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Forest Service rejects Blackwater logging road

By [Ken Ward Jr.](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- Federal officials have rejected Allegheny Wood Products' proposal for the company to use a national forest trail in the Blackwater Canyon as a logging road.

The U.S. Forest Service announced its decision in an e-mail sent Friday morning to citizens and groups who have been following the proposal.

Clyde Thompson, supervisor of the Monongahela National Forest, wrote that he would approve Allegheny Wood's access to the trail on a former railroad grade for the "limited purpose of repairing damage to the grade and maintaining drainage structures to reduce impacts" to the company's land.

"My decision does not authorize AWP to have motorized access to the Forest Service's portion of the railroad grade for log hauling or timber management," Thompson wrote in the e-mail message.

In its formal decision document, the Forest Service said Allegheny Wood "has shown the ability to manage timber on their land without using the railroad grade."

Agency officials concluded that "using the grade for these purposes would adversely affect the natural character of the grade, as well as recreational opportunities and experiences along the grade."

In December 2005, the Forest Service had proposed to give Petersburg-based Allegheny Wood Products an easement to the publicly owned half of a railroad grade along the Blackwater River in Tucker County.

The timber company owns the other half of the railroad grade. Allegheny Wood President John Crites wanted to expand onto the public side to ease access for more logging of the Blackwater area.

In February 2007, Crites bought more than 3,000 acres of the scenic canyon. His firm has timbered in the area, and floated plans for condominium development. Environmental groups have opposed the logging and development. They want the area to be made into a national park or be made part of the adjacent state park.

Judy Rodd, director of Friends of the Blackwater, said the Forest Service decision "is a great tribute to all the folks across West Virginia and the nation that worked together for eight long years to keep the Blackwater Canyon Rail-Trail unspoiled."

Officials from Allegheny Wood Products did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

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