Penn's Stewards

News from the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation

Fall 2026 Newsletter

PENNSYLVANIA Parks & Forests FOUNDATION

The mission of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation is to inspire stewardship of Pennsylvania's state parks and forests.

Vision: To be the trusted voice and advocate to sustain and enhance Pennsylvania's state parks and forests.

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PAParksAndForests.org



Chuck Kimmel, Michaux State Forest

Focus on Forests

Pennsylvania's forests are entering a defining moment—one shaped by both remarkable milestones and urgent stewardship needs.

This season, we celebrate the billionth board foot of sustainably harvested lumber, a testament to decades of careful management and the enduring strength of Pennsylvania's working forests. At the same time, spongy moth outbreaks remind us how vulnerable these landscapes remain, and how essential active restoration is to the long-term resilience of our forests.

Across the Commonwealth, foresters, volunteers, land owners and partners are stepping up: replanting where canopy loss is greatest, monitoring forest health, and advancing practices that ensure our woods continue to thrive for generations.

For this issue of Penn's Stewards, we forego the long lead article in favor of "shorter bites" that tell the story of the current state of forests and forestry in Pennsylvania. Together, these stories form a single throughline—Pennsylvania's forests are both a legacy we benefit from today and a responsibility we carry forward.

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President's Message



Some people become part of an organization. Others become part of its personality.

For more than 15 years, Pam Metzger has been an important part of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation—and it is difficult to imagine PPFF without her.

Pam came to the Foundation after years in the legal field, taking what might seem like a winding path into the nonprofit world. Fortunately for all of us, that path led her to PPFF. Over the years, she became the person so many of our members, Friends Groups, supporters, and partners came to know and trust. She helped people navigate the details, answered questions, kept things moving, and somehow made even the mundane parts of nonprofit work a little more enjoyable.

But Pam's contribution to PPFF was never just about membership or administration.

She helped build relationships.

She helped Friends Groups find resources and solutions. She celebrated their accomplishments. She listened when they had challenges. And through her weekly **Take Five/Fridays with Pam** emails, she created a connection with thousands of people who care about Pennsylvania's parks and forests. Her writing had a personality all its own—informative, curious, occasionally irreverent, and always grounded in a genuine love of the outdoors.

Pam also understood something fundamental about our work: parks and forests are about people. They are places where we find adventure, solitude, renewal, friendship, and sometimes even ourselves..

Pam is officially retiring from her day-to-day role with PPFF, but I have a feeling we haven't heard the last from her. She plans to continue writing **Take Five/Fridays with Pam** for a while, and knowing Pam, she'll continue finding ways to connect people with the places she loves.

Pam, thank you.

Thank you for your years of service, your friendship, your humor, your steady presence, your fierce commitment to our Friends Groups and members, and your belief in the importance of Pennsylvania's parks and forests.

Most of all, thank you for helping make PPFF what it is today.

Happy retirement, Pam. You have earned it.

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The Billionth Board Foot

On October 9th, the Bureau of Forestry, in conjunction with the PA Lumber Museum, celebrated a milestone achievement for its work in conserving the state forests of Pennsylvania – offering the one billionth board foot of sawtimber through state forest timber sales since the inception of its Harvest Allocation Model in 2004.

Aldo Leopold once said "A conservationist is one who is humbly aware that with each stroke [of the axe] he is writing his signature on the face of the land." These words personify the ethic for many of the dedicated men and women of the Bureau of Forestry, present and retired, who contributed to this moment, whether that was marking the timber, maintaining forest roads or processing block payments.

It applies to the loggers who accomplished the hard work of cutting these sales over the last 22 years under the sustainable forestry standards of both the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, and the truckers who delivered the logs.



Photo by: DCNR

And all of it is supported by the sawmills who purchase the timber and employ thousands across rural Pennsylvania in primary manufacturing.

The work of forest restoration and creating new, resilient forests for future generations of Pennsylvanians is important to us all.

The billion board feet harvested from Pennsylvania's state forests during this time is equivalent to what the hardwood lumber industry of the state produces in a year. Cut into one-inch boards, it would stretch nearly to the moon! It is estimated this amount of hardwood lumber stores 765,000 tons of carbon and keeps 2.8 million tons of CO_2 out of the atmosphere, which is equivalent to the greenhouse gas emissions of 600,000 gasoline-powered vehicles for one year.

Meanwhile, the harvesting of this timber directly led to the establishment of 140,000 acres of new forest providing early successional habitat and improving the health and resiliency of forested landscapes. It also produced $535 million in revenue for the Commonwealth. Through all of this, US Forest Service data indicates Pennsylvania continues to grow 2.1 times as much timber as is harvested annually.

All of this speaks to the responsibility and potential the Bureau of Forestry is given in managing state forests, not only for the board feet but for all the valuable ecosystem services forests and trees provide.

The PA Woodland Stewardship Network

The Pennsylvania Woodland Stewardship Network is a new forestry cost-share program delivered as a collaboration between the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay and the DCNR Bureau of Forestry. The Alliance received five million dollars of US Forest Service grant money to implement forest resilience enhancing practices across the Commonwealth's 11+ million acres of privately owned forestland. Practices include:

Brush management	**Herbaceous weed control**	**Forest stand improvement**
Crop tree release	**Invasive pest treatments**	**Supplemental tree/shrub planting**
Forest farming establishment	**Herbaceous cover seeding**	**Agroforestry plantings**

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Photo by: Kelsey Mummert

These practices were identified as the greatest need for increasing the health, climate change resilience, and retention or expansion of the Commonwealth's private forests.



Photo by: DCNR

Of the $5 million, 40% of the funds were restricted to underserved landowners that fell within one of five identified categories. This increases the number of landowners that would normally never undertake these forest management activities and out-of-pocket costs.

