



**House Appropriations Budget Hearing Testimony
Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
February 28, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairman Harris, Chairman Grove, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss Governor Shapiro's 2024-2025 proposed budget for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). I want to personally thank Governor Shapiro and members of the General Assembly for their commitment to ensuring DCNR can continue to conserve and sustain our natural resources for years to come.

It's more important than ever that we continue to improve Pennsylvania's public lands by protecting and improving the infrastructure in our state park and forests because if we don't, they will be lost forever. The Governor's economic strategy supports this by proposing an investment in our parks and forests that will make Pennsylvania a premier destination for exceptional trail experiences, benefiting the economic competitiveness of communities, tourism, and public health.

The Governor's proposed 2024-25 budget invests \$630 million for DCNR to continue and expand other core work and initiatives, including:

- \$8.5 million to advance historic investments in DCNR's trail system to ensure that DCNR's most popular trails in our state park and forests are sustainably designed and constructed to manage heavy traffic and withstand severe weather; ensure vigilant maintenance and management; support accessibility improvements that advance DCNR's mission and strategic priority of "Recreation for All"; leverage outdoor recreation as a tool for economic competitiveness and business and workforce recruitment; and build capacity within DCNR to compete for and administer federal infrastructure funding that could support Pennsylvania's trail networks.
- An additional \$5 million from the Reemployment Fund to expand the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps which continues to be a shining example of success at DCNR. Many participants continue to serve in different capacities throughout their lives, including with DCNR as a future employer, drawing satisfaction from giving back and paying increasing dividends over time from this singular investment in our environment and the next generation. This request increases regionalized field support, which better prioritizes need and

opportunities, strengthens partnerships, and ensures more efficient geographic coverage.

- Significant investments in additional regionalized park and forest staff to meet the high visitation demands on our park and forest system, as well as additional capital budget investments in state park and forest infrastructure.

The skilled employees of DCNR manage, protect, and promote 124 state parks that were enjoyed by 38.5 million visitors in 2023 and more than 2.2 million acres of state forests across Pennsylvania. This added support better prioritizes need and opportunities, strengthens partnerships, and ensures more efficient geographic coverage. This will be an important step to ensure the public have what they need when they are enjoying the Commonwealth's natural treasures and the homes and communities that exist within them are able to thrive together for decades to come.

Again, I want to thank you for helping secure much needed funding that will strengthen and protect our natural resources that will benefit Pennsylvania's communities, businesses, and residents alike. We look forward to partnering with you in the coming year to further our mission and ensure that people, businesses, and communities across our Commonwealth continue to thrive.