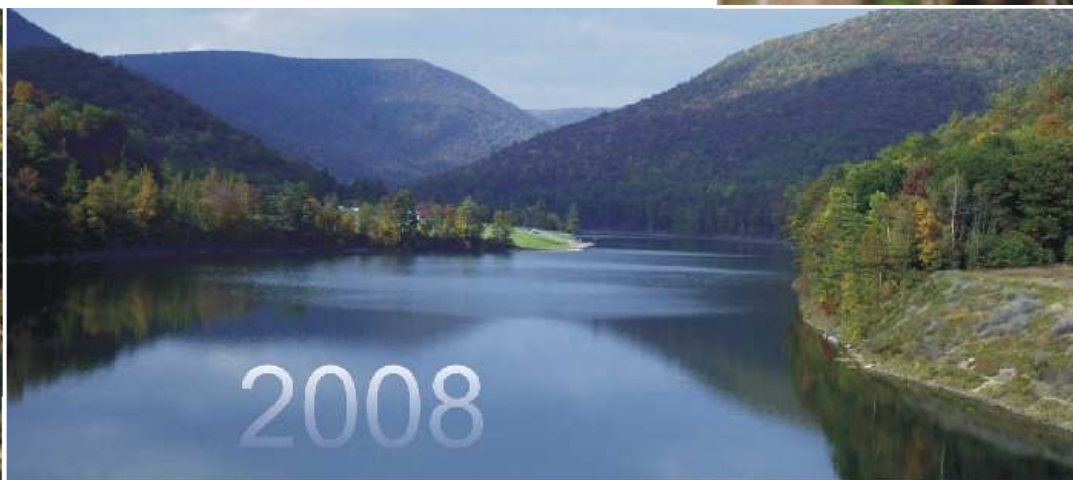


Preserving past traditions, creating new connections



governor's outdoor task force report

Edward G. Rendell, Governor



www.connectoutdoors.state.pa.us



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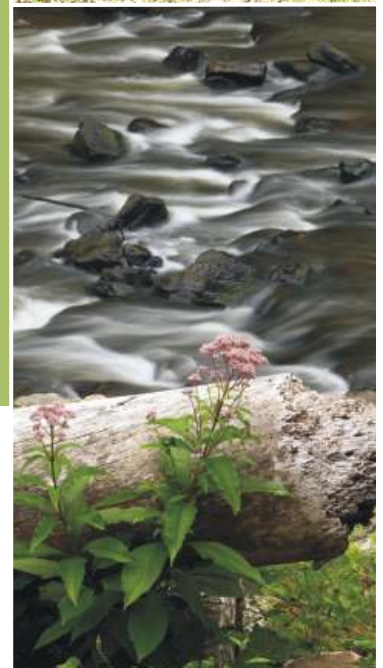
Written by Ben Moyer

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introduction and executive summary

Once a place whose people lived close to the land and attuned to the seasons, America is becoming an “indoor” nation. Urbanization consumes forests and farms, children spend more time watching television than playing outdoors and obesity rates are climbing. In his landmark book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv called the growing isolation of Americans from outdoor experience “nature-deficit disorder.” Louv’s book explored how the destruction of natural landscapes by urban sprawl, community design that denies access to nature, and the explosion of electronic distractions are cutting contact with the natural world from American childhood. “Baby boomers—Americans born between 1946 and 1964,” he wrote, “may constitute the last generation of Americans to share an intimate, familial attachment to the land and water.”¹

Louv’s book focused on children but, increasingly, Americans of all ages are insulated from contact with woods, fields, streams and wild living things. The implications of this widening gulf are enormous, threatening our physical health, emotional well being, and the environmental quality of our communities and our world.

In March 2007, Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell convened a two-day conference to address these trends. This first-of-its-kind exchange on reconnecting Pennsylvanians with the outdoors assembled experts and organizations with various perspectives on the relationship between people and the outdoors. Leaders from conservation groups, government, business, health care, recreation, academic institutions, and local municipalities sought strategies to encourage meaningful contact with the natural world and physically active lifestyles.

Speakers from the outdoor recreation industry, environmental and conservation organizations, government, health care, universities and the press discussed realities in modern life that present obstacles to contact with nature. Presentations and large and small group discussions called on participants to consider the influence of diminished outdoor experience and sedentary, indoor lifestyles on human health and the future of environmental stewardship.



National Wildlife Federation President and Chief Executive Officer Larry Schweiger related a story that distilled these concerns into a few sentences. Schweiger told about sitting next to a young boy on an airliner as the plane flew over the Grand Canyon while the morning sun struck across the canyon walls, igniting them with color and stark contrasts in shadow and light. The boy, Schweiger explained, was furiously fingering the controls of a hand-held electronic game while the pilot's voice invited passengers to look out the cabin's left windows and enjoy the view.

"His eyes never left that Game Boy," Schweiger said. "Not for a single second."

Schweiger said he could not stop thinking about the incident. It's alarming, he said, because, "We only save what we love and we only love what we know."

This sentiment was echoed by Pennsylvanians across the commonwealth who were unable to attend the Governor's Outdoor Conference, but attended a series of public meetings held throughout the summer of 2007. Co-chairs of an appointed Governor's Outdoor Task Force presented the original conference findings and invited citizens to share their concerns and propose solutions.

During the months that followed, the 16-member Task Force met to forge this final report, summarizing input from the conference and public meetings, and offering the recommendations on the next three pages to reconnect Pennsylvanians with the outdoors in their schools, communities and beyond.





connecting in schools

- Promote resource materials that integrate outdoor environmental learning with other subjects
- Provide teachers with curricula relevant and accessible to minority populations
- Create and support opportunities for outdoor physical play on school property and in the neighborhood
- Encourage co-location of school playfields and community recreation areas, and assure that both are walkable from residential areas and connected to other open spaces and natural areas
- Use school-based wellness campaigns to inform parents, school boards and PTAs about the health benefits of outdoor recreation
- Train teachers how to teach outdoors
- Encourage use of school grounds or nearby lands as outdoor, nature-based learning resources
- Help Pennsylvania schools evaluate land holdings, develop school ground master plans and implement nature-based education
- Bring private and non-profit partners into schools to share their unique outdoor recreation equipment and enthusiasm



connecting in communities

- Celebrate open space as a positive aspect of cities and towns
- Distribute information on green, healthy communities and the benefits they provide
- Inform and train municipal officials, civic groups and developers on benefits of and demand for walkable communities
- Reward planning for sustainable communities through state funding criteria
- Link civic, religious and community groups with organizations already engaged in outdoor volunteer efforts
- Enlist nontraditional partners to promote outdoor destinations and attract a broader audience
- Provide resources and training for the professionals who teach outdoor skills to youth and the general public



- Identify and develop connectors between communities and outdoor resources like trails and rivers
- Provide technical assistance and training to recreation providers, homeowners and businesses
- Develop local public transportation routes to nearby parks, outdoor areas, nature centers and trails, especially those near urban areas

connecting in nature

- Develop a “master” web portal to cross-reference the diverse outdoor resources available
- Encourage media outlets to adopt more positive slants in weather forecasts
- Engage media professionals by recognizing coverage that highlights Pennsylvania’s outdoors
- Develop and convey consistent messages about stewardship of our natural resources
- Redefine outdoor experience to embrace technologies that may have greater relevance for younger generations, like geocaching and podcasts
- Develop and support mentoring programs that encourage fishing and hunting
- Develop messages about hunting to better communicate factors such as ecosystem management, environmental stewardship, and eating fresh, natural “locally produced” foods
- Connect people to wildlife through wildlife-based nature tourism and events and programs on wildlife viewing, wildlife photography, etc.
- Compile a master database of wildlife programs and events offered by parks and nature centers throughout the state
- Expand commonwealth business support programs to include the many businesses that make up the outdoor economy
- Explore ways to reduce the liability exposure of outdoor recreation providers
- Connect youth with the variety of outdoors careers by investigating current opportunities and communicating them to students
- Engage professional associations, sustainable business networks, employment advocacy organizations and others in exploring strategies to support and grow our green economy





- Survey Pennsylvanians to understand how they use outdoor resources and how they would like to use them in the future
- Add new public lands of significant natural value, particularly tracts that connect people to existing public lands
- Assess interpretive and directional signs and printed materials to make sure that the invitation to enjoy the outdoors is extended to all
- Identify opportunities to keep private lands open for public use
- Establish greater river access for fishing and non-powered boating in our large cities
- Develop a guide to public access, with model permits and hold-harmless agreements for private landowners
- Explore development and distribution of model signage that would enable landowners to permit some activities of their choosing while restricting others
- Explore establishing a liability or insurance fund, or tax credits for private landowners who permit appropriate public use
- Examine and test adjustments to fishing and hunting seasons that make it easier to participate in the sports
- Consider starting the school year one week later to give families an additional three-day weekend to enjoy the outdoors and one another



Recognizing the imperative to Pennsylvania's future and the complex challenges, the Task Force recommends establishment of a Governor's Commission on People and Outdoor Connections, representing these private and public perspectives, to motivate, guide, and promote implementation of the recommendations set forth in this report.

