

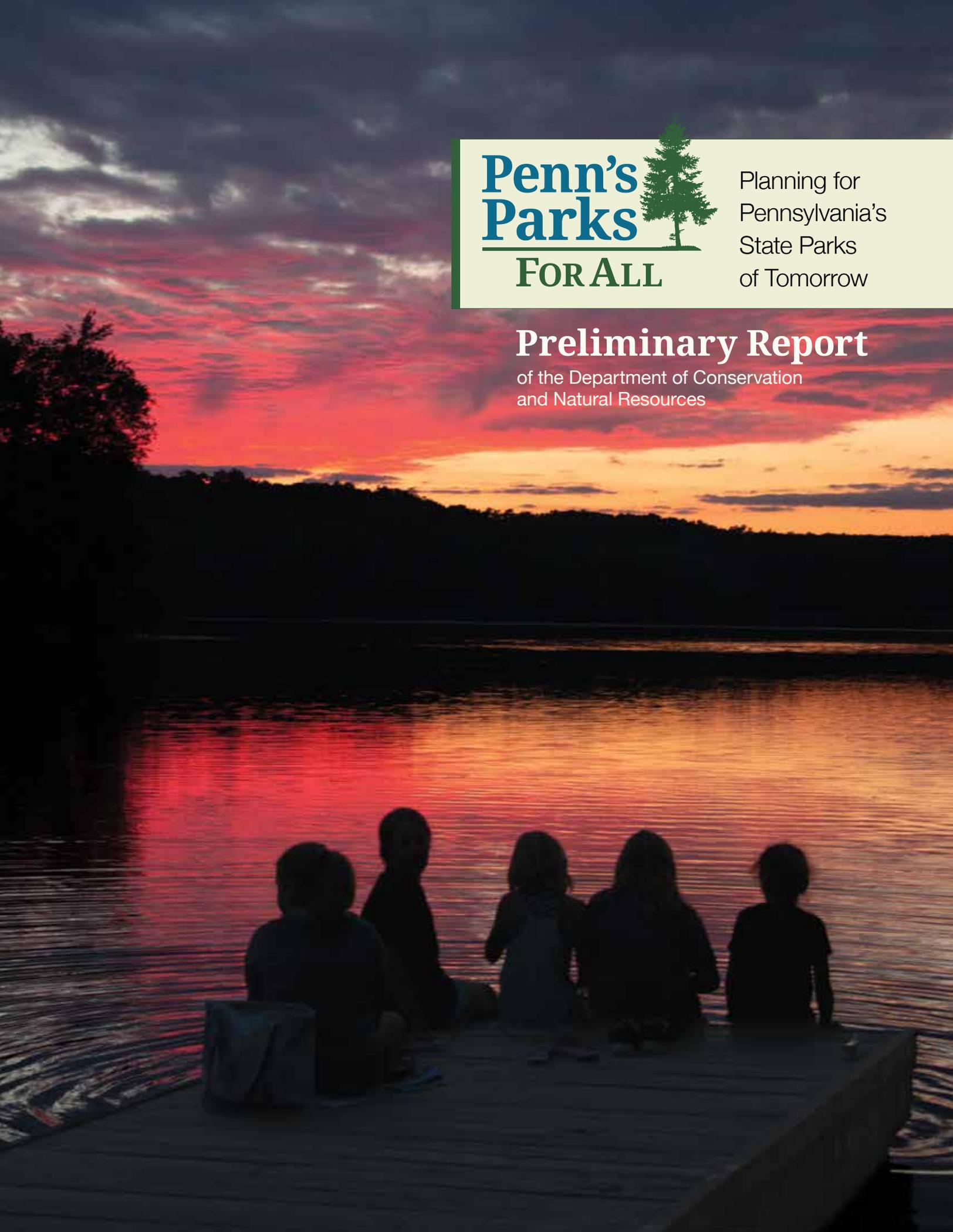


**Penn's  
Parks**  
**FOR ALL**

Planning for  
Pennsylvania's  
State Parks  
of Tomorrow

## **Preliminary Report**

of the Department of Conservation  
and Natural Resources



## Pennsylvania State Parks Mission

In 1971, Pennsylvania voters approved the Environmental Rights Amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution: **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 the people.**

Twenty years later, as part of the *State Parks 2000* planning process, a formal mission for the Bureau of State Parks was developed: **The primary purpose of state parks is to provide opportunities for enjoying healthful outdoor recreation and to serve as outdoor classrooms for environmental education. In meeting these purposes, the conservation of the natural, scenic, aesthetic, and historical values of the parks should be given first consideration. Stewardship responsibilities should be carried out in a way that protects the natural outdoor experience for the enjoyment of current and future generations.**

### PA Administrative Code of 1929

The Bureau of State Parks was officially created in 1929 and was charged with the purpose of "...promoting healthful outdoor recreation and education and making available for such use natural areas of unusual scenic beauty, especially such as provide impressive views, waterfalls, gorges, creeks, caves or other unique and interesting features..."

### PA Act 18 of 1995

In 1995, Act 18 established the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) as an administrative agency within the executive branch of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania government.

Chapter 3 of the Act specifically states the powers and duties of DCNR with respect to state parks, covering such areas as new land acquisitions, planning, enforcement, contracts and leases, mineral extraction, right-of-ways, and water usage.

The Act also specifically states that DCNR cannot impose any parking or admission fees.



Cover photo:  
Gifford Pinchot State Park

## Message from the Director

It's been 25 years since the DCNR Bureau of State Parks underwent its last strategic planning effort, *State Parks 2000*. The list of recommendations from that process included the modernization of facilities, expanding environmental education program offerings, and designating natural areas in parks to better protect sensitive or special natural resources.

The goal of the *Penn's Parks for All* strategic planning process is to help guide Pennsylvania's state park professionals in carrying out the important work of caring for the 121 state parks in our system for the next 25 years.

Presented here is a summary of results from the various surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018, along with proposed recommendations for public discussion, which will inform our final plan for changes to make within the state park system moving forward. We invite all Pennsylvanians to review this report and provide comments.

The State Parks website provides more details on public input opportunities and links to view raw data from the survey responses: [www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks](http://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks)

I look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas for improving our state parks for future generations.



John S. Hallas  
Director, Bureau of State Parks  
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

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# Introduction



Leonard Harrison State Park

Photo credit: Curt Weinhold

Since the *State Parks 2000* initiative was launched in 1992, many improvements and changes have been made to Pennsylvania's state park system. In addition to a steady

modernization of facilities, the DCNR Bureau of State Parks (Bureau) has responded to visitor needs by making adjustments in park staffing at locations across the system.

## A System Under Stress PA's state park system: 40 years of change

Year	# Parks	# Acres	Annual Attendance
1970	85	214,000	29 million
2018	121	295,000	39 million
Change	+36	+81,000	+10 million

The annual budget for the DCNR Bureau of State Parks has regularly fluctuated due to changes in the economy and other commonwealth governmental needs; but reviewing trends over several decades shows a systemic problem. Since 1970, 36 more state parks have been added to the system with 81,000 additional acres to manage, and millions of more people visiting the parks annually. The total number of state park staff, however, has decreased over that same time. It has become increasingly difficult to manage the system in a way that provides an enjoyable and safe experience for all visitors, while also properly caring for the recreational, natural, and cultural resources that attract visitors to the parks.

At the outset of the *Penn's Parks for All* initiative, a series of issues were identified that seem to be most pressing for the state park system today, as well as issues emerging for the years ahead. These issues have guided the development of the Bureau's public survey questions

and internal and external discussions—focusing on changes that will help the Bureau carry out its stewardship responsibilities for the 121 parks and 295,000 acres of land under its jurisdiction.

This report is organized with sections that correspond to the categories of questions from surveys conducted in 2017 and 2018. Each section includes background information, a summary of the results of survey questions relating to that section, and “Recommended Future Directions” that the Bureau is considering.

Following public and stakeholder input, a final list of strategies will be outlined to help move Pennsylvania's state park system forward through the next few decades.

### Comments on this report

can be submitted in the following ways:

- An online comment form can be found at <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks>
- Mail comments via postal to:  
PA Department of Conservation  
and Natural Resources  
Bureau of State Parks  
Planning Section  
P.O. Box 8551  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8551





# A Brief History of Pennsylvania State Parks



McConnell's Mill State Park

In 1893, Valley Forge became Pennsylvania's first state park, which then became part of the National Park System in 1976. The 1920s saw an aggressive effort to carve areas out of the state forest system for picnicking, swimming, and camping, which became known as "state forest parks."

As the number of outdoor recreation areas continued to grow across the state, it was recognized that a separate bureau would be needed to properly manage these sites. The Pennsylvania Bureau of State Parks was officially created in 1929.

