



REMARKS BY MARCI MOWERY, PRESIDENT
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I'm a user. A park and forest user, that is. When I interviewed for my position at the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation in 2005, I had already visited 87 of the then 114 state parks and 17 of the 20 forest districts. I knew, as a user, it was time to give back.

How many of you have visited a state park or forest?

Our state parks and forests are the vacation destination for over 40 million visitors a year. Our parks **and forests are where our kids learn to camp, hike, and make s'mores. They are the places where** family memories are made, proposals of ever-lasting love are issued, and where friendships are formed.

Did you know that reducing stress is the #1 reason people give for visiting a park? Do any of you **have stress? Meet me outside, we'll take a hike at the closest state park to the city, Boyd Big Tree Preserve on Fishing Creek Valley Road.** We are fortunate in Pennsylvania to have a park within 25 miles of every resident offering free admission and free parking, making them accessible to all.

Other speakers have shared the important role parks and forests play in building the economy and **creating jobs. We've also discussed the role they play in cleaning our air and protecting our water** quality.

Yet, despite these many documented benefits of our parks and forests, they suffer from decades of **"making do."**

Park and forest staff are some of the hardest working people I know. They understand that your visit is most likely your vacation, and they want you to have the best experience possible.

Yet years of underfunding has reduced staffing levels in state parks to the same levels they were in the **1970's when there were fewer parks and only 20 million visitors. State forest staffing levels are also** down, while pressures on the forests, from invasive pests and flooding to increased visitation, are on the rise.

The work of park and forest staff cannot be mitigated through technology and abstract theory. It requires people.

Any investment—like your own car or home—requires regular maintenance to retain its value. We need to keep the roof from leaking and periodically change the oil in the car. For state parks and forests that same regular maintenance means investments in our roads, bridges, trails, beaches, and

campgrounds. It means managing for invasive plants and diseases, and restoring landscapes from past industrial uses.

These special places, which are guaranteed to all Pennsylvanians through the Environmental **Rights Amendment to Pennsylvania's Constitution, are suffering.**

We are here today to release *The Legacy of Pennsylvania's State Park and Forests: The Future Is in Our Hands*, a call to action for citizens and decision makers to understand the challenges facing our parks and forests and to launch a conversation to ensure a vibrant future for our public lands. At the foundation, we muster volunteers and private donations to invest in parks and forests, but the task ahead of us requires more than private philanthropy, it requires courageous leadership to conserve our rich natural heritage.

During graduate school I worked for a chamber of commerce doing industrial site location. As part of our recruiting materials, we promoted the quality of life created by vibrant towns and access to the outdoors. Investing in our parks and forests creates a quality of life that makes Pennsylvania a great place to live, work, and play, keeping us competitive on the national front for job creation, employee retention, and attracting new businesses.

The conversation begins today, with the release of this report. We are all the stewards of these lands—we hope that you will join us as we became the voice for stewardship and investment not just for today, but for our children and grandchildren.