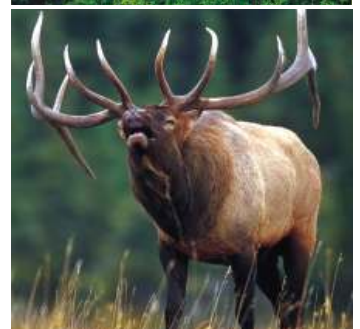


pennsylvania—our rich outdoor heritage

Despite contemporary influences that tend to exclude nature from everyday life, Pennsylvania's rich natural heritage offers clear opportunities to forge bonds with the outdoors. Nature rings in its very name—"Penn's Woods." Seventeen million acres of forest still grace the state, nearly two-thirds of its total surface. Pennsylvania's geological backbone is the Appalachian Mountain chain. Rising to over 3,200 feet in Somerset County, the highlands divide streams and rivers flowing eastward toward the Atlantic Ocean and west to the Gulf of Mexico. Unique natural treasures, from a Great Lake to a Grand Canyon (Pine Creek Gorge) enrich the state's horizons. White-tailed deer, black bears, brook trout and bald eagles are among the 500 species of vertebrate wildlife native to its woods, streams and sky. Some 750 elk, the largest wild herd in the Northeast, inhabit an 800-square mile swath of the Allegheny Plateau just north of Interstate 80.

Few states' citizens enjoy such widespread public access to undeveloped land and water. Pennsylvanians can hike, camp, boat, fish or hunt on two million acres of state forest lands managed by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and the commonwealth's state park system is one of the nation's most extensive and diverse. State parks range from urban oases, such as Pittsburgh's Point State Park, to near-wilderness tracts like Cherry Springs in Potter County, where astronomers gather to study one of the darkest night skies in the eastern United States. Recreational planning efforts set in motion in the 1970s established at least one state park within 25 miles of every Pennsylvania resident—117 parks in all. The Pennsylvania Game Commission owns and manages 1.5 million acres of state game lands for wildlife habitat and public hunting, and the Fish and Boat Commission administers a network of public access facilities on lakes and rivers. In addition to state lands, the half-million-acre Allegheny National Forest offers public hiking, camping, fishing, canoeing and hunting on federal lands along the gathering streams of the Allegheny River in Pennsylvania's northwest corner.

Pennsylvania is a national leader in recreational trail development. Working together, communities, volunteers, local and state government and private business have transformed nearly 100 different sections of abandoned railways, in every region of the state, into community trails. Some trails are primarily local assets while others are international destinations. The Lackawanna River Heritage Trail, for example, provides urban Scranton residents easy access to five miles of tree-lined trail only minutes from downtown. In the state's opposite, southwest corner cyclists can follow the Great Allegheny Passage for over 100 miles through wilderness settings, small mountain towns and along the wildest whitewater reaches of the Youghiogheny River. These trails lead the adventurous into scenic valleys and through the storied birthplaces of the coal, steel and oil industries where locomotives and freight cars once commanded the right-of-way. Even the rivers themselves offer trails. Canoeists and kayakers can paddle 1,500 miles of officially designated river trails



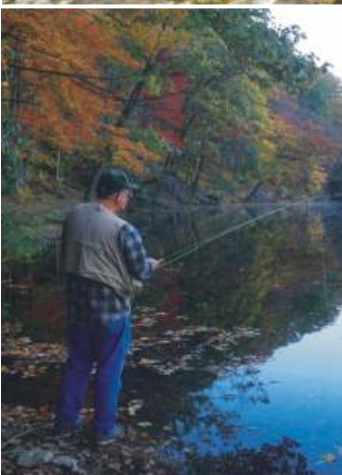


in the Ohio, Susquehanna and Delaware river watersheds. Designated water trails feature marked public access points and a brochure that interprets history and natural features along the route.

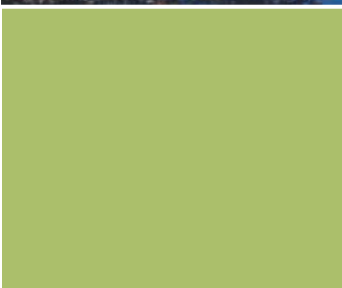
Cyclists and boaters are not the only adventurers with long-distance options in Pennsylvania's outdoors. Hikers from all over the world traverse 200 miles of rocky southcentral ridges on the Appalachian Trail. In the west, the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail spans the Allegheny heights for 70 mountainous miles from Johnstown south to Ohiopyle State Park.



Often associated with the industrial "rust belt," or "smokestack" industries, Pennsylvania embraces some of North America's most ecologically significant places. Each fall, tens of thousands of hawks, falcons, ospreys and eagles fly low over Hawk Mountain, 90 miles northwest of Philadelphia's skyline. Soaring on ascending air currents, these birds of prey assemble from all across the Mid-Atlantic, New England and eastern Canada to follow the long Appalachian ridges southward on their autumn migration. From mid-September through late November, birders gather by the hundreds on boulder seats atop the Mountain's lookouts. Kettles of broad-winged hawks circling over the horizon and eagles soaring at eye level on seven-foot wingspans reward them for braving the chill north wind. Far to the northwest and across the mountains, 90-foot bluffs overlook the expanse of Lake Erie at Erie Bluffs State Park. Pennsylvania's most recently established park, Erie Bluffs harbors some of the lake's longest undeveloped shorelines, bank swallow nest colonies and pristine lakefront streams. Fifty miles south of Pittsburgh, plants more at home in the southern Appalachian Mountains, such as buffalo nut and large-flowered marshallia, find their northern limits in the Ferncliff Peninsula National Natural Landmark, rooted from seeds carried downstream by the north-flowing Youghiogheny River.



Together with forests, flowing waters are one of the defining elements of Pennsylvania's natural character. Eighty-six thousand miles of flowing streams course across its face.² The Lehigh and Youghiogheny rivers thrill a quarter-million whitewater rafters every summer, and canoeists paddle hundreds of miles of more placid streams like the Clarion, Juniata and Susquehanna. Anglers from around the world come to fish the limestone-born trout streams of the Cumberland Valley, and the Fish and Boat Commission stocks three million trout each year in streams and lakes to enhance recreational fishing.

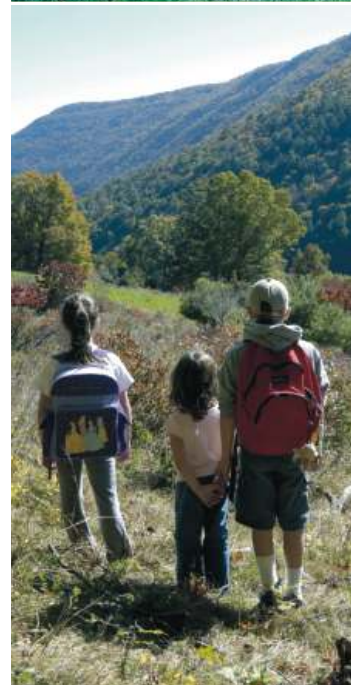




Even Pennsylvania's largest cities reveal a heritage of natural abundance. Philadelphia's Fairmount Park system holds 9,200 acres of woods, streams and open space, fully 10 percent of the city's total land area. Pittsburghers enjoy three major rivers and five urban parks covering 2,600 acres. Erie residents use Presque Isle State Park as a gateway to Lake Erie. Harrisburg, Wilkes-Barre and Scranton facilities offer access to fishing and boating on the broad Susquehanna.