This new program catalyzed renewed interest from the consulting forestry industry in areas that have lost many of their practicing private foresters. The program was barely announced for a month before interested landowners exceeded the program's available slots.

Predicted outcomes of the program include a more resilient forest and increased acreages of productive forestland across the 165 properties selected for cost-share, expanded development of Pennsylvania's private forest workforce from consulting foresters, herbicide contractors, pre-commercial tree cutters, tree planters, and agroforestry professionals.

PWREN
PA WOODLAND RESILIENCE ENHANCEMENT NETWORK
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
ALLIANCE for the Chesapeake Bay

Spongy Moth Impacts to Oak Forests in Pennsylvania

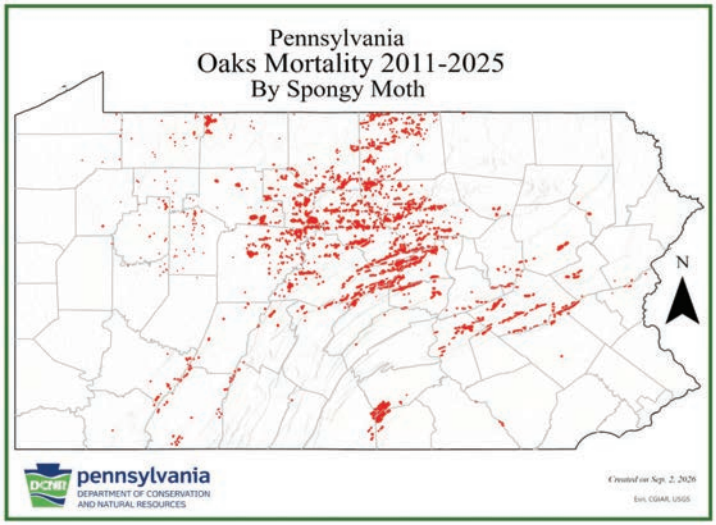


Photo by: DCNR

Spongy moth is an invasive forest pest that threatens the health of Pennsylvania's valuable oak forests that support native ecosystems, recreation, and timber, to name a few. Oaks provide acorn mast and are a vital host species for many native invertebrates that feed wildlife. Recent studies have shown that damage to forests from invasive pests can decrease carbon sequestration by up to 69%. Among the various abiotic and biotic stressors, spongy moth remains one of the primary contributing factors.

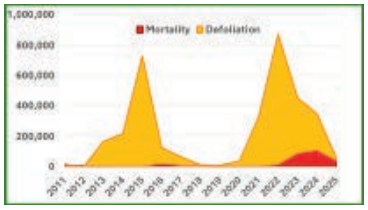
Spongy moth caterpillars can feed on various hosts, but primarily feed on chestnut, red, and white oaks. Oak trees may die after two to three consecutive years of heavy defoliation, especially when combined with other stressors, such as drought.

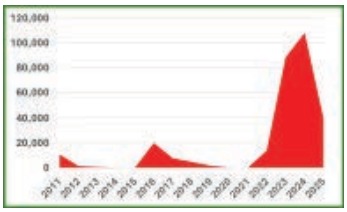
Annual aerial surveys map oak mortality associated with spongy moth. The resulting survey map identifies areas with oak mortality ranging from light to severe in 2011-2025.



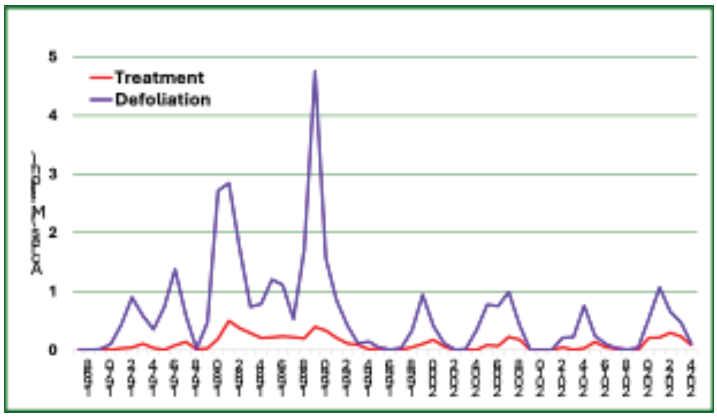
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Spongy moth outbreaks occur approximately every 7-10 years, with the last outbreak peaking around 2022. Surveys revealed dramatic increases in oak mortality in 2023 and 2024 in over a decade, with over 80,000 and 100,000 acres impacted. Tree mortality often peaks 2–3 years after defoliation spikes.



The PA DCNR has implemented treatment operations since the 1970's to help protect oak forests by reducing caterpillar populations, especially during periods of spongy moth outbreaks. Currently spongy moth populations are low as we are at the tail end of the 2022 outbreak.



Photo by: DCNR



Turn Your Required IRA Withdrawal into a Gift for Pennsylvania's Parks and Forests

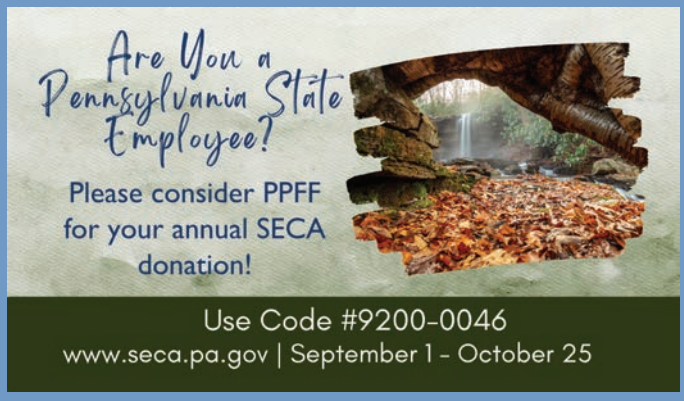
If you're required to take distributions from your IRA, there may be a tax-smart way to turn those funds into something you care about: Pennsylvania's parks and forests.