During the Great Depression (starting in the 1930s), the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Project Administration (WPA) put tens of thousands of young men to work in Pennsylvania planting trees and building roads, dams, cabins, pavilions, and stone walls. Five federal Recreation Demonstration Areas (constructed by the CCC and WPA) to serve urban populations, along with numerous CCC camps, also became state parks.

Under Secretary Maurice K. Goddard's leadership from the 1950s through the 1970s, the number of state parks grew from 50 to 111 as part of his vision of locating a state park within 25 miles of every citizen in Pennsylvania.

In the 1980s, an ongoing effort was started to improve park facilities and to support environmental education and interpretation.

*State Parks 2000* (1992) was the initiative that helped guide the modernization of the system and the growth of the Bureau's environmental education and interpretation program. It was also the impetus for the State Parks Natural Areas program, designating 16 areas for special protection.

New parks added during this period included those that were designated as a conservation area or preserve, to be managed as passive recreation areas with minimal development.



*Marsh Creek State Park in Chester County was one of numerous parks created in the late 1950s through the '70s that met Dr. Goddard's criteria of having clean water for recreation, adequate outdoor recreation space, historical or scenic values, and a location reasonably near population.*



*Caledonia State Forest Park in Franklin County, circa 1922.*



*Hickory Run State Park in Carbon County, developed in the 1930s as a federal Recreation Demonstration Area, has many recreational attractions, including a hiking trail to its nationally recognized boulder field.*



# A Snapshot of State Parks Today

Pennsylvania's park system includes 121 parks, ranging in size from three to more than 20,000 acres, totaling nearly 300,000 acres statewide.

The park with the longest beach frontage (7 miles) is Presque Isle State Park, which is a sandy peninsula arching into Lake Erie.

Leonard Harrison and Colton Point state parks are located on either side of the Pine Creek Gorge, also known as the "Pennsylvania Grand Canyon."

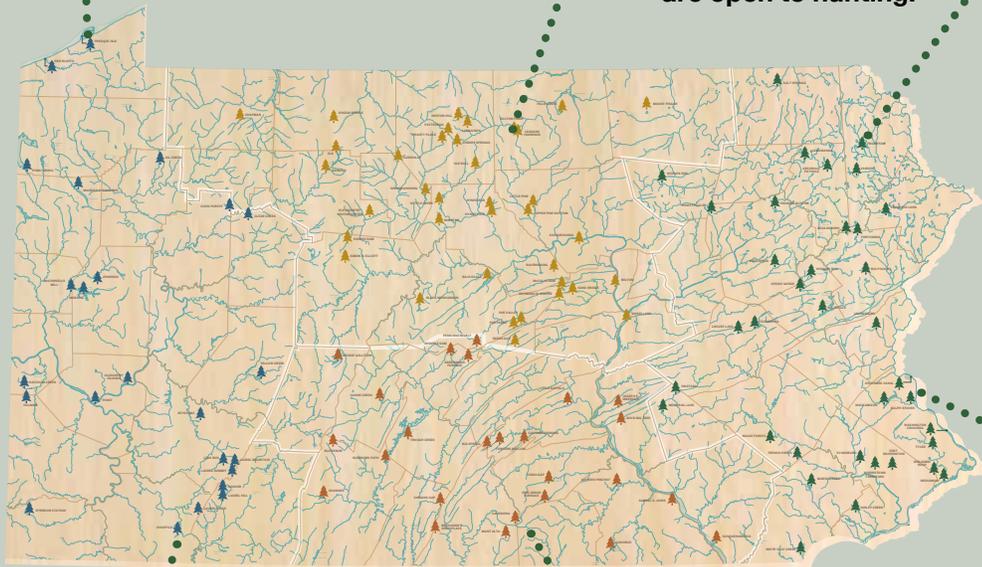
Promised Land State Park was acquired in 1903 to serve as one of Pennsylvania's first outdoor recreation areas.

There are 55 major recreational lakes in the state park system, with 40 smoke-free beaches.

More than 250,000 acres (85%) of state park land and water are open to hunting.

State park environmental educators and interpretive naturalists conduct tens of thousands of classroom and in-park programs each year, attended by more than 400,000 people.

The 60-mile long Delaware Canal State Park is a Registered National Historic Landmark.



**Location of state parks**

-  Eastern Region
-  Northcentral Region
-  Southcentral Region
-  Western Region

A planning effort in the 1930s and '40s focused on developing five major recreational parks within 30 miles of urban populations.

The largest state park in the system is Ohiopyle State Park, with 20,632 acres of land.

Volunteers contribute more than 100,000 hours of time each year in state parks.

Caledonia State Park contains the property of an historic iron furnace that also played a role in guiding runaway slaves to freedom in the north.

To operate and manage the system, the state parks are divided into four regions, each managed by regional staff who provide oversight and support for the park managers and their complement of full-time and seasonal employees:

**Northcentral Regional Office**

Office located in Emporium, PA

**Southcentral Regional Office**

Shawnee State Park, Schellsburg, PA

**Western Regional Office**

Moraine State Park, Prospect, PA

**Eastern Regional Office**

Nockamixon State Park, Perkasie, PA



The Director’s Office provides oversight and support for regional and park staff, supported by a central office staff that includes three divisions:

**Park Operations & Maintenance**

Responsible for the development and implementation of rules and regulations, and policies and procedures that govern operations, and the management of 1,800 legal agreements that help to protect parks from the wide variety of activities that take place in them.

**Outdoor Programming Services**

Provides program direction to the Bureau’s non-formal environmental education and interpretive field staff through training, program development, interpretive exhibits, publications, and website and social media content.

**Resources Management & Planning**

Responsible for the long-term stewardship of the natural and cultural resource base in order to ensure that recreational facilities can be used and enjoyed by all park visitors while preserving the natural and cultural resources for future generations.



# State Park Issues & Surveys



Point State Park

## State Park issues that this planning effort is hoping to address

### Operating 121 parks with decreasing resources

Each new state park added to the Bureau requires a certain level of staffing, security, maintenance, and resource management. Staffing and funding needs for each park vary with the size of the park, the number and type of outdoor recreation facilities, and the seasonal fluctuations of visitors using the park. An increasing challenge for the Bureau is how to operate the parks in our societal climate of wanting smaller government, which translates to fewer park staff and less funding for maintenance and infrastructure improvements.

### Visitor carrying capacity at numerous parks

The impacts of reduced staff and resources are magnified on summer weekends and holidays when the vehicle and facility capacities of some parks are reached before noon, and people continue to enter by parking outside the gates. In these instances, the park's water and sewage facilities, enforcement capabilities, and trash management can all become overwhelmed. With population growth in major metropolitan areas of the state, these stressful occurrences will only become more frequent in the years ahead unless changes are made.

Special events, such as races or festivals, can bring thousands of people to a park at once as participants or spectators, detracting from the natural or wild experience sought after by other visitors who may be there for quiet hiking, camping, or other outdoor recreational activities.

### Threats to park resources

A park's natural resources may be able to recover from occasional special events, but some parks are being asked to accommodate an increasing number of events, resulting in successive weekends of vehicles parking on turf, trampled vegetation, and staff resources pulled away from other nearby parks to assist with public contact, policing, parking, and cleanup.

Other increasing threats to park resources are less obvious, such as ecological impacts from invasive plants or insects, the deterioration of historic buildings, more frequent flooding impacts due to climate change, or increasing encroachments due to private development along park boundaries.

A more modern threat to state parks in this electronic age is the social media posting of unsanctioned or "rogue" trails in parks that have not been designed or approved by park staff. Other visitors mistake these for official state park trails, with each successive user further adding to resource damage.

### Changes in public recreation interests

People's preferences for overnight accommodations have been changing over the past several decades, and the challenge is to provide an appropriate variety of options while not having a negative impact on resources or other visitors. Examples of recent trends for campgrounds include: bringing pets on camping trips, multiple tent "pods" joined together (that don't fit a standard state park camping site), larger RVs that require longer sites and full-service hook-ups, and multiple families or group camping weekends seeking a block of adjoining campsites.

Another recreational trend is the growing interest to experience a dark night sky without light pollution, which could necessitate significant changes in structural lighting within a park or how visitors use campfires or lighting in campgrounds. Bicycle riding is a growing interest, creating a demand for safe bike routes from municipalities to state parks, and longer distance biking trails within and through parks.

### Facility improvements or additions

With more visitors and overnight accommodations comes the need for more bathrooms and shower houses, more parking, and more visitor centers. Additional habitat may need to be sacrificed to construct new campsite loops or larger campsites for larger RVs or multiple tent sites joined together. An increase in the number of visitors also requires expansion of drinking water and sewage treatment systems.

Other improvements will be needed to stay current with societal changes. Electric vehicles will only increase in the years ahead, necessitating charging stations for overnight visitors in campsites and for the public in day-use areas. In addition, social media has increased the desire by many to have an available Wi-Fi connection to share the day's experience, which is currently unavailable in many state parks.

