

June 7, 2017

The Honorable {Representative Name}
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
PO Box {Address}
Harrisburg, PA 17120-{Suffix}

Dear Representative {Name}:

On behalf of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) I am writing to urge you to support sustainable and adequate funding for operations of our state parks and forests, and for investments in community recreation.

For over 125 years, Pennsylvania has been fortunate to have had leaders with enough foresight to set aside more than two million acres of state forest and 121 state parks for the general public to enjoy and appreciate. **Sadly, HB 218 (the House Budget Bill) would send us backwards as it relates to operating our state lands.**

Pennsylvanians love their state parks and forests, as do we at the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation. As an organization, we are dedicated to the stewardship of our parks and forests. We invest volunteer labor and private dollars into their conservation and stewardship and firmly believe they should be accessible to every Pennsylvanian.

Our back of the envelope calculations indicate that HB 218 **cuts the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources by 16%** over what we estimate to be the cost to carry budget. This 16% translates into \$60 million less than necessary to manage our parks and forests. This loss would deal a blow to a state agency that, research has shown, provides a 1:12.5 return for every dollar invested!

What would HB 218 mean for our state parks and forests?

- Severe understaffing in park and forest operations
- Shortened camping seasons, potentially removing shoulder seasons that accommodate anglers and hunters
- Significantly reduced access to overnight accommodations of all kinds
- Significant reduction in wage staff (approximately a 22% cut!), including maintenance staff, rangers and educators
- Reduced visitor center hours in state parks
- Reduction in ranger patrols in forests and parks
- Elimination of capacity to meet the demand for new or connector trails
- Reduction in routine maintenance, such as lawn mowing, bathroom cleaning, tree trimming
- Increased deferred maintenance, leading to potentially more costs down the road
- Staff shortages for the high risk fire season
- Delays in providing the public timely information regarding drinking wells and groundwater
- Reduced bridge inspections on bridges less than 20 feet in length

- Reduction in dam inspection
- Inability to purchase heavy equipment that maintains roads and fights wildfires
- Emergency radio equipment purchases would be suspended
- Limited staffing in the mineral division to oversee lease transactions, audits, etc.
- Closure of the community enhancing programs like TreeVitalize

The current budget bill will impact public services and programs in state parks and forests. With historic staffing cuts in both wage and salary staff, it will be impossible to operate our 121 parks and 2.2 million acres of state forest as the public anticipates, expects, and deserves they will be operated. This could equate to campground closures, reduced hours and access to staff, and fewer restrooms and safety patrols. In 2016 alone, state forest staff conducted 91 search and rescue operations!

Yet it isn't only state park forests operations that will be impacted...community recreation would also be impacted through the reduction of grant programs and staffing that assist community programs in the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation.

Our parks and forests—be they state or community—are economic engines for the state. They not only create jobs and provide tax revenue for the commonwealth, but they make Pennsylvania an attractive place to live, work, and play. Forest protection also improves water and air quality, reduces erosion, and makes Pennsylvania a healthier place to live.

Reducing investment in state parks and forests impacts surrounding communities. When the Linesville campground at Pymatuning State Park was closed a few years ago, the community of Linesville felt the impact—with fewer visitors to support their local businesses. In a study by Penn State, it was found that direct contribution of visitor spending to the state economy was \$628.7 million in sales, 9,435 jobs, \$227.2 million in labor income, and \$360.5 million in value added effects. The outdoor industry estimates that outdoor recreation generates \$21.5 billion in consumer spending, \$7.2 billion in wages and salaries, \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenue and creates 219,000 jobs!

Our state Constitution, Section 27, Article 1, states that the people have a right to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all people.

Pennsylvania's state parks belong to all of us. At PPFF, we and our 40 chapters eat, sleep, and breathe state parks and forests. We know that when we put in a playground, improve an amphitheater, host a concert, or work on trails, we are doing what our fellow citizens want.

We like to say that we are the “icing on the cake,” but we depend on the state to provide adequate funding for the cake. House Bill 218 fails in this regard.

Yours in the Outdoors,

Marci Mowery

Marci Mowery
President