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**PENNSYLVANIA STATE PARKS FINALIST FOR NATIONAL GOLD MEDAL AWARD**

**HARRISBURG** – Pennsylvania’s state park system is one of four finalists for the 2009 National Gold Medal Awards for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management, acting Secretary of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary John Quigley said today.

“We have spectacular natural assets in our state park system -- the darkest night-time skies east of the Mississippi; the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon; the largest known bat colony in the state and largest elk herd in the Northeast; and Pennsylvania’s seashore on Lake Erie,” Quigley said. “Beyond what we are blessed with, we have been very innovative in Pennsylvania in our efforts to draw people into our parks in new ways, and connect them to nature through outdoor recreation.”

The Gold Medal Award is given by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration and the National Recreation and Park Association. The winner will be announced by at the NRPA annual meeting in Utah in October. The other finalists are the state park systems in Georgia, Michigan and North Carolina.

The award honors excellence in long-range planning, resource management, volunteerism, environmental stewardship, program development and professional development.

Pennsylvania has 117 state parks and three conservation areas. The system’s nearly 300,000 acres and 1,800 full- and part-time employees play host to more than 35 million visitors each year.

Some of DCNR’s new and innovative state park programs include:

- The *Get Outdoors PA* program that offers hundreds of activities annually for people to learn about outdoor recreation such as kayaking, fishing and hiking, and learn about how we protect our natural resources, their role and why they should care.
- To increase exposure to natural experiences for kids in urban areas, the Bureau of State Parks teamed up with city parks and recreation programs and youth organizations to create the Adventure Camp program—summer camp program for teens. More than 150 kids attended camp in 8 metropolitan areas last summer.
- DCNR launched a Green parks initiative in 2007 to address climate change and energy consumption in our parks, both in words and action. The goal is to reduce the carbon footprint of our parks by 20 percent over the next 5 years.
- Construction is underway on the system’s first nature inn at Bald Eagle State Park, to expand overnight accommodations and attract new visitors.

“We see ourselves not only as land protectors and recreation providers, but also as a model of best practices, conservation advocates, and educators of our future stewards,” Quigley said.

For more information about Pennsylvania state parks, visit the DCNR Web site at <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/>. For more information about the Gold Medal program, go to <http://www.nrpa.org/awards>.