Still, despite their state's natural attributes, more Pennsylvanians are being cut off from convenient contact with woods, water and wildlife. Even here, with our strong conservation history, sprawl is rapidly changing large regions of the state. Between 1997 and 2003, development converted 288,000 acres of rural land—about equal to the area of Beaver County—to other uses.³ As natural places disappear, outdoor experience recedes beyond the reach of Pennsylvania residents. Social research tells us this could become a self-perpetuating cycle, in which people care less about the quality of their natural environment because their personal contact with it has been so scant. Less public concern for wild things and places, then, permits even more destruction and ever diminishing familiarity with Pennsylvania's native natural resources.

There is, however, much reason to hope. That hope is clear in all those who came to the Governor's Outdoor Conference and public meetings across the state to express their concern and commitment. The challenge they identified is to help people enmeshed in today's hectic way of life, or those cut off from outdoor access, to know what we have and to help them make it part of their lives. With our remaining wild lands and clean water, our small communities still wed to countryside, our great cities graced by great rivers, and our resourceful people, it is not too late to rekindle the connection between nature and ourselves, to the benefit of both, in Pennsylvania and beyond.





trends and solutions

The March 2007 Governor's Outdoor Conference engaged participants in identifying trends indicating disconnect of people from nature, and explored solutions to stem that disconnect. Dialogue captured in the general sessions and "breakout" workgroups is briefly summarized below.

Smart Sustainable Development

Speakers, panelists and participants agreed that the most obvious threat to the human-nature bond is the outright destruction of natural places by development and urban sprawl. To Pennsylvanians across the state, the loss of woodlots, fields and streams is an all too familiar fact of life. Though our state's population has remained nearly static, our appetite for land is disproportionately vast and expanding.

Pennsylvania's conversion of rural lands to other uses is disproportionate to its population growth. Between 1982 and 1997, developed land increased by 56 percent in Pennsylvania, versus 40 percent nationally. During the same period, Pennsylvania's population grew by only 1.4 percent compared to 16 percent nationwide.⁴

Over the last 50 years, Pennsylvania ranks second only to West Virginia in consuming the most land for the least population growth.⁵

Once, contact with natural places and the life they support was a part of everyday existence. Farm chores, walks to and from school, childhood play in woodlots or fields, and rural-rooted pastimes such as hunting, trapping and fishing nurtured familiarity with soil, native trees, weather, birds, and edible fruits. In that setting, physical activity was a routine and necessary part of life.

Today, contact with nature is seldom routine and most people must carve opportunities to physically interact with nature from their demanding schedules. Increasingly, contact with the outdoors requires deliberate efforts to find and reach open space. Urban sprawl not only destroys landscapes that were once conveniently accessible, it also drains time from people's lives. As sprawl spreads farther beyond the former urban fringe, people need to drive farther and longer to work and school, to shop, reach medical care, and especially to enjoy outdoor recreation.

Speakers pointed out that for senior citizens and those who live in urban centers, insulation from natural landscapes can be even more complete. Public transportation rarely reaches beyond the sprawl surrounding modern cities to outdoor recreation sites or natural areas. Unless they can reach a neighborhood park within walking distance, many urban residents and seniors who no longer drive are virtually marooned within "built" environments.

Discussion participants expressed a belief that Pennsylvania could better manage sprawl without hampering economic growth. In fact, they generally agreed that conservation of



natural resources integrated with well-planned development could support one another in building vigorous communities that also accommodate wildlife and outdoor recreation. Participants did not, however, dodge conflict. They declared that outdated regulations and misplaced incentives in tax codes, municipal revenue streams and inter-municipal competition are currently encouraging sprawl in Pennsylvania. Zoning and municipal planning codes were accepted as useful tools to encourage better development, generally and in specific cases. But participants supported improved coordination between local governments, counties and the state, and restructuring of existing regulations to encourage more development of abandoned industrial sites. Several participants suggested a shift from Pennsylvania's strong reliance on local land-use planning toward a more regional approach.

Local and state policy makers in Pennsylvania have already begun to address and apply strategies to promote sustainable growth that preserves natural resources and outdoor recreation opportunities. Many of their ideas have been published in the *Keystone Principles*, a multi-agency collection of best practices that can guide growth and discourage unplanned sprawl.⁶

Improving Outdoor Access

Participants identified a range of obstacles to outdoor use associated with restricted, poorly developed or ineffectively promoted access. Some suggested that these barriers may explain some of the decline in traditional outdoor pursuits, such as hunting and fishing, and may block users from sampling or remaining active in hiking, camping, or water sports. Some barriers are physical, such as distance from outdoor sites, poor transportation or a lack of equipment. Such deterrents may be especially challenging for aging outdoor users with diminishing physical independence. Cultural or language obstacles can result in miscommunication and thwart outdoor use by some groups.

Discussion groups agreed that Pennsylvania can make significant progress in improving outdoor access by providing information to the public in ways that are better planned and coordinated. Participants felt that posting signs at outdoor sites in different languages to reach and encourage diverse users was an obvious first step. Forming partnerships among government, recreation organizations and the media to convey information also won strong support. Some participants advanced novel ideas such as using celebrities to tell communities, families and individuals how to take better advantage of existing outdoor opportunities. "Connectivity" was a common theme in the discussions. Greenways, corridors and trails that connect urban neighborhoods or other population centers with natural areas were consistently near the top of the list of proposed solutions.

Engaging New Users

Discussion revealed a need to reach out to those who may harbor an interest but are not engaged in outdoor activities to any great degree. Much comment focused on how





recreation managers must realistically consider the changing outdoor recreation market, particularly among young people. For example, young people might prefer to experience the outdoors on a skateboard or with headphones, rather than casting in a quiet stream or watching birds in a meadow as their parents might have done.

Ideas for engaging those least connected with nature brought out some of the most creative thinking of the conference. Many participants suggested marketing and the media as vital tools to reach young people and diverse cultural groups. Partnering with existing institutions, from colleges to community centers, and multi-media events to broadcast the outdoor recreation message was another popular suggestion. Participants recognized that working with technology—not against it—must be part of any workable solution.

New outdoor users can be enticed, said some participants, by using popular electronic technologies in an outdoor context. Sophisticated technology, like GPS units, used in introductory geocaching events could encourage those who are comfortable with technology to take their interests outdoors. A high-tech treasure hunt of sorts, geocaching invites participants to search in outdoor settings for hidden “caches,” using hand-held GPS units and geographic coordinates.

Participants at the conference felt that significant progress could be made by enticing urban residents not presently engaged in outdoor pursuits to sample opportunities to hike, fish or boat near their homes, or by providing those opportunities where they do not now exist.

Fostering Stewardship and Conservation

Deep concern for diminished childhood experience in nature dominated these discussions. Participants agreed that all the obstacles—physical and cultural—currently separating humans from outdoor experience jeopardize future generations’ commitment to resource conservation. They warned that as children live increasingly insulated from natural landscapes, wild things and wild places become irrelevant in their values, resulting in diminished support for responsible environmental policy.

An Iowa State University study of motivations that caused people to work actively to protect environmental quality found that: “Far and away the most frequent cited influence was childhood experience of natural, rural, or relatively pristine habitats.”⁷

Participants acknowledged that not all barriers to nature are built of concrete and glass. Several speakers warned of more insidious obstacles. Fear may be harder to see than urban sprawl, but is no less powerful in separating people, especially children, from contact with the natural world. Group discussions acknowledged that parents are afraid to allow their children to experience what shreds of woods may survive near their homes. In *Last Child in*



the Woods, Richard Louv calls this “the Bogeyman Syndrome,” the terror of “stranger danger,” and says it is turning American childhood into virtual “house arrest.”

