

Celebrating the 125th Anniversary of PA's State Parks and State Forests

May 22, 2018

2 p.m.

Ryan Office Building – Atrium Steps

Thank you for inviting me to share a few words on this remarkable 125th anniversary of Pennsylvania's State Parks and State Forests. It is an honor to serve on the board of the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation, and it is an honor to speak with you today. Thank you to Marci Mowery and Jessica Aiello for organizing this event, thank you to John Norbeck of DCNR for being here to celebrate this occasion, thank you to Senator Baker, Senator Schwank, and Representative Harper for their leadership, and thank you to all our colleagues for voting in support of House Resolution 901 today.

Pennsylvania's State Parks and State Forests are an invaluable resource in countless tangible and intangible ways. Land conservation is so important to maintaining a sustainable ecosystem. The benefits of a thriving environment ripple through our lives every day: from cleaner air and cleaner water, to more bountiful wildlife and agricultural output, to judicious management of mineral resources and other commodities.

And, of course, our State Parks and State Forests provide wonderful opportunities to spend time in the great outdoors right in our own backyards. As it turns out, those of us gathered here are not the only ones who appreciate our Parks and Forests. Many Pennsylvanians – and, in fact, many residents of other states and even other countries – can see the value in our precious State lands.

In my position as the Democratic Chairman of the House Tourism and Recreational Development Committee, I have a unique perspective on the many positive impacts of State Parks and State Forests on our economy:

- A study ordered by DCNR and conducted by Penn State University demonstrated that Pennsylvania's State Parks hosted 37.9 million visitors who spent \$859 million on their trips in 2010 alone. Nearly one quarter of that money was infused from out of state.
- Our State Parks directly supported 9,435 jobs in 2010, and the secondary effects of visits to the Parks added another 3,200 jobs across the economy.
- For every dollar invested in Pennsylvania's State Parks in 2010, \$12.41 of value-added income was returned to the Commonwealth.

- State Parks and Forests are especially valuable to the more rural regions of Pennsylvania, where the economy has struggled in recent decades. The Parks that were associated with the highest estimated visitor spending in 2010 were Pymatuning in Crawford County, Presque Isle in Erie County, Prince Gallitzin in Cambria County, and Ohiopyle in Fayette County.

As you can see, our State Parks and Forests are integral to our Commonwealth in so many ways. We were blessed 125 years ago with the forward-looking visions of men and women like Governor Robert E. Pattison, Dr. Joseph T. Rothrock, Commissioner Mira Lloyd Dock, and Governor Gifford Pinchot. Their plans were supported through the 20th century by the likes of Secretary Maurice K. Goddard and Ms. Rachel Carson. Now, the mantle of conservation falls to us to carry on their legacy in the 21st century, and this recognition of the 125th anniversary of the founding of our State Parks and State Forests is an important opportunity to focus on that mission and renew our dedication.

Once again, thank you for inviting me to be a part of this commemoration.