Individuals age 70.5 or older may be able to make a **Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD)** directly from an IRA to an eligible charitable organization such as the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation. For those who must take Required Minimum Distributions (RMDs), a QCD can count toward that requirement while generally keeping the donated amount out of taxable income.

Most importantly, your gift can help protect and enhance the special places you love across Pennsylvania.

If you're considering a QCD, contact your IRA administrator and ask about making a direct charitable distribution to the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation. Because individual tax situations vary, please consult your financial or tax advisor to determine whether a QCD is right for you.

Your required distribution can do more than satisfy an IRS requirement—it can help Pennsylvania's parks and forests thrive for generations to come.



The Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Reforestation Efforts

Much like forest replenishment provided by the 'boys' of the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression, Pennsylvania's youth conservation employment program, The PA Outdoor Corps, is working to conserve and enhance the forests of today.

The Corps has planted nearly 19,000 native trees and plugs from 2016-2025.





Photos by: DCNR

- In 2026, 250 Trees for America's 250th took place at Neshaminy State Park with the Philly ASLi Crew, the Philly Youth Crew, and the SEPA Adult Crew. See related article on page 12.
- In 2026, Williamsport Adult Crew worked with Green Forests Work in Tioga State Forests to remove significant non-native invasive species.
- In 2025 and 2026, various adult crews worked with DCNR's Forest Health to treat hemlock woolly adelgid using soil injectors.
- In 2025, the Meadville Adult Crew spent two weeks on forest restoration work planting plugs, seedlings, and live stakes and removing competing, invasive vegetation at M.K. Goddard State Park.
- In 2024, the Southeast PA Adult Crew worked with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to plant and tend a riparian buffer of 2,000 trees at Big Elk Creek State Park.
- In 2024, the Wilkes Barre Adult Crew spent three weeks planting climate tolerant shade trees at Hickory Run State Park.
- In 2024, the Harrisburg Youth Crew inventoried and cared for existing trees and planted new ones in Borough of Mechanicsburg to improve urban tree canopy.

In addition to the work of this important program, Friends groups and PPFF work across the state to plant trees, remove invasive species, and educate visitors on the value of trees.

PENNSYLVANIA Parks & Forests FOUNDATION

Plan Ahead! Continue the legacy of conservation of our state parks and forests for future generations through a bequest or life income gift to PPFF.

Did You Know? PPFF is able to accept your TAX DEDUCTIBLE donations of stock to support our work and/or projects in state parks and forests.

For more information visit www.PAParksAndForests.org

250 Years of Trees in American Art

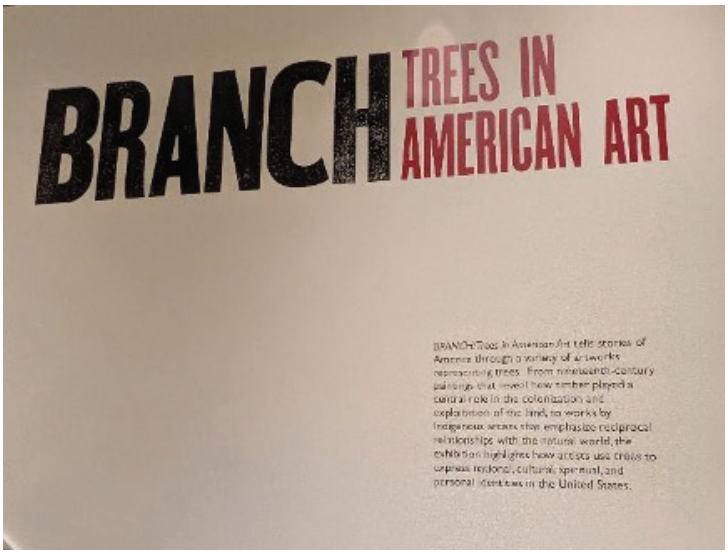
By Suzanne Hartley, Bureau of Forestry, Forest Fridays, reprinted with permission

This year marks 250 years of the United States with celebrations around the country. Dickinson College's Trout Gallery in Carlisle is celebrating America250 in a unique way with an art exhibition all about trees. "Branch: Trees in American Art" features artwork from the nineteenth century to current day that "highlights how artists use trees to express national, cultural, spiritual, and personal identities in the United States".

Throughout the exhibition are reminders of the role humans play in shaping our landscapes. For example, the exhibition features nineteenth century paintings of lumber mills and landscapes that hint at the role of deforestation, agriculture, and the timber industry had on reshaping our landscapes. Other pieces, like the work of Mark Dion, explicitly highlight the impacts of introduced forest health pests, such as emerald ash borer, spongy moth, and hemlock wooly adelgid, have on our ecosystems.

There is even mention of State Forests, as one of the pieces features botanical sketches labeled "Michaux Forest Trees" from a notebook on botany that belonged to James King Davison, a Dickinson alumnus. The notebook is from 1828, almost 80 years before the Department of Forestry was formed in 1901, and the first tracts of Michaux State Forest were purchased in 1902.

The exhibition also does not shy away from darker moments in our nation's history, with a photograph of trees at the site of a civil war battleground by George N. Barnard. Another photograph, by Ken Gonzales-Day, is part of a project to document the history of racial violence in California by photographing over 350 trees from reported lynching sites.



