



## *Creating a Partnership with the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation*

*“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 people.”*

*– Pennsylvania Constitution, Article I, Section 27*

People who use, enjoy, and live near the Commonwealth’s 117 state parks and 20 state forests are often the best supporters of these lands. Many of these citizens are willing to commit time, energy, and resources to enhance the conservation and enjoyment of state lands. The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) assists motivated citizens, businesses, and local organizations in forming friends groups to support a state owned park or forest. This guide is intended to provide a process overview.

### *The Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation*

The Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation, created in 1999, gives supporters and users of Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests a positive way to contribute to the conservation of the Commonwealth’s publicly-owned lands.

Although the PPFF works closely with the DCNR, it is an independent non-profit foundation that:

- Assists citizens and organizations to create partnerships with their local state park, forest or state owned entity like a natural area.
- Provides a tax-deductible vehicle to donate or bequeath money to Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests.
- Promotes education, recreation and volunteerism at state parks and forests.

### *What is a Friends Group?*

A friends group is organized to support, assist, and promote the mission or activities of a particular state park and forest. A friends group consists of motivated people and organizations that understand the value and benefits of a state park or forest and share a common goal to work with PPFF and the DCNR. Friends groups are not government advisory groups, but they are often an important source of support and public comments.

### *Why Create a Friends Group?*

The objectives of a friends group are crafted cooperatively by the citizens and organizations who come together to form such a group and the state park or forest manager. Groups form for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- Becoming a constituency for state parks and forests promoting the park or forest to visitors through publications and special events.
- Lending expertise and knowledge to educational and interpretive programs.

- Providing volunteer services.
- Maintaining good community relations.
- Raising money
- Soliciting donations of land or direct financial contributions to conserve and protect lands
- Assist with special projects and events.

### ***Why Become a chapter of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation?***

Under Pennsylvania law, no organization can legally raise funds without registering with the Department of State and its Bureau of Charitable Organizations. That's because donors are entitled to know about the organizations to which they are giving money. As a chapter of PPF, you will be authorized to operate under the existing registration of PPF. Under federal law, no organization can claim to be tax exempt unless the Internal Revenue Service has conferred that status upon them. Becoming a chapter of PPF will confer tax-exempt status on a friends group. Without this 501(c) (3) status, donors cannot claim a tax deduction for contributions.

By operating under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation in a manner fully consistent with PPF's incorporation, registration, and tax-exempt status, a friends group will be able to avoid cumbersome paperwork, registration fees, and annual audits. Under this arrangement, PPF provides all financial and accounting services be a local subsidiary of the PPF, or chapter.

As a chapter of PPF all money generated by a friends group must be deposited with PPF to be placed in a segregated account. A chapter does not disburse funds but submits a written request for release of funds to PPF who will pay all legitimate expenses. All requests must be sent through the park or forest manager. Only by operating in this fashion can PPF submit one IRS filing covering the financial activity of all chapters and the Foundation and relieve individual chapters of that burden (forms provided).

While PPF does not direct the chapter — that's up to the local citizens and respective park/forest manager involved — the activities of the partnership must be consistent with the broad policy guidance issued by the board of directors and Bylaws of PPF. The bylaws of PPF will serve as the bylaws for all chapters.

Friends groups are required to follow a simple annual reporting procedure that assists PPF in marketing friends groups, raising funds that benefit friends groups, and providing information requested by state and federal government agencies.

### ***How Do We Get Started?***

Creating a friends group requires a core group of leaders working cooperatively with the park or forest manager to get the organization off to a good start.

PPF will provide:

- Legal documents regarding incorporation and by-laws.
- Accounting and financial services which, if utilized, will qualify a group for tax-exempt status.
- Advice and guidance on how to begin.

### ***What's the Fee for Being Part of the PPF?***

The Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation charges a one-time affiliation fee of \$25 to local friends groups that work under PPFF auspices. In addition to this minimal charge, PPFF also requires that the local group sign a Memorandum of Understanding.

As outlined above, PPFF will facilitate all financial transactions for the local group. In addition, PPFF will endeavor to hold contributions to the friends group in an interest-bearing account. PPFF collects one point of interest on the account to cover expenses and charges a one dollar per transaction fee.

### *What Happens Next?*

A board of directors will need to convene soon after the organizational meeting of the friends in order to make some basic decisions about the friends group. The organization will need to raise funds, perhaps by assessing dues on each member. The board, in conjunction with the park manager or district forester, develops an action plan to choose and implement the specific projects of the friends group. PPFF can help facilitate this planning process. Plans should include standards for measuring success. A copy of the completed plan must be submitted to PPFF for inclusion in the chapter's files, along with a complete list of board members and officers.

### *How Do We Choose the Initial Project?*

Choosing the first project is important because it sends a message about the group. Pick a realistic project, something do-able and appealing to the community. Remember that everything that occurs on state property requires the approval of DCNR through the park manager or district forester. By working closely with these officials throughout the planning process, set backs and disappointments can be diminished.

Remember that DCNR personnel understand the state laws, regulations, and guidelines governing the Commonwealth's lands and waters, and also work under a management plan for the entity they oversee. As your partners, DCNR officials have knowledge of the urgent needs of the park, forest or other entity. Working cooperatively with park and forest officials, you can develop the project that meets everyone's common goal of enhancing Pennsylvania's parks and forests.

### *In What Other Ways Can PPFF Assist?*

PPFF is here to ensure the success of your endeavors. We offer training, support, facilitation and encouragement. We can connect you to other groups for shared resources and ideas. We serve as a conduit between groups and DCNR officials, when needed. In addition to our accounting services, we can assist with grant writing, pool resources among groups, and assist in promoting the work of the partnerships and groups.

Friends who form under the auspices of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation are covered by the Foundations directors and officers liability insurance as well as their general liability insurance for volunteer activities. All volunteers should also be registered as a DCNR Conservation Volunteer.

*To learn more about the PPFF, log onto the website at [PaParksAndForests.org](http://PaParksAndForests.org).*