



Senate Appropriations Budget Hearing Testimony
Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
March 2, 2022

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).

Never has DCNR's mission to conserve and sustain Pennsylvania's natural resources for present and future generations' use and enjoyment been more important. Two years removed from the onset of the pandemic, record numbers of Pennsylvanians are still flocking to state parks and forests, as well as local parks, trails, and preserves funded by DCNR grants, to maintain their mental and physical health. In 2021 there were roughly 42.2 million state park visits, the second-highest total ever. This number represents an 11.3 percent increase compared to the average of the three years before the pandemic, proving that most people who discovered the joy of hiking, biking, paddling, and other activities during the initial phase of the pandemic will continue these activities into the future.

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 booming outdoor recreation industry—an industry that adds \$12 billion of value to the Pennsylvania economy, supports nearly 150,000 jobs, and attracts people to our state. Each year, state park visitors alone generate more than \$1 billion in economic activity, directly supporting 9,435 jobs and spending over \$628 million directly at local shops, outfitters, restaurants, and other businesses. Overall, every \$1 invested in state parks returns \$12.41 of value-added income to the commonwealth

DCNR also infuses over \$30 million annually into local economies by contracting engineering, construction, and landscaping companies (often locally owned and operated) for park and forest infrastructure projects. This money has played a vital role in keeping local businesses afloat during challenging economic times.

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 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 \$638 million allows the agency to continue anchoring Pennsylvania's growing outdoor recreation economy and providing these essential services. Importantly, this budget adds 31 staff positions, helping DCNR hire more rangers to strengthen public safety as well as more staff to maintain ATV trails and recreational areas and support the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (a program currently facilitated by only one person). And in his recent announcement of a plan to help Pennsylvania fully recover from the pandemic through the American Rescue Plan Act funds, Governor Wolf proposed making a \$450 million investment in conservation, outdoor recreation, and preservation—including funding to improve state parks and forests, build trails and local parks, and protect open space as part of the envisioned Growing Greener III.

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 2022:

- Boost Pennsylvania's economy 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 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 \$1.4 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. The injection of federal funding for parks and forests would represent a tremendous down payment towards these needs, but there is still much more funding needed.

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.