The role of trees in culture and spirituality is celebrated by showcasing Ralph Waldo Emerson's writing, Ansel Adam's photography, and the artwork of Kay WalkingStick, an indigenous artist. Another featured indigenous artist, Lehuauakea, used charcoal from a 2020 Oregon wildfire to create a design on a kapa, a traditional Native Hawaiian barkcloth made from the bark of paper mulberry (*Broussonetia papyrifera*).

The exhibition is a great reminder of how we are shaped by the ecosystems around us, and the opportunity we have to shape our ecosystems for the future.

The exhibition is free and open to the public now through January 23, 2027, if you want to explore the connections between forestry, history, and art for yourself. https://www.troutgallery.org/



PENNSYLVANIA Parks & Forests FOUNDATION

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

BY THE NUMBERS

Your support fuels every mile of progress. Across Pennsylvania, PPFF and our Friends groups bring parks and forests to life through volunteer power, hands-on trail improvements, accessibility projects, educational programs, and community outreach. Whether restoring a footpath, enhancing a waterway, or strengthening the many "trails" that lead people into outdoor stewardship, your commitment makes these experiences possible. In 2025, together we:

277 service projects

151 SPECIAL EVENTS

attracting **64,410** people to concerts, yoga, paddles, heritage days, fishing derbies, movie nights, the PPFF banquet, and more!

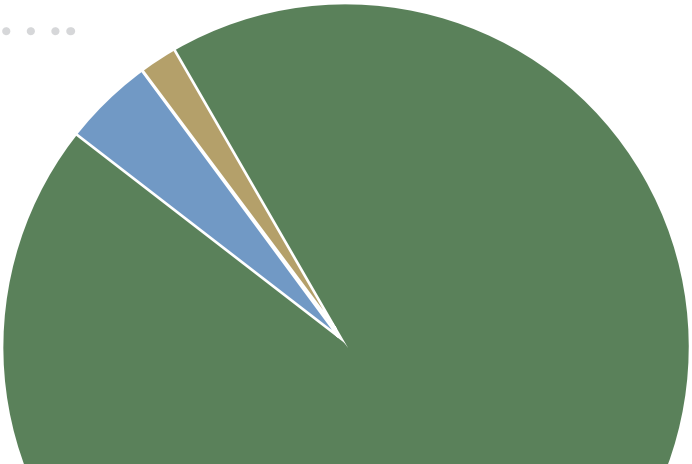
3,215 volunteers who provided **38,792** volunteer hours of service

The value of this volunteerism is worth more than

$1,252,205.76

EXPENSES

The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation focuses on program, which is reflected in the annual allocation of expenditures.



TRAILS:
A YEAR IN REVIEW

The theme for 2025 was "Trails"—a celebration of the paths that connect us to Pennsylvania's state parks and forests and to one another. Throughout the year, PPFF and our Friends chapters followed that theme by creating opportunities for recreation, learning, stewardship, and connection. We reached people across the state through newsletters, blogs, social media, and our podcast, sharing stories to encourage people to discover their own paths outdoors.

Friends chapters organized trail workdays, stewardship projects, educational programs, and community events, while corporate and community partners contributed time and resources to projects that make a difference on the ground. Together, these efforts demonstrated how much can be accomplished when people come together to care for their parks and forests.

Access and inclusion continued to be an important part of our trail focus. We expanded efforts to help inclusive and equitable experience the outdoors, providing information, training, and opportunities to connect with adaptive equipment and accessible recreation.

Education also remained central to our work. Through programs, publications, the Conservation Heritage Project, and our growing Think Outside podcast, we connected people with the natural and cultural stories of Pennsylvania's parks and forests.

Our commitment to trails was also reflected in projects across the state. PPFF provided funding and support for trail improvements, helping address maintenance needs and enhance recreational opportunities. We continued to advocate for the resources needed to care for Pennsylvania's parks and forests, while supporting partnerships that bring additional capacity and investment to these treasured places.

In 2025, trails reminded us that every journey begins with a first step. Whether that step was onto a forest path, into a volunteer project, toward greater accessibility, or into a new partnership, each one contributed to a stronger future for Pennsylvania's state parks and forests.

Things that YOU made possible through PPFF and friends groups:

4700 Students Reached through 177 programs supported through EITC donations

4482 Trees Planted

465 Miles of Trails Built or Maintained

252 Bluebird Boxes/Bird Projects

226 Trails Maintained

38 Picnic Tables Placed

30 Gardens Planted or Maintained

27 Roadside and Shoreline Cleanups

21 Trail Bridges or Culverts Built or Maintained

18 Color Correcting Glasses Placed

14 Benches Placed

13 Buildings, Equipment or Similar Items Maintained

10 Spanish Language Radio Shows Held

9 Historic Structures Maintained

8 Training Programs Held for Volunteers

7 Leave No Trace programs

6 Amphitheaters/Educational Areas Maintained

4 Corporate Volunteer Days

2 Playgrounds Built or Updated

2 Interns Mentored

2 Bike Repair Stations Placed

1 Natural In-Ground Slide Placed

1 Action Track Chair Purchased

Trail Equipment Purchased: mini dumper and tractor

Educational Supplies Purchased - water quality test kits, program supplies, etc

Pa Outdoor Corps Crews Supported

Loaner gear placed at 22 libraries, four state parks and one state forest

Bus transportation fees paid to reduce transportation barriers

Equipment for programming: Paddle Boards and Tents

Sensory Needs and Shared Outdoor Spaces

Matt Crosbie, Non-motorized Recreation Specialist, Bureau of Forestry

State forests and state parks are destinations open and welcoming to all. Visitors come from all walks of life, and it is a reminder that humans are inherently diverse. Every part of who we are varies by person including our physical traits, lived experiences, and even how our brain works. But when we think of diversity, how often do we think specifically of the brain? Let's explore how this relates to public lands, especially around neurodiversity, and how public lands can accommodate everyone's needs.

