



HOW TO CELEBRATE THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF STATE PARKS AND FORESTS:

A HANDBOOK FOR PPFF FRIENDS CHAPTERS

2018 marks the 125-year anniversary of Pennsylvania's state parks and forests. This is a legacy we can all be proud of. As we look to the future, know that there are many ways we can help shape the next 125 years of these public lands.

This handbook - generated by suggestions made by friends groups at the eastern and western Pennsylvania retreats - provides activities your Friends Chapter might consider to celebrate the 125-year anniversary. Our goal with the anniversary celebration is to ensure that there will be another anniversary for future generations of volunteers to celebrate. Select one or more actions and have some fun in the process!

1 HOLD AN ANNIVERSARY PARTY OR OTHER CELEBRATION

There are many ways to celebrate the 125th anniversary as well as the specific "birthday" of your state park/ state forest. You might host a day-long event or a one-hour celebration. Regardless of the length of time, by celebrating the occasion you demonstrate to visitors the importance we place on the legacy of Pennsylvania's state park and forest system and the role they can play in supporting the next 125 years. This may also help to generate new volunteers for your group!

HERE ARE A FEW SUGGESTIONS:

Hold an open house on the birthday/month of your state park/forest.

Work with park/forest staff to use the office, visitor center, or other on-site building as a hub from which people can meet Friends Chapter members and park/forest staff to learn about the park/forest (its history and current amenities), volunteer opportunities, and other upcoming events. Make it a party-like atmosphere with cake, and other light refreshments. Consider inviting retired staff and long-time volunteers and encourage them to share stories of days past. You can use this as an informal way to raise funds for any projects on the park's/forest's needs list, too.

Designate an existing event at the state park/forest as a 125th anniversary celebration.

Many Friends Chapters are already involved in organizing festivals and other events for their state park/forest. Use these established events to promote the anniversary. Pass out literature about the celebration (those generated by PPFF, the park/forest, or Friends Chapter), have a cake and party decorations, etc. to make it a fun and informative atmosphere. Perhaps have a pledge sheet where folks can commit to conserving our parks and forests for another 125 years!

Incorporate your event into Pennsylvania State Parks and Forests Week (May 23-30, 2018).

PPFF is in the process of getting a Governor's proclamation and resolution from the House and Senate to designate the week of May 23-30, 2018 as PA State Parks and Forests Week. We hope to debut this during the PPFF banquet. This week was chosen because the date that legislation was signed to create the state Forestry Commission (May 23, 1893) and the date that legislation was signed to create the first state park at Valley Forge (May 30, 1893) both fall in that week. This will be the perfect week to kick-off the 125th anniversary celebration. Use social media to let people know about any events and activities you have planned to coincide with the week. Plan events (see #2 below for ideas) to take place that week. The more you can draw attention to this week, and the anniversary in general, the more people we can engage with about the important legacy of Pennsylvania's State Parks and Forests.

CREATE SPECIFIC PROGRAMMING TO EDUCATE VISITORS ABOUT THE ANNIVERSARY AND IMPORTANCE OF PENNSYLVANIA STATE PARKS AND FORESTS

Friends Chapters across the Commonwealth are skilled in planning events and activities for their state park/forest. Create a new or add to an existing program a promotion of the 125th anniversary.

HERE ARE SUGGESTIONS GENERATED BY YOUR FELLOW FRIENDS:

➤➤➤ Schedule one or more speakers/presentations.

This could take place for an hour in the evening, or an afternoon on a weekend. It could take place inside with a computer presentation, or outdoors with hands-on learning. Topics could include a history of your state park/forest and plans for the future; the economic, health, and environmental benefits of the park/forest; people who have made the park/forest what it is today; an overview of the history of the state park/forest system as a whole; or other topics specific to your park/forest. Or you could have a film screening of Parks and Forests for Everyone (or similar video) followed by a facilitated audience discussion. (See www.PaConservationHeritage.org for available videos.)

