



Since 1999, the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation has been the only charity solely dedicated to stewarding our state parks and forests.

Last year was a year like no other. The pandemic forced changes in our lives for which few were prepared. Visitation to our state parks rose an unprecedented 23%, with over 45 million people seeking refuge and ways to connect. Our forests saw similar high usage.

High visitation created new demands, and new ways of thinking about delivering programs. And parks and forests staff, volunteers, and businesses rose to the challenge.

To recognize the work of staff and volunteers across the state who worked to ensure people had safe ways to engage in the outdoors, we stepped away from our normal awards banquet to establish the COVID-19 Champion Awards Program. The program not only honors those who went above and beyond, it recognizes the inherent right of all people to enjoy the health benefits of the outdoors—as set forth in the Environmental Rights Amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution, which turns 50 this year.

Pennsylvania's Environmental Rights Amendment

The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people.

Pennsylvania Constitution
Article 1, Section 27
Natural Resources and the Public Estate



**Thank you to Recreation Equipment, Inc.
(REI) for their sponsorship of the virtual
awards ceremony!**



Please join us in congratulating the following 19 individual and group COVID-19 Champion Award Winners!

Ambassador – Individual

Mike Teeter and his family have always loved and taken advantage of Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests. He frequently talks about the benefits of spending time in the outdoors and takes every opportunity to visit as many parks and forests as possible. He has the personal goal of spending time at every park across PA, and not just visiting them... Mike picks up trash wherever he goes, because he cares deeply about taking care of the environment.

Mike also loves to share his passion for the environment with others. He is a great resource for anyone wanting to explore a park in which they are unfamiliar, and to share his thoughts on which parks and forests would be best for someone based on the facilities, trails, and other features they offer. Perhaps Mike is one of the reasons Pennsylvania parks were so heavily used in 2020?!



Ambassador – Business

Brandi Aulston recognized that not all women in the Philadelphia area were familiar with or comfortable in the region’s natural spaces. She wanted to offer all women an opportunity to enjoy each other’s company and grow together in nature. That is why, in 2019, she began offering twice-monthly group hikes for women (primarily in Wissahickon Valley Park), as well as supportive “hangouts” and an annual retreat, all under the banner of her organization, “**Hike and Heal**”.

When COVID-19 hit, Brandi was able to safely offer hikes and other community building services, following all relevant guidelines, including virtual meetings called “Hopeful Hours” and “Healing Hours”. Photos of those participating in Brandi’s activities show how all women – despite experience or location – can share time in nature and grow their understanding of themselves and each other in a safe and healthy manner.





Communication

When the pandemic hit, **DCNR's Office of Communications** (comprised of Director Chris Novak (*1st photo*), Press Secretary Terry Brady (now retired) (*2nd photo*), Digital Director Tara Ramsey (*3rd photo*), and Deputy Digital Director Al Germann (*4th photo*)) was planning for spring events and preparing to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. Instead, they had to shift focus quickly when county stay-at-home orders were being issued. Noting that time in the outdoors was essential for mental and physical health, DCNR kept all parks and forests open, yet closed facilities like restrooms and offices. What was open and closed was confusing to the public, and constant communications through the media was needed to ensure people knew where to go and how to do it safely.

Over the first few months of the pandemic, the Communications Team issued more than a dozen news releases, staged multiple media interviews with DCNR senior staff, created infographics for social media accounts, and generated a series of videos (on littering, social distance hiking, etc.), all on pandemic-related topics that reached millions of people.

Even with all the COVID-related news they dispensed, the team also found time to write dozens of non-pandemic news releases, plan events, and produce nearly two dozen other videos about recreation and the natural world. Thanks to their efforts, DCNR's internet presence ballooned by 4 million new users in 2020.



This award is sponsored by:





Education – Community

When Upper Gwynedd Township closed its doors this spring due to COVID-19, their Parks & Recreation Program Coordinator, **Angelina Capozzi**, used her extreme creativity to provide recreational opportunities for township residents. She created a special Facebook page with online crafts for kids and adults, hosted a different “story walk” in the park each week (see *photo on right*), turned the lending library into a small food pantry for anyone in need, planned and executed a summer day camp that sold out, collected more than 40 backpacks full of school supplies for those in need, and much more.

Thanks to Angelina and the Parks & Recreation Department, nothing was canceled during the pandemic due to the creative ways they developed to make it happen while keeping people safe.