Neurodiversity reminds us that each brain is unique. The way we think, observe, and react is distinct and valuable. Autism is an example of that uniqueness and should be seen as a difference, not a disorder. PPFF and DCNR are working to bring more attention to and address noise sensitivity, something many Autists experience, and show how our public lands can serve as restorative spaces for those who experience it.

Sensory sensitivity of all kinds is very common in autism. Noise sensitivity, specifically, affects about 50%-70% of Autists. Some surveys estimate even higher rates. Sounds can trigger anxiety, anger, distress or other intense reactions like physical pain. Reduced sound tolerance can make everyday activities challenging. In fact, research suggests that it has the largest impact on the overall quality of life for Autists and others with sensitivity needs.



Photo by: Mark Lucas, Gallitzin State Forest



Photo by: Annie Thorne, Ridley Creek State Park

Unfortunately, sensory sensitivity remains stigmatized, underrecognized, and arguably one of the least accommodated forms of disabilities. Noise aversion is often dismissed as being fussy or dramatic. Because it involves internal regulation, it's not always easy for others to recognize or understand. Fortunately, growing awareness and acceptance of autism and other neurodiverse characteristics is helping bring this concern to light.

Why should this matter to park and forest visitors?

Avoiding noise is difficult. The world is loud. Estimates suggest that many people in the U.S. are exposed to harmful levels of noise pollution at rates similar to air pollution. DCNR lands, especially state forests, provide a reprieve from these soundscapes. More than 45,000 acres of state forest are more than a mile from the nearest road, offering excellent sources of quiet. Even in more accessible spaces like picnic sites and areas sheltered by valleys offer significant quiet.

Quiet is a natural resource that is often overlooked. The Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) recognized its importance by including noise exposure in its Environmental Justice (EJ) Mapping and Screening

Continued on page 11...

Tool. Approximately 20% of Pennsylvanians live in EJ areas where communities bear a disproportionate burden of environmental burdens, including noise.

DCNR lands offer a place to escape, and they are free and open to all. Recognizing the value of the quiet areas found there should be a forethought, not an afterthought. In busier areas and destinations, it may be difficult to maintain total quiet. It is here that we should strive to accommodate and assist those with sensory needs.

How can you help?

There are many ways that we can help support those with sensory-processing differences.

These can include:

- Learning more about autism and sensory needs
- Informing friends and family on the restorative opportunities on state park and state forest lands and helping identify appropriate destinations and what to expect
- Recreating responsibly and limiting your impact on others by limiting noise levels, busy areas like picnic areas and beaches can quickly become overstimulating
- Supporting programming and services offered to those with sensory needs
- Supporting efforts to create or maintain sensory trails or create sensory guides

In addition, PPFF is currently working towards creating and dispersing Sensory Bags at various DCNR locations that can be on loan for those that need them. Items in these kits can include noise cancelling headphones, earplugs, anti-glare sunglasses, fidget toys, non-verbal communication boards, stress balls, putty or moldable materials, and other items to assist with sensory regulation and communication.

The items in these kits can assist those with sensory-processing differences in being able to experience some of the best opportunities in shared outdoor spaces. Busy picnic areas, large programming and events, and areas generally impacted by external stimuli can be overwhelming or a challenge for some. Let's help provide the resources needed to assist them.

If you're interested in supporting PPFF in this effort, you can donate at: https://ppff.givessensorybags

New Staff joining the Team!



Join us in welcoming Heather Post, who steps into the role of Membership and Development Coordinator. Heather's diverse professional background and enthusiasm for Pennsylvania's parks and forests will strengthen PPFF's efforts to engage and promote membership, support donors, and ensure a bright future for the Commonwealth's natural resources.

Heather Post joins the team after decades working in the educational technology sector. She brings more than 20 years of hands-on experience managing customer relationships, data systems, and business operations to PPFF.

"Pennsylvania's state parks and forests have been a part of my life for years, and I'm looking forward to helping PPFF support the members, donors, and volunteers who make that mission possible."

Welcome to the team, Heather!

250 Trees, One Big Celebration

Neshaminy State Park was the place to be this summer as the PA Outdoor Corps helped leave a lasting mark on America's 250th anniversary.

On August 5, members of the new Philadelphia American Sign Language Inclusion Crew, Philly Youth Crew, and Southeastern PA Adult Crew came together at Neshaminy State Park for a special planting event: 250 Trees for America's 250th.



Working together, the crews planted 250 trees in Eagles Forest, creating a living tribute to the nation's Semiquincentennial—and a gift that will keep growing long after the 250th celebration is over.

The event brought together PA Outdoor Corps members, partners, and leaders from across Pennsylvania. Speakers included DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn, Labor and Industry Secretary Nancy Walker, PA Outdoor Corps Director Mike Piaskowski, Student Conservation Association President and CEO Lidia Soto-Harmon, DCNR DEIB Director Arlene Marshall-Hockensmith, Philadelphia Eagles Vice President of Sustainability Norman Vossschulte, and PPFF's own President Marci Mowery.



Photos By: Commonwealth Media Services

For the crews, however, the real stars of the day were the 250 trees.

The planting also added another chapter to the story of Eagles Forest. The Philadelphia Eagles originally helped establish the forest in 2007 through their Go Green environmental initiative. Nearly two decades later, Outdoor Corps members returned to help grow that forest for the next generation. The Eagles recently described the event as a "full-circle moment" for the Go Green initiative.