A study of three generations of nine-year-olds found that the radius around the home where children were permitted to roam on their own had shrunk by 90 percent between 1970 and 1990.⁸ *American Demographics* magazine reported that 56 percent of today’s parents say that by the time they were 10 years old they were allowed to walk or bike to school. But only 36 percent of those same parents say their own kids should be allowed that freedom.⁹

The groups acknowledged parents’ responsibility for vigilance, but expressed a need for a more realistic balance between keeping children at home and allowing them some freedom to explore their world. As Louv noted, the risk of a child, in his/her own room, communicating with a child-predator online is now one in five.

Several attendees suggested that the current attraction of young people to recreational activities that do not place them in contact with the outdoors in any way may result in fewer Americans developing a sense of stewardship toward nature. Some increasingly popular forms of recreation may be physically active, but emphasize individual or team competition and encourage little affinity with natural places.

Organized team sports do provide exercise but take place on manicured play surfaces devoid of natural character and interest. As competitive sports have grown more popular, opportunities for unstructured childhood play in natural settings have dwindled.

Between 1981 and 1997, the amount of time spent by children in organized competitive team sports increased by 27 percent. The U. S. Youth Soccer Association had 100,000 members in 1974; today, there are more than three million.¹⁰

The group acknowledged the physical benefits of organized sports on prepared surfaces but, in regard to developing stewardship ethics toward the natural environment, they saw a need for a better balance in schools and communities that allows for more loosely structured experience in natural settings.

Some recreational choices such as electronic video or computer games involve no contact with natural surroundings, little physical activity and may encourage obesity in the same way as watching television.

Video games are now available in more than 80 percent of American homes with children. Adolescent boys spend an average of 23 hours each week playing video games, more than they spend watching television; girls of the same age play an average of 12 hours per week.¹¹





Participants observed that kids could spend more time outdoors and that parents' fears could be eased if schools, communities and churches offered more outdoor activities under supervision from teachers and field experts. Children exposed in this way to outdoor experience, they observed, may wish to return to the outdoors as self-motivated users later in life. Participants suggested working in partnership with a variety of organizations to bring these ideas into practice.

Creating Healthy Outdoor Lifestyles

Participants pondered how to get parents and kids off the couch, out of the car, and into the outdoors, and experts supported their concerns. Americans now spend an average of 101 minutes every day confined in cars, five times the amount devoted to physical exercise.¹² Various speakers suggested that a symptom of our diminished contact with the outdoors can be seen in declining health, and stated that inactive lifestyles are contributing to unprecedented rates of obesity in both children and adults. Panelists told participants that The Center for Disease Control reports the number of overweight adult Americans increased by 60 percent between 1991 and 2000. In Pennsylvania, 62 percent of adults are now overweight and one quarter of adults are obese.

Although several factors can contribute to weight gain, the link between increasing time spent indoors, physical inactivity and obesity is clear, and the problem starts early. American children between ages six and 11 now spend an average of 25 hours per week watching television, as much time as they spend in school.¹³ Numerous studies demonstrate that increased television watching and computer time correlates directly with measures of body fat in children. A 2007 study determined that 18 percent of Pennsylvania elementary school children are overweight, and rates in some counties, and among some demographic groups, are even higher.¹⁴

As childhood obesity becomes more common, pediatricians are seeing a higher incidence of health problems, such as diabetes, once rarely diagnosed in youth. Obesity in the young can also contribute to serious health conditions later in life including heart disease, diabetes, hypertension and psychological alienation. Some pediatricians speculate that this generation of children may be the first to die at an earlier age than their own parents since World War II.

There is mounting evidence that outdoor activities can also help parents manage children's attention disorders. Researchers at the University of Illinois have found that natural settings tend to lessen symptoms of Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder in children.¹⁵

Similarly, regular physical exercise, outdoors when practical, can help to maintain independence and quality of life for older Pennsylvanians.



Participants acknowledged that obesity and other ailments occurring with greater frequency present complex problems, involving diet, sedentary habits, time constraints and diverse social factors. Encouraging healthy lifestyles in the outdoors needs to be addressed on multiple fronts, through a coordinated effort of employers, educators, health care providers, community institutions, churches, academia and the private sector.

Discussion groups in conference workshops also agreed that the health of children and adults could be improved through a shift in thinking about “leisure” time. Time spent in active outdoor recreation, they said, should not be regarded as discretionary but, instead, as proactive and responsible pursuit of good health. Any public service messages communicating that perspective, whether from government or organizations, the participants said, would represent steps in the right direction.

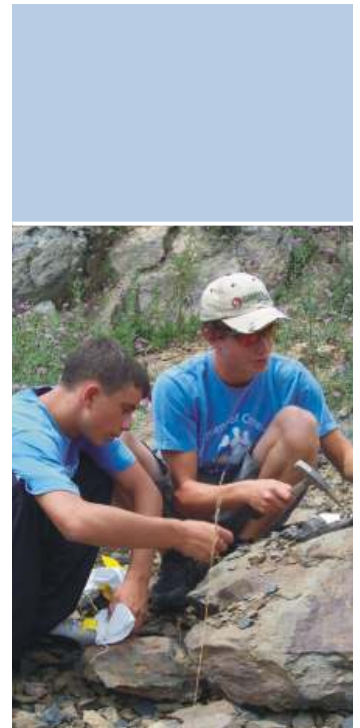
The Outdoor Classroom

Attendees felt that, too often, the design of today's school grounds and daily schedules separates children from nature. Despite acknowledged good intentions, public schools have fallen short of their potential to instill in students an affinity for nature. Modern school environments seldom include natural, undeveloped spaces for childhood exploration or experiential classes in natural science. But even when schools do have grounds that could be utilized as outdoor learning sites, they are often unable or unwilling to take kids outdoors because of liability concerns, demanding class schedules, or because teachers feel unprepared to help kids learn outdoors about their natural environment. Wary of lawsuits and perhaps the same “stranger danger” that concerns parents, school boards seek to protect kids, and themselves, by cutting off students' access to outdoor activity in places that represent the natural landscape of a child's own native community.

Numerous studies document the benefits to students from school grounds that are ecologically diverse and include free-play areas, habitat for wildlife, walking trails and gardens.¹⁶

Participants expressed a concern that few Pennsylvania schools provide natural history instruction in an outdoor setting, even though materials to aid teachers working with kids outdoors are available. Although Pennsylvania teachers are required to address Environment and Ecology standards in the classroom, there are, at this point, no requirements for actual “on the ground” outdoor experiences.

Education professionals pointed out that some of the forces that result in declining outdoor experience at school, both for physical play and academic work outdoors, originate in federal mandates. Federal requirements for school performance place an emphasis on in-class learning in English and math, while tightened school budgets may eliminate field trips, during which kids might experience scientific concepts brought to life in forests and streams.





Helping teachers feel comfortable in the outdoors has huge potential to positively affect their students. State resource agencies and universities can mount more effective outreach campaigns to get teachers the training they need to be confident and inspiring in outdoor teaching situations. These partners could also help to make teachers more aware of resource materials for outdoor use.

Most participants felt that trends separating kids from the outdoors at school could be reversed if school boards and administrations can be helped to understand what is at stake with children's physical, mental and emotional health. Wider recognition of outdoor learning as a legitimate component of public education, they suggested, could result in a higher funding priority for outdoor experiences on school grounds or in natural areas nearby.

Managing Competing Uses

As outdoor users themselves, conference attendees were keenly aware of growing competition among recreational uses for limited access to land and water. Increasingly, they noted, new activities compete with one another for limited space or, sometimes, are incompatible with established recreation options. This conflict has the potential to discourage outdoor use and damage resources that support all outdoor recreation.

