

June 3, 2022

TO: Appropriations and Environmental Resources & Energy Committee Chairs

RE: American Rescue Plan Act Funds and 2022-2023 Budget

Dear Chairs of Appropriations and Environmental Resources & Energy Committees:

The Conservation & Natural Resources Advisory Council (CNRAC), a legislatively mandated Pennsylvania advisory Board, is writing to request your support in two areas that will directly invest in the statutory mission of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). First, we request that you allocate a portion of the Commonwealth's remaining American Rescue Plan Act Federal funds to support DCNR initiatives through the Growing Greener III proposal. Second, we request your support for the allocation of General Fund monies to DCNR in the 2022-2023 State Budget. Such funding is critical for Pennsylvania to maintain the infrastructure and programs that are vital to our natural resources at a time when they are most needed by our citizens and businesses.

Growing Greener III

The one-time allocation of remaining American Rescue Plan funds for Growing Greener III will address a list of capital projects that are ready to be implemented and will also provide a significant return on investment for many years. Senate Bill 525 and House Bill 2020 are two such proposals that would accomplish these objectives. Allocating these Federal dollars in this manner will ensure that they have a lasting impact while enabling this initiative to be funded without adding to the Commonwealth's debt. Applying American Rescue Plan funding to state parks and forest infrastructure and local community recreation and conservation projects would:

- Support small businesses.
- Create well-paying jobs.
- Stimulate economic activity related to outdoor recreation and tourism, particularly in small and rural communities.
- Reduce safety concerns related to failing infrastructure such as 148 bridges rated "poor" and water/sewer systems needing replacement or upgrading.
- Avoid costs related to public health and flooding.
- Support local municipalities' economic initiatives and job growth through matching grants for capital projects; these projects span numerous legislative districts and counties.

All of these opportunities can make a significant difference in the lives of Pennsylvanians. By directing the Federal recovery dollars to Growing Greener III, you will be supporting an established outdoor economy that adds \$12 billion annually to Pennsylvania's GDP, representing 1.5% of Pennsylvania's total economy, and is responsible for the equivalent of 150,000 full-time, year-round jobs. When outdoor recreation industry inputs and the buying power of the wages earned by outdoor recreation employees are included, the economic impact of outdoor recreation more than doubles.

2022-2023 State Budget

For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, DCNR has identified a need for an increase in funding of approximately \$29 million

from the General Fund. This funding will allow DCNR to support existing operations and initiatives and manage Commonwealth natural, cultural, and historical resources per its mission. Some of the ways the increased funding will be used include:

- **Public Safety:** Add rangers that will work on a landscape scale rather than on an individual park and forest approach.
- **Motorized Recreation:** Build the needed staff capacity and equipment to develop and maintain new and existing ATV trails and recreational areas.
- **Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps:** Increase support for the youth jobs program that is training a new generation of conservation stewards and leaders.
- **Carbon Capture and Storage:** Expand scientific expertise to help the Commonwealth leverage Federal funding opportunities for carbon capture and storage.
- **Engineering and Infrastructure Maintenance:** Hire staff in electrical, civil and stormwater engineering to ensure adequate capacity to address needs driven by increased use and demand on natural resources.

During the pandemic, we saw Pennsylvania citizens confirm the essential nature of our parks and forests, as these resources provided the needed space for maintaining physical and mental health. Visitation rates at Pennsylvania state parks and forests skyrocketed, with more than a million additional visitors per month. DCNR staff worked tirelessly to provide a quality experience to first-time and long-time visitors within a limited budget and with infrastructure needs across state parks and forests exceeding \$1.4 billion. The increased interest in outdoor recreation continues, along with the dedication of DCNR staff to provide services and education.

We hope you will join us in our continuing work to make Pennsylvania a leader in safe outdoor recreation with a growing economy supporting a vibrant workforce.

Sincerely,



Geralyn Umstead-Singer, CNRAC Chair

cc: Governor Tom Wolf
PA Legislature
Cindy Adams Dunn, Secretary, DCNR
Gretchen Leslie, DCNR, CNRAC Liaison