Angelina’s award is sponsored by:

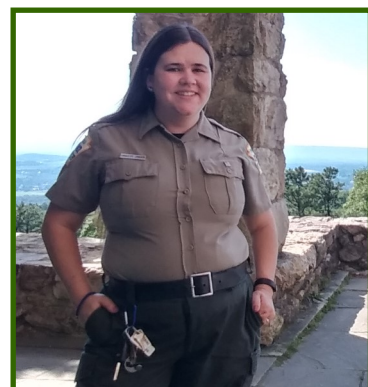


The Honorable
Liz Hanbidge

Education – State Employee

Being relatively new to her Program Manager position and facing the pandemic didn’t stop **Onnolee Jansen** from developing numerous remote programs to encourage learning and self-teaching at Kings Gap Environmental Education Center. She created a story book trail that was a great success, a DiscoverE Activity Guide where kids completed outdoor activities to earn points for badges and prizes, and multiple virtual programs to replace the in-classroom programs that are typical of Kings Gap.

While other staff members also worked hard and did an amazing job bringing the mountain to the public through virtual means, Onnolee did not have that support until months into the pandemic. Her creativity and passion for the outdoors was put to great use during this time.





Public Safety – State Employees

As COVID-19 struck the Commonwealth in the spring of 2020, citizens were told to stay home. Meanwhile, PA's state parks and forests remained open to visitors, and the **190 park rangers and 42 forest rangers** continued their work in the face of many uncertainties. Larger than normal numbers of visitors meant increased activity to address, such as increased litter, vandalism, illegal ATV use, and large parties. But there were positives too, with many visitors being new and inexperienced with the outdoors, providing the rangers with an opportunity to educate folks.

Many rangers performed special details at alternate work locations during the pandemic to provide support for sites experiencing capacity issues. Often, they traveled overnight to do so, and then faced the challenge of performing their job duties at a less familiar location with a different, unique set of challenges. See full list of state park and forest rangers below:



Adam Geer	Charles Cavanagh	Douglas McCarson	Jeremy Bechtel	Margaret McNamara	Scott Novatnak
Adam Misterka	Charles Zeigler	Douglas Ringer	Jerry Kreiser	Mark Deussing	Scott Novatnak
Aidan Quinn	Christa Sandoval	Edward Ottinger	Jill Flanagan	Mark Larocca	Shane Brinkley
Alexander Dale	Christian Smeal	Elizabeth Gehman	John Alleman	Mary Lupacchini	Shane Stinedurf
Alfred Tosi	Christopher Bohlin	Elizabeth Raibeck	John Gladfelter	Matthew Clark	Shawn Kulick
Allen Chislow	Christopher Dennis	Emily Hawthorne	John Kaminsky	Michael Bonner	Stacey Dudek
Amanda Rabenstine	Christopher Engle	Eric Tracy	John Rohland	Michael Fusco	Stacy Duffield
Amy Sterner	Christopher Hall	Ernest	John Rohland	Michael Hardy	Stephen Anthony
Andrew Akers	Christopher Moore	Jendrzewski	John Weisel	Michael Myhasuk	Stephen Mazik
Andrew Brock	Christopher	Gabriel Marks	Jonelle Davis	Mickey Maneval	Steven Anderson
Andrew Penecale	Thompson	Gary Werner	Jose Valencia	Nathan Koller	Steven Shaffer
Annemarie Sciarra	Christopher Toaso	Gregory Eitner	Joseph Markley	Nathaniel Tierney	Tanya Smith
Argil Posey	Clark Verchuk	Hannah Wilson	Joseph Petrencsik	Padriac Foley	Terry Czerwinski
Ben Rzicznek	Clinton Goodwin	Hunter	Joshua Engle	Patrick Bowes	Thomas Gerlach
Benjamin Moyer	Colin Morell	Wierzbowski	Joshua McVay	Patrick Briggs	Thomas Haluska
Bradley Nauman	Corey Denton	Jaclyn Bair	Joshua Wagner	Patrick Kennedy	Timothy Gregory
Brandon	Cory Johnson	Jacqueline	Justin French	Paul Tubbs	Timothy Martin
Stanopiewicz	Craig Bressler	Merwarth	Justin Waid	Rachel Oplinger	Timothy Martin
Brian Caldwell	Craig Fishel	James Knox	Justine Armanini	Ralph Barb	Timothy Smith
Brian Derr	Craig Walter	James Sleighter	Justine Armanini	Raquel Huff	Todd Showen
Brian Derr	Curtis Reynolds	James Subic	Justine Hubler	Rebecca Anna	Tracie Cobb Irvin
Brian Grove	Dan Hogan	Jared Pierce	Juston Flick	Regina Remetta	Troy Gearhart
Brian Johnson	Danica Bange	Jarod Allison	Kara Swarthout	Richard Martin	Tyler Ickes
Brian Lambermont	Daniel Hartley	Jason Constance	Katherine Kelsey	Richard Weaver	Tyler Johnston
Brian Marendt	Daniel Peterson	Jason Constance	Kip Hursh	Robert Priest	Wanda Pritulsky
Brian O'Donnell	Daniel Post	Jason Greenfield	Krista Leibensperger	Robert Williams	William
Brian Price	Daniel Powell	Jason Greenfield	Lane Naugle	Ryan Thrush	Hornberger
Bryan Hogan	Darren Kramer	Jeffrey Lynes	Lindsay Baughman	Samuel Pongracz	William Laverty
Bryan Moore	Darren Kramer	Jennifer Traup	Lindsey Johnson	Scott Brumagin	William Young
Carinne Homan	David Dziurzynski	Jennifer Traup	Logan Glessner	Scott Greevy	William Young
Casimir Guzowski	David Plessinger	Jennifer Valese	Luke Stake	Scott Ishman	Zachary Snyder
Catherine Davis	David Yelle	Jennifer Valese			Zoe Zentner
		Jeremiah Johnson			