### Changing population demographics

In the coming decades, it is projected that Pennsylvania's population will continue to grow older and become more urban, primarily in the southeastern counties. In addition, Latino, African American, and Asian populations will continue to increase in number and percentage.

It is important for the Bureau to better understand the needs of all Pennsylvanians and to plan for expected demographic changes.

## Impacts of Climate Change on State Parks

Climate change has already begun to manifest itself in the commonwealth and in the state parks in the form of higher temperatures, increased annual precipitation, significantly higher numbers of large storm events, changes in peak stream flows, decreased snow cover, changes in recreational use patterns, and the movement of some species.

Climate change impacts the state's communities, lands, waters, plants, wildlife, air, and visitors; and affects DCNR's ability to manage these resources for the long-term benefit of the public.

DCNR's *Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Plan* (2018) identifies a series of measures that State Parks can take to better manage and mitigate the expected impacts. These measures will be incorporated into the final strategic plan. [http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr\\_20033655.pdf](http://www.docs.dcnr.pa.gov/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_20033655.pdf)

## Overview of Surveys Conducted



Ricketts Glen State Park

A series of surveys was designed to assess the attitudes and opinions of Pennsylvania state park visitors and the public regarding key issues affecting the future of the state parks. The results of these surveys will help inform the *Penn's Parks for All* strategic plan, guiding the Bureau's work for the next 25 years. The intent was to

ask some specific questions that park users could answer, as well as some general questions that could be answered by all Pennsylvanians. In addition, some questions were included that were asked 25 years ago as part of the *State Parks 2000* survey to ascertain any changes in public opinion.

The Pennsylvania State University (Penn State) Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management was contracted by the DCNR Bureau of State Parks to assist with the design, implementation, and analysis of the surveys, which consisted of the following:

### 2017 Survey

A survey for all Pennsylvanians, administered throughout the summer and fall of 2017, included online and in-park (paper) versions. The questions on these two surveys were identical—with the addition of an open-ended comment box provided in the online version. A 12-page informational booklet was also made available to participants of both versions to provide background on the issues being addressed in the questions. The total participation in the 2017 survey was 10,186 online and 4,090 paper responses.

### Telephone Survey

Since the online and in-park surveys would more likely be taken by people that have a bias in support of the parks, it was deemed important to obtain a random probability sample of Pennsylvania adults. To obtain such a sample, telephone surveys remain a viable way to reach the Pennsylvania population and include both cell phones and land lines. The survey was conducted in the spring and early summer of 2018, with 1,650 completed surveys. The sample for this survey closely matched the demographics of Pennsylvanians statewide in race, age, income, and urban/rural zip codes. Due to possible participant “fatigue” when a telephone survey is too long, Penn State advised the Bureau to reduce the number of questions from the 2017 survey instrument, resulting in the elimination of some questions that were more pertinent only to park users.

### Ethnicity Survey

This online survey polled Pennsylvanians who identified their ethnicity as Latino, African American, or Asian. It was designed to provide an additional survey sample (1,131 of varying ages) representing those ethnicities. A similar number of Pennsylvanians of “white” European descent was also included in this survey to use as a comparison with the 2017 survey results. This survey was conducted in the spring and early summer of 2018.



Park # \_\_\_\_\_

## State Park Visitor Survey

Researchers from Penn State are working with Pennsylvania State Parks to help inform the strategic plan for the next 25 years. Your opinions, perspectives, and experiences as a visitor are important for informing State Parks' future management. Please fill out this survey and return it to a park office/visitor center or drop it in the mail. Your participation in this survey is voluntary and responses are anonymous. We appreciate your input.

---

How many **different** PA State Parks have you visited in the past twelve months? \_\_\_\_\_ different State Parks  
 How many **total visits** have you made to any PA State Parks in the past twelve months? \_\_\_\_\_ total visits  
 Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
<b>Should we change the current outdoor recreation opportunities or experiences in State Parks?</b>					
Visitors to State Parks should expect a quiet, natural and/or wild experience	1	2	3	4	5
Some parks should offer more active adventure recreation activities	1	2	3	4	5
State Parks should continue to emphasize healthful outdoor recreation activities	1	2	3	4	5
The natural resources of some State Parks are being impacted by over use	1	2	3	4	5
When impacts of over use are evident at a State Park, participation should be limited	1	2	3	4	5
Travel and camping vacation packages for more programmed vacation experiences should be provided	1	2	3	4	5
Parks should develop additional "splash playgrounds" in some parks in place of swimming pools	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Should we enhance existing overnight accommodations in our State Parks?</b>					
Parks' modern family cabin or camping areas should include a central all-purpose social hall	1	2	3	4	5
Parks should designate entire campground areas for quiet, wild and remote camping experiences	1	2	3	4	5
Parks should construct larger cabins that can accommodate multiple families at once	1	2	3	4	5
Parks should develop a few more inns in carefully selected locations	1	2	3	4	5
Current State Park accommodations are sufficient	1	2	3	4	5
<b>How should we pay for our State Parks?</b>					
Parks' modern family cabin or camping areas should include a central all-purpose social hall	1	2	3	4	5
Parks should institute a new annual or daily entrance fee or parking permit system	1	2	3	4	5
Parks should increase the existing fees for camping, marinas, cabins, swimming pools, picnic pavilions etc. for all visitors	1	2	3	4	5
Parks should allocate funding to reduce the backlog of park rehabilitation projects	1	2	3	4	5
Facilities that are expensive to operate and maintain should be closed	1	2	3	4	5
The operation of select park areas should be leased to private businesses or non-profit organizations to reduce costs	1	2	3	4	5

### This report provides general summaries of the survey results.

All data, along with the final reports provided to DCNR by Penn State University, is available for review on the DCNR website:

<https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks>



# Survey Results & Recommendations



Cook Forest State Park

For the purposes of this report, the numerous questions asked in the surveys have been organized into the following categories:

- **Outdoor Recreation Opportunities**
- **Overnight Accommodations**
- **Protecting Natural & Cultural Resources**
- **Paying for State Parks**
- **Improving Services & Facilities**



To help put the survey results in context, the review of survey questions and responses for each category is preceded with some background information related to the category. This is to provide a snapshot of current Bureau activities, programs, and initiatives; and to provide some context for the issues being addressed through the questions.

As was previously mentioned, three different surveys were administered to obtain a representative cross section of Pennsylvanians, including active park users, non-park users, urban and rural residents, and varying ethnicities.

An interesting finding was that the different surveys produced very similar responses to most of the questions. To simplify this report, the responses to each of the three surveys are not presented separately, unless there was a meaningful difference by one of the survey groups or a particular demographic within one of the surveys.

At the close of the public input period, the Bureau will examine all comments and develop final recommendations that will form the bulk of the Bureau's strategic plan for the next 25 years.

### How to Comment

Comments on this report are encouraged, and may be submitted in the following ways:

- An online comment form can be found at <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks>
- Mail comments via postal to:  
PA Department of Conservation  
and Natural Resources (DCNR)  
Bureau of State Parks  
Planning Section  
P.O. Box 8551  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8551

### *Penn's Parks for All* Timeline



# Improving Outdoor Recreation Opportunities in State Parks



Chiopyle State Park

Today, state park visitors can enjoy the outdoors in many ways. Activities range from leisurely to active adventure, including hiking up a slope past beautiful waterfalls, strolling to the edge of an overlook for magnificent vistas, watching a meteor shower against the backdrop of the Milky Way, biking through fall foliage, paddling a quiet stream, skiing on a cross-country trail or downhill slope, and much, much more.

## Day Use Facilities

30,000+ picnic tables	11 marinas
270 picnic pavilions	2 equestrian stables
56 swimming beaches	4 ski areas
15 swimming pools	2 golf courses
16 disc golf courses	6 model airplane fields





*The natural beauty of Pennsylvania's four seasons, mountains, rivers, lakes, and millions of acres of forests and fields serves as the setting for just about every recreational pursuit.*



*There are more than 1,500 miles of trails within state parks. Trail types include: hiking, running, bicycling, mountain biking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and water trails for paddling.*

# Summary of Survey Results

## Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

The surveys asked questions about current recreational opportunities, as well as whether state parks should change any of their current recreational offerings. Overall, respondents overwhelmingly support the mission of state parks regarding healthful outdoor recreation activities, as well as the importance of managing for a quiet, natural, and wild experience. There was some support for management activities to limit impacts, but less support for vacation packages and splash playgrounds.

- Almost all respondents (92%) agreed or strongly agreed that state parks should continue to emphasize healthful outdoor recreation activities.
- The vast majority agreed or strongly agreed (87%) that visitors to state parks should expect a quiet, natural, and/or wild experience.
- A majority (65%) agreed or strongly agreed that when impacts of overuse are evident at a state park, participation should be limited.
- Respondents were split about travel and camping vacation packages and splash playgrounds, with an even distribution among agree, disagree, and neutral. Black and Latino respondents in both the 2017 and ethnicity surveys, however, were more supportive of these items, with travel and camping vacation packages responding 61% and 65% in agreement respectively, and for splash playgrounds 53% and 64% respectively.
- When asked in the 2017 survey, urban respondents felt slightly stronger than rural respondents that the natural resources of some state parks are being impacted by overuse (50% urban; 44% rural).
- All age groups rated active adventure recreation facilities similarly, expressing moderate levels of agreement that these types of offerings should be increased.

