

A Legacy You Can Take Pride in Continuing

125 Years of Preserving, Creating, and Investing in Pennsylvania's State Parks and Forests

Imagine Pennsylvania depleted of trees and wildlife. No hiking trails or bike paths. And polluted water and eroded shorelines. It's certainly not a pretty picture or one we want to think about, but by the end of the 19th century's industrial heyday, that was the direction the Commonwealth was headed.

Thankfully, our forefathers and mothers recognized the need to preserve land and invest in our parks and forests. As a result, we are fortunate to enjoy breathtaking landscapes, unsurpassed natural resources, and award-winning parks and forests.

It's a legacy to be proud of continuing and one that was inspired by William Penn more than 300 years ago. The founder of Pennsylvania and a forward thinker, Penn understood the value that our forests provided and his obligation to protect them. His early dedication to conservation paved the way for future leaders to invest in the betterment of the Commonwealth.

Today, Pennsylvania boasts 121 state parks encompassing nearly 300,000 acres and a nationally-recognized state forest system with 2.2 million-acres within 49 of the state's 67 counties.

With the legacy of the state's parks and forests now in our hands, it is up to us to sustain the level of investments and resource protection begun by past leaders and citizens, continuing a tradition that is so important to our heritage.

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Photo credit: Chris Brewer

*"I expect to pass through this world but once.
Any good therefore that I can do...let me do it now.
Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again."*

— William Penn

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Pennsylvania Then and Now

To continue the legacy of conserving our state parks and forests, it's important to remember where we started. As we've often said, looking back serves as a reminder to never take our natural resources for granted while inspiring us to plan for the future.

In the dawn of the 20th century, when the country was desperate for more of everything to fuel expansion, Pennsylvanians cut, mined, quarried, hunted, fished, and harvested, leaving in their wake unbelievable devastation. Polluted air and waterways, denuded forests, impoverished soils, extinct and disappearing plant and animal life motivated citizens to embrace an interest in conservation that they believed would restore the state's environmental health.

It wasn't always easy, but through decades of hard work, environmental stewardship and quality management, Pennsylvania is a shining example of how valuable protected land can be. In fact, many now view our state parks and forests as essential features for healthy ecosystems and critical wildlife habitats, the protection of water resources, outdoor education and recreation, personal well-being, and overall health.



Early 20th century coal mining



Promised Land State Park

Photo credit: DCNR

“My great grandfather was the first park ranger at Promised Land State Park and it has been an important asset to our family and the public to enjoy.”

– Nancy Carter, Pike County

The Evolution of Land Protection and Infrastructure

As a reaction to the devastating losses experienced through the industrialization of the state, citizens began organizing – a movement that bore fruit in the creation of commissions, the push for restoration, and the slow recovery of not just our forests, but the species that depend on them.

A bill signed in 1893 formed the PA Forestry Commission, tasked with the control of forest fires and to establish a forest reserve system. The system began with the purchase of 7,500 acres in Clinton County to be used to “furnish timber, protect the water supply of Young Woman’s Creek, and provide recreation for citizens.”

Our first state park, Valley Forge, also established in 1893, recognized the importance of putting aside places of cultural and natural significance for the benefit of all; a recognition that we truly do live in a commonwealth. The founding mothers and fathers also acknowledged the health qualities of protecting these assets, not just clean water from reduced erosion, but access to fresh air and open spaces. Joseph Rothrock, our first Forestry Commissioner, actually practiced medicine and spent much of his life outdoors because of its healing properties.

Over the past 125 years, visionary leaders recognized the need to make investments to develop our system, from early acquisition of lands through tax sales (thus reducing the burden on local and county governments) to investments of infrastructure, leadership, and indeed the public, recognized and supported these investments.



Leaders like Mira Lloyd Dock championed for the acquisition and reforestation of Pennsylvania.

Photo credit: Mont Alto Archives

Valley Forge served as the site of three Boy Scout National Jamborees in 1950, 1957, and 1964.



Photo credit: National Park Service

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Community organizations grew out of need, and assisted in the advancement of a system that became a fabric in the identity of the state and its residents. Indeed, our name says it all: Penn's Woods, Pennsylvania.

How Funding is Changing Lives

From the creation of the Oil and Gas Lease Fund, to Projects 70 and 500, to Growing Greener I and II and the Keystone Fund, investments made a difference in the quality and experience that our parks and forests provided and continue to provide, while also protecting the natural assets we enjoy.

Today, every dollar invested in our state parks and forests brings multiple benefits to the communities that surround them. In a 2012 study, for instance, the return on taxpayer investment in our state parks alone was estimated at nearly \$12.41 for every \$1 invested. With more than 41 million visitors to our state parks in 2016, that accounts for considerable economic stimulation and jobs created and/or retained.

Another study done in 2015, this time for the VisitPA.com website, found that \$6.9 billion in tourism industry sales in Pennsylvania were associated with recreation, making it the third most profitable industry in relation to tourism.

