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Athens Unit

Wayne National Forest management plan revision, phase one.

Report of the Culture and Heritage Working Group

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Introduction

The Culture and Heritage working group based within Athens Unit of the Wayne has spent the last several months delving into the significance of the forest as it relates to our shared narrative, our history, and our families. The group was formed through the revision planning process and consists of voices from a variety of interested parties including recreation, environmental, and concerned citizens. Each member of the working group was drawn to collaborate on this project because of the importance of the Wayne not only to our economies, but to the identity of our communities. The Wayne is the place where so many of our memories, traditions, and prospects for the future are housed. The following is but a brief overview of why the Wayne is more than the sum of its parts.

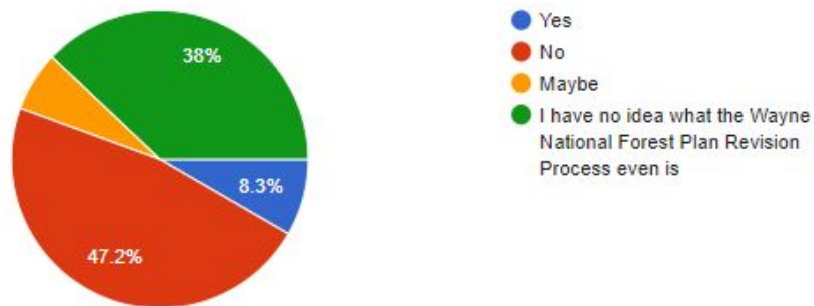
Questionnaire Results

The revision planning process offered this group the opportunity to not only share our own opinions and research, but to aggregate and lift the voices of our neighbors and friends. Working in collaboration with the Ironton Culture and Heritage working group, we crafted a questionnaire specific to our unit of the forest. While the data should not be considered empirical or soundly scientific, the information gathered does lend more voices than just the four of us within the working group. The [questionnaire](https://goo.gl/forms/liebNcZjsPHt0qb42)¹ garnered 108 responses in a three week window. We believe this type of public engagement should be utilized by the forest service once the draft plan is released to gain insights into public opinion beyond those who attend or call into planning meetings. Furthermore, the working group believes that the forest service should utilize all the groups including recreation, air and water quality, culture, etc. etc to assist in crafting the questions and sharing the surveys within their networks. The graph of responses below shows that the majority of those who answered have no knowledge of the revision planning process.

¹ <https://goo.gl/forms/liebNcZjsPHt0qb42>

Do you feel informed of the Wayne National Forest Plan Revision Process?

108 responses

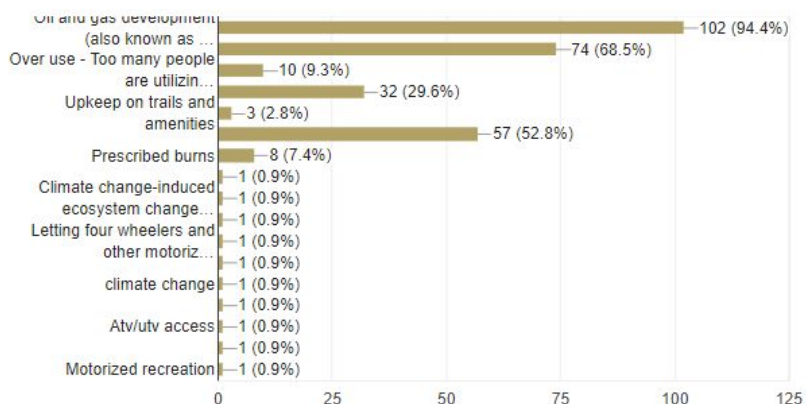


The forest is an asset, on meant to generate funds through the selling of its resources. Forest management thereby is the delicate balance of profit versus sustainability, like a farmer forecasting his crop rotation for seasons to come, the forest service must also conduct their business with an eye on tomorrow and the thousands that follow. But they must also balance the price communities surrounding and within the Wayne are paying in exchange for the extraction of resources.