Extreme skiing, bungee jumping, skydiving and mountain biking are rapidly attracting new participants, and while these forms of recreation do involve physical activity, the work groups suggested that public lands managers, recreation organizations, industry and the media emphasize the benefits of outdoor experience and immersion in nature rather than competition and personal risk.

Participants noted that some increasingly popular forms of recreation can have a negative impact on the environment if practiced irresponsibly. Such impacts include soil erosion, stream sedimentation and destruction of wildlife habitat. Conference participants saw a need for greater cooperation between advocacy organizations for these recreations—such as all-terrain vehicle riding, horseback riding, snowmobiling, mountain biking, and other riding pursuits—and industry and government to convey the importance of responsible riding.

Managing competing uses presents a complex situation, as evidenced by participants' discussion of Sunday hunting. Some participants, concerned about declines in hunter participation, viewed authorizing Sunday hunting as a way of providing more opportunity to hunters who drop out of hunting due to a lack of time. Others said hunting on Sunday would discourage outdoor use by hikers, horseback riders and others who feel safer on the trails when no hunters are present. A thorough examination of the issue may reveal opportunities to accommodate both perspectives, offering hunters some options on Sunday, without discouraging others' Sunday outdoor activities.

Better education, improved access, and better inter-agency coordination among the several state agencies that manage public lands and waters were the major solutions offered. More



specifically, participants suggested that public lands managers institute recreation “zoning” to separate potentially competing uses, or user fees calibrated to the potential for environmental damage.

The Future of Traditional Outdoor Sports

Passionate discussion in conference work groups revealed deep concern for declining participation in hunting and fishing in Pennsylvania, and nationwide. Participants suggested that urban sprawl and development of formerly rural lands are impacting hunting and fishing recruitment and retention. “It is getting harder to find a place to fish and hunt,” was the theme of numerous statements from attendees. Many cited personal experiences of familiar hunting and fishing grounds lost to development in recent years. Pennsylvania Game Commission’s Farm-Game and Forest-Game Cooperative programs were referenced as models that keep private land open to public hunting access.

Hunters and anglers attending the conference were especially concerned that sprawling development and changing social pressures were reducing the number of young people attracted to hunting and fishing. Research conducted by Responsive Management, Inc., a natural resources research firm that has implemented surveys for most state wildlife agencies and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, supports their concern. Their findings document that a person’s likelihood of engaging in these activities, particularly hunting, are associated with rural life experience.¹⁷ Not all hunters grew up in a rural place, but in past generations most had some rural connection—a farm relative or a homestead or rural property that was still in the family. That is changing as the landscape changes, and the pools of young potential hunters and anglers are living in regions we would now be hard-pressed to call rural, where their experiences seldom connect them with the outdoor world or with other people who hunt or fish. Many sportsmen attending the conference cited sharing their outdoor experiences with family and friends as a primary motivation for their hunting and fishing outings. They fear that as the network of family and community experience in hunting diminishes, so will opportunities for young Pennsylvanians to be active hunters. They supported greater investment in youth mentoring programs by government, sportsmen organizations and individuals.

Conference participants reached agreement that growing constraints on leisure time also negatively impact hunting and fishing participation. Some participants noted that a lack of time to hunt and fish may be linked to sprawl and development, which require sportsmen to travel longer distances to reach places where hunting and fishing are appropriate or practical.

Strong support was expressed for messages from agencies and hunting organizations that convey the relevance of hunting in modern society, focusing on the role of hunting in ecosystem management and in offering participants the opportunity for natural, local food sources. Concern for retention of existing hunters, and recruitment of new hunters was evident in work group discussions.





conference follow-up: statewide public meetings

stewardship



To continue the dialogue with individuals and organizations that may not have had the opportunity to attend the conference, a post-conference process presented findings to a broader public, solicited further discussion, and gathered more ideas about how to strengthen outdoor connections.

Five public meetings were held in May and June 2007 in Erie, Harrisburg, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and Scranton. Conference materials were also provided to interested organizations so they could hold additional meetings. Attendees at the Conference and public meetings, as well as Internet visitors to the conference website (www.connectoutdoors.state.pa.us) were asked to complete a survey to provide additional input (about 300 surveys were completed and returned, an interesting but small sample that the task force does not consider representative of broad public opinion). Respondents to the survey said the three most influential factors negatively affecting Pennsylvanians' connections with the outdoors are: 1) time constraints, 2) competition for scarce leisure time, and 3) development of lands that once provided outdoor opportunities.

Respondents said improved "stewardship of natural resources," "better health," and "strengthening families," were the most important benefits of building stronger outdoor connections.

When asked what should be given attention in working to build stronger outdoor connections, those who returned surveys ranked "smart development and economic strategies to maintain accessible open space," as the highest priority, followed by "experiential outdoor and environmental education strategies," and "marketing/communication about available resources."

At the five public meetings, facilitators engaged the public to brainstorm and prioritize ideas through simple voting. While every meeting was different, one consistency among all meetings was the importance (prioritized highest overall at each of the meetings) of using



health



schools and curriculum to encourage outdoor connections. Some public meeting participants emphasized learning in outdoor classes and through outdoor play at recess or other breaks, others focused on the importance of teacher training in natural history, still others on the value of weaving environmental learning into other subjects. Better access to the outdoors and to outdoor opportunities was, similarly, a universal concern. “Walkable” communities and smart sustainable development were consistently among the highest priorities as the public lamented the loss of open space around their homes. Many in attendance called for greater communication of outdoor opportunities and collaboration among the many agencies and non-profits that provide outdoor recreational pursuits.

Issues sparking particular local passion marked some meetings. An energized group of young people in Erie advocated for the construction of a skatepark. An equally motivated group in the Pittsburgh area requested wider options for hunting on Sunday. Several citizens at the Harrisburg meeting raised the idea of reaching youth through creation of a league of teams that would compete in natural history knowledge based on a competitive sports model.

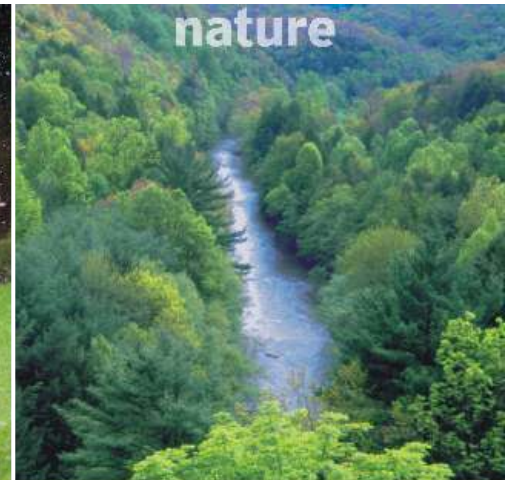
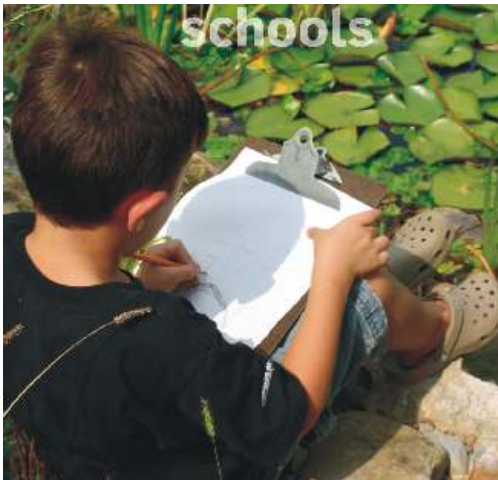
Though concerned with the spreading disconnect between humans and nature, participants in the Governor’s Outdoor Conference and the five public meetings that followed were not discouraged. Coupled with their concerns, they expressed the belief that all Pennsylvanians, rural and urban, young and old, harbor a deep, residual affinity for the natural world. If more people can be encouraged and enabled to venture outdoors in ways that build bonds with nature, the future will be healthier and more hospitable for all.

