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A Letter from Our Chair

Happy Spring Everyone!

While our year started off on a happy note with our well-attended First Day Hike, we were hit like everyone else with the COVID-19 outbreak. Cook Forest State Park is currently closed, at least until the end of April. Like many other groups we're unable to schedule anything with any degree of certainty as the closure could continue past April the way things are looking now. While the park is closed the trails remain open, and we encourage everyone to get out and walk, stay active and perhaps see some parts of the park you haven't gotten to for a while. This past weekend I saw quite a few cars in the office parking lot and at the Log Cabin Inn lot as well.

While official Friends events are on hiatus we're trying our best to plan what will take place the rest of the year. We still want to pick up litter along Forest Road as part of our Adopt-A-Highway commitment, and we'll need to pull Garlic Mustard in May to keep it from overwhelming the area between the office and the Log Cabin Inn. The initial Walk With Friends hike on March 21st was postponed due to the virus, but we'll be starting those up again as soon as possible.

This newsletter is our longest (and hopefully our best!) to date. We hope you enjoy what we've gathered for you here. We have a contribution from Park Manager Ryan Borcz and Friends board members Amanda DiBenedetto and Roger Mazzarella.

Please keep the park in mind as we all wait out the end of the COVID-19 outbreak, we're hoping for a busy and successful year once it gets rolling. You can follow us on Facebook and also on our website (www.friendsofcookforest.org) where we'll be posting all of our events.

Carl Harting
Chair, Friends of Cook Forest

A Message from Park Manager Ryan Borcz

Dear Friends of Cook Forest,

Thank you for your continued support of the Pennsylvania State Park system through these unprecedented times. I'm hoping this message finds you and yours doing well, staying safe, and enduring the challenging times that we are all confronting.

I'm sure that many of you are aware that Pennsylvania State Park facilities are currently closed until April 30 to help slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As part of Pennsylvania's COVID-19 mitigation efforts, all buildings in the parks, including park offices, restrooms, campgrounds, cabins, marinas, shoreline mooring, boat racks, all reservable facilities, and all forms of accommodations are closed. All events and public educational programs are canceled through April 30th. The public can still access trails, lakes, rivers, non-marina docks, forests, roads, and parking areas for passive and dispersed recreation such as hiking. Anyone with reservations in this time period will be contacted and full refunds will be made. While these park facilities are closed, our state park rangers, managers, and essential maintenance staff will continue to work, reporting to the park daily to ensure facilities maintenance, security, and that public safety is protected.

The best advice to slow the spread of the corona virus is to stay home, not recreate in large groups, and practice social distancing. If you are looking to be outdoors, stay as close to home as possible including your backyard, neighborhood, or local park or trail unless they are crowded or closed. Visitors can help keep state parks safe and clean by doing the following: avoid crowded parking lots and trail heads, use the bathroom before you visit, bring a bag and carry out your trash, clean up after pets, and avoid activities that put you at greater risk of injury, as there is limited staff to assist.

Despite our current facility closures, our park attendance during the month of March, when compared to March of 2019, has increased considerably. These observations show that our visitors are still turning to Cook Forest and Clear Creek for their recreation benefits, quiet reflections, and the overall renewal benefits of spending time in the outdoors. I'm very thankful and fortunate to have an excellent front line and support staff during these uncertain times, and we're equally lucky to have a dedicated group of volunteers through the Friends of Cook Forest. I hope that you all remain safe and healthy.

For the most up to date information about DCNR facilities and closures due to COVID-19 please visit www.dcnr.pa.gov.



Has Climate Change Affected Our State Parks?

by Amanda DiBenedetto

The answer is a big YES. In fact, Greg Czarnecki, the Director of Applied Climate Science at the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, recently published an article calling climate change Pennsylvania's greatest environmental crisis. He states that since the first Earth Day celebration 50 years ago, we have made tremendous progress protecting our air, water and natural resources. But despite that, we now face major impacts here in Pennsylvania's State Parks because of the change in seasonal temperatures and weather.

How much has our climate changed? Czarnecki states that since the early 20th century, Pennsylvania's average temperature has increased more than 1.8° F, with an even greater rise in winter temperatures. We receive about 10 percent more precipitation annually, with the greatest increase during winter as rain. He says the intensity of our rain events has also changed, with an increase in very heavy rain events.

How has this impacted our State Parks? DCNR reports that infrastructure damage from flooding has increased substantially, leading to washed out roads and trails and even structural damage to buildings. Other impacts include wind damage and loss of recreational opportunities. Czarnecki states our natural world is being changed too. He says climate change is affecting the growing season. It is now 10 days longer than it was during the mid-20th century. He adds that while that might be good for your vegetable garden, it's leading to an increase in frost damage to forests that bud early during late winter warm spells. Animals are responding too. The timing of bird migrations, for example, is shifting, and in the case of red-tailed hawks many no longer migrate because food is available year round.

How is DCNR taking action? To help ensure that our parks and forests remain resilient in the face of climate change, Czarnecki says DCNR developed a climate change adaptation and mitigation plan. The plan identifies 46 climate change vulnerabilities ranging from the loss of species and the introduction of new invasive species to increased wildfire risk and the loss of winter recreational opportunities. More than 200 actions related to infrastructure, recreation, and conservation were identified. For example, the plan contains many recommendations for making infrastructure more resilient. And since the summer recreation season is longer and the winters are warmer and rainier, DCNR is looking at recreational sustainability and resource carrying capacity. DCNR states that state parks and forests are key pieces in the system of interconnected habitats that plants and animals use to migrate north and to higher elevations as the climate changes. They are currently working to identify the state's key migration corridors to direct conservation dollars to preserving missing links through acquisition, easements, and support of land conservation.

