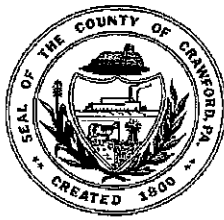


Crawford



County

Eric Henry
Chairman
Francis F. Weiderspahn, Jr
Vice-Chairman
John Christopher Soff
Secretary/Treasurer

Commissioners Office

903 Diamond Park
Courthouse
Meadville, Pennsylvania 16335

Gina Chatfield
Chief Clerk
Keith A. Button
Solicitor

May 24, 2023

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service
11296 Wood Duck Lane
Guys Mills, PA 16327-9499
Attention: French Creek Proposal

Dear Sir or Madam:

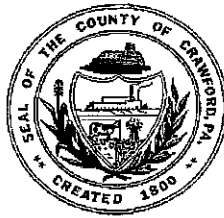
The comments below are submitted in support of an alternative plan to accomplish the stated goals of the United States Fish & Wildlife Service's (USFWS) proposed French Creek National Wildlife Refuge.

Our region is possessed of three features which make it an exceptional place to start families, build businesses, and create partnerships based on shared values.

- The first of these features is the health and vibrancy of our natural environment, and a strong, biodiverse French Creek is essential to the quality of and way of life in our community.
- The second is the working lands that define the character of our region. The fields and forests that are the basis of the livelihoods of so many of us and our neighbors foster a deep connection between our communities and the land that is our legacy.
- The third is the people who live in this area, and the ingrained conservation ethic that has already prompted the creation of local land trusts and conservation groups that help us balance the needs of our citizens, the importance of our working lands to their lives and livelihoods, and the imperative to support protecting the natural ecosystems with whose care we have been entrusted.

Our community appreciates that the USFWS also recognizes the importance of French Creek and shares our goal of protecting and strengthening it for the enjoyment and use of future generations. At the same time, we are concerned that the USFWS proposal, as presented, does not effectively consider its impact on the balance between the three critical features identified above. We would instead suggest that USFWS consider an alternative plan, one that accomplishes its stated goals by utilizing and building upon the strong conservation infrastructure already established by local residents.

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Providing technical and financial resources to local land trust and conservation groups, whose members have decades of experience in protecting the ecology of this vital community asset, is a superior method of promoting each of the three features discussed above. These organizations have demonstrated their ability to successfully serve the needs of both the human and natural communities, all while steadily increasing the number of acres under sustainable management and long-term conservation. We are concerned that the proposed French Creek Wildlife Refuge will hamper those efforts by taking land off the local tax rolls, thus weakening the critical mass of businesses and residents necessary to maintain the infrastructure we have established to support both our economy and our environment.

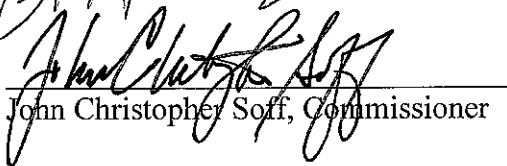
Therefore, a better option would be for the USFWS to redirect its efforts toward assisting in scaling up the great work already underway to manage and protect the French Creek watershed, rather than duplicate those efforts by increasing the number of acres under federal ownership in the watershed.

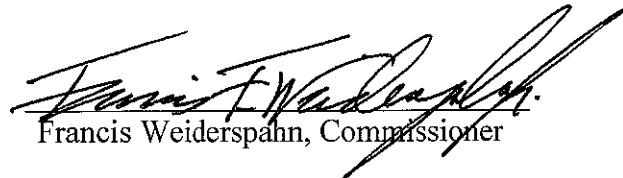
The stated goal of the USFWS and the scientific community—to protect French Creek—is a worthy one. The communities of the French Creek watershed share that goal and have already created a workable and effective model for achieving it. In that context, the appropriate role for the federal government to play in future conservation efforts in the watershed would be to put available federal resources to work through the organizations who have done an outstanding job to date in service of that goal and in enhancing the three features noted above.

Members of our community stand ready to work with USFWS, other federal, state, and local officials, and all interested parties to support our local organizations in their continued conservation work, and we appreciate your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,


Eric Henry, Chairman


John Christopher Soff, Commissioner


Francis Weiderspahn, Commissioner