But the value of state parks and forests goes beyond economics. Several Pennsylvania State Park Visitor studies by Penn State University found that Pennsylvanians who visit state parks each year do so to have fun, reduce stress and anxiety, and connect to the outdoors. Not to mention the fact that it also helps them achieve healthy lifestyles.

In terms of environmental services, our state forests and parks provide numerous benefits to us via water treatment, air purification, groundwater recharge, erosion reduction, and capturing atmospheric carbon. Who doesn't like clean water?

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Our state forests and parks include thousands of miles of flowing water.

Photo credit: Tom McCorkle

Follow the Funding

Over the years, governors and the legislature have designated different funds for conservation and recreation purposes. The following is a synopsis of the historic and current funding mechanisms used for state park and forest operations and maintenance projects.

1955 – Act 256 (The Oil and Gas Lease Fund) used money from oil and gas leases on state lands for a broad range of conservation infrastructure, including land acquisition.

1964 – Project 70 authorized \$70 million for the acquisition of lands for recreation, conservation, and historical purposes. The last Project 70 funds were invested in state parks in the late 1970s.

1968 – Project 500 (The Land and Water Conservation and Reclamation Act) packaged state park needs, along with money for abandoned mine land cleanup and sewage treatment plant construction, into another bond issue worth \$500 million. Project 500 funds were fully invested by 1980.

1981 – Act 51 enabled fees collected in state parks to be spent for park operation and maintenance, rather than deposited into the General Fund.

1993 – Key 93 (The Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Act, a.k.a the Keystone Fund) earmarks a portion of the realty transfer tax for state parks, historic sites, libraries, zoos, and higher education facilities.

1999 – The Environmental Stewardship Fund (Growing Greener I) was created to invest in watershed restoration, parks and recreation, open space preservation, abandoned mines and wells reclamation, and sewer and drinking water system upgrades.

2005 – Growing Greener II was passed to allocate funds for state park and forest improvements and open space conservation.

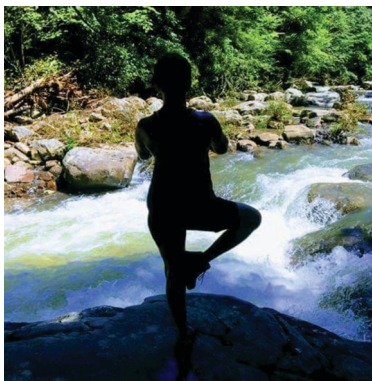


Photo credit: Sharon Dobbs



Photo credit: Friends of Kings Gap

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Ensuring Another 125 Years

It's obvious that our state parks and forests are well loved and much appreciated, having provided generations of Pennsylvanians with some of their fondest memories. But with that use comes significant wear and tear to the built and natural infrastructure, requiring frequent maintenance and upgrades to keep up with the demand and ensure that our state parks and forests remain well regarded in the public eye.

With the significant amount of buildings, roads, bridges, dams, and other structures within our state parks and state forests, routine maintenance is a daily task. Water and sewer lines, as well as treatment facilities, need to be upgraded to meet new regulations, roofs worn by time need to be repaired or replaced, roads need to be resurfaced, campsites need to be mowed, and fences need to be mended or removed. Much like a home to-do list, the removal of one project from the maintenance list at a state park or forest makes way for another project, and another, and another.

Like our foremothers and fathers, we all play a role in ensuring we present our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren with the same opportunities we had for enjoying the outdoors. **To hand them anything less would rob them of their legacy, and remove their rights under our state constitution.**

How do you want to be involved? Does volunteerism interest you? Are you interested in advocacy? Is there a project that you would like to support financially? A trail you want to hike? A skill you have to share? **There is a role for everyone in continuing the legacy of conservation that IS our state parks and forests.**

"It never ceases to amaze me what a beautiful, bountiful state we have and our parks are AMAZING. Each one is so special – all free to visit, awesome trails to hike, lakes to paddle, history to learn. I love our parks and forests!"

– Janet Ball, Allegheny County



Fishing at Marsh Creek

Photo credit: Xiaowei Zhang

How Do I Love Thee, Let Me Count Thy Ways *Celebrating 125 Years*



Throughout 2018 opportunities exist to engage in the 125th anniversary of our parks and forests.

While we are still building our activity list, we welcome your input. Email your ideas to 125anniversary@paparksandforests.org and share with us your thoughts.

Keep your eye on our website and calendar for ways to get involved.

Celebrating More Milestones!

25th anniversary of the Keystone Fund, a critical funding source for Pennsylvania recreation and conservation projects, libraries, and historical preservation initiatives. Celebratory events are being planned – keep an eye on our calendar for activities near you.

150th anniversary of the death of James Buchanan, the only president from our fine state. Visit his home, Wheatland, in Lancaster; have a picnic and visit the monument to him at Buchanans Birthplace State Park, or enjoy a hike on one of many miles of trails in Buchanan State Forest.

200th anniversary of the National Road. What's that, you ask? Visit <http://nationalroadpa.org/about-the-national-road> to learn more about the National Road in Pennsylvania.