

# ***Allegheny Forest Alliance***

## ***Fall 2007 Newsletter***

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## **NOT SO SECURE FUNDING**

There is a strong bicameral effort underway in Congress to fashion a bill reauthorizing PL106-393, popularly known as the "Secure Rural Schools Act." You may recall the law sunset in September of 2006 after six years of authorization. Earlier this year Congress reauthorized an emergency, one year extension at the 2006 level, which will maintain a funding stream for school districts and townships at an approximate amount received this past spring.

The package currently working its way through Congress would more aptly be called the Not So Secure Rural Schools Act because the funding formula has been so corrupted it no longer offers security for this state and several others. As is usually the case, new legislation reflects the wishes of new legislators. The original package co-authored by Senators Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Larry Craig (R-ID) heavily favored far western states. In fact, Oregon received 67% of all reimbursable funds. The current package is promoted by the new democratic leadership coming from states like New Mexico, Montana, Utah and others. Unfortunately, there has been no significant involvement by congressmen from east of the Mississippi. Hence, PA and most eastern states will not benefit from the new bills.

The loss will manifest itself in three ways. First and foremost, the new package includes a 10% annual ramp-down over five years. Effectively, states will only receive slightly more than half of the 2006 figure the fifth year of the bill. In addition, the new formula ties federal acreage per county to the formula, which again favors western states where most of the federal land exists. In PA, national forest acreage per county averages approximately 25%. In some western counties it reaches well into the 90's.



The third wrinkle in the new formula, which I do not have a handle on at this point, is known as "economic condition of the county." How that will impact the formula is anyone's guess, but it is a reasonable assumption it is designed to help the counties in states where the bill's authors reside.

Another carrot inserted in the bill that has great appeal nationwide is full funding of PILT. Payment in lieu of taxes has been around for many years and is a law that reimburses counties burdened with non-taxable federal lands. Traditionally, Congress only funds it at a 10% - 20% level. Full funding will benefit counties across the nation including those in PA. Unfortunately, however, in most other states, counties manage roads and schools. Therefore, any increase in county receipts will help commissioners balance the budget. As you know, that is not the case in PA where townships manage local roads and school districts have been independent of county control since the 1950's.

All things considered, the new packages currently being promoted in the halls of Congress will likely not benefit the folks on the Allegheny, which is not too surprising. In conclusion then, we cannot abandon our quest to ramp up timber receipts with an eye on returning to traditional 25% payments because what Congress is promoting will leave local folks on the ANF not so secure.

## **LOCAL REACTION TO WILDERNESS**

A recent press release by the Idaho Recreation Council causes me to wonder about support for more wilderness among local residents. A highly respected pollster, the Terrance Group from Alexandria, VA, queried residents in Custer and Lemhi Counties in Idaho, the citizens in closest proximity to where a wilderness tract is being projected. The results indicate overwhelming opposition to the so-called Central Idaho Economic Development and Recreation Act (CIEDRA) that would add substantial wilderness acreage to central Idaho. When asked, "Do you favor or oppose this CIEDRA proposal?" 83% were opposed with a whopping 70% strongly opposed. Only 10% of the local citizens supported the addition while 7% were unsure. I am confident a similar poll conducted among residents living within the proclamation boundary of the ANF would yield similar results.

As you know, the new ANF forest plan recommends an additional 11,500 acres for wilderness study while a local wilderness advocacy group, Friends of Allegheny Wilderness (FAW) is seeking 54,500 additional acres. FAW adamantly contends there is more public support for the additional wilderness than are opposed pointing out that 75% of the responses to the Draft Environmental Impact Statement promoted the cause. No mention is made of the fact that the vast majority of those responses were simply form letters mass produced and distributed, which is more a credit to FAW's diligence than actual support.

Why do I believe a poll conducted exclusively within the region would be no different than the one in Idaho? Simply because the results would reflect the concerns of the folks most affected by the presence of wilderness and not the just the emotion-filled sentiment of people most likely to never visit the area. As I was once told, just knowing the Grand Canyon exists is important to most citizens. While that may be so, such a notion does little to sustain the lives of residents in and around the Canyon.

