



**pennsylvania**  
DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

**House Appropriations Budget Hearing  
Testimony by Cindy Adams Dunn  
Secretary  
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources**

**February 29, 2016**

Good afternoon Chairman Adolph, Chairman Markosek and members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the budget priorities of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

When he presented his budget, Governor Tom Wolf noted there are two paths we can take. The Governor's proposal provides a clear path for a promising future for our commonwealth by investing in our schools, meets critical human service needs, fully funds our pension and debt obligations, and eliminates the structural budget deficit that has plagued us.

The governor also recognizes that conserving our natural places, providing citizens and visitors with opportunities for outdoor experiences, and harnessing our natural resources responsibly improve our economy and quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.

During the past year, DCNR added Washington Crossing Historic Park to our system, and rolled out a 5-year plan with 83 action steps to improve our opportunities for outdoor recreation and adventures all across the commonwealth.

Three buildings on DCNR lands, including a new visitor center at Ohiopyle State Park, received top certifications for being green and sustainable. We also collected more than 4,000 comments to inform a plan to manage our state forests to make sure they are healthy and productive for many years.

DCNR's proposed total budget of \$356.8 million for next fiscal year allows the department to operate as we currently do.

The Governor's proposal returns stability to our budget by reducing by \$51 million our reliance on revenues generated from leases for natural gas extraction, and restoring that same amount of General Fund monies to the department's general government, state park and state forest operations. This moves us away from funding conservation through a revenue source that is subject to fluctuations related to the energy market.

I'm pleased to say that DCNR's budget includes \$2.5 million for a youth conservation corps program that will offer work experience, job training and educational opportunities to young people who complete recreation and conservation projects on Pennsylvania's lands.

Studies show that people age 16-24 who are employed have a better chance in the labor market later in life. Governor Wolf believes there will be positive impacts on Pennsylvania's future workforce if we increase youth employment opportunities now.

We've been laying the groundwork for this important program through a youth engagement strategic initiative – one of six strategic initiatives DCNR is

focusing on that grow from and build on the core work our bureaus and staff perform every day.

If we take the path outlined by Governor Wolf, the proposed budgets for our bureaus of state parks and forestry allow us to provide the same levels of staff and service to ensure our visitors have a meaningful and enjoyable experience; maintain and improve our facilities with an eye to energy efficiency and sustainability; continue monitoring and oversight of gas development on previously-leased lands; and carry on the tradition of harvesting timber to manage the forest and support jobs that pay in the forest products industry.

If we choose a path that continues to ignore financial reality and pretends the commonwealth's budget is in balance when it clearly is not, we put our local and state park systems and our forests at risk from crumbling infrastructure and inadequate management staff, as well as invasive pests like gypsy moth and the water-based hydrilla; and lose opportunities to help landowners and communities address issues like managing stormwater by planting trees and attracting tourists to our natural and heritage assets.

Our state and local parks and forests add beauty, places to relieve stress and improve health through family recreation, and habitat for wildlife to flourish.

In addition, our work protecting our natural assets is important to local economies, especially in rural areas, as our award-winning state park system generates more than a billion dollars annually in economic activity and supports 13,000 jobs.

Our forest products industry, with support from a steady, continuous supply of quality, sustainably-harvested timber from our state forests, provides jobs that pay in every county in the commonwealth with an overall economic impact of \$19 billion contributed annually to the state's economy.

Closer to home, local and regional parks create \$1.6 billion in economic activity in Pennsylvania and support about 12,500 jobs.

Related to recreation and conservation, we anticipate that dollars from the Keystone Fund for grants will increase by about \$8 million, reflecting recent recovery in the housing market. DCNR will continue our work to connect to communities and, through our grants, support the trails and local projects that add greatly to our future health and economic prosperity.

The department's many public services – from geological and seismic data to community firefighter training, forest pest management, development of recreational trails – are all important to a government that works, and to ensuring a vital and healthy Pennsylvania for future generations.

With a fully-funded budget, this will be an exciting year for DCNR as we build upon our core work and grow our efforts around not only youth engagement, sustainability and forest conservation, but also water resources, adapting to climate change and promoting our fantastic outdoor recreation opportunities.

The men and women of DCNR strive every day to create opportunities to grow our recreational and tourism economy through a revitalized park and forest system that ensures we are conserving our natural resources, and protecting our

people and the environment. I'm proud to work with them, and you, to make Pennsylvania a great place to live, work, and play.