

# Wilderness buffs blast Ottawa timbering plan

By Penny Wright  
special writer

Southeastern Michigan conservationists are giving poor reviews to a new U.S. Forest Service resource management plan for the 928,000-acre Ottawa National Forest, located in Michigan's western upper peninsula.

At an Arbor meeting last week, many called the plan flawed and urged public opposition. The issue is whether the Ottawa National Forest should be opened to increased timber harvesting. The forest, abutting Michigan's Porcupine Mountain Wilderness, is home to an extensive mix of wildlife including the bald eagle and the nearly extinct eastern timber wolf. The Ottawa is dotted with scenic waterfalls, pristine lakes and dense masses of hardwood and conifer trees.

**THE PLAN** was discussed at a workshop held in the Ann Arbor public library last week. Besides Ann Arborites, the session drew onlookers from Livonia, Dearborn, East Detroit, Birmingham and other suburban communities.

Workshop panelists spoke on behalf of the Wilderness Society, a co-sponsor the session along with the Sierra Club and National Audubon Society.

The Forest Service is part of the U.S. Agriculture Department. National forests are designated as multiple use lands — for timber and grazing as well as recreation and wilderness. Wilderness advocates charged the plan displays a long-term philosophy of "building more roads and harvesting more timber." They called the philosophy unnecessary, uneconomical and damaging to the forest's wild resource values.

"We feel it is critically important for people to know about the Ottawa Plan and how they can influence the outcome of the plan," said Mike Anderson, a forest planning specialist



our land  
**Penny Wright**

with the Wilderness Society. Anderson said the general public has until Feb. 28 to comment on the Ottawa plan. "Citizens have the opportunity to affect the outcome of the final plan if they act immediately."

**THE BASICS** of the Forest Service plan are:

- Increase the timber harvest to 86 million board feet (mbf) yearly for the plan's 10 years. In the second decade, annual harvests of 111 mbf are planned; 130 mbf in the third decade, and 140 mbf annually in the fourth and fifth decades.
- Increase the road system through the forest to 5,000 miles over 30 years. Currently 4,000 miles of roads are in place.
- Designate some 50,344 acres — Sylvania, Sturgeon River Gorge and McCormick areas — as protected wilderness.
- Support four packs of endangered eastern timber wolf and 66 bald eagle breeding areas.
- Provide opportunity for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation on 14 percent of the forest, semi-motorized recreation on 5 percent and roaded recreation on the other 81 percent.

**WHILE** CONTENDING the plan lacks enough undisturbed land to support wildlife needs, panelists fired hardest at the proposed increase in lumbering.

Panelist Michael Kellett, citing figures showing an average of \$1 million a year loss in timber sales from the Ottawa Forest, called for a slowdown in timbering.

"Using Forest Service data, we can show taxpayers are losing money on the timber har-

vesting, and we believe there is not strong enough need to do what is planned," said Kellett who is on the faculty of the University of Michigan medical school.

When questioned about the losses, Kellett indicated the Forest Service lost money due to high overhead, which included the costs of building roads. Timber sold from non-national forest land usually includes the costs of road building in the price.

In addition, Kellett said, "we propose the Forest Service call it quits on road building for 10 years and save the government money."

**LOOKING AT** the recreational aspects of the plan, Mark Fly, Ph.D. of the U-M School of Natural Resources, said it could reverse the migration trend of city dwellers to the upper peninsula.

"People are making quality of life decisions to move up there. They are looking for natural amenities of the area," he said. "Most land owners — new, longtime or absent — want more wilderness areas."

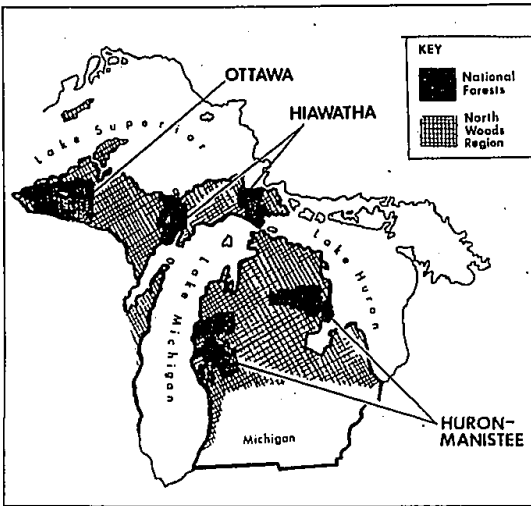
Mike Anderson ended the session by urging attendees to write their congressmen and forestry agencies.

"Public comments on the earlier Forest Service plans have made a difference," said Anderson. He noted the final plan will have a direct effect on how the forest is used over the next 50 years.

**FOREST SERVICE** plans have been issued for six other national forests: the Hiawatha and Huron-Manistee in Michigan, the Nicolet and Chequamegon in Wisconsin, and the Superior and Chippewa in Minnesota.

The Ottawa forest plan is the only draft version still open for public comment.

The Wilderness Society urged sending letters to: Forest Supervisor, Ottawa National Forest, East U.S.-2, Ironwood, Mich. 49938. They also urged writing to U.S. senators and representatives.



The Ottawa National Forest covers almost a million acres of wilderness in the western part of Michigan's upper peninsula. At issue is whether the Ottawa National Forest should be opened to increased timber harvesting. The forest, abutting Michigan's Porcupine Mountain Wilderness, is home to an extensive mix of wildlife including the bald eagle and eastern timber wolf.

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