Funding for the trees was provided through two innovative programs managed by PPFF. New Trail Brewing's now retired Replenish IPA dedicated a portion of proceeds from every case sold to support tree planting and forest restoration. People First Federal Credit Union actively contributes by donating to the Foundation each time one of its members chooses electronic statements instead of paper. Together, these partnerships demonstrate that conservation can be woven into our everyday choices.

And the impact doesn't stop at 250.

With this planting, PA Outdoor Corps crews have now planted approximately 600 trees this season at Neshaminy State Park and Benjamin Rush State Park. Across the Commonwealth, the Corps has planted nearly 19,000 native trees and shrubs since the program began 11 years ago.

The event also showcased something just as important as the trees being planted: new opportunities for young people to build careers in conservation. The Philadelphia ASL Inclusion Crew is the first of its kind for the Outdoor Corps, expanding access to conservation workforce opportunities for Deaf and hard-of-hearing young people.

From shovels in the soil to new pathways into conservation careers, the message at Neshaminy was clear: the best way to celebrate the future is to plant it.

And somewhere in Eagles Forest, 250 new trees are enjoying their new home.

Richard Fritsky, Regional Supervisor
Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps
Department of Conservation & Natural Resources

Partnerships

Women in the Big Woods: Growing Confidence, Community, and Connection

This year's *Women in the Big Woods* event was a powerful reminder of how meaningful it is to create spaces where women can learn, explore, and feel comfortable being outdoors. Throughout the day, participants shared skills, asked questions, challenged themselves, and encouraged one another—each person connecting with the outdoors in her own way.

Outdoor connection doesn't look the same for everyone. Sometimes all it takes is an invitation, a bit of encouragement, or the chance to learn alongside others. Watching women discover new abilities and enjoy time in nature underscored just how important it is to offer welcoming entry points into outdoor recreation.

At the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation, we see every day how vital it is for people to build their own relationships with Pennsylvania's public lands—not only as visitors, but as stewards and advocates. Programs like *Women in the Big Woods* help make that possible.



Photo by: Heather Post

Thank you to the partners, the amazing staff at French and Marsh Creek state parks, the instructors, volunteers, and participants who made this event such a meaningful experience.

Eagles Forest at Neshaminy State Park

Trees are among nature's greatest assets. They clean our air, filter water, reduce flooding, provide habitat, cool communities, and create beautiful places for people to connect with the outdoors.



Photo by: Carla Eissing

That is exactly why the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation was proud to support projects like the tree planting at the Eagle Forest at Neshaminy State Park.

Funding for the trees was provided through two innovative programs. The New Trail Brewing's now retired Replenish IPA dedicated a portion of proceeds from every case sold to support tree planting and forest restoration. People First Federal Credit Union actively contributes by donating to the Foundation each time one of its members chooses electronic statements instead of paper. Together, these partnerships demonstrate that conservation can be woven into our everyday choices.

We're grateful to the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Crews for their hard work and commitment to stewardship. Their efforts go far beyond planting trees—they are helping build healthier, more resilient parks while gaining valuable conservation experience that will benefit Pennsylvania for years to come. (See related story about the event).

Worthy of mentioning: Additional trees from the same funding partnership were also planted at Benjamin Rush State Park, bringing the benefits of native trees to Pennsylvania's only state park located entirely within the City of Philadelphia.



Photo by: Marci Mowery

Launch Party: Shawnee State Park Beer

What better way to introduce the newest beer in New Trail Brewing's State Park Series than by celebrating with a local craft brewer right next to the park? In August, PPFF teamed up with New Trail Brewing and Woodhaven Pizza for a launch party that doubled as a kickoff for Healthy Lands Week.

We expected a fun evening—what we didn't expect was the incredible turnout and enthusiasm. The room filled quickly with people eager to try the Shawnee State Park beer, connect with partners, and learn more about the stewardship work happening across Pennsylvania. It was a reminder of how powerful community can be when great partners come together around parks, forests, and good beer.

Know Before You Go

Sunday Hunting Expands in State Parks

Pennsylvania's state parks and forests are shared spaces, offering opportunities for hiking, fishing, camping, hunting, wildlife watching, and many other outdoor activities. As Sunday hunting expands, visitors should be aware of when and where hunting is permitted and plan accordingly.

Beginning with the **2026–27 hunting license year, hunting is permitted on Sundays during established hunting seasons in most Pennsylvania state parks and all state forests where hunting is already allowed**. The change follows the 2025 repeal of Pennsylvania's longstanding prohibition on Sunday hunting. State forests also permit Sunday hunting on Sundays that fall within hunting seasons established by the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Sunday hunting in state parks is **not universal**. Some parks do not allow hunting, while others have designated hunting areas or specific restrictions. In southeastern Pennsylvania, seven state parks have a more limited schedule for the 2026–27 season. Sunday hunting at **Big Elk Creek, Delaware Canal, Evansburg, Marsh Creek, Nockamixon, Ridley Creek, and White Clay Creek is limited to November 15, 22, and 29, 2026**. Delaware Canal and Ridley Creek allow hunting only during archery seasons.

For visitors planning a fall or winter outing, a little preparation can help everyone enjoy these shared public lands safely. **Check the individual park's hunting information before your visit**, particularly if you are planning to hike or recreate during an established hunting season. Park-specific information includes hunting boundaries, seasons, and restrictions. DCNR also recommends that visitors stay on established



trails, make themselves visible to hunters, and consider wearing fluorescent orange, particularly during hunting seasons.

It is also important to know that **migratory game bird hunting is not permitted on Sundays during the 2026–27 season**, including waterfowl, woodcock, and mourning doves.

Before you go: Visit DCNR's Hunting in Pennsylvania State Parks and Forests information and check the specific park or forest district you plan to visit.





