



Senate Budget Hearing Testimony

Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

March 9, 2021

Good afternoon Chairman Browne, Chairman Hughes, and members of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the budget for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR).

This past year Pennsylvanians realized how critical natural places, trails, and opportunities for outdoor recreation are to their well-being. Never has the importance of DCNR's mission to conserve and sustain Pennsylvania's natural resources for present and future generations' use and enjoyment been more important.

During the COVID-19 pandemic and economic fallout, record numbers of Pennsylvanians participated in outdoor recreation. State parks and forests, as well as local parks, trails, and preserves funded by DCNR grants, helped people maintain their mental and physical health while abiding by social-distancing protocols and travel restrictions.

From March through December, state parks saw unprecedented levels of visitation—overall, there were roughly 46.9 million state park visits in 2020, an increase of more than 26 percent from 2019. Park visitors made 289,023 reservations for amenities like campsites, cabins, and pavilions—35 percent more than the previous year. Even on weekdays, parking lots at parks and trailheads were full, and outdoor-related businesses quickly sold out of bikes, kayaks, and other gear.

Through it all, DCNR staff stepped up. From the rangers, firefighters, and other field staff risking their own health while doing everything possible to keep Pennsylvanians safe to the staff across the commonwealth who seamlessly adapted to working remotely, the department's public servants continued stewarding Pennsylvania's natural resources for every citizen today and for generations yet to come.

Governor Wolf's vision is to make Pennsylvania a place where families and businesses thrive, a place where everyone has the opportunity for a happy, healthy, and successful life. DCNR and its partners play a key role in this vision, helping provide for and protect the parks, trails, clean water, breathtaking landscapes, and other amenities that ensure both quality of life and economic growth—benefiting Pennsylvania's local governments, businesses, and citizens alike.

By conserving and stewarding our commonwealth's natural resources, DCNR is vital to Pennsylvania's \$29 billion-dollar outdoor recreation industry—an industry that supports 251,000 direct jobs and attracts people to our state.

DCNR also infuses over \$30 million annually into the Pennsylvania economy to private engineering and construction companies throughout the state through ongoing park and forest infrastructure projects. Now more than ever, this money can play a vital role in keeping local businesses afloat and speeding the commonwealth's economic recovery.

The outdoor recreation opportunities DCNR provides are crucial to helping Pennsylvanians of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds stay active and healthy, boosting quality of life (especially during difficult times like these) while reducing healthcare costs. And the department's many public services—such as collecting geological and seismic data, training community firefighters, and managing invasive species—protect our citizens and are essential to having a government that works.

DCNR's proposed total budget of about \$427 million allows the agency to continue anchoring Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation economy and providing these essential services.

As Pennsylvania continues to recover from the impacts of the pandemic, our department is well-positioned to enhance our core work while providing effective, common-sense solutions to new challenges facing the commonwealth. Here are some of DCNR's key initiatives in 2021:

- Help Pennsylvania's economy recover by infusing money into local communities through grants and construction contracts while stewarding the public lands that support numerous small businesses and are the backbone of the commonwealth's \$29 billion outdoor recreation industry.

- Ensure that public lands are safe, welcoming, and accessible for all visitors, while also working towards the goal of having a park or trail within 10 minutes of every Pennsylvanian.
- Bolster youth engagement and workforce development through the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps. This program offers work experience, job training, and educational opportunities to young people who complete recreation and conservation projects, helping them gain real-world experience and skills that will make them more attractive job candidates for Pennsylvania businesses.
- Collaborate with local stakeholders to plant thousands of trees along waterways, which will prevent costly, dangerous flooding and keep the water safe for drinking, fishing, and swimming.
- Implement practices to protect Pennsylvanians and our natural resources from severe storms, invasive species, wildfires, and other impacts of climate change that threaten lives, the economy, and our natural resources.
- Pioneer energy efficiency and sustainability practices that save money, reduce carbon emissions, and support renewable-energy jobs. For example, installing solar arrays in state parks.

DCNR faces pressing needs in our state parks and forests—there is a documented need of more than \$1 billion to fix and maintain the roads, bridges, dams, sewer systems, and other crucial infrastructure that allows visitors to enjoy our parks and forests safely.

And across the commonwealth, local governments and volunteer groups are creating parks, playgrounds, green spaces, and trails that generate revenue, build

community character, and improve quality of life. These conservation and recreation projects would be impossible without dedicated funds like the Keystone Fund and Environmental Stewardship Fund and the local money that grants from these dollars leverage.

DCNR staff work tirelessly to welcome millions of visitors to Pennsylvania's state parks and forests, enhance communities, engage young people, and conserve the commonwealth's natural resources and outdoor heritage. I'm proud of them.

We look forward to working with you over the coming year to make Pennsylvania a great place to live, work, and play.