Whatever the subject matter, be sure to wrap up the presentation with a discussion of the anniversary – what events might be planned, the materials that are available, and the importance of it (now and for the future). Leave attendees with some concrete tasks they can do to help the state park/forest – donate to a project, join your Friends Chapter, write their legislator about getting dedicated maintenance funds, etc.

➤➤➤ Lead a virtual or real walk.

Virtual walks can be created online to show people the great features of your state park/forest from the comfort of their chair. While of course we would rather get them outdoors, this is a way to ease someone into the idea of a state park/forest with the hope that they will be intrigued enough to then visit it in person. They can “take a hike” on one of the park/forest trails and learn about the features along the way (what geologic features might they see? What plants and animals are along the trail? What historic structures might be seen? etc.) Talk about the sights and sounds from both a historic and current perspective, then leave them with a call to action for the future about how they can help the park/forest.

For real walks, the same ideas apply. Have someone knowledgeable about a certain topic(s), such as CCC-era structures, geologic features, birds, invasive plants, etc. lead small groups on an education hike, being sure to link it back to why the topic is important and how the state park/forest is relevant. Remind them of the 125th anniversary and provide them with ways that they can get involved.

➤➤➤ Create a geocache with 125 anniversary related items inside.

Geocaching is the activity where people use GPS devices to locate small hidden containers that typically contain a small trinket that they can take. Friends Chapters can hide their own geocaches on state park/forest property (with the ok of the park/forest manager) to promote the anniversary. PPFF will make available for purchase small pins, patches, and stickers that could be used as the geocache prize. Small business cards could be printed as well, with the anniversary logo and quick information about the anniversary and sending them to a website for more information.

➤➤➤ Organize a scavenger hunt.

Like the geocache idea but not necessarily requiring the use of a GPS device, a Friends Chapter could create a scavenger hunt for their state park/forest to engage people with the anniversary. Clues would take participants to different locations that are easily identifiable using a map or directions. At each stop participants would learn a bit about the location and why it is important. Participants would be required to either take a photo of each location or write down the answer to a question posed at each spot as proof that they went to each location. Small prizes could be awarded for making it to each stop.



ENGAGE WITH AT LEAST 125 PEOPLE ABOUT THE ANNIVERSARY AND BENEFITS OF STATE PARKS AND FORESTS

As we know, the benefits and importance of Pennsylvania's state parks and forests are numerous, but do the visitors to your park/forest know of them?

RELEVANT INFORMATION TO SHARE:

»»» The more than 40 million visitors a year to Pennsylvania's state parks and state forests generate more than \$1 billion a year for our economy through visitor purchases of hotel rooms, dinners, souvenirs, and other amenities.

»»» The return on taxpayer investment in our state parks alone was estimated at nearly \$12.41 for every \$1 invested, according to a 2012 study by Penn State University.

»»» Pennsylvania's 121 state parks were recognized in 2009 as the best state park system in the nation from the National Recreation and Park Society

»»» Pennsylvania has a nationally-recognized Forest Stewardship Council certified sustainable state forest system with 2.2 million acres within 49 of the state's 67 counties.

»»» Spending time in our state parks and forests is great for your health. Studies show that outdoor recreation reduces stress, anxiety and depression, lowers the risk of obesity, helps regulate blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and reduces your risk of cardiovascular issues.

»»» Pennsylvania state parks and forests provide many ecosystem services, including clean air and water. In fact, our forests act as a 2.2 million-acre water treatment system.

»»» There are so many recreational opportunities at Pennsylvania's state parks and forests including, 180 boat ramps, 56 swimming beaches, 50 fishing piers, 18 swimming pools, 280 cabins, 4 ski areas, 2 golf courses, and 2 model airplane airports, among so much else!

There are many ways to formally and informally share this information and engage with visitors to your state park/forest. You can talk to them one-on-one and share the 125th anniversary materials developed by PPFF. You can invite them to attend one of the events created by your Friends Chapter. You can post information on your social media channels (see examples developed by PPFF that you can use and/or modify) and/or reach out to the press (using the sample press release developed by PPFF). The opportunities for engagement are endless, but a few suggestions are listed below.