- When asked about appropriateness of certain activities in state parks, the item viewed as the most inappropriate was resort-style development, with 79% of respondents rating resort-style development as somewhat inappropriate or inappropriate.
- Regarding the appropriateness of other activities, 62% responded that special events with greater than 1,000 attendees were somewhat inappropriate or inappropriate for Pennsylvania state parks; and 68% felt trails for motorized use were somewhat inappropriate or inappropriate.

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## Findings at a Glance

### High Agreement

- Continue to emphasize healthful outdoor recreation activities
- Visitors should expect a quiet, natural, and/or wild experience

### Slight Agreement

- Limit participation of activities when impacts of overuse are evident
- More active adventure recreation activities should be offered

### Neutral

- Programmed vacation packages should be offered
- Install splash playgrounds in place of some pools

### Somewhat Inappropriate

- Trails for motorized use
- Special events with greater than 1,000 attendees

### Inappropriate

- Resort-style development
-

## Focused Findings

There is strong public concurrence for a continued emphasis on healthful outdoor recreation activities with the expectation of quiet, natural, or wild experiences, with support for protective measures when park resource impacts are evident. Additionally, there was agreement that state parks should offer more active adventure experiences.



## Recommended Future Directions

### Expand Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

- Enhance landscape-level partnerships to increase connections between publicly accessible lands, with the goals of gaining outdoor recreational efficiencies and minimizing duplication of outdoor recreational services.
- Improve each park's trail system to ensure trails are sustainable and accessible for those seeking healthy, quiet, and natural experiences, with a goal to develop in every park one trail loop that is accessible to all people.
- Enhance water-based recreational offerings by developing innovative water facilities and activities, consistent with each park's natural aesthetic and character. An example would be developing a water/splash play area with the look of boulders and rock ledges where natural water recreation amenities are not available.
- Improve accessibility for water-based recreation by developing canoe and kayak launch sites for people with all abilities on all major recreational lakes within state parks.

- Partner with the health industry in marketing state park outdoor recreational activities as a means of reducing obesity and stress and developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

### Protect Resources from Recreation Impacts

- Establish site-specific prescriptions to manage high-density outdoor recreation at parks where resources, visitor experiences, or communities are being impacted and develop viable solutions to address issues through stakeholder and community engagement.

### Offer More Active Adventure Activities

- Partner with the outdoor recreation industry to build and promote active adventure activities that are consistent with the state parks mission through joint programming that provides educational opportunities for novice and experienced adventure seekers.

## Expanding Overnight Accommodations in State Parks



Over the last 25 years, much work has gone into modernizing facilities and expanding the number and variety of ways to stay overnight in a Pennsylvania state park. Now nearly half of the parks have some form of overnight accommodations covering a wide range of options, such as tent campsites with varying levels of amenities, RV campsites with full-service hook-ups, cabins with or without a bathroom, or a modern inn.

Despite these improvements, more needs to be done to keep pace with national camping trends and visitor demand, such as reconfiguring some campground loops

to better separate tents and RVs, provide more space between campsites, or enable multiple families to camp together.



*The Nature Inn at Bald Eagle is the largest overnight facility, offering year-round individual stays or small-group meetings with 16 guest rooms and suites. The Inn combines the comfortable amenities of a bed and breakfast with peaceful views of the park from private balconies or patios.*



*Pets are now allowed in designated campsites in 55 of 56 camping state parks.*

### Overnight Facilities (totals as of 2020)

- 5,689 modern campsites (flush toilets and shower houses provided)
  - 299 full service (sewer, water, and electric)
  - 2,870 electric only
- 532 rustic campsites (no showers)
  - 111 rustic walk-in sites
- 5 large group/multi-family sites
- 143 organized group tenting sites within 37 parks
- 12 organized group camps within 5 parks (CCC-era cabin clusters with a dining/meeting hall)
- 55 parks with pet camping: 2,326 pet-friendly campsites
- 80 pet cabins/camping cottages/yurts
- 412 cabins, cottages, and yurts



*During the late 1980s and through the 1990s, many modern cabins were constructed statewide in response to the desire by many to have cabins with bathrooms, running water, and kitchen facilities.*



*Campsites vary from primitive sites with a flat area and fire ring to full-service sites enabling a recreational vehicle to connect to sewer, water, and electricity.*

# Summary of Survey Results

## Expanding Overnight Accommodations in State Parks

When considering the existing overnight accommodations in Pennsylvania state parks, the vast majority of respondents agreed that parks should designate campground areas for quiet, wild, and remote camping experiences. There was less support for multiple-family cabins and central all-purpose social halls, with overall responses averaging on the disagreement end of the scale. Respondents in the ethnicity survey, however, were the most supportive of larger multi-family cabins, central all-purpose social halls, and increased inns.

- A total of 72% of respondents in the 2017 survey agreed or strongly agreed that state parks should designate campground areas for quiet, wild, and remote camping experiences.
- A plurality of respondents in the 2017 survey agreed or strongly agreed (47%) that current state park accommodations are sufficient.
- Respondents did not, on average, agree that parks should construct larger cabins that can accommodate multiple families at once (only 27% agreed or strongly agreed); however, ethnicity survey respondents were more likely to agree or strongly agree (50%).
- Respondents did not, on average, agree that state parks' modern family cabin or camping areas should include a central all-purpose social hall (only 23% agreed or strongly agreed). Non-white ethnicity survey respondents were far more likely to agree or strongly agree with this item (50% average).
- Agreement was fairly evenly split over the question of developing a few more inns in carefully selected locations, with 36% in agreement, 34% in disagreement, and 30% neutral; with respondents in the ethnicity survey again slightly in agreement (average of 53% agreed or strongly agreed).

### Findings at a Glance

#### High Agreement

- Parks should designate areas for quiet, wild, and remote camping experiences

#### Slight Agreement

- Current accommodations are sufficient

#### Neutral in the 2017 survey, but Slight Agreement in the Ethnicity Survey

- Should add more on-site water, sewer, and electrical hook-ups
- Should develop a few more inns

#### Slight Disagreement in the 2017 survey, but Slight Agreement in the Ethnicity Survey

- Enhance cabin kitchen amenities
- Add air conditioning in some modern cabins
- Add larger, multi-family cabins
- Include central, all-purpose social hall in camping areas



## Focused Findings

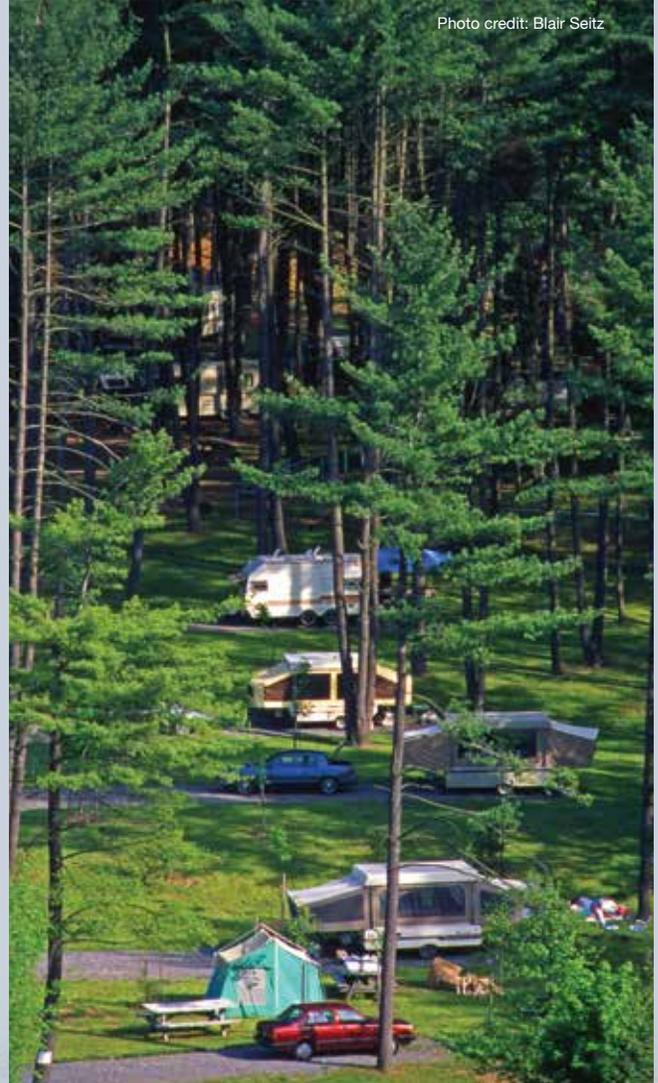
There was strong public concurrence for the designation of quiet, wild, and remote camping experiences in state park campgrounds.

