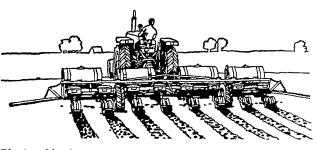
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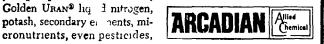
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# Sides being drawn in Allegheny Forest dispute

KANE — The Allegheny National Forest and its natural resources are the rope in a tug-of-war which is pitting conservationists against preservationists.

On the one hand are the natives of the Northwestern Pennsylvania area where the forest currently is located. On the other hand are people from across the nation who feel the Allegheny tract is an unappreciated site which needs to be preserved in its present state forever.

At stake are hundreds of acres of fine cherry timber and a potentially lucrative oil and gas field. Both are located in the Allegheny Forest area.



Vic Westerberg, former legislator from McKean and Cameron County is lobbying to keep the Forest from being declared a Wilderness Area. This, in its pure sense, would exclude any development at all in the Forest.

No roads would be built. Down trees would not be salvaged. No hunting or fishing would be permitted.

The Sierra Club generally favors that approach, although its lobby has agreed to allow hunting and fishing in the proposed wilderness area, apparently to keep those factions in the Wilderness camp.

Each side has its bill in the U.S. Congress. Peter H. Kostmayer, District 8 Representative, has HR 5488, the Wilderness Bill.

Kostmayer is from Bucks County in Southeastern Pennsylvania.

Representative William F. Clinger, Jr., District 23, has HR 6006 which basically gives seven islands in the Allegheny River to the Wilderness Area and keeps the rest of the Forest open to forest management for harvesting timber or other resources.

Clinger is from Warren, in the center of the Allegheny Forest area.

In Kostmayer's corner are the Sierra Club and others

who feel the Forest should become a Wilderness Area.

In Clinger's corner are most of the local people in the Forest area.

Westerberg said the National Forest is a great boost to the local economy.

He pointed out that Cameron County is owned 95 percent by the government and only 5 percent by private landholders.

In McKean County the ownership ratio is about 50-

He said the Forest puts timber up for sale at bid and part of the revenue generated goes to the local second class townships.

Funds are spread out on a county-wide basis so every township gets some money for schools.

In addition, the logging roads which must be built are left behind to serve as fire roads.

Residents of the area fear provisions of the Wilderness Area which would allow fires to burn virtually unchecked, Westerberg said.

Also worried about the outcome are the loggers who derrive most of their imcome from the national forest. Below them in the economic chain is a whole host of suppliers, machinery manufacturers, and the like.

Economically important to the timber jobbers are the excellent stands of hard-

wood, especially the black cherry in the Hickory Creek area.

The Wilderness faction sees the area's greatest resource as the timeless beauty of a natural area growing up the way nature intended it. They feel exploitation of timber or petroleum resources would only ruin the scenic, wild beauty.

The oil and gas in the Tracey Ridge section have not been exploited. The preservationists say they don't want to see heavy equipment dragged in over the land.

They proposed horsedrawn equipment. "The only drilling we'll ever see is with a helicopter that makes no noise," Westerberg said.

Congressman Foley of Washington state proposed taking a bit of land and establishing a framework for a roadless area. His proposal would take only a bit of the land and then guarantee the local people there would be no more taken.

Sierra Club members, who said they wanted no more land, would not buy the release language.

So, the battle wears on.

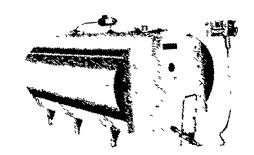
"It bodes ill there and anywhere," Westerberg said.

So, both sides tug at the Allegheny National Forest. The prize is thousands of acres of excellent woodland. The remaining question is which faction has the political muscle to pull the other over the brank and win the day.—CH

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