From added stress to local infrastructure to public health impacts, the business of the Wayne has real world costs for communities. As noted in the questionnaire responses below- people who responded believed oil and gas development, also known as fracking, to be the largest threat facing the forest.

What issues do you feel poses the biggest threats to the Wayne National Forest?

108 responses

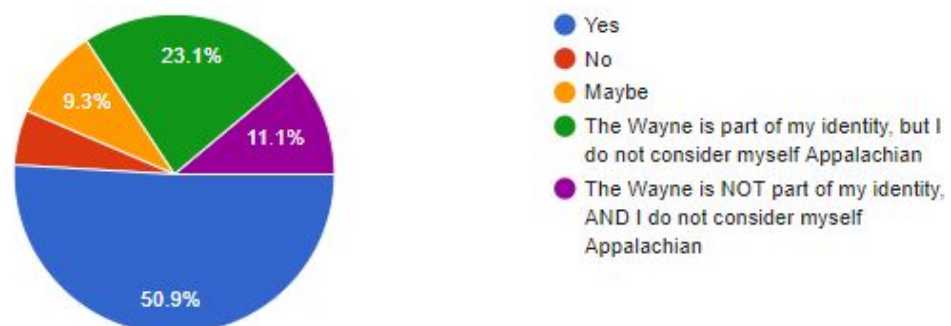


This tract of land nestled in the foothills of Appalachia has paid time and again the legacy costs of extraction. From timber to coal to the looming threat of natural gas, the forest has played host to industry. While the area has a deep history with natural resources being the main economic driver- the communities that surround the forest are amongst the poorest in the state. It is time for a new model, one that lifts up our community interest of selling our resources at the detriment to our health and livelihoods. The forest is a part of our culture, our economy, our shared history, and our future. This group asserts that keeping the forest free of oil and gas development is tantamount the longevity and legacy of the Athens Unit and the communities that share its boundaries.

Cultural Significance

Do you feel the Wayne is part of your identity as an Appalachian?

108 responses

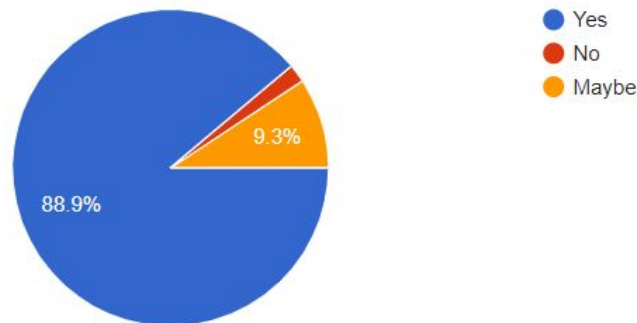


The questionnaire responses above show something interesting about our community. While 78 of the 108 people who completed the questionnaire said they used the Wayne sporadically or less, 90 people said the Wayne was a part of their identity. Meaning there are a number of people who may never visit the Wayne, but the forest is a part of their culture and identity. Moreover, the culture of what it means to be Appalachian is intrinsically tied to the public lands, lush forests, and beautiful landscapes that make up our mountains and foothills. Appalachians

not only wish to keep the forest within their backyards, they wish to keep it protected. See the graphs below as to how the people of the Athens Forest Unit support both Wilderness and

Would you support a portion of the Athens Unit of the Wayne being designated a Wilderness Area?

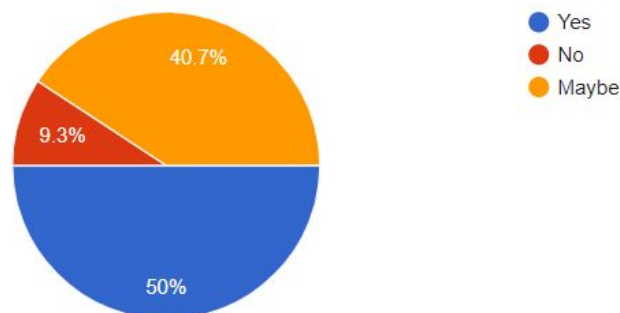
108 responses



Recreation designation, with almost unanimous support for the wilderness designation.

