

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Forest Service responds to Allegheny Defense Project Appeal

The U.S. Forest Service has withdrawn its decision to approve over 1,700 acres of logging in the South Branch Kinzua Creek watershed in the Allegheny National Forest a few miles north of Kane. The Allegheny Defense Project filed an administrative appeal of the Forest Service's timber sale approval on March 24, 2008. According to ADP, the timber sale was not in compliance with the Forest Service Chief's decision regarding the recently revised forest management plan

for the Allegheny.

The Forest Service approved the South Branch Kinzua Creek timber sale on February 7, 2008. The following week, the Forest Service Chief in Washington rescinded portions of the forest plan that the Allegheny Forest Service relied on to approve the timber sale. The Forest Service Chief's decision on the forest plan stated that the Allegheny Forest Service failed to consider the cumulative effects of oil and gas development on local and regional air

quality. The Forest Service Chief instructed the Allegheny Forest Service to revisit its analysis on this point and give the public further opportunity to comment on standards and guidelines for regulating private oil and gas drilling operations, which have dramatically increased in Pennsylvania's only national forest in recent years.

"The South Branch Kinzua Creek timber sale was prepared and published under the direction of the revised forest plan and it suffers from the

same deficiencies that the Chief's Office found with that plan regarding the cumulative effects of oil and gas development," said Ryan Talbott, Forest Watch Coordinator for the Allegheny Defense Project. "The Allegheny Forest Service completely ignored the cumulative effects of oil and gas drilling in conjunction with its clearcut logging proposals."

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission designates South Branch Kinzua Creek as a wilderness trout stream.

According to the Fish and Boat Commission, wilderness trout stream management "is based upon the provision of a wild trout fishing experience in a remote, natural and unspoiled environment where man's disruptive activities are minimized."

The ADP claims that the Forest Service timber sale violated the spirit and intent of the wilderness trout stream designation.

"The Forest Service must protect the surface and water resources of the

Allegheny National Forest for future generations," said Bill Belitskus, ADP board president. "Proposing a massive timber sale in one of the Allegheny's only wilderness trout stream watersheds without considering the cumulative impacts of expanding oil and gas drilling in the area violated the Chief's forest plan decision and federal law. It is time the Forest Service returns to its original of managing national forests as watersheds, not tree farms for the timber industry."