



Open Letter to Governor Wolf and Members of the General Assembly March 25, 2019

In January, the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) released a report, [*The Legacy of Pennsylvania's State Parks and Forests: The Future Is In Our Hands*](#), that outlines the billion dollar need for infrastructure investments in our state parks and forests. Years of underfunding and sporadic investment has created a situation in which our built (bridges, dams, water and sewage treatment facilities, recreational facilities) and natural environments face an unprecedented need.

Recreational user expenditures have made Pennsylvania rank 5th in the nation in terms of the amount of outdoor recreation spending. According to the 2017 National Recreation Economy Report (<https://outdoorindustry.org/advocacy>), this spending generates more than \$29.1 billion in revenue and supports over 251,000 jobs. This study aligns with other studies that find that investments in our state parks and forests yield valuable returns for the state, with one 2010 study finding that for every \$1 in tax payer money invested in a state park, \$12.41 is returned to the state in revenue.

At a time when we need to invest MORE in our state parks and forests, current budget proposal would **strip millions of dollars** away from park and forest infrastructure project investments in order to fund general government operations. PPFF has historically, and continues to believe, that these funds need to be used as they were intended—to fund projects in communities, parks, and forests that benefit all Pennsylvanians. The funds were not and are not intended for government operations.

It's been suggested that money can be taken from the **Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund** (Keystone) and the **Environmental Stewardship Fund** because no harm will be done to project investments. Furthermore, it has been implied that because the funds have increased in the past few years, tapping into them at this point in time will not cause ill-effect. We disagree.

- Annually, more funds are requested from the Keystone Fund and the Environmental Stewardship Fund than can be awarded for projects. Additionally, many projects that are funded are not funded in full, due to the demands on the program.
- Money encumbered for projects in the Keystone Fund and the Environmental Stewardship Fund are monies that are committed to projects. Many of the funded projects take more than one year to complete, therefore money remains in the account until grantees request payment. When a grant contract is signed, the grantee assumes that the contracts will be honored.
- During house and senate hearings related to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources budget, it was revealed that going forward, grants would be awarded to communities on a “contingency basis” or allocated to park/forest projects on a “cash basis,” i.e. payments would be spread over multiple years and would be made “if funds are available.” This creates uncertainty for planning and executing projects, and could increase costs if loans are required or if projects are approached in a start/stop manner.

We understand that the departments of Environmental Protection and Conservation and Natural Resources need additional revenue to operate. Staffing in both agencies has plummeted—with park staffing operating at the same level as in 1970 when we had fewer parks and 20 million fewer visitors! As the demands on our parks and forests have increased, so should our investments in them.

Our parks and forests are the public trust, and as such require additional general fund investments for operations. The proposed transfers in the Governor’s budget are predicated upon the successful execution of the Governor’s proposed RestorePA initiative in order to mitigate the impacts on parks, forests and recreation. While we applaud the Governor for looking at the broad based infrastructure needs across the commonwealth, we argue that RestorePA would best serve our parks and forests if it were in ADDITION TO, not as a replacement for, the Keystone Fund and the Environmental Stewardship Fund. Should RestorePA fail to pass, the proposed Keystone and ESF transfer impacts will be readily felt.

Investing in parks, forests and recreation is an investment in the economy and human health of our state. We urge you to protect both the Keystone Fund and Environmental Stewardship Fund, while also considering the additional funding that could be made possible through RestorePA.

Very truly yours,



Marci J. Mowery, President