

Partners in Forestry COOP prevails in appeal on the Ottawa National Forest

Partners in Forestry Coop (PIF) has prevailed in an appeal with the Ottawa National Forest over a decision which would have traded away Wildcat Falls and approximately 66 acres of old growth forest featuring hemlock and cedar. The decision notice signed on February 4, 2011 by acting Forest Supervisor Keith Lannom for the Delich land exchange, would have resulted in an increase in total acreage of the Forest. However, PIF was very concerned about the comparison of the quality of the parcels to be traded. After examination of the parcels involved in this project, the group was convinced that a significant loss of public values would occur. Thus, PIF filed their Notice of Appeal on March 20.

The PIF appeal covered several points, including: the loss of the unique feature of Wildcat Falls, the loss of rare hemlock and cedar communities with old growth characteristics, a net loss of perennial stream, and the impacts of future development on the public parcels to be traded. In our original comments from Jan. 2010, as well as in the appeal, PIF did not object to Forest Service acquisition of the Delich parcel, which is just south of the Porcupine Mountain State Park, but did express caution on several points.

The appeal included arguments such as: “Due to its rarity, hemlock forests should not be exchanged for ubiquitous aspen and second growth hardwood stands...in no way can the diminishment of this rare resource be considered insignificant. In light of the threat of extinction from an introduced insect pest, the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, the Forest Service must make every effort possible to retain and protect these rare forests,” and “Old growth forests are an extremely rare feature in the upper Midwest, and by trading away these parcels, the Forest Service would demonstrate that it has no sound policy for maintaining or enhancing these special features.”

While the loss of Wildcat Falls and development impacts were very important to PIF and emphasized in the appeal, it was the concern over the rare hemlock and old growth features which resulted in the reversal of the decision by the regional forester, who stated: “...I find the Ottawa should have more clearly documented and disclosed the analysis regarding hemlock and potential old growth.” PIF considers the acknowledgement of this old growth area as an important step in recognizing the value of unique forest features.

Partners in Forestry is a land owner cooperative, and while our primary mission is in private land and forestry issues, we cherish our role as public land advocates. We recognize the value of the public-private land partnership within the greater forest landscape, and in turn, we encourage members and the public to be involved in public land management.

For more information on PIF, please call Rod Sharka at 715-547-6493 or Joe Hovel at 715-479-8528, or visit www.partnersinforesstry.com.

