

Connecting Gateway Communities to Pennsylvania's Parks and Forests

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In record numbers, visitors are seeking ways to enjoy outdoor recreation. Navigable rivers, hiking and biking trails, forests, and parks provide opportunities for nearby communities. And these communities, in turn, can offer new support to parks and forests. Residents become more fully invested in the health of the park as a mutually beneficial partnership develops.

Beyond offering lodging and food and other services, towns near a state park or forest can introduce a region's heritage and history through attractions, museums, and events. Gateway communities are discovering ways to encourage longer stays as destinations themselves, in turn increasing the economic impact on town and region.

Through a grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation launched a Gateway Community project in Ligonier, in the heart of the Laurel Highlands. Working with McCollom Development Strategies LLC, an active team including civic and municipal leaders and directors from Linn Run SP, Laurel Ridge SP, and Forbes SF, are exploring the concept of Gateway communities. The team developed projects and programs to effectively connect visitors and residents to amenities, services, recreational pursuits, heritage, and historic sites found in the parks, forests, and local communities.



Ligonier, Pennsylvania

Photo credit CountryLiving.com

***“Gateway communities
are important not
just for providing
food, lodging and
transportation and other
business support for
visitors, but also as
portals to cherished
landscapes.”***

- National Geographic

Projects include:

- Marketing materials targeting rainy and sunny day activities in both town and park.
- A mobile-based walking tour highlighting charming and historic Ligonier and detail routes to nearby Linn Run State Park and Forbes State Forest.
- Enhancing existing websites with information for visitors.
- Working with PennDOT to add additional vehicular signage so visitors to the park can easily find the community.
- Creating a new regional map.
- Hosting open houses for community and community leaders in Linn Run State Park and Forbes State Forest.