

# Meeting struggles to stay on point

## ANF seeks input on recreational facilities, receives input on many other ANF issues

By DEAN WELLS

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The problem?

There's not enough funding to maintain all the developed recreational facilities in the Allegheny National Forest.

The solution?

Ask the public which facilities should receive that funding in the future.

The other problem?

The public was more concerned with addressing a whole plethora of other issues during Tuesday's open house meeting held by the U.S.

Forest Service.

There was a palatable sense of anger and frustration in the air during the meeting held by the U.S. Forest Service at the Lions' Club in Sheffield.

ATV riders want more trails. Snowmobilers don't want ATV riders on their existing trails. Mountain bikers want to know what trails they are allowed to ride on. Anglers don't want anyone who wants to ride any type of vehicle in the ANF running through the streams.

Horse enthusiasts want more trailheads.

No one who rides or fishes was

really fond of more oil and gas wells in the ANF.

Forest Service representatives kept stressing the purpose of the meeting was to determine where the public would like to see Forest Service's limited recreation funding spent.

"We can't continue to scatter funds to all the facilities," Bradford District Ranger Tony Scardina told those gathered. "What we need is the most bang for our buck. I would rather have five great sites with things people want than 30

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*Times Observer photo by Dean Wells*

### Public opinion

U.S. Forest Service representatives Tony Scardina, left, Kathy Frank and Rob Fallon listen to public comment during an open house on Tuesday night in Sheffield, held to discuss funding for developed recreational facilities in the Allegheny National Forest.

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mediocre sites."

According to Forest Service spokesperson Kathy Frank, every national forest in the United States is mandated to finish a recreational facilities analysis in 2008. The Forest Service is scheduled to finish a proposal by June to prioritize "funding to maximize our recreational potential" in the ANF.

Frank told the crowd in her opening remarks that a separate meeting would be held to address trail concerns in the national forest.

The meeting then immediately shifted to trail concerns.

"What good are the trailheads, if you don't extend the trail systems?" an ATV advocate asked Frank. "In that 15-year plan I read, you're not going to add to those trails at all."

"We can't bring trails into this product by this June," Scardina said. "The actual trail analysis will be done this summer."

Bill Belitskus, a member of Allegheny Defense Project, asked if this was the only meeting the Forest Service planned to hold on developed recreational facilities in the ANF.

Frank confirmed that this was the only scheduled meeting.

"Are all the other national forests holding just one meeting?" Belitskus said. "If you're only holding one meeting to fill out your (recreational) niche, that isn't enough."

Belitskus questioned why the meeting was being held on a weeknight, "in the middle of the forest."

"Why aren't any meetings being held in the major metropolitan areas like State College or Harrisburg or Buffalo—places where we actually draw people from who use the forest?"

"I really think (the information from tonight's meeting) needs to come back again and (we should) have some dialog going back and forth (between the public and forest service)," Bill Moriarity, a member of the public, suggested. "The Forest Service comes up with the ideas, then it goes into the political system. That's where you people come in; you need to go to your politicians."

A half hour into the meeting, a member of the public finally made the first suggestion for a developed recreational facility: enlarge the parking

lot at the Minister Creek trailhead. He went on to suggest constructing trails in the Kinzua Beach area and developing areas for rock climbers in the ANF.

The meeting went off track moments later when someone asked if there was anyone in attendance representing tourism in Warren County in the ANF. He was met with silence.

"Why don't we promote this area?" he said. "If it wasn't for (outdoor writer) Mike Bleech, Warren County wouldn't even be mentioned. We are in the Pennsylvania Wilds — we might as well be in the Ohio River Valley Association. The Pa. Wilds is the biggest waste of money Warren County has. Pennsylvania Wilds doesn't care if anyone goes to Warren County. And as far as that mausoleum (the Warren County Visitors Center) on Route 6, even if someone goes there, it's closed."

Belitskus accused the Forest Service of discouraging recreation in the Allegheny National Forest.

"Shouldn't you take the clause out (of the Forest Plan Revision) that actually tells

people, 'You're not going to like what you see here, so don't come here,'" Belitskus said. "It's in your forest plan. We've pointed it out to you. Make a commitment where you're actually going to manage the forest so we can have recreation in it. Start with tonight and move forward with a commitment for recreation. That's your problem — you don't have a commitment in your 15-year plan for recreation."

Frank disagreed.

"I don't think we'd be here tonight if we weren't committed to recreational opportunities in the forest," she said.

The meeting ended after two and a half hours with Scardina outlining what would happen next.

Very little discussion was held on developed recreational facilities in the ANF.

"Get your comments on those sheets (provided for public comment at the meeting) and make sure you get them to us," Scardina said. "We'll upload the data onto the web. We need to go back and talk about having other meetings. From there, we'll get back to you guys on what our next steps will be."