What is DCNR doing to "Go Greener?" To date DCNR says they have installed 16 solar arrays in state parks and forests with a combined energy production of 365kW, and by the end of 2020 that will increase to 1,665kW, with 11 new projects expected to be completed. DCNR plans to derive 50 percent of its electricity from renewable sources by 2022. Also DCNR is electrifying its automobile fleet and installing electric vehicle charging stations. Since 2017, the department has replaced 23 of its vehicles with a mixture of fully electric and hybrid plug in vehicles. Additionally, 19 electric vehicle charging stations have been installed in state park and forest locations. By 2025 DCNR plans to have 25 percent of its fleet electric. DCNR says they also remain committed to educating the public about climate change impacts and solutions with signage and special programming. Society's actions over the next decade will determine how severe the long-term effects of climate change will be.



Binocular Astronomy

Submitted by Roger Mazzarella

Seeing stars in the night sky is increasingly difficult in our cities. Not so in Cook Forest. Ready to take the next step in observing the night sky from your campsite or cabin porch? Click [here](#) to read an article on EarthSky.org.

Friends T-Shirts and Cathedral DVDs

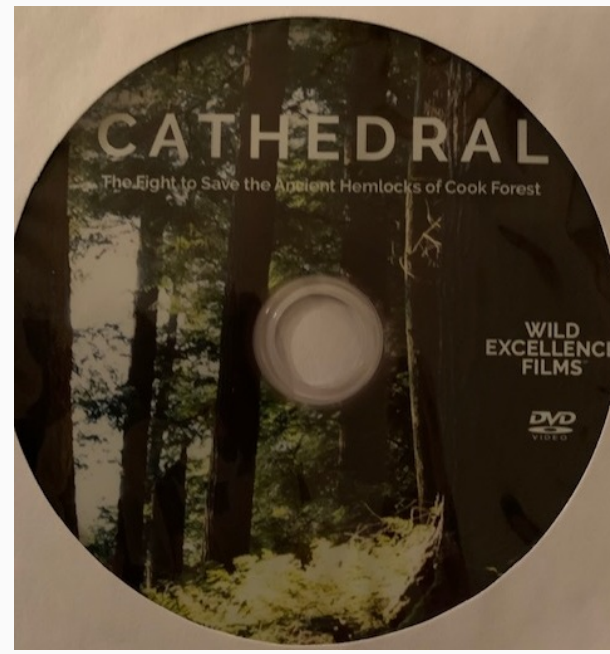
The Friends of Cook Forest T-Shirt and "Cathedral" Documentary are Available to Purchase!

Show your support for The Friends of Cook Forest through the purchase of a "Friends" stunning sky blue t-shirt or your own copy of the DVD "Cathedral, The Fight to Save the Ancient Hemlocks of Cook Forest." Both items are priced at \$15 dollars apiece. And the proceeds will go towards Friends of Cook Forest programming and projects that benefit Cook Forest State Park.



T-shirts are available in Small, Medium, Large and X-Large. Supplies are limited on each size. The t-shirts feature the Friends of Cook Forest State Park/Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation logo, are a quality Gildan brand ultra-cotton blend and are currently available in sky blue.

The "Cathedral - Fight to Save the Ancient Hemlocks of Cook Forest" DVD features the beautiful scenery and wildlife of Cook Forest State Park. The documentary was filmed and produced by Wild Excellence Films and was introduced at different wildlife conservation venues throughout the state of Pennsylvania to help raise funds to protect the Eastern Hemlocks of Cook Forest State Park. This DVD was a contributing factor in Cook Forest State Park being named State Park of the Year last year. The information and facts about Cook Forest contained in this DVD will truly expand your knowledge and love for this forest even more. Cathedral gives you a chance to meet all those people working behind the scenes to save Pennsylvania's State Tree from the deadly invasion of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.



You will have a chance to purchase either of these items at any of our events held throughout the year, so stay tuned to our website, Facebook page, or newsletter for all our Friends of Cook Forest sponsored events. We now offer a choice of one of them with the sponsoring membership level of \$50 or greater for the new year of 2020. Just mention which item you would like and size if applicable, and we will send it to the address listed.

Volunteer Opportunities & Membership Benefits

Trail Stewardship: Monitor and maintain trail conditions, as well as planning and assisting in the restoration of existing trails, their signage and educational qualities.

Habitat Enhancement: Remove invasive plants, in addition to planting vegetation that will improve the habitat of natural native forest species.

Education and Recreation: Program hosting, lead hikes, assist with special events and seminars.

Additional: Administrative tasks, grant writing, public relations, and fundraising, volunteer at meetings, and board positions.



Membership Benefits:

*Subscription to the Friends of Cook Forest newsletter

*Supporting the protection, improvements, and activities of the "2018 Park of the Year - Cook Forest State Park"

*Meet people with similar interests

*Stay connected and informed



Become a Friends of Cook Forest Member...

Download a membership application [here](#). Or register online [here](#). Thank you!

The Friends of Cook Forest is a chapter of the PA Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF). PPFF is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Contributions to PPFF are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law. The official registration of PPFF may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll free within Pennsylvania 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



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