The new forest plan refers to this phenomenon as "passive use values" and divides it into three analytical categories. The first is called "option value," which is related to the notion of having land set aside for potential future visitation. The second category relates to the Grand Canyon idea of being content just knowing it exists and is called "existence value." The third category is called "bequest value" and supports the tired old notion that protection today sustains the land for future generations to which I might add, whether they want it or not.

Passive use values reflect nothing more than a desire rather than a need, and do nothing to put bread on the tables of the locals living adjacent to the wilderness. The new forest plan reports wilderness visitation on eastern national forest is projected to increase by only 0.5% per year for the next 50 years. More disturbing is the statement in the plan that wilderness "may warrant public use restrictions..." Therefore, I am confident there would be little support among local residents most affected by wilderness establishment.

## IS MORE WILDERNESS JUSTIFIED?

For sure there are many controversial issues in the new forest plan, which went into effect in April. Perhaps none is more so than whether or not to recommend more land for wilderness. The plan itself cannot create wilderness. Such a proclamation can only be done by act of Congress. The Planning Team can, however, suggest additional acres for consideration by assessing inventoried roadless areas (IRA) for their wilderness potential. The evaluation process is supposed to determine the mix of land and resource uses that best meet public need.

A national, one size fits all criteria must be used to assess whether wilderness is justified relative to the following three measures described in the FEIS (C-31):

- Capability – the degree to which an area contains basic wilderness characteristics.
- Availability – the degree to which the values of the area, tangible and intangible, offset the value of resources that formal wilderness designation would forego.
- Need – the degree to which there is desire for more wilderness.



Frankly, equating desire with need is a fundamental flaw in the evaluation process in my opinion. Need implies necessity while desire is nothing more than a wish. Claiming more wilderness is necessary on the ANF is unjustified by any standard and the FEIS actually refutes the claim. Analysis reported in the new plan suggests more wilderness will not receive any significant increase in use by the public over the next 20+ years. In fact, the FEIS reports a less than modest annual increase of 0.5% over that time span.

In addition, the National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) survey reports that only 2.6% of the visits to national forests in Region 9 that includes the ANF were to wilderness areas in 2002. Analysis of the year-end reports from the ANF is even direr, where only 0.10% of all Recreational Visitor Days (RVD) are spent in wilderness areas. Certainly, none of these statistics establish a need for more wilderness. It must be noted, however, the FEIS goes to great lengths establishing a desire for additional wilderness.

What about whether the ANF offers significantly appropriate acreage capable of being wilderness? To the largest degree, the entire ANF stands to be incapable of sustaining the required characteristics of wilderness for one basic reason; 93% of all subsurface rights are privately owned. This unique characteristic, which is sometimes referred to as the “1000 lb gorilla,” separates the ANF from nearly all other national forests. As a result, the use of national standards and measures is by in large wholly inappropriate when planning for the ANF. Few if any areas currently being considered for wilderness study are immune to OGM activity. Hence, none of the designated study areas stand much chance of maintaining true wilderness characteristics given shared management responsibilities.

Can a case be made for “availability” under the assessment criteria? The answer is unequivocally NO! National forests are to be managed sustainably. There are three “Pillars of Sustainability” that must be considered in the planning process: ecologic, social and economic. None of which is to supercede the others in the planning process. While a strong case can be made of any of the three with regard to why they corrupt the “availability” measure, let us consider the economic issue. If the numbers being projected in the new plan are correct, the desire for more wilderness does not translate into actual visitors

affecting the economy. On the contrary, if the land being considered for wilderness were to be managed for developed recreation, far more visitors would travel to the ANF thereby enhancing the economy.

Legitimate justification for more wilderness in the new forest plan is meager at best and it can be reasonably concluded more wilderness on the ANF is just a manifestation of national perspective of forest planning and little else. Clearly, there is no reasonable justification for additional wilderness on this national forest.

## **FISCAL YEAR 2007**

Although no official data has been released regarding FY'07 on the ANF, the unofficial figures are not very encouraging. In a recent communication with Forest Service management personnel, it was confirmed that the volume sold did indeed reach the 35mmbf figure Supervisor Morse suggested was the target for 2007. Although volume sold has little immediate affect on current timber receipts, it does establish a basis for the "pipeline," a quantity of timber to be harvested within five years or so, which in and of itself is important.