The following section of this report outlines the Task Force recommendations—both broad and specific—for how Pennsylvania’s public and private partners can address the concerns raised by citizens at the conference and statewide public meetings.

family



reconnection to nature



recommendations: reconnecting pennsylvania to nature

The Governor's Outdoor Task Force (members are listed on page 40) was convened with representation from diverse sectors, private and public, interested in or affected by the widening separation of people from the outdoors. Its assignment was to examine information and findings from the conference and public meetings, and prepare a report with recommendations for action by the Governor and General Assembly.

The Task Force sought to express its recommendations in a format that recognized how and where people spend their time, and aspects of “nature deficit” that collaborative efforts might appropriately seek to influence. Its efforts are directed toward three primary arenas for reconnecting Pennsylvanians with the outdoors—in schools, within communities, and in Pennsylvania's broader natural landscape of forests, streams and rivers.

In addition to evaluating public input, the Task Force explored existing programs and practices that serve to reconnect people with the outdoors. Some of these programs are cited in the recommendations, while more examples are listed in detail in an appendix posted online at www.connectoutdoors.state.pa.us. The Task Force does not consider this to be an exhaustive list, nor does it make a judgment about programs of which it became aware but with which it is not familiar. Consequently, the reader should not interpret reference to particular programs as an indication that these are the best or only ones of their types.

The report closes with thoughts about how the work begun at the Governor's Outdoor Conference might be best carried into the future.



connecting in schools

Outdoor Conference attendees, public meeting consensus, and the Task Force agreed that schools hold great potential for forging new connections between children and the outdoors. Throughout the conference and follow-up processes, there was support for both teaching young Pennsylvanians about the environment and getting them outdoors to personally experience their local natural environment.

Some important work in environmental education has already begun. In 2002, the Pennsylvania State Board of Education adopted Academic Standards for Environment and Ecology, which has helped move environmental learning into mainstream education. As a result, school districts and students will be asked to demonstrate their mastery of this subject matter in the new version of the 4th, 8th and 11th grade Pennsylvania State System of Assessment (PSSA). Governor Rendell and the State Board of Education are committed to holding school districts accountable for standards-based achievement, including the standards for Environment and Ecology.

Task Force members identified a critical need to increase teachers' and

Big Idea: Start early – empower schools and teachers to connect students to the outdoors, creating leaders for tomorrow who embody stewardship ethics and healthy lifestyles.



school boards' awareness of, and comfort in using curricula that addresses Environment & Ecology standards. **We must promote resource materials available from various sources, including the Pennsylvania Department of Education and state natural resource agencies, that integrate outdoor environmental learning with math, language arts, science, health and the arts.** One example is a state-specific textbook coordinated by the Department of Education (Environment and Ecology for Pennsylvania) that meets standards for grades eight through 10.

Project Learning Tree, and Project WET and Project WILD are examples of teacher training programs that meet current environmental education standards for Pennsylvania. We should also promote resources such as OutdoorResource.org, a national conservation education portal currently in development, and other efforts to disseminate best practices.

Teachers also need curricula relevant and accessible to minority populations, such as the highly successful Suenos Migratorios—Hopes of Migration—summer art

and education program developed by the Reading School District and PA Migrant Education. Students in this program work over the summer on a mural depicting colorful migratory birds and images of students from Caribbean and Latin American countries whose own migrations have followed similar paths.

In addition, **we must encourage schools to create and support opportunities for outdoor physical play on school property and in the neighborhood.** Liability constraints, whether real or perceived, are keeping kids indoors and we need to look at constructive ways to address them. The Victor Central School District in upstate New York offers an outdoor recreation curriculum that includes canoeing, kayaking, rock climbing and other activities. It addresses liability through an insurance contract that includes annual inspections of facilities, equipment and curricula; interviews with instructors; and monthly meetings of a safety advisory board made up of insurance representatives, instructors, and school district officials.

Also, as we plan our communities, **we should encourage co-location of school playfields and community recreation areas, and assure**



that both are walkable from residential areas and connected to other open spaces and natural areas. A new middle school in Mechanicsburg, Pa. was recently built adjacent to an existing environmental center and woodlot. Students use these facilities in their classes, for special events such as Earth Day, for cross-country practice, and as a base for an ecology club.

Outdoor play's connection to child wellness is important and widely documented.

School based wellness campaigns should inform parents about the health benefits of outdoor recreation and should convey this information to school boards and PTAs.

In addition to educational materials that teach about the environment, the Task Force recommends development of new curriculum materials that engage students directly in outdoor activities. **Teachers need to be provided with the tools and training that will empower them to take their students outdoors**—the very best setting to learn about the environment. We encourage the Department of Education to develop guidelines for outdoor experiential learning that can serve as a roadmap for teachers who are exploring



Big Idea: Education needs to happen in nature, not just about nature.

this option for the first time. Making outdoor learning a priority is the first step, but will require convincing school boards and administrators of the value of educational experience outside formal settings. Environmental organizations such as the Pennsylvania Alliance for Environmental Education may take a lead on this. Student presentations to school boards on the personal value of outdoor learning, and inviting board members on field trips are simple but potentially effective suggestions to win a higher standing for outdoor learning in Pennsylvania's schools.

Our colleges and universities can augment new and exciting teacher training,

enhancing teaching degrees and certifications to include environmental education and experiential learning. We should also expand training options using our intermediate units and through other means for working teachers. The proposed No Child Left Inside Act (H. R. 3036) at the national level recommends grant funding to train teachers in outdoor curricula aligned with environmental education standards, and to authorize and fund environmental 'magnet' schools that emphasize ecological literacy and outdoor experience.

The design and use of school environments also influences students' personal connection to the outdoors and

nature. That connection can be strengthened if we **encourage schools to use school grounds or nearby lands as outdoor, nature-based learning resources.** Two schools making good use of grounds and nearby lands are the Hand Middle School and Washington Elementary School in Lancaster. There, the Hand W.O.O.D.S project takes advantage of an adjacent nine-acre woodlot developed as an outdoor classroom for a variety of subjects.

Numerous partner organizations could help Pennsylvania schools evaluate land holdings, develop school ground master plans and implement nature-based education. The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay's Bayscapes program provides startup guidelines for rain gardens, riparian buffers and other wildlife habitat features that can be adapted to school yards. The Pennsylvania Game Commission offers PA Wild Action, which provides startup funding to schools on a competitive basis for development of wildlife habitats on school grounds. Once a habitat is established, the program follows up with teacher instruction and an on-line monitoring program so future classes can compare habitat



changes over time. In Maryland, a similar program run by the non-profit Environmental Concern, helps schools establish on-campus wetlands, followed by teacher training in the Wonders of Wetlands curricula designed to feature wetland concepts in class instruction.

To supplement teacher skills and address school equipment shortages, **we should seek opportunities to bring private and non-profit partners into schools to share their unique outdoor recreation equipment and enthusiasm.** The New Brighton (Pa.) School District works with partners to bring fly-fishing tackle, orienteering equipment and other outdoor gear to the schools, which are then integrated into physical education classes. Similarly, Pittsburgh public schools offers physical education credits through a program run by the Three Rivers Rowing Association in which students learn kayaking and sculling on the Monongahela, Allegheny and Ohio rivers.

In Kentucky, school districts and natural resource agencies work with archery equipment manufacturers to introduce archery to students through the "Archery On Target for Life"



program. This program is available in some 40 Pennsylvania schools, its expansion limited to date by resources. Nearly 100 Pennsylvania schools currently participate in Trout Unlimited's "Trout in the Classroom" program, run in cooperation with the Fish and Boat Commission, which provides aquariums, trout eggs, technical help and educational support to classes who raise trout in school and later go into the field to release their fish into streams. There may be a role for intermediate units to help link districts and schools with such programs available through partnering organizations. We need to encourage further develop-

ment and dissemination of these opportunities and others that may currently exist through the Department of Education's web portal and other avenues.

School districts without space or opportunity for on-site outdoor learning could be encouraged to explore programs that visit natural areas nearby. Nearly all schools today, however, face budgetary constraints that make travel off-site difficult. There may be opportunities for partner organizations to facilitate student travel to outdoor sites and these potentials should be explored.