## Recommended Future Directions

Enhance the full spectrum of overnight opportunities in state parks by 2030, including:

- Renovate campgrounds to enhance their natural character while providing additional privacy, accessibility, sustainability, and safety.
- Increase pet-friendly campsites to 50% of all campsites (presently 37%).
- Increase large, multi-family campsites to 50 sites statewide (presently 5 sites).
- Add 100 more rental cabins.
- Increase full-service campsites to 20% of all campsites (presently 5%).
- Increase electric-only campsites to 50% of all campsites (presently 47%).
- Increase remote, non-electric, walk-in sites.
- Explore opportunities for “boat-in” waterfront camping.
- Examine trends for new types of overnight facilities and institute pilot projects, such as building elevated camping cottages to simulate a treehouse effect.

Photo credit: Blair Seitz



## Protecting the Parks' Natural & Cultural Resources



Pennsylvania has a wide diversity of state parks that range from rural to urban, and from naturally wild to mainly historic. A number of state park areas have special legislative designations by the Pennsylvania General Assembly, restricting recreational development for the entire park.



### **National Natural Landmarks in Pennsylvania state parks include:**

- The Boulder Field in Hickory Run State Park
- Ferncliff Peninsula Natural Area in Ohiopyle State Park
- Pine Creek Gorge in Leonard Harrison and Colton Point state parks (above)
- Slippery Rock Creek Gorge in McConnells Mill State Park
- The entire peninsula of Presque Isle State Park
- The Glens Natural Area in Ricketts Glen State Park
- The Forest Cathedral in Cook Forest State Park



*Caledonia State Park is one of several historic iron furnace sites found in state parks. Throughout the park system, there are many other historic features, such as grist mills, bridges, buildings, and canals.*



*Washington Crossing Historic Park, in southern Bucks County, is one of three state parks designated as a National Historic Landmark, the others being the Delaware Canal that runs for 60 miles along the Delaware River, and Point State Park in downtown Pittsburgh.*



*Cook Forest State Park, which includes an old growth stand of hemlock and white pine, was the first state park acquired to protect a natural landmark (1927). The "Forest Cathedral" in the park was later designated as a National Natural Landmark.*

A **Conservation Area** is a designation for an entire state park whose lands have been donated to the commonwealth and have been dedicated for the primary purpose of natural resource conservation and open space preservation. One is in Wayne County: Varden Conservation Area; and two are in Dauphin County: Joseph E. Ibberson Conservation Area and Boyd Big Tree Preserve Conservation Area.

In the 1990s, the **State Park Natural Areas** program was created to identify and conserve examples of special plant and animal communities, and areas of natural interest and beauty. Nearly 12,000 acres were officially designated as Natural Areas within 16 state parks to ensure their protection for future generations.

## Managing State Park Natural Resources

As the state park system grew in number of parks and acreage from the 1970s to the present, the Bureau's staff complement decreased. The result has been a decrease in the ability of staff to adequately maintain physical infrastructure (buildings, water systems, campgrounds, etc.), manage natural and cultural resources, and address numerous environmental challenges.

Managing the nearly 300,000 acres of state park land requires careful planning, acre-by-acre assessment, and intensive habitat work to ensure that park resources are properly conserved for future generations.

A 2018 Bureau-wide workload analysis showed that the resource management staff needed to properly care for ecological resources throughout the park system is 10 times greater than at present.



*The night sky has become a natural resource in need of protection due to the expansion of light pollution from urban areas and industrial development.*



*Volunteers play an important role in many parks in helping to build sustainable trails, plant trees, clean up trash, build structures, and raise funds for historic restoration or buying needed equipment.*



*State parks staff regularly monitor lake chemistry to assess water conditions for healthy aquatic habitat and for the desired recreational uses.*



Photo credit: Ward Oberholzer, Land Studies.

*Restoring and protecting aquatic ecosystems and recreational access is a critical need, requiring work to reduce erosion and sedimentation by reconnecting streams with flood plains and stabilizing lake shorelines. These issues are compounded by stormwater runoff and poor land use practices upstream and outside of park boundaries.*



**Examples of environmental issues within the state park system:**

- Erosion and sedimentation impacts on streams and lakes
- Recreational use impacts
- Declining forest health from a variety of factors, such as: invasive plants and animals, declining plant and animal diversity, and fragmentation impacts from roads, trails, and energy transmission corridors

*Land management work, such as prescribed burns and habitat improvement, is coordinated by state park resource managers.*

# Summary of Survey Results

## *Protecting the Parks' Natural & Cultural Resources*

All items concerning the protection of state parks were rated favorably by survey participants. Respondents were especially supportive of improving water quality in streams and lakes, continuing land acquisitions, enhancing the state park volunteer program, and devoting more staff and funding to conserving native habitat.

The majority had disagreement with the statement that there was no need to acquire more land for the state park system. These attitudes held across all demographic groups.

- A sizable majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the state parks should continue their strategic land acquisition program (74%). To test whether respondents were being “led” by asking the acquisition question in a positive way, it was also asked in a negative way: “There is no need to acquire more land for the state park system.” The majority of respondents to this question (66%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, confirming that the majority feels that acquisition of land for the state park system should continue.
- Respondents who participated in the ethnicity survey, however, were slightly less positive to the land acquisition questions, but still above neutral in their support of continuing to acquire land for protection.
- Respondents also agreed or strongly agreed that state parks should devote more resources for conducting water quality improvement activities (76%), conserving quality native habitats (73%), and enlarging boundaries of parks to protect watersheds and to buffer park lands from negative impacts (72%).
- Respondents felt strongly that state parks should invest more time and resources in their volunteer and friends group programs (73% agreed or strongly agreed); and should devote more staffing and funding to protecting cultural resources (64% agreed or strongly agreed).
- Finally, respondents slightly agreed that when impacts of overuse are evident at a state park, participation should be limited (64% agreed or strongly agreed); but only 47% agreed or strongly agreed that natural resources are currently being impacted at some parks.



### Findings at a Glance

#### High Agreement

- Conduct more resource management activities to improve water quality
- Devote more staffing and funding to conserve quality native habitats
- Enlarge some park boundaries to protect watersheds and buffers for recreation
- Continue acquiring land to conserve resources and to help manage parks
- Invest more time and resources in volunteers and friends groups

#### Slight Agreement

- Devote more staffing and funding to protecting cultural resources
- Limit participation when impacts of overuse are evident
- Natural resources in some parks are being impacted by overuse

### Focused Findings

There was strong public concurrence for improving state park aquatic resources and terrestrial native habitats, and expanding park lands in the commonwealth for the benefit of all Pennsylvanians, and high agreement that the Bureau should provide more support for volunteer efforts that assist park operations.

## Recommended Future Directions

### Strengthen Resource Protection

- Increase professional staff levels by 15% to meet the Bureau of State Parks' legislative mandate and constitutional trustee responsibilities.
- Develop a night sky management program to conserve the night sky in state parks and enhance night sky viewing across the commonwealth.
- Determine threats within state park watersheds that have the potential to impact park resources and work collaboratively with public and private partners to mitigate impacts.
- Identify and fund prioritized cultural resources for restoration and engage cultural resource partners and the PA Historical and Museum Commission in completing historical restorations and utilizing historical structures for alternative uses.
- Establish Bureau-level data management and mapping services using GIS to support the Bureau's operations, recreational planning, and resource management needs.
- Expand research and collection of scientific data to establish site-specific prescriptions that will conserve critical habitat and protect species of special concern.
- Expand native habitat by converting remnant agricultural lands into pollinator meadows, native grasslands, and forests.
- Expand construction of ponds, wetlands, rain gardens, bioswales, and other landscape elements to capture and treat stormwater running off parking lots, roads, and buildings located within park boundaries.

### Improve Park Boundary Planning

- Dedicate a minimum of 2% of the Bureau's operating budget annually for land acquisitions to eliminate inholdings, enhance boundary management, and protect and conserve outstanding natural, cultural, and outdoor recreational resources in the commonwealth.
- Establish a sustainable boundary goal for each state park that will meet operational needs and support identified outdoor recreational activities, resource conservation, and park programs.

### Enhance Resource Mitigation

- Identify, fund, and implement park-based projects that will mitigate the effects of climate change and that address habitat resiliency, riparian buffers, and lake and stream restoration.
- Seek scientifically based compensation when private entities gain legal right-of-way access across state park lands when all alternatives to avoid park lands have been exhausted. This will serve to mitigate the resulting losses of ecological function and outdoor recreational use.

### Improve Volunteer Program

- Work through major state park volunteer organizations to enhance relationships with volunteers. An example of an enhancement would be to develop an annual conservation volunteer summit to help retain and recruit volunteers, share new opportunities, and increase esprit de corps.