»»» **Record interactive "first memories" conversations.** This can take the shape of written stories, voice recordings, or short videos of people recounting their first or fondest memory of your state park/forest. The key is to have a few questions written ahead of time to give to the participants to frame the discussion, as well as guidelines about length and format, for consistency. Questions to ask could include, "What was your favorite experience here and why?", "How old were you at the time and who was with you?", "Have you had similar experiences here since or introduced others to the experience?", etc. Participants could include visitors to the park/forest, staff (current or retired), members of your Friends Chapter, and residents of nearby communities.

The collected memories could be put together in booklet format with photos of each participant, used for social media posts, placed on posters to hang up in park/forest buildings, shown during an anniversary event, shared with local media for their use, etc. Be sure to get written permission from each participant to use their story and likeness before sharing. (See photo release provided). Be sure to let PPFF know if you do this project so that we can share some of the stories through our social media and newsletter too.

»»» **Hold a photo and/or short video contest,** offering 125th anniversary prizes for winning participants (PPFF is developing t-shirts, patches, pins, and other items to be used as prizes). Ask participants to submit an image that, to them, captures the importance of your park/forest and describe why they chose that image. You can choose to have different categories such as "economic benefits", "ecological benefits," "social benefits," etc. Or different participant age categories, or amateur versus professional photographers. If you choose to go the route of a video competition, be sure to specify length (recommended to keep under 3 minutes). Any photos or videos that include people should include a written permission statement to use their likeness. Selected photos and videos can be then used for social media posts, sent to the local media for their use, compiled into a calendar to celebrate the 125th anniversary, displayed in the park/forest office, and/or used on other promotional materials.



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INVITE LEGISLATORS TO THE STATE PARK/FOREST TO SHOWCASE ITS UNIQUENESS AND ITS NEEDS

Just as the public may not know all the benefits of our state parks and forests and what makes them special, our legislators may also be uninformed. The legislature is an important ally to have on our side, as they can designate special and recurring funds for state park/forest projects and on-going maintenance needs. Friends Chapters have a unique opportunity to engage with local representatives and senators during the 125th anniversary to share the needs and opportunities present within the park/forest. Share the economic, ecologic, health, and social benefits of your park/forest with them and discuss items from the needs list and how designated funds from the state would meet those needs.

PPFF has set a goal of at least 25 legislative visits during the next 5 years of the anniversary campaign.

YOU CAN ASSIST PPFF BY:

- »» Communicating your interest in hosting a legislative visit to PPFF and PPFF will supply you with the legislators that represent your park/forest. In some cases, there may be several.
- »» Serve as a point of contact so that this is a local event
- »» Sending written requests to legislators, then following up via phone calls as needed
- »» Creating an agenda for the visit, including special sites to see
- »» Designating members of your Friends Chapter as guides for the day
- »» Sending thank you cards/letters to those who participate

PPFF staff may provide copies of the new DCNR infrastructure needs report, as well as anniversary materials, to distribute to the participants, and they will be present during the visits to assist, but the message of the benefits of Pennsylvania state parks and forests will be best received coming from people who live, work, and recreate in their district – people like you!

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FINAL SUGGESTIONS

Use the designated list of **anniversary hashtags** (*shown below*) on your social media platforms, and encourage others to use them, too. A hashtag is a word or phrase preceded by a hash mark (#), used within a message to identify a keyword or topic of interest and facilitate a search for it. Whenever a user adds a hashtag to their post, it's able to be indexed by the social network and becomes searchable/discoverable by other users.

ANNIVERSARY HASHTAGS ARE:

- »» #PARKSFORESTS125
- »» #PAPARKSANDFORESTS

However you decide to engage, we encourage all Friends Chapters to **use the 125th anniversary logo on handouts and social media posts** created in 2018. PNG and JPEG files of the logo will be shared with all chapters by PPFF, in addition to a sample press release and other materials combined in a media packet.

The benefits of engaging on state parks/forests and the anniversary are numerous, but one of the best outcomes could be attracting new volunteers who will join your chapter.