Public Safety – State Employees (*continued*)

The COVID-19 pandemic put the knowledge and skills of the **Bureau of Forestry's Incident Management Team** to the test. The experiences of these 53 staff members, gathered during other incidents such as wildfires, floods, snowstorms, hurricanes and other natural disasters, placed them in a unique position to exercise their incident management skills for the benefit of the Commonwealth.

Team members assisted with the planning and layout of testing sites, assisted counties in need, and supported several logistical operations when PEMA required assistance. These men and women went above and beyond their normal job duties and will continue to do so until the pandemic is at an end. See full list of Team Members below:



Aaron Troutman
Adam Kling
Alex Meyer
Amy Orzel
Brian Pfister
Brian Schwartz
Carl Sarti
Cecile Stetler
Chad Herrold
Chad Martin
Chad Northcraft
Charles Kauffman
Charlie Choplick

Dale Appleby
Dan DiCamillo
Daniel Murphy
Dave Lynch
Dave Warfel
Diane Schmidt
Ellie Elliott
Fran Chadick
Greg Reese
Heather Kerr
Hope Mroczka
Jacob Schall
Jason Johnson

Jeanne Wambaugh
Jim Hyland
Jim Jopling
Jim Stiteler
Joe Ulozas
Joe Walker
John Hecker
John Wambaugh
Kayla Kehers
Matt Reed
Mike Freeman
Mike Roche
Ray Miller

Ray Finnen
Richard Deppen
Rick Temple
Robin Register
Ron Bass
Shawn Turner
Steve Wacker
Terry Cook
Terry Smith
Todd Breininger
Troy Fortney
Wes Stout
Will Devore

Hannah Wilson went above and beyond her (former) role as Ranger I for Colonel Denning and Fowlers Hollow state parks. She was great at greeting guests and making sure they were informed about what each park has to offer. She is especially knowledgeable about plant life. Park visitors learned so much from her and wanted to recognize her for her outstanding job.





Public Safety – State Employees (*continued*)

The task of running French Creek State Park's maintenance crew can be daunting and stressful any year, but due to the pandemic, 2020 was especially hard. French Creek saw record visitation, but maintenance supervisor **Cody Miller** led his staff to keep the park in the best possible condition. He goes above and beyond when it comes to visitor services: always out responding to complaints and issues in the park. When staff were concerned about getting COVID from cleaning the restrooms, Cody did the work himself to instill trust in his workers and show them that he is there for them. He does his work without complaint and even came to management several times looking for more projects on which to work.

Anytime something needs to be done in Region 4 Cody is on it. He sent his entire staff to Ridley Creek State Park after a tornado hit. He has gone to assist Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center and Marsh Creek State Park many times too. Cody has instilled these values in his staff and because of this, French Creek State Park, Region 4, and all park visitors are better off.