Would you support a portion the Athens Unit of the Wayne being designated a Recreation Area?

108 responses



Beyond how the forest affects our identity, there are many other cultural intersections between the Wayne and our community. Many people couple their trips to the region for local events such as the Paw Paw Festival and Nelsonville Music festival with a trek to the forest. Families host reunions and watch their children grow within the forest. Parents teach survival skills,

organizations like Rural Action and Camp Oty'okwa use the forest to teach science, life skills, and build the next generation of Appalachians. Businesses rely on the forest from lodging to liveries, rentals to recreation. The Wayne is tied to every fiber of our collective identity. Our culture would be forever changed if the Wayne were not longer seen as a place of respite and recreation.

Historical Significance

As stated above, the Wayne is integral to our collective identity, which was formed over generations. Just as the forest houses our families stories, it houses our regions as a whole as well. From iron furnaces to abandoned mines and orphan wells-- the forest is dotted with the legacy of extraction, and of existence. The lands that once housed great tribes and early settlers, are all but forgotten. Our history that has taken place within the Wayne is one that needs preservation. We asked Athenians to share their views on the forest service and their reverence to historical people- their responses are graphed below.

Do you feel the Wayne respects the local culture and heritage of historical occupants (such as Indigenous peoples and Settlers).

108 responses



Only 15% of people asked said they believed the Wayne (by extrapolation the forest service) respects the local culture and heritage of historical occupants. The majority of respondents

either had no concrete idea or opinion. With the wealth of history and knowledge housed within the Wayne, these numbers should be more robust.

Do you have any information or knowledge regarding historical sites or places of cultural significance of indigenous people. 41 responses

If you have thoughts you would also like to share with the Wayne National Forest Culture and Heritage Working group- please provide in the box below. 24 responses

There were noteworthy responses to these last three questions on the survey. Most people were not aware of any way in which the Wayne acknowledged indigenous peoples or settlers. Respondents were generally aware that there were most likely Mounds from ancient peoples in the Wayne as well as settler cemeteries. They felt that both types of human sacred places should be protected and kept undisturbed. Some suggested more educational activities about the previous people living on and utilizing the land of the Wayne could be done while protecting the actual site locations of Mounds. Perhaps settler cemeteries could be restored to allow public visiting of the sites with consultation with the Southeast Ohio History Center. The research of Richard Patton was mentioned as a topic worth sharing with visitors. Others expressed the view that resource extraction was not respecting the heritage of the land; How can we show respect if we are permanently damaging the ecosystem and possible burial sites of earlier people? "Once you lose certain things, they can never be replaced. That's my main concern. No amount of money can compensate for an irreplaceable wonder."

Conclusion

The submission put forth by the Athens Wayne Culture and Heritage Working Group is but a sample of the information needed to convey the cultural and historical importance of our forests to our communities. As mentioned above, we hope the Wayne continues to collaborate with the

newly established working groups and collectively, we can utilize a survey mechanism when the draft plan is released. The questionnaire we conducted should not be seen as empirical, but it does show there is considerable work to be done in terms of outreach and public education. Furthermore, if the forest service wishes to have public buy-in on the draft plan, they need to allow the general public the opportunity to voice those opinions in more accessible ways. The Athens and Ironton Culture and Heritage working group shared one committee member who kept both groups informed of the others' progress and tactics, acting as a conduit of collaboration and thus why the submissions are similar yet distinct to unit community. The questionnaires were created in tandem, but upon comparison you will note slightly different wording to questions- this is due to the customization between communities. Once the questionnaire was finalized by the groups, it was shared via social media, namely the network of neighborhood and specific Wayne user Facebook groups and other listservs via email to committee members network within the community. As previously mentioned, the forest service should create a survey mechanism in collaboration with all the established working groups and utilize similar methods to deliver to a diverse audience. We would also suggest submission of the survey to the ANews and the Athens Messenger, listing a phone number where people without internet access can call in to answer the questions. By doing so, not only will the number of people who are educated about the Wayne undergoing the planning process increase, the forest service would also be gathering the voices of the greater community.