## Paying for State Parks



Fort Washington State Park

The rapid growth of the state park system from the 1960s through the 1970s was made possible through dedicated funds and state bond initiatives. These funds paid for land acquisition and initial construction; however, they were not designed to cover ongoing maintenance costs.

### Economic Value of State Parks

In 2012, Penn State conducted an updated analysis of the economic value that state park visitors contribute to Pennsylvania's economy.\*

This analysis showed that the annual primary and secondary economic contribution includes:

- 12,630 jobs (part-time and full-time)
- \$400 million in labor income
- \$1.15 billion in sales
- For every \$1 invested in state parks from the state's General Fund, \$12.41 is returned to Pennsylvania's economy.

\* *The Economic Significance and Impact of Pennsylvania State Parks*; Penn State, 2012.

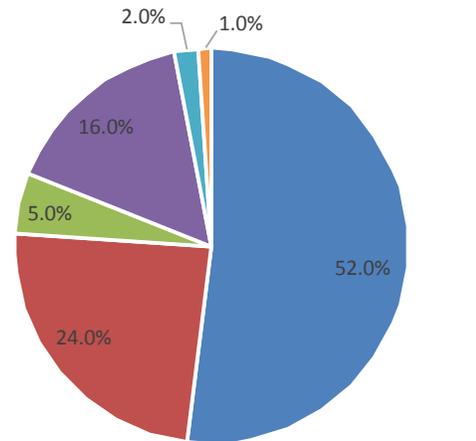


The *State Parks 2000* survey (conducted in 1989), showed strong public support for increased user fees to help solve state park operating and maintenance shortfalls. Since then, various fees (such as for a campsite or boat rental) have slowly increased and are now market-based to be compatible with surrounding state park systems or nearby private campgrounds.



## State Parks Funding Sources

July 2018 – June 2019



- General Fund
- State Park User Fees
- Key 93 Funds
- Oil & Gas Lease Revenues
- PA Outdoor Corp
- Miscellaneous

### State parks receive 0.16% of the state’s General Fund budget.

PA Act No. 51 of 1981 directed that all fees collected by state parks would be deposited into a restricted fund to be used solely by the Bureau “. . . for the acquisition, maintenance, operation or administration of the state parks . . .” which provided a sustainable funding source for major maintenance of park facilities. Starting in 2002, however, the Bureau’s general revenue funding was reduced by a directive that the Bureau use its dedicated fund for operational costs such as salaries and other non-maintenance budget gaps. While it would require additional General Fund investment, restoration of the dedicated fund would ensure that fees collected from concessions and other park activities are reinvested in repairing park infrastructure.

### Annual funding for state parks is made up of:

- General Fund allocations (state taxes)
- User fees (overnight accommodations, marinas, swimming pools, etc.)
- Oil and gas lease revenues
- Key 93 funding (a portion of the state’s realty transfer tax)
- Other funds restricted for land acquisitions or construction projects

## Major Maintenance Repair and Rehabilitation Needs

Twenty-five years ago, the *State Parks 2000* report showed that \$100 million was needed to properly address a growing list of maintenance and replacement projects related to state parks infrastructure. Today, that need has grown to more than \$500 million due to the appropriated budget for state parks not keeping up with inflation, and due to a reduction in staff, requiring higher costs for contracted labor. The condition of state park facilities is deteriorating, with some facilities being shuttered, and some recreation activities no longer available—while demand for park use is higher than ever before.

The below list provides a general summary of the system-wide need that exists to fix or improve the aging infrastructure in all the state parks.

**Administration/Visitor Support** – includes facilities such as park visitor centers, offices, contact stations, and maintenance and service facilities. Approximate need is \$77 million.

**Dams/Impoundments** – includes dams and related structures and components, as well as lake dredging. Approximate need is \$53 million.

**Overnight Facilities** – includes campgrounds, cabins, inns, camping cottages, and associated buildings (bathhouses, restrooms, etc.). Approximate need is \$48 million.

**Outdoor Recreation Facilities** – includes restrooms, pavilions, pools, trails, playgrounds, picnic areas, ski areas, marinas, etc. Approximate need is \$200 million.

**Resource Management** – includes management of invasive aquatic and terrestrial plants, habitat restoration, grassland management, riparian and lakeshore restoration, etc. Approximate need is \$25 million.

**Transportation Infrastructure** – includes roads, bridges, and related structures (such as guard rails, curbs, etc.). Approximate need is \$82 million.

**Water and Sewer Infrastructure** – includes water and sewer conveyance and treatment facilities such as pump stations, treatment plants, canal structures, pipelines, and in-takes. Approximate need is \$56 million.



*This collapsed bridge in White Clay Creek Preserve cannot be used until it is replaced. Many of the 332 bridges throughout the state park system need structural repair or replacing.*



*The collapse of a nearly 200-year-old culvert under the Delaware Canal in 2015 resulted in the subsequent collapse of the canal walls—an example of expensive on-going maintenance needed for historic features in many parks.*

### State park infrastructure requiring regular maintenance includes:

- 90 dams
- 490 miles of roadways
- 332 vehicle bridges
- 770 pedestrian bridges
- 4,188 buildings
- 128 drinking water treatment facilities
- 59 wastewater treatment systems
- 15 swimming pools

## Infrastructure for Water-based Recreation and Aquatic Habitat

An example of infrastructure that impacts the most visitors has to do with the ongoing maintenance needs of the lakes in state parks. There are 90 dams located within the state park system, which create the lakes used for recreation and for wildlife habitat, and all need regular inspection, maintenance, or major repair.

In addition, it is very expensive to dredge silt that is filling in many reservoirs, or to remove invasive vegetation that can grow so thick on the surface of lakes that it impacts aquatic habitat and hampers or prevents swimming, boating, and fishing activities.

Without the annual funding needed to manage these problems, the quality of resources and water-based recreation activities will steadily decline, leading to the ultimate closure of some lakes.

## State Park Dams

State regulations require that all state park dams receive regular inspections and maintenance to ensure their integrity. If any should fail, they would pose a hazard of varying degree to property and people living downstream. All dams in the commonwealth are given a classification according to a varying potential for loss of property or loss of life, were they to fail, not due to their condition. Pennsylvania's state park dams each fall into one of three categories: High Hazard, Significant Hazard, or Low Hazard.



*This dam at Lyman Run State Park (Potter County) is one of 10 dams in state parks that were also designed for flood control. It is one of 41 dams classified as “High Hazard,” meaning that there is potential for loss of life or loss of infrastructure downstream if the dam were to fail. Populated areas are located downstream of a High Hazard dam. The dam that creates the 45-acre Lyman Run Lake was reconstructed in 2009 at a cost of \$18 million.*



*The dam creating the lake at Keystone State Park (Westmoreland County) is one of four state park dams classified as a “Significant Hazard” dam. If dams of this classification were to fail, there is potential for significant damage to property downstream and short-term public inconvenience, but there is no threat of loss of life.*



*The dam at Colonel Denning State Park (Cumberland County) is one of 45 dams classified as “Low Hazard.” This classification means that if it were to fail, there is potential for only minimal property damage in areas located downstream, and no significant public inconvenience.*

# Summary of Survey Results

## *Paying for State Parks*

Similar to *State Parks 2000*, an important question of this study was the issue of state park funding. Participants were asked how they felt about a variety of funding-related issues. Across all demographic groups, there was strong support for increasing the allocation of commonwealth funding to better address the growing list and cost of state park rehabilitation projects. There was modest support for converting low-usage parks to primitive and rustic parks. However, across all groups there was uniform disagreement with the institution of a new annual/entrance fee or increasing existing fees. Additionally, there was broad disagreement with the leasing of select park areas to private businesses or non-profit organizations.

- Across all demographic groups, support for the allocation of additional funding from the commonwealth to reduce the need for state park rehabilitation projects was high, with 82% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with this statement.
- The response to whether state parks should institute an entrance fee or parking permit system was below neutral for all respondents (58% in disagreement versus 27% in agreement); however, when examined by income categories, lower income respondents had slightly greater disagreement.
- Respondents expressed consistent disagreement with an increase in existing fees (only 33% agreed or strongly agreed), or the leasing of state park facilities to private businesses or non-profit organizations (59%).

- Those in lower income groups also agreed less often with increasing existing fees (for camping, marinas, cabins, swimming pools, picnic pavilions, etc.) than higher income respondents.
- The response on whether to close facilities that are expensive to operate and maintain was generally in disagreement, with 13% in agreement, 32% neutral, and 55% in disagreement.

