

Here are specific, practical reasons to keep our state parks and state forests open and available.

1. **Economic benefits to tourism**...state parks and forests are key items in most visitor and convention bureaus publications as major attractions. According to DK Shifflet and Associates in the 2001 Pennsylvania Year End Report, visiting state and national parks ranked among the top five reasons to travel in Pennsylvania. This study goes on to state that the average daily expenditure per person for leisure travel in 2001 was \$79. In the 1999 Pennsylvania Outdoor Travelers Profile and Activities Analysis, it was found that about one in five of Pennsylvania's leisure tourists travel for the primary purpose of outdoor recreation and that outdoor recreation was the fastest growing segment of tourism. DIRECT expenditures for outdoor recreation in 1997 were \$4.03 billion, or 33% of Pennsylvania's leisure travel spending. The study went on to find that outdoor travelers spend about 35% more per trip than the average traveler. At that time, 44% of the outdoor recreation travelers were from Pennsylvania, the remainder came from neighboring states (read—new money into the economy.)

Not only will we lose the economic benefits to this tourism, especially the communities surrounding our parks and forests, but we will be losing inexpensive means of recreation for commonwealth citizens if we reduce funding to state parks and forests.

2. **Health and wellness benefits** are provided to park and forest visitors particularly those stressed by the current economic crisis and related impacts. State parks and forests provide inexpensive areas and facilities for families to get outdoors and exercise. Pennsylvania is still facing an obesity crises as outlined in the final report from the Governor's Conference on the Outdoors. According to one website, nearly a quarter of Pennsylvanians are considered obese. In the report, "Actual Causes of Death" by AH Mokdad et al, poor diet and lack of exercise is the second leading cause of death among Americans.

The 2008 Pennsylvania State Park visitors study performed by Pennsylvania State University found that Pennsylvanian's visit their state parks to have fun, reduce stress and anxiety, and to connect to the outdoors. The 2009 Residents survey found that many folks recreate in the outdoors for health reasons.

3. While state parks have received significant capital funds for badly needed upgrades and improvements from Keystone and Growing Greener Programs, **state parks operating funds have already been cut significantly** going back to the \$12 million reduction in 2003. In the interim between then and now, the Bureau of State Parks has taken all measures possible short of closing parks to maintain operations. This has included the use of the augmentation funds previously earmarked for major maintenance to go to normal operations.

State forests have traditionally funded 66% of their budget through timber sales. With timber sales at a low, the need for state funding to assist forests in the year ahead cannot be overemphasized. While there is no easy way to count state forests visitors due to the nature of state forests, one only need to venture out on the weekends to see that they support a diversity of recreational opportunities.

4. The need to support and **oversee the Marcellus gas leases** and resulting activity is increasing the need to actually increase funds and staff for the Bureau of Forestry

5. Closing parks and limiting access to state forests or significantly reducing operations can **exacerbate the revenue situation for the state.**

6. State parks already have **obligations to your constituents who have reservations** for cabin and campground lodging, who may be mooring a boat at a state park marina, and who may be planning events at parks. Do we want to frustrate park users who may decide not to return for future visits or have to actually refund fees that have already been paid? Is this how we want to treat visitors to Pennsylvania?

7. State parks and forests provide employment to **seasonal workers from the local areas** who then contribute payroll taxes, contribute to the local economy, and do not have to draw unemployment benefits. The seasonal workers are extremely important to the proper operation of our state parks and forests.

8. Having sufficient seasonal workers as well as the normal complement of full time employees including state park and state forest rangers is **essential to the safety and well-being of park and forest users** who assume a reasonable level of staffing in case of emergencies.

9. Most state parks and forests provide significant **support for local small businesses** such as grocery stores, boat stores, bait and tackle shops, ice cream parlors, motels, and gas stations. As state parks close or access to state forest roads decreases, these businesses will suffer, and many are in rural areas without many other options for customers. One conservative estimate found that if 35-45 parks were to close, based on their visitation numbers, loss revenue would exceed \$57 million.

10. Closing parks and forest roads will reduce the **opportunity for kids and families to enjoy the outdoors.** The excellent environmental and interpretive programs offered in the parks provide considerable educational benefits during that period of the year when kids are not in school. Hiking and biking trails are often best accessed by forest roads, as are hunting opportunities. Why take away from the summer fun if it can possibly be avoided! The 2001 National Survey on Hunting, Fishing, and Wildlife Associated Recreation found that 2.2 million PA residents hunt/fish, while 3.4 million PA residents participate in wildlife watching, including bird watching.

In 2008, State Parks alone provided over 10,000 programs reaching over 347,000 people. This figure does not include the active recreation provided by concessionaires at state parks who provide boat and bicycle rentals.

11. Many of the state parks and forests have **friends groups** who work very hard to raise funds to supplement the normal funding to the parks. Closing or significantly reducing operations will potentially frustrate these valuable volunteer groups. These groups leverage the

funds provided by the state to enhance visitors' experience. The burden should not be placed on volunteers to staff and run state parks and forests, as well.

Our organization, the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation, works closely with parks and forests to get citizens involved. These citizens in formal Friends Groups, gave more than 25,000 hours of their time last year to make their parks and forests even better.

12. Voters and taxpayers have consistently supported funding for state parks and forests. To the taxpayers who have traditionally demonstrated the willingness to support and make financial investments in the Commonwealth's state park and forests system for themselves and their children and grandchildren, keeping the parks and forests open only seems fair.

13. The 2008 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report found that in 2007, 50% of Americans participated in outdoor recreation. The top seven activities varied by age, but included running/jogging/trail running; bicycling (any type), fishing (any type), wildlife viewing (more than ¼ mile from vehicle/home); skateboarding; camping, and day hiking. The 2004-2008 Pennsylvania Recreation Plan summary actually showed a higher level of participation in outdoor recreation, with the percentage varying by region, but ranging from a low of 74% of those surveyed to a high of 82%.

14. Only 2.1 cents of every \$10 coming into the general fund is allocated to state parks. Not much money in the grand scheme of things.

15. The May 2009 Draft Outdoor Recreation In Pennsylvania Resident Survey indicates that 90% of people surveyed believed that maintaining parks and recreation areas were a high priority and 85% felt that protecting wildlife habitat and conserving wild resources were a priority.

Funding state parks and forests, as well as other programs within DCNR, for optimal operations is an important tool for keeping the economy of Pennsylvania vital and strong, as well as for keeping Pennsylvanian's healthy. I hope that we can count on you to find a means to support funding at a level for full operation.

Source;

Shifflet, DK and Associates, Ltd. 2001 Pennsylvania Year End Report. Pennsylvania Tourism, Film and Economic Development Marketing. Falls Church, VA.

Shifflet, DK & Associates, Ltd. Pennsylvania Outdoor Travelers Profile and Activities Analysis, McLean, VA 1999.

The Outdoor Foundation. Outdoor Recreation Participation Report 2008. Boulder, CO.

Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Pennsylvania's Recreation Plan 2004-2008. Executive Summary. April 2004.