We Will Miss

Franklin Kury
October 15, 1936 – August 16, 2026

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania lost a true giant of the environmental movement with the passing of Franklin Kury in August of this year. Our story on the PA Conservation Heritage website barely scratches the surface in relating his importance to the Commonwealth.

As a state representative from Sunbury, Kury authored and championed what became, in 1971, the nation's first Environmental Rights Amendment, which guarantees Pennsylvanians the right to clean air, pure water, and a preserved environment, making the state a trustee of public natural resources. Now known as Article 1, Section 27, Kury introduced it on April 22,1970, to mark the first Earth Day celebration. As of 2026, five other states have followed his lead - Montana, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York.

Kury also fought for the Clean Streams Bill, the Surface Mining Bill, and the Air Pollution Control Act while serving in the House of Representatives. In the six years Kury served in the House, more environmental protection bills became law than had in the entire history of Pennsylvania.



Photo by: DCNR, 8/21/2021 dedication of Kury Point at Shikellamy State Park.

Joe Healey
October 4, 1941 – August 20, 2026

Joe was the former chief of Keystone Trails Association's trail care crew, having assumed that mantle from the legendary Tom Thwaites in 1999. He served in that capacity and on an untold number of trail miles until 2010.

Marci remembers building the Rose Trail at Goat Hill in the William Penn State Forest with Joe during a tropical storm. “He declared that ‘when it really starts to rain, we will stop.’ We didn’t stop until we were finished, as wet as wet can be. But what a sense of accomplishment and camaraderie!”



Photo by: Jenn Ulmer, Keystone Trails Association

Mary Jane Bittle
June 16, 1942 – July 14, 2026

Mary Jane’s true passion was for education. She started a Montessori school in the basement of an unused church near Chambersburg Area Middle School in the early 1980s, eventually growing the school and becoming its administrator. Mary Jane and Harry, her husband, were founding members of the Friends of Cowans Gap and contributed countless hours to the park and the group’s activities. Mary Jane could be found front and center with that lovely smile.



Photo by: Friends of Cowans Gap. Mary Jane is 6th from the left.

You Made it Happen

Access to the Lake at Locust Lake State Park

It was a 'build it and they will come' moment at the dedication of the new ADA Canoe and Kayak Launch at Locust Lake State Park. The installation marked an important step toward expanding outdoor access for visitors of all abilities.



The new launch—designed with input from individuals with lived experience—creates safer, more welcoming opportunities for older adults, veterans, people with disabilities, and anyone who benefits from additional stability when getting on the water. As PPFF President Marci Mowery shared during the dedication, accessible recreation helps people build confidence, enjoy healthy activity, and experience the joy of connecting with nature.

This project was made possible through strong partnerships and generous support. Funding was provided in part by the Community Conservation Partnerships Program Environmental Stewardship Fund, administered by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources through the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR) Statewide Watershed Access Grant Program, and matched with private donations.



Photos by: Marci Mowery

Photo Gallery Reception

Photographers from across the state joined us in celebration of the annual photo contest award winners. These photos not only showcase all that is good about state parks and forests, they remind us of the many and diverse ways visitors both use and are inspired by nature.





Photos by: Carla Eissing

In their own words:

Amanda Wydra: "We are blessed to have as many state parks and forests that we do in PA. Each one is unique, yet similar in what activities are available to us. Whether you enjoy travel, hiking, fishing, hunting, kayaking, or two of my personal favorites, photography and camping, there is always something to do."

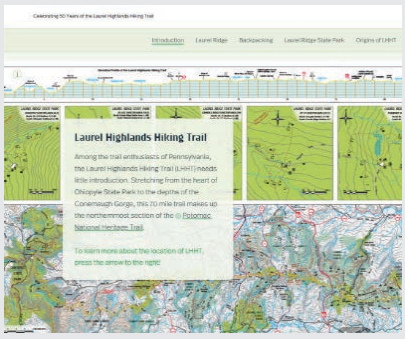
Ally Latham: "Pennsylvania's state parks in general have beautifully maintained trails, stunning natural features, and a sense of calm and connection with nature that keeps you coming back for more."

Cindy Schaltenbrand: "There is something very spiritual in these tranquil moments alone on my kayak that truly give me an overwhelming sense of peace. So, when I saw that the contest category was going to be "Peaceful, Easy Feeling", I knew exactly what photo to enter!"

New Story Map

"Labor of love" is an oft-used phrase that may generate the occasional eyeroll but it's very much the case here. 2026 marks the 50th anniversary of the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail (as I'm sure you've heard). The care and maintenance and enjoyment of the trail itself has been a labor of love for thousands of people in that time, as has the story map of the trail's development created by Eleanor Meckley, our PPFF intern.

The beautiful result of all that hard work is now available for viewing on the PA Conservation Heritage website. Congratulations, Eleanor, on a job very well done!



You Made it Happen

Oh, What A Storm!



Photo by: Marci Mowery

The July 4th storm that caused a great deal of damage across Pennsylvania, didn't skip the office of the PPFF. Somehow, a gust of wind slammed down the storage shed where we keep some of our volunteer and trail tools and supplies. Some kind people in the office complex gathered the items before we arrived– apparently, they were strewn across the parking area.

Fortunately, we had support to repair the shed, and only a few items were totally lost.

Board on the Move

The summer PPFF Board Retreat included site visits to Pennsylvania's newest state park, along with projects that we are currently supporting, such as the Carroll Cabin, projects we hope to launch, and projects that we previously supported, such as the Wharton Iron Furnace, pictured here.



Photo by: Marci Mowery

We also kicked off strategic planning to set the course for the next five years. Opportunities will exist for input as we move through the planning process.