Revenue payments to the Forest Service are based on what is actually harvested, not on what is sold. These payments form the basis for over 99% of all receipts in any given fiscal year on the ANF. For 2007, approximately 33mmbf was actually harvested with a receipt value of approximately \$20.3M. That figure is discouraging based on the previous three year's account that essentially yielded a dollar for every board foot of timber harvested. The current receipt value only represents 62 cents per board foot.

At least two issues reflect on the diminished number. First, the market for timber off the ANF would have dropped significantly. Second, the value of the material being offered for sale was far less. Given what I know about recent sales being offered on the ANF, the latter seems to be the more accurate reason for the sharp drop. Most of the sales were of the "salvage" variety, which quite often results in little quality per volume.

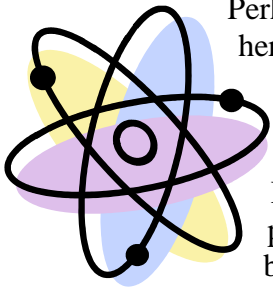
The important thing to remember for the primary constituents of the AFA (townships and school districts) is they must once again ask themselves whether continuing the pursuit of safety-net reauthorization is a priority. For many of us, this preliminary report strongly suggests we must. News both from the Forest Supervisor and the new forest plan to ramp up timber production to 35mmbf annually might have suggested otherwise, but unfortunately it does not insure a stable 25% payment based on this preliminary report. Frankly, 62 cents per board foot given projected volumes will not yield traditional payment.

To make matters worse, the Supervisor recently stated in a local newspaper the projected volume for the next couple years will likely be in the neighborhood of 25mmbf. If that is the case, the future volume in the "pipeline" is in jeopardy, which will cause an additional drop in potential receipts in coming years.

When we combine these numbers with what is being generated in DC relative to safety-net reauthorization, one cannot help but conclude the future for payments to townships and schools in rural PA is anything but rosy.

## A LITTLE BIT PREGNANT?

Governor Rendell recently called America's reliance on foreign oil a "prescription for disaster." In fact, energy independence may be one of the few issues upon which both Democrats and Republicans agree both statewide and nationally. The dilemma facing politicians on both sides of the isle is just exactly how to achieve this much sought after goal without somehow ramping up domestic OGM production somewhere within our nation's (state's) boundaries.



Perhaps more striking in this debate is the newly assumed stance of the Democrats, who here-to-for received significant "guidance" from environmental groups to preserve nature from the ravages of fossil fuel exploration. Whether it would be in ANWR, the Outer Continental Shelf (as Representative John Peterson has strenuously advocated), the Allegheny National Forest or other public lands across the nation, Democrats have managed to stonewall potential energy independence under heavy preservationist influence. Based on recent rhetoric, however, the winds of change are blowing. Even the DCNR is reviewing their current forest plan with an eye on reinstating oil exploration on state lands. This has to be shocking news to preservationist groups such as the Sierra Club, Nature Conservancy and ADP.

Fact is you cannot have it both ways. You cannot strive for energy independence while ignoring abundant reserves currently available on public lands. At its very core, energy Independence requires self-reliance. Whether more wells are sunk, mines developed or even land cleared to grow more crops for bio-fuels, the results look much the same. Abundant land will need to be "disturbed" to achieve energy self-reliance.

The conundrum facing the preservationist community is which fundamental goal to support; preservation or self-reliance. You cannot have it both ways. If clearing more land for wells, mines, wind or agricultural farms and the like does not suit your fancy, then energy independence is not a realistic goal. Such is the case with the ADP, which strenuously opposes OGM expansion on the ANF and even the relatively unspectacular co-generation unit at the Kane Area High School to be fueled by a small amount of woody debris from the ANF.

Clearly, Governor Rendell and the so-called environmental community at large must make a choice because you cannot have your cake and eat it too. Either you use the resources to become energy independent and accept the baggage it entails or you preserve the land and remain dependent on other nations. As a wise doctor once said, "You are either pregnant or you are not."

## FALL BOARD MEETING SCHEDULED

The fall board meeting of the Allegheny Forest Alliance is scheduled for **noon on Tuesday, November 13, at the Olmsted Manor in Ludlow**. All board members are urged to attend.

Your membership contribution for 2007 is due. Payment ensures you are represented in advocating for multiple-use management and a sustained yield on the Allegheny National Forest. Thank you.

**Allegheny Forest Alliance**

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