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## **U.S. Sen. Bob Casey sends letter to Forest Service chief over Allegheny National Forest recreation areas**

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U.S. Sen. Bob P. Casey Jr., D-Pa., has sent a letter to the head of the U.S. Forest Service asking why the federal agency has proposed closing multiple recreation facilities on the Allegheny National Forest.

As part of a nationwide Forest Service Recreational Facilities Analysis, forest officials have recommended that a number of locations be either closed or partially or wholly decommissioned in an effort to trim operating costs. Officials say increasing maintenance costs coupled with lower visitation levels have required forest officials to make the recommendations.

Among the recreation areas on the chopping block are: Dewdrop Recreation Area, Kiasutha Recreation Area, Kinzua Beach, Roper Hollow Boat Launch, Timberdoodle Flats Trailhead, Tracy Ridge Recreation Area, Beaver Meadows Campground and Recreation Area, Loleta Campground and Recreation Area and Twin Lakes Campground and Recreation Area.

Bradford District Ranger Anthony Scardina has defended his recommendations, saying by closing these sites the forest will be able to “focus more money towards priority sites.”

“These choices will cause internal and external conflicts, but it is my job as a leader and manager to make choices that are in the best interest of the federal government and the American taxpayer,” Scardina said in July.

In the letter addressed to U.S. Forest Service Chief Abigail R. Kimbell, Casey outlined the importance of the national forest on the local communities.

“The recreation facilities in the Allegheny National Forest are an integral part of the northwestern Pennsylvania economy, and they are important on a personal level to many people throughout the state,” the senator wrote. “It would be a shame to see them closed or neglected to the point of demolition.”

All national forests nationwide were required to conduct an analysis of their recreational facilities, the RFA. In short, the Forest Service is trying to cut spending by consolidating services, while maintaining the forest’s niche — the reason people visit a specific national forest.

By following through with the proposed closures and decommissioning, officials say the national forest could save \$109,309 on annual operating costs, \$325,887 on annual maintenance costs and \$2,546,072 of deferred maintenance costs, expenses associated with repairs or major maintenance of a facility.

“It makes sense to have one facility operating at a high standard versus many facilities operating below that high standard,” Kathy Mohney, forest spokeswoman, previously said.

Casey’s press secretary, Kendra Barkoff, said the senator’s office has received many inquiries from concerned citizens throughout the national forest region.

The letter to Kimbell represents the first step in the senator’s search for an explanation, Barkoff said.

“He’s trying to get some answers,” she added.