Photo by: Carla Eissing

Ticks Happen

PPFF President and the Office Dog Phoebe, joined the Secretaries of Health, DEP and DCNR to talk about being safe in the outdoors and how to handle ticks. This was just one of several press events that occurred this summer, keeping people informed of new opportunities in state parks and forests, as well as ways to be safe.

In The Field

PPFF joined the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps, the Richard King Mellon Foundation, and the staff at Ohiopyle State Park to see the projects completed or under construction at the park. Our first stop was to see the crew members problem solving on the placement of new steps for the loop take out on the Youghiogheny River. It is a good example of group problem solving and the old adage: measure twice, cut once.



Photo by: Marci Mowery



Photo by: Carla Eissing

Out and About

It was a busy summer of outreach and education across the state, with staff and interns making appearances at a variety of events, from Outdoors for All Day in Lancaster to the Outdoor Expo at Shikellamy State Park and many locations in between! Look for us this fall at a variety of state park events.

More Out and About

Friends groups provide a critical conduit to volunteerism in state parks and forests and also serve as a connection between communities and public lands while also investing in these special places.

Serving under PPFFs non-profit umbrella, we work to assist friends through attendance at meetings, providing information and training, and connecting to resources.

In this light, we will launch an online learning platform to allow groups access to information at a time convenient to them. The first three learning modules are: Writing an Appeal Letter; Basic Trail Maintenance; and Conflict Management.

Friends in Action

Oil Creek State Park

From an EnviroBash/Outdoor Show to their local community hall, the Friends of Oil Creek are tabling pros! Their top-tier table set up includes taxidermy, interactive activities, and hand-outs for passersby of all ages. We love to see it!



Michaux State Forest

The Friends of Michaux maintenance and sawyer teams have been hard at work keeping the trails open and clear in the forest. Between regular vegetation removal and bucking large downed trees, these Friends have their work cut out for them!



Ridley Creek State Park

This set of stairs is used to ascend a steep embankment on one of the many trails that Ridley Creek contains. After multiple repairs the Friends took action and went big for a more permanent fix; rebuilding the stairs with 6 x 6 lumber, anchoring the top and bottom of the steps for support. We think these are a step up from the last ones!







Promised Land State Park

Friends at Promised Land got creative when celebrating the only flying mammal, the Bat! Their art in the park programming is completely run by volunteers and donations. We think their creative designs really took flight!

Tuscarora & Locust Lake State Parks

The Friends at Tuscarora & Locust Lake have found a way to reduce, reuse, and reuse their... invasives! Friends cut and loaded invasive vegetation into over 65 fish cribs to create underwater habitat for fish at Tuscarora Lake. They also treated the cut invasive stumps to prevent regrowth.



List of Friends

Cherry Springs Dark Sky Association
Friends of Beltzville
Friends of Big Pocono
Friends of Black Moshannon
Friends of Buchanan-Bear Valley
Friends of Buchanan-Sideling/Martins Hill
Friends of Caledonia
Friends of Canoe Creek
Friends of Chapman
Friends of Colonel Denning
Friends of Cook Forest
Friends of Cowans Gap
Friends of Davis Hollow Cabin
Friends of Goddard
Friends of Greenwood Furnace
Friends of Kings Gap
Friends of Laurel Hill
Friends of Little Buffalo
Friends of Lyman Run
Friends of Michaux
Friends of Milton
Friends of Mont Alto
Friends of Mount Pisgah
Friends of Nockamixon
Friends of Nolde Forest
Friends of Oil Creek
Friends of Ole Bull
Friends of Parker Dam
Friends of Pinchot
Friends of Pine Grove Furnace
Friends of Prince Gallitzin
Friends of Promised Land
Friends of RB Winter
Friends of Ridley Creek
Friends of Ryerson Station
Friends of Shawnee & Blue Knob
Friends of State Line Serpentine Barrens
Friends of Trough Creek & Warriors Path
Friends of Tuscarora & Locust Lake
Friends of Tyler
Friends of Varden Conservation Area
Friends of Weiser - Roaring Creek
Friends of White Clay Creek
Friends of Worlds End
Friends of Yellow Creek
Lackawanna State Park Trail Care Crew

Bring Your Voice

DCNR Budget

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources budget for several key areas increased due to greater transfers from the Oil & Gas Lease Fund. These increases included:

- $104.62 million for state park operations, a 25.7 percent increase over the previous fiscal year.
- $82.57 million for state forest operations, a 35.06 percent increase.
- $59.15 million for general government operations, a 12.84 percent increase.

These increases were due to higher transfers from the Oil & Gas Lease Fund. In an ideal world, these revenues would all be used for state park and state forest projects and infrastructure funding as originally intended.

Data Centers

Despite a lot of attention to the issue, the General Assembly only took two modest steps on data centers. First, there are now annual energy and water reporting requirements for these facilities. Second, PJM, the regional grid operator, will now be required to submit forecasting information to the Public Utilities Commission, which will be able to review data center agreements and contracts that could impact forecasts of the demand for electricity.

The Senate did not take action on several bills on data centers that were passed by the House. House Bill 2151 would require the Center for Local Government Services to develop a model data center development ordinance that municipalities could adopt or modify. House Bill 1834 would require data centers to pay for the costs of their power and any needed updates for the grid, as well as requiring more clean energy for the grid. Finally, the General Assembly took no action on eliminating the state tax incentives for the development of data centers.

Required Recess

In a big and surprising win, the General Assembly incorporated mandatory recess into House Bill 1505, which became the omnibus Public School Code bill that was passed by the General Assembly as part of the budget.

PPFF and our friends at Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society supported this bill, sending joint letters outlining our support.

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