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## Findings at a Glance

### High Agreement in the 2017 survey, but Slight Agreement in the Telephone and Ethnicity surveys

- Commonwealth should allocate additional funding to better address the list of rehabilitation projects. This also increased with the age of respondents

### Slight Agreement

- Convert low-usage parks to primitive and rustic parks with minimal facilities (asked in 2017 survey only)

### Slight Disagreement

- Increase existing fees

### Moderate Disagreement

- Institute an entrance fee or parking permit system
  - Close facilities that are expensive to operate
  - Lease select park areas to private businesses or non-profits
- 



## Focused Findings

There is strong public concurrence that the commonwealth should increase funding to maintain, repair, and improve park facilities, and that increased funding occur without creating new fees or increasing existing costs to park visitors. In addition, there is mild support among 2017 survey respondents for converting low-usage parks to being more rustic with minimal facilities.



## Recommended Future Directions

### Reduce Costs and Improve Efficiencies within State Parks

- Assess all current park buildings to determine their condition, and provide funding to renovate those buildings deemed mission-critical while accelerating demolition of buildings that are costly to maintain and do not have historical significance.
- Reduce energy consumption by 25% with the goal of deriving 50% of electric needs through renewable energy sources, working toward a goal of net-zero energy consumption of the built infrastructure in all parks.
- Establish annual park-based maintenance plans to maximize staff efficiencies and use of resources to repair and restore park resources, facilities, and infrastructure.
- Identify leaks in water distribution systems, then develop a prioritized list of critical water infrastructure projects and funding needed to renovate and construct water treatment infrastructure, thus conserving water and reducing annual operating costs.

### Increase Funding for Maintenance Work

- Commit fees collected in state parks for the maintenance, repair, and improvement of park resources.
- Ensure that conservation funding (e.g., the Keystone Fund and the Environmental Stewardship Fund) is used for stewardship purposes to repair and improve park resources. If necessary, provide a commensurate increase in annual state appropriations.
- Pursue federal grants to augment state funding for park operations and maintenance.

## Improving Services & Facilities



Presque Isle State Park

An important goal for the Bureau has been, and continues to be, providing high-quality service to all visitors. Paramount to achieving this goal is the day-to-day effort of providing a welcoming environment along with clean and safe facilities, and the flexibility to respond to changing visitor demographics, needs, and demands.

Over the past 25 years, the Bureau has worked to respond to changes in visitor

expectations and has made regular investments to upgrade and improve accessibility to facilities and to modernize where needed.

The ongoing challenge, however, is how to retain the natural or historic character of each park and provide the expected outdoor recreation experiences, while still providing the services, amenities, and safety to meet visitor expectations in the information age.



*State park professionals are highly skilled and trained to provide the safe and welcoming environment that park visitors have come to expect. Staff receive specialized and ongoing training for the Bureau's more than 60 different job categories throughout the park system.*

*The photovoltaic solar array at the Tom Ridge Visitor Center at Presque Isle State Park (at left) is an example of work being done to install modern technology throughout the park system. A statewide effort is underway to assess all park buildings to ultimately reduce the carbon footprint of state parks, as well as reduce water use and operating costs. Improvements will include energy-efficient light fixtures and LED bulbs, efficient new heating and cooling systems, water-saving devices, insulation, and more.*



*An example of the Bureau's continuing effort to remove barriers and make park facilities accessible for all visitors is the renovations to this cabin at Nockamixon State Park that included the removal of steps, and the addition of concrete walkways and an accessible picnic table.*



*The original pit toilets of many parks have been gradually replaced by more modern "vault" toilets—where waste is held underground in a tank or "vault," then pumped out periodically. The enhanced ventilation and upgraded interiors of these facilities have been a welcome improvement.*



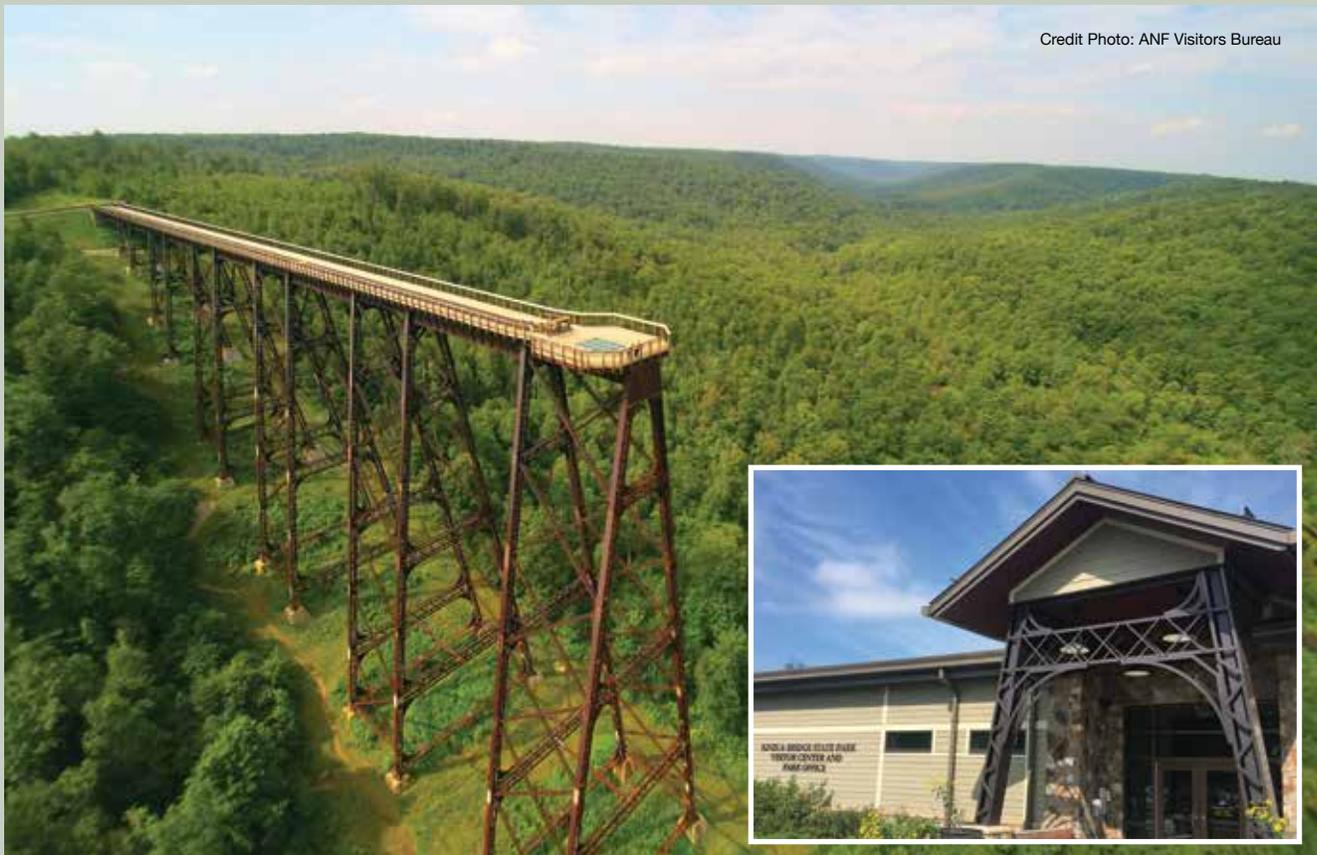
*Public charging stations for electric vehicles, like this one at Kinzua Bridge State Park, are planned for 35 parks by 2020. Charging can now also be done at all campgrounds that provide electricity.*

**Over the past two decades, many camping facilities have been modernized:**

- Replaced primitive toilet facilities in many campgrounds with flush toilets and showers, and added laundry facilities
- Added 129 modern cabins
- Continuing to add full-service campsites (RV hook-ups for electric, water, and sewer)



*The Bureau of State Parks currently has approximately 125 public-private partnerships to help provide for numerous types of visitor services, such as: food and refreshment, swimming pools, watercraft and bicycle rentals, marina services, camp stores, firewood, whitewater rafting, skiing, golf, and disc golf.*



Credit Photo: ANF Visitors Bureau

*Many parks have added Environmental Learning Centers or Visitor Centers, like Kinzua Bridge State Park (above), to support the Bureau's expansion of outdoor education programming. In 1992, the Bureau had 53 sites offering environmental education programs—five of which were year-round programs. There are now 60 sites with environmental education programs—25 of which are year-round.*



*The DCNR Bureau of State Parks has developed a full program to accommodate visitors with pets, including pets on a leash in all day-use areas, and designated pet-friendly cabins and campsites.*



*State park environmental educators and interpretive naturalists conduct tens of thousands of classroom and in-park programs each year, attended by more than 400,000 people.*



*Visible state park rangers play an integral part of providing a safe environment for visitors to relax and enjoy their park experiences.*

