



*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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### **Proposed Allegheny National Forest Wilderness Receives National Spotlight Chestnut Ridge Identified as a Significant Natural Treasure in Jeopardy**

**Warren** – Chestnut Ridge, a proposed wilderness area in the Allegheny National Forest (ANF), is one of 10 wild places nationwide highlighted in a new report titled *Wild... for How Long? Ten Treasures in Trouble*.

Penn State Erie – The Behrend College professor Roger Knacke, who is featured in the report, said the reason for listing Chestnut Ridge is simple – time is running out for preserving the natural integrity of the area. On a recent backcountry hike into the area, Knacke found survey flags for oil and gas developments.

“As we were hiking through this very pretty and beautiful forest enjoying it and looking for wildlife, we suddenly came upon these rows of orange flags marking a future oil development,” Knacke said. “I was taken back and sorry to see it in a very natural area that could potentially be designated as a wilderness area.”

The *Ten Treasures in Trouble* report prepared by the national conservation organization Campaign for America's Wilderness highlights wild lands at risk around the country, and features people like Knacke; wilderness heroes who are working to protect the places they love.

Chestnut Ridge, located in McKean County, is one of eight areas totaling 54,460 acres identified for Congressional wilderness designation under the Wilderness Act of 1964 in the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal for Pennsylvania's Allegheny National Forest*.

Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) released the *Citizens' Wilderness Proposal* in the fall of 2003 following two years of detailed work to identify the remaining roadless and most natural areas in the ANF that qualify for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

John Bartlett, field representative for FAW, said the threats to Chestnut Ridge are real and immediate.

“There is a drilling frenzy in the Allegheny National Forest, driven by the skyrocketing price of crude oil and natural gas,” Bartlett said. “The oil, gas, and mineral rights beneath more than 90 percent of the forest are privately owned, including those under nearly all of Chestnut Ridge.”

But as great as the threats are, there is also opportunity, Bartlett points out, noting that Chestnut Ridge is in fact one of two areas also recommended for wilderness designation by the U.S. Forest Service in its new management plan for the ANF, released in March of 2007.

“The agency agrees that Chestnut Ridge is a very special area that should be protected,” Bartlett said. “We hope that this helps clear the way for federal legislation designating Chestnut Ridge as wilderness and opens avenues for obtaining the mineral rights, perhaps using the public-private partnership model that gained mineral rights beneath the Hickory Creek Wilderness when it was designated in 1984.”

Knacke said that is his hope as well.

“I know the gas and oil companies have rights to the minerals, but I believe we can work this out so that wilderness is preserved and the gas and oil companies still have places to drill,” Knacke said. “I think that can be done.”

“The places included in the *Ten Treasures in Trouble* report tell a compelling story about what’s at stake when it comes to ensuring there will always be wild places to enjoy for wildlife habitat, as sources of clean water and clean air, and to experience nature far from roads and noise,” Mike Matz, executive director of the Campaign for America’s Wilderness said in releasing the report.

Chestnut Ridge and the other troubled treasures listed in the report are characteristic of the threats facing wild lands across the country. They were selected with the help and guidance of state and local wilderness advocates like Knacke who are working to protect these special places.

“As we celebrate Earth Day 2008, let us acknowledge the value of these wild places in our lives,” Matz said.

Today less than two percent of the 513,200-acre ANF is protected in perpetuity through wilderness designation – the highest level of protection that can be given to federal lands. Legislating the *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal* would bring the total to about 12 percent, still far below the 18 percent average nationwide, but about the same as other national forests in the East.

“Saving and forever protecting Chestnut Ridge and the other areas we propose for wilderness in the Allegheny National Forest is really up to all of us,” said Kirk Johnson, FAW’s executive director. “Wilderness designation requires an Act of Congress and they are our elected representatives. We need to call on them to act now for Chestnut Ridge, and indeed all the special wild places remaining here in the Commonwealth’s sole national forest.”

Since its publication, the *Citizens’ Wilderness Proposal* has been formally endorsed by more than 30 local, regional, and national organizations whose memberships total over 400,000 Americans. More than 75 businesses from the four-county ANF region and beyond have also formally signed on as supporters.

***Wild... for How Long? Ten Treasures in Trouble*, the full report, is available online as a PDF document on the Campaign for America’s Wilderness website at: [www.leaveitwild.org](http://www.leaveitwild.org).**

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