It is important to note that, unlike many states, Pennsylvania public educa-

tion is characterized by a diffuse authority structure with substantial power resting at the local level. The commonwealth, represented by the state Department of Education, is an important partner to convey information, training and resources to the state's 501 school districts but has limited ability to "mandate" public school policy. While school districts are required to educate students to the State Board's standards, how they choose to do that is up to local boards. Consequently, school boards, teachers and parents will need to support and embrace outdoor learning activities if schools are to meet their potential for nurturing nature-child connections.



connecting in communities

The way we design—or fail to design—communities profoundly influences the lives of people who live and work within them.

Conference attendees, public meeting participants and survey respondents expressed strong support for state incentives to design new developments with smaller “footprints” on the landscape, while incorporating open space and opportunities for people to move around their communities without cars. Residential and commercial developments designed on such a “human scale” would encourage healthful physical activity while also providing environments where people could be aware of, and influenced by, aspects of the natural landscape around them.

Places designed in this way are sometimes referred to as “mixed use communities,” safe for travel on foot or by bicycle, and sometimes served by public transit. The growing number of residential communities and commercial developments designed this way do not require personal automobile travel as a routine and expected part of daily life, and have proven extremely popular with residents, businesses and prospective buyers. Some forward-

Big Idea: Pennsylvanians will be healthier and more nature-aware if they find it safe, convenient and fun to get outside near home, school and work.



thinking community designs even connect residents to nearby undeveloped natural sites. In Archuleta County, Colorado, for example, federal, state and local planners worked together to link residential communities to the nearby San Juan National Forest through trails and greenways. Not every community is near a national forest, but many similar possibilities exist in Pennsylvania near state and county parks, state forests, state game lands, and the growing network of trails that parallel our rivers, many of which pass through urban areas at various points.

Pennsylvanians have already made a significant investment in these public lands. If nearby communities can be linked to them in ways that encourage safe, convenient access by human-power—pedestrian, peddle or paddle—that investment can pay off for Pennsylvania in healthier citizens with a better appreciation for our natural environment.

State and local leaders should also recognize the value of open space in existing communities and look for ways to celebrate open space as a positive aspect of cities and towns.

Community leaders in Genesee County, surrounding Flint, Michigan, adopted just that approach with the Genesee County Landbank. Community groups in Genesee County “adopt” and care for 60 vacant lots—formerly considered eyesores—by planting flowers, trees and vegetable gardens. A county Landbank fund reimburses participating groups on a competitive grant basis and recognizes their work through an annual awards program.

Closer to home, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy works with local groups to plant and maintain 200 community gardens on vacant or formerly blighted sites in urban neighborhoods in western Pennsylvania. The Conservancy provides seeds, bulbs and technical assistance and local organizations supply manpower.

Creating market links for sustainable, locally grown products from our farms and forests helps sustain community economies and environments. An example is the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture's Buy Fresh, Buy Local program, which publishes a directory of farm markets, pick-your-own farms, wineries and other businesses that sell locally grown products.



Pennsylvania can make progress toward more livable communities throughout the state by distributing information on green, healthy communities and the health and economic benefits they provide. We need to inform and train municipal officials, civic groups and developers on the real and growing consumer demand for walkable communities, property value benefits, and how to develop ordinances to promote healthier communities. The 2005 guide, *Better Models for Development in Pennsylvania: Ideas for Creating More Livable and Prosperous Communities*, co-published by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and The Conservation Fund provides many good examples. Randall Arendt's 1997 publication *Growing Greener* offers blueprints and economic evidence to developers that communities designed with smaller footprints and more open space are profitable investments.

We recommend that all state funding criteria reward planning for sustainable communities. One current example of funding that does so is DCNR's Community Conservation Partnership



Program. Applications for grants through this program rank higher if they incorporate the Commonwealth's Keystone Principles on sustainable growth and a consistency with regional or municipal comprehensive plans. Communities might also be encouraged to provide more outdoor recreational and educational programs through grant application criteria that reward nature-based outreach efforts.

Civic, religious and community groups may provide more avenues for outdoor connection for their members and associates, especially if they can be linked with organizations already engaged in volunteer efforts outdoors. The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation helps start-up "friends groups" to assist state parks

in educational programs, maintenance, and other activities, recruiting volunteers from communities near the parks. The National Wildlife Federation's Habitat Steward Volunteer/Host program trains volunteers to help communities, schools and homeowners establish natural areas where people can enjoy and learn from them.

Pennsylvania's many outdoor advocates should also reach out to nontraditional partners like ethnic and cultural centers, niche media, religious institutions, libraries, local papers, chambers of commerce and realtors to promote outdoor destinations and attract a broader audience. Many service organizations (rotary, 4H, scouts, Big Brother/Big Sister) have deep roots in their communities and can

help develop outdoor programs consistent with their overall missions. For example, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts of America, and St. Georges Independent School in Memphis, Tennessee enjoy day or weekend excursions in parks and wildlife refuges through the National Wildlife Federation's Great Outdoors University, with funding support from The Memphis Daily News.

Often, a single person can be a powerful influence on others' outdoor attachment. **We can help to establish hundreds of individual sources of outdoor inspiration if we support skills-building with resources and training for the professionals we rely on to teach outdoor skills** (physical education teachers, environmental educators, outdoor recreation professionals, youth activity leaders, etc.) to youth and the general public. Venture Outdoors, based in Pittsburgh, is an example of one group that offers professionals training in river travel, backpacking, orienteering, wildlife tracking and identification, and first aid in both urban and backcountry settings. The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's Green City Youth program is another, training teachers and working with



K-12 students to engage in urban “greening” projects throughout Philadelphia through a service-learning model that promotes community stewardship.

Our recently expanded hiking and bicycle trails along major rivers offer new options for creating inviting links between communities and natural resources. In some places, only a short connecting trail could link residents in communities near trails with miles of publicly accessible riverfront recreation. **Such places, which provide a large payoff in access for a relatively small investment, should be identified and developed.** For example, private businesses such as restaurants and inns in the borough of Perryopolis, Fayette County, have recently enjoyed greater use from cyclists on the Youghiogheny Trail, which parallels the river about three miles from town. Visitors are already finding their way to amenities in Perryopolis, and local residents use the trail, but the economic and health impacts perhaps could be greater if they could reach these facilities by trail rather than by road.

Technical assistance is also important for promoting outdoor connections in our communities.



The National Wildlife Federation's Certified Wildlife Habitat program helps homeowners develop outdoor habitats, and the Wildlife Habitat Council offers similar assistance to corporations for improvements to corporate campuses that attract wildlife, improve water quality and offer outdoor exercise opportunities for employees.

Providing high-quality experiences in community-focused recreation areas attracts residents and visitors. Organizations like the Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society can help by disseminating best practices and conducting training for community recreation providers, whether paid staff or volunteers. Training should address quality and accessibility in physical features such as parking and restrooms, and

help providers recognize and overcome access barriers, real and perceived, to some user populations such as language or culture and safety concerns. Outreach and communication are important in addressing barriers and tailoring outdoor recreation areas to community needs and interests (such as gardening, dog walking, or skateboarding). Currently, Pennsylvania State Park staff are conducting a survey among Hispanic residents in the Reading community to determine barriers, needs and interests in their use of nearby state parks. At Beltzville State Park near Allentown, strong community interest in dog walking prompted the Beltzville Pooch Patrol, through which park staff offer guided trail walks and information on pet health and exercise to local dog owners on selected trails.

In Eugene, Oregon the Obsidians Outdoor Club offers senior citizens a wide range of hiking experiences, ranging from challenging to casual. Many seniors have remained active in the club as a result of the hiking program. Its 500 members' average age is 62, ranging from 18 to the 90s.