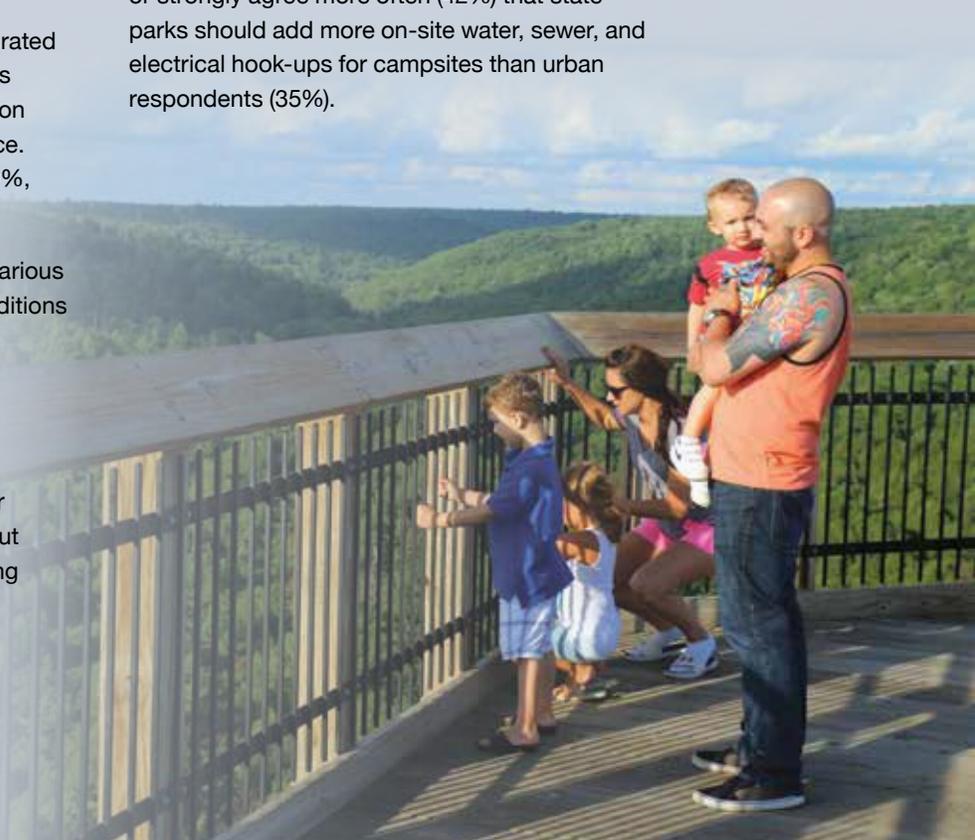
# Summary of Survey Results

## Improving Services & Facilities

Respondents were asked to rate various services and facilities available at state parks: Poor (1) to Excellent (5). Most respondents were satisfied with every state park service/facility they were asked about. On average, all items were rated as above average.

Regarding modern conveniences, on average, this sample was not supportive of increasing kitchen amenities and air conditioning in cabins. Respondents were the least supportive of state parks offering Wi-Fi access to visitors. While this trend held across the overall sample, it should be noted that Black and Latino respondents were far more supportive of additional on-site water, sewer, and electrical hook-ups; enhanced kitchen amenities; air conditioning; and internet access than White and Asian respondents.

- Overall, respondents were satisfied with the services and facilities at state parks, with no response dropping below “average,” and the majority of responses for every item being either “good” or “excellent.”
- The overall percentage of respondents who rated the feeling of safety as good or excellent was 90%, but this question showed some variation in the 2017 survey when broken down by race. Blacks had a percentage of 74%, Latinos 89%, Asians 94%, and other non-whites 83%.
- The percentage of respondents who rated various features as good or excellent were: trail conditions (83%), responsiveness of employees (81%), sanitation and cleanliness (79%), interaction of park staff (74%), and state parks’ online presence (71%).
- Overall, 68% rated the availability of outdoor recreation programs as good or excellent, but Latinos deviated significantly, with 83% rating this item as good or excellent.
- The two lowest-rated items (but still above average rating) were the availability of education programs and the reservation system, both with a 68% rating for good or excellent.
- In response to the statement that nothing needs to be modernized and that parks now provide adequate conveniences, 46% agreed or strongly agreed, while 30% disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- When asked about specific amenities, a minority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with offering internet access (23%), adding air conditioning to some modern cabins (28%), and enhancing kitchen amenities in cabins (23%).
- Black and Latino respondents were much more supportive of all suggested increases in modern conveniences than White and Asian respondents.
- When home zip codes of respondents were analyzed, rural respondents were found to agree or strongly agree more often (42%) that state parks should add more on-site water, sewer, and electrical hook-ups for campsites than urban respondents (35%).



## Findings at a Glance

### **Satisfaction with Services and Facilities**

#### **Very High**

- Feeling of safety

#### **High**

- Trail conditions
- Reservation system
- Sanitation and cleanliness
- Employee responsiveness

#### **Above Average**

- Availability of outdoor recreation programs
- Availability of education programs
- State parks' online presence
- Level of interaction with park staff

### **Modernization**

**Slight positive response in the Ethnicity survey, but Slight negative response in the 2017 survey**

- Offer internet access to visitors

#### **Neutral**

- Nothing needs to be modernized; parks now provide adequate conveniences (asked in 2017 survey only)



## Constraints to Visitation

A final set of questions, asked only on the telephone and ethnicity surveys, was included to explore whether there are constraints or barriers to state park visitation. Respondents were given a series of possible constraints and asked to rate each on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 was “not at all important reason” and 5 was “extremely important reason.”

As a whole, respondents did not report that any of the constraints were a “very important reason” or an “extremely important reason” for not visiting state parks, with the majority being below 2.5. That said, the highest of the constraint items included being “Too busy with other life priorities,” “I do not have enough information on state parks,” and “Activities that I like to do are not available in state parks.”

Respondents, as a whole, were least constrained by a “Fear of the outdoors” and “The state parks are not for people like me.” When the responses of specific demographic groups were examined, however,

constraints to state park visitation appear to be higher among younger respondents and respondents of lower incomes. In addition, Black and Latino respondents had more constraints to state park visitation than other ethnicities.

- For Black respondents in the ethnicity survey, the highest constraints appear to be a lack of transportation (42% very important or extremely important) and a lack of public transportation (41%). Among female Black respondents, these constraints were even higher (52% and 53% reported these as very important or extremely important, respectively). Concern about a lack of transportation was higher among both urban and rural Black respondents (42% and 50% reported these as very important or extremely important, respectively) as compared to respondents of other race/ethnicity groups.
- Respondents of all ethnicity groups reported consistent importance of being too busy with other life priorities.

## Focused Findings

There is high public satisfaction with the quality of services and facilities currently being offered at state parks. Constraints to using state parks appear to be few, but more work could be done to improve transportation opportunities to parks from urban areas.

## Recommended Future Directions

### Expand use, access, and inclusion

- Develop a marketing campaign that will attract diverse, new, and inexperienced outdoor recreational users to the state parks.
- Improve transportation options to broaden park access, particularly in urban areas, by partnering with public transportation agencies to improve utilization of bus and rail lines.

### Improve Program Offerings and In-park Experiences

- Expand educational programming for all audiences on how to enjoy the state parks sustainably during their stay, with emphasis on understanding conservation of park resources and ecologically sensitive behavior.
- Work with the educational community to expand integration of environmental education into the classroom, particularly in urban areas and in middle and high schools, resulting in new generations of supporters of the state park system.
- Expand the use of social and electronic media, including development of smart mobile device applications, that enhance the state park experience for all Pennsylvanians.
- Expand the Bureau's public safety and outdoor recreational programming to increase visitor awareness of the inherent risks in visiting natural places and building skills and confidence, to better prepare for outdoor experiences.

- Evaluate the more than 125 state park concession operations and implement improvements that will better serve the public. An example would be replacing a small food stand run by one concessionaire with a parking area designed for several food trucks, with the goal of enhancing flexibility and variety of refreshments for visitors.

### Increase Employee Diversity

- Increase support for youth programs, such as the PA Outdoor Corps, that serve as a stepping stone to exposing promising youth to careers in DCNR and the Bureau of State Parks.
- Develop programs to increase the diversity of state park staff to reflect the ethnicity of Pennsylvania citizens.

### Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions

- Utilize green building design where appropriate in facility construction and expand alternative energy generation (such as adding photovoltaic panels to buildings), with a goal of 50% of electricity derived from renewable sources by 2030.
- Continue to add new electric-vehicle charging stations across the park system to support the statewide development of a public electric vehicle charging infrastructure network.

## How to Comment on the *Penn's Parks for All Preliminary Report*

Thank you for taking the time to read this report, including the **Recommended Future Directions** that have been presented for consideration.

Please feel free to provide comments on this report, or to offer other suggestions on how to improve the state park system for future generations.

All input is encouraged, and may be submitted in the following ways:

- An online comment form can be found at <https://www.dcnr.pa.gov/StateParks>.
- Mail comments via postal to:  
PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)  
Bureau of State Parks  
Planning Section  
P.O. Box 8551  
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8551





**pennsylvania**

DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION  
AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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