

Pennsylvania's state parks and forests are engines of economic strength and businesses located near them frequently benefit from "location, location, location."

The COVID-19 Pandemic affected all of us in profound ways. For Pennsylvania's state parks and forests, it meant an increase in visitor numbers across the board which also meant, in the case of many of these small ventures, an increase in business.

The Foundation is happy to share their stories.

Local Business Relies on Lehigh Gorge State Park for Operations

Family owned and operated for over 40 years, Pocono Whitewater (PoconoWhitewater.com and PoconoBiking.com, in Jim Thorpe is a must-visit for a recreation enthusiast. Not only can they lead you on exciting whitewater rafting trips of various lengths and difficulties, they will also set you up for a perfect bike ride or day on the paintball course. Pocono Whitewater is unique because not only is it located near Lehigh Gorge State Park; it operates within the park's boundaries. All but one of their rafting courses go through the park, and the entirety of their rail trail biking excursions are within the park.



Like most businesses, the COVID-19 pandemic had its effect on Pocono Whitewater. While state safety regulations had their rafting trips running at limited capacity, they mostly reached that capacity. Director of Marketing Nikki Hurley said they saw an increase in mid-week traffic this year and it was clear people were looking to be outside. They are thankful to have the Lehigh Gorge as a business ally. "Having park access and our brand within the park is important to people. It has a large impact because visitors know the park is regulated and adhering to state guidelines [regarding COVID-19]. They know it's a safe place to go for recreation," said Hurley.



As visitation and park use continues to grow, the staff at Pocono Whitewater knows how important consistent funding for state parks and forests is to their continued longevity. "Guests want the park to be clean and maintained, and [know] that a park ranger is on hand to help," said Hurley. "Locally they do a really good job maintaining trails, keeping the park clean, and having rangers visible day to day."

Without a well-maintained park, Pocono Whitewater could not operate. The mutually beneficial relationship between park and business highlights the economic benefit state parks and forests have on the commonwealth.

Investing in state parks and forests help nearby small businesses like Pocono Whitewater. To learn about ways that you can help support Pennsylvania's parks and forests, visit the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation website at **PAParksAndForests.org**.

(All photos [Facebook.com/PoconoWhitewaterRafting/PoconoBiking](https://www.facebook.com/PoconoWhitewaterRafting/PoconoBiking))