Cody's award is sponsored by:



Public Safety – Volunteers

COVID-19 shut down the beach at Beltzville State Park for the busy Memorial Day weekend. A hiring freeze left the park very short-staffed. Park gates had to be closed on weekends due to reaching maximum capacity, which usually only happens on holiday weekends. Some visitors ignored closed gate, trampling vegetation and leaving litter behind.

That's when the **Friends of Beltzville State Park** stepped in. They assisted with a trash pick-up after the busy 4th of July holiday. They sat at the park gates on weekends to educate visitors on the purpose of the gates and alternative places to visit. They were willing to step out of their comfort zone to serve the park, such as by directing traffic.





Public Safety – Volunteers (*continued*)

When the pandemic hit, the need for personal protective equipment placed stress on the supply chain, while also presenting a need that had no line item in the state budget. With the heavy use of our state parks and forests, a need arose to provide masks to protect staff. DCNR reached out to PPFF, and PPFF sent out a call to its supporters for assistance. In just a few weeks, **Mask Brigade** volunteers sewed 2,000 masks to distribute to state park and forest staff. The volunteers donated the costs of the masks and their time.

The following people and groups made it happen:

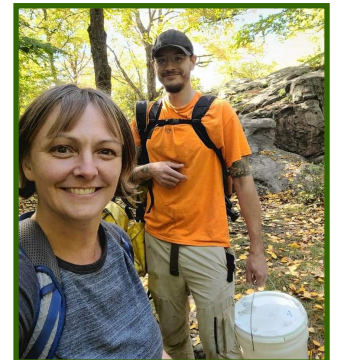
Alice Doxsey, Amanda Galvan, Annette Roy, Cathy Jackson, Charla Keffer, Claire Confer, Deirdre McPhillips, Eileen Frey, Ginny Price, Jenn Ott, Jessica Beamesderfer, Johanna Cordell, Judi Fasick, Linda Smith, Marci Mowery, Mary Gee, Mary Soderberg, Maryann Skubecz, Maxine Harrison, Melodie Schwarz-Higgins, Michael Piaskowski, Missy Grove, Missy Molino, Patricia Kramer, Patt Hipp, Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps, Rebecca Miller, Sarah Yerger, Sean Quinlan, Sherry Ferguson, Stitchers Corp of Central PA, Susie Seifert, Teresa Sterner



Stewardship – Individual

As a member of the Ridge Runners, a volunteer group dedicated to trail maintenance along the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail, **Luke Miney** was bothered by the graffiti that plagues Beam Rocks in Laurel Ridge State Park/ Forbes State Forest and wanted to do something about it. So, Luke became one of the first Stewards of Penn's Woods in 2016, taking on stewardship of Beam Rocks. He organizes clean-ups there several times a year and purchased graffiti removal equipment at his own expense.

Luke partnered with fellow COVID-19 Champion, **Georgetta Frederick**, in the fall of 2020, for a National Public Lands Day clean-up at Wolf Rocks in Gallitzin State Forest. Georgetta worked with District Forester, Bob Wetzels, to come up with a solution for getting a source of water close enough to the rocks to make a cleanup effort feasible, and rallied nearly 30 volunteers to help.





Stewardship – Individual (*continued*)

One of the bright spots of the otherwise challenging 2020 pandemic was that many people immersed themselves into the outdoors, some for the first time. Volunteers like **Amanda Galvan** were looking for ways to provide a better experience for those heading into the outdoors. Amanda participated in ongoing trail work at Forbes State Forest, Stackhouse Park, and the Inclined Plane bike trails in Johnstown. She helped with graffiti removal at Wolf's Rocks in Gallitzin State Forest and planted trees at Canoe Creek State Park. She also volunteered her time supporting First Waves, which uses standup paddle boarding, filmmaking, and digital media-inspired conservation of local waterways for at-risk youth.

Amanda's passion for the outdoors is contagious and especially inspiring during these trying times. Amanda is also one of our mask makers – helping to keep state park and forest staff safe!



