmetics) pattern, and order.

So by advocating wildness you are also advocating those important aspects of our world - the only world we have. I am so appreciative of the fact that you have made this canoe trip. I hope you've had a great time!

Best regards,
Ed Zahniser, Shepherdstown,
West Virginia"



Photo submitted to Times Observer

Ed Zahniser's salute to the paddlers, as read by Johnson near R. Thompson Island – one of the seven Allegheny Islands Wilderness islands.