The busy 2020 season, combined with severe storms that felled trees and washed out culverts, left trails in the White Clay Creek Preserve in much need of maintenance. Seasonal staff were not available due to the pandemic. White Clay Creek Friends Group volunteer **Gary Kirk** stepped up and took charge. He led a team of volunteers to remove the downed trees, repair bridges, and clear ditches on an almost daily basis, allowing the Preserve to remain open for the larger than normal crowds of hikers and bikers.

Gary does much more than trail maintenance too. He organized care for 300 native shrubs and trees that were planted in the Preserve for a Scout project. He maintains the Friends Group's equipment, and he is always ready to lend a hand. Gary's knowledge, hard work, and passion for the outdoors shows through in his ability and inclination to help anywhere on the Preserve.





Stewardship – Community

Under the leadership of Executive Director, **Ryan Beltz**, the **Perkiomen Watershed Conservancy** was able to continue to provide its education, conservation, outdoor stewardship, and recreation activities to the community in spite of the pandemic. Safety measures put in place allowed for their annual stream clean-up to continue with more than 1,200 participants across 364 square miles of the watershed. When gathering in person was not feasible, Ryan adapted many of their traditional events to online platforms, including their native plant sale and fundraising auction.

The pandemic didn't stop Ryan from finding ways to connect with volunteers and show them how they can give their time and skills to continue to make a positive impact within the watershed. Online volunteering opportunities were increased, and on-the-ground outdoor activities took place in smaller managed groups to provide a respite from COVID fatigue.



When budget cuts decimated the City of Philadelphia's park budget, in spite of the fact that park usage was at its highest thanks to the pandemic, **AeLin Compton** went above and beyond to help. AeLin is a Community Initiative Specialist for the Park Stewardship Team in **Philadelphia's Department of Parks & Recreation**. She developed socially-distanced volunteer events to help mitigate trash problems in the parks and continued her monthly Second Saturday volunteer day program to engage and train volunteers in natural lands restoration projects.

AeLin also co-created and launched the Philly Forest Stewards program, which trains individuals in forest maintenance and invasive species mitigation. She worked daily to support dozens of community neighborhood park friends groups. Throughout the pandemic, AeLin never once said no to a request. Doing all she can to help the volunteers she serves, AeLin is a true public servant!





Stewardship – Community (*continued*)

The Five Senses Garden along the Capital Area Greenbelt in Harrisburg relies on significant volunteer support to maintain, but this work had waned in recent years. **Cindy Hogeman**, a founding board member of the **Capital Area Greenbelt Association**, stepped up in 2020 to become lead caretaker of the garden. Right as she was trying to rebuild the volunteer workforce COVID-19 hit. She couldn't schedule large groups for spring maintenance, but trained individuals and small groups to adopt and care for small plots within the garden.

As a Master Gardener, Cindy brought sustainable gardening practices and native plants to the garden. She worked with other volunteers to restore the garden's underground watering system. She worked closely with local police to monitor for graffiti and remove trash. And she partnered with the Harrisburg Keystone Rotary Club to restore the MLK Memorial garden.



Cindy's award is sponsored by:

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The **Tookany/Tacony-Frankford (TTF) Watershed Partnership** works to improve the health and vitality of the TTF watershed in the Philadelphia region. Much of its work centers around the 300-acre Tacony Creek Park northeast of the city. The pandemic provided further evidence that environmental justice issues and adequate access to outdoor recreation for minorities and low-income populations in this region is more important than ever.



That is why Friends Group members took action during the pandemic to connect more deeply with their constituents. The Partnership worked with the city to distribute free lunches to children during the summer, offered safe, socially-distanced walks and other outdoor activities. They created virtual bilingual tours of the park's flora and fauna and gave away trees for community members to plant in their yards.





Stewardship – Friends Group

Even though the **Friends of Trough Creek/Warriors Path State Parks** were in their first year of existence when the pandemic began, that didn't stop them from getting things done. Friends Group members started firewood sales at the Trough Creek campground, which was well received by park visitors. They built a storage shed for the firewood and collected, cut, split, and bundled every piece of wood for sale. Friends Group members worked together to prepare for the 2021 season.

Members also restored the stone fireplaces found throughout Trough Creek's various picnic areas. Without this committed group of individuals, this important fundraiser for the Friends Group would not have been successful.



Thank You to All Our Award Sponsors!



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The Honorable
Liz Hanbidge



Thank you to Graphics and Design for designing the awards invitation.

And thank you to Purple Lizard Maps for designing the awards logo.