Public transportation can play a role in improving outdoor connections in communities. The Yosemite Area Regional Transit System provides public transportation to Yosemite National Park from several locations in surrounding counties. The service reduces congestion and pollution, and, just as important, allows people without private transportation to enjoy the park. **Our transportation agencies and partners can look for opportunities to route local public transportation to provide stops at nearby parks, outdoor areas, nature centers and trails,** especially those near urban areas. This service can pay off for Pennsylvania in better health for its citizens through increased physical activity.



connecting in nature

Diverse opportunities for outdoor experience abound in Pennsylvania and a core of citizens already take advantage of these resources. Millions of state residents, however, are unaware of the trails, campgrounds, nature centers, streams and wildlife viewing sites, some quite near their homes, that make Pennsylvania a potential national leader in outdoor and nature-based recreation.

Given our increasingly “net-savvy” culture, we see the Internet as an obvious avenue for improving access to information people need to plan their visits. All agencies and many organizations offering outdoor opportunities maintain websites featuring their programs, facilities and activities. One example is DCNR’s Get Outdoors PA website that provides a searchable calendar of events scheduled at state parks and state forests. The site lists organized programming and events for a wide range of skill levels and interests in every part of the state. Invitations to backpack, kayak, night hike, snowshoe, or gaze at winter constellations are a small sample of what browsers encounter on the site.

Some organizations update their sites with links that go

Big Idea: Pennsylvanians will spend more time outdoors if they’re more aware of and intrigued by available opportunities.



beyond the immediate focus of their members’ interest. The Pennsylvania Center on Environmental Education website (www.pcee.org) links teachers with environmental education resources but also directs browsers to outdoor fun in state and county parks. Users also find links to environmental education programs for the general public.

Once encountered, these sites stimulate excitement and prepare the user for visits to real outdoor places.

It would be helpful to cross-reference diverse outdoor resources on as many sites as possible, or on one “master” site linked to others, so that those seeking information would have a simpler task,

and may learn about unexpected options in the process.

The Internet can be an excellent tool to research outdoor opportunities. But for many people, some initial outdoor experience stimulated the desire for more outdoor connection. One particular outdoor pursuit, such as hunting or birding, can kindle a lifelong attraction to nature, from which an individual will explore other recreational options on their own. If we can help more Pennsylvanians connect with the outdoors, even through one activity, it may encourage them to seek additional experiences and skills.

We could engage our many local chambers of commerce to work with us to change the negative slant many media outlets give to the weather.

Glum forecasts in the weather report may have a dampening affect on outdoor recreation and tourism in their communities. “Good News Outdoors” is how one Task Force member characterized weather broadcasts in Colorado, where predicted snowfalls are communicated as bonus incentives to hit the ski slopes and cross-country trails. Guidelines for weather forecasters provided by the



United Kingdom's Meteorological Office offer a charming—and telling—example:

Old style : *It's another miserable day for the far north of Scotland with strong winds and some rain. Last night's mist and fog will clear, leaving a rather cloudy day for Central England. It will turn chilly over-night in Devon and Cornwall, and temperatures will fall to 8C (46F).*

New style: *Leave those rain-coats at home. Sunny spells will bring unseasonably mild temperatures of 18C (46F) to London and the South East. It will be a dry day, with gentle breezes at Blackpool for the Conservative Party conference, which you can see live on BBC Two.*

We could engage media professionals in competition for awards that would recognize articles, columns, books or photographs that best encourage Pennsylvanians to get out and try a new outdoor activity, or experience a new destination.

All outdoor outreach, public or private, should highlight enjoyable activities and simple, consistent messages about stewardship of our natural resources, conveyed through as many outlets as possible. Leave No Trace, a non-profit group that advocates and educates for



Big Idea: Wildlife is an alluring aspect of the outdoors that can draw people into lifelong connections with nature. Improving public understanding of and support for a wide range of experiences that bring people into contact with wild living things will benefit our citizens and the sustainability of our environment.

better stewardship of camping, hiking and water-trail resources, uses simple, consistent conservation and stewardship messaging that can be adopted by virtually any individual or outdoor organization.

Pennsylvania needs to be open to redefining outdoor experience to embrace those connections that may be more intriguing to younger generations, like geocaching and podcasts.

These can offer gateways to entice technology-proficient youth into spending more time in the outdoors, with or without electronic gadgets. In Cleveland, the MetroParks' Institute for the Great Outdoors introduces beginners to geocaching, while the Cleveland city parks take part by hiding their own caches within the parks. Any city, state or county park in an urban area could host a pilot geocach-

ing program. Hidden caches could have an ecological theme, and hidden messages could interpret the history or ecology of the region. The initial emphasis, however, should be on having fun outdoors.

Human beings have long been attracted to and fascinated by wildlife. Our traditional conceptions of “the outdoors” and outdoor recreation are rooted in the pursuit of wild birds, mammals and fish. Encounters with wildlife offer a thrilling contrast to daily routines and represent powerful potential for building, and strengthening, connections to the outdoors and nature. Wildlife experiences can profoundly influence personal stewardship and outdoor participation throughout a person's entire life. Our challenge, emphasized by conference attendees, public comments and the work of the Task Force, is to facilitate and encourage more of our citizens' interaction with wildlife in a wide variety of ways.

Pennsylvania boasts a deep tradition of connection to nature through fishing and hunting. Through creative outreach and with inviting, welcoming opportunities for families, youth, seniors and



urban residents, these activities can continue to inspire lifelong attachment to the outdoors.

Most committed anglers and hunters were introduced to these pursuits by a family member or friend. Those who may be attracted to fishing and hunting but have no contact with a relative or friend who fishes or hunts need other avenues, such as mentoring programs.

These programs offer new opportunities to the uninitiated—including many youth, women, and urban residents—and could also provide sportsmen's organizations with a purpose that could motivate and excite their members.

Mentoring young people or families can provide a meaningful avenue for senior club members to stay connected to the outdoors.

Many non-profit organizations and our Game and Fish and Boat commissions offer a range of such introductory programs to prospective hunters and anglers. The National Wild Turkey Federation's state chapter runs Women in the Outdoors events across the state every year. These events invite women to sample shooting sports, archery, fishing, canoeing and turkey calling in a non-threatening, helpful setting among peers.



Fishing is particularly well suited to mentoring and the state Fish and Boat Commission has instituted several programs with the potential to entice new anglers. These include staffed Family Fishing events, scheduled at state or county parks near population centers with volunteer mentors available to instruct and help families who want to try fishing. The events focus on basic skills—knot tying, introductory tackle use, baits—that families need to fish on their own. Local sportsmen's groups and individuals are

important contributors of volunteer time.

The Department of Community Economic Development and local tourist agencies and convention and visitors bureaus work with the Commission to offer fishing or boating outings combined with other attractions as “package events.” Families taking part can fish or boat together, participate in informal educational sessions provided by state park staff or local outfitters, and enjoy discount rates on rental cabins, meals and other

amenities. Families without their own tackle, whether participating in these formal events or not, can borrow gear through the Fish and Boat Commission's Fishing Tackle Loaner Program. Additionally, the Commission grants about \$60,000 each year to local organizations to buy tackle for similar local lending initiatives, and for educational programs.

Pheasants Forever and local sportsmen's groups work with the Game Commission to offer mentored youth pheasant hunts each fall. The Commission has established a special youth pheasant season before the general season and provides farm-raised pheasants to participating clubs. The clubs recruit and mentor young hunters in the field. A number of local groups also sponsor mentored youth turkey hunts, taking advantage of youth hunt dates. Additionally, supportive of mentoring, three years ago Governor Rendell signed Families Afield legislation, which allows licensed hunters to accompany youngsters (no minimum age) in one-on-one mentored hunting experiences. These efforts depend on volunteer contribution of time and resources.



Our messages about hunting, and in some respects fishing, can better communicate factors such as ecosystem management, environmental stewardship, and eating fresh, natural “locally produced” foods.

Such messages could enhance hunting's appeal to new potential participants.

A program like Hunters Sharing the Harvest, in which hunters donate venison (low in fat, high in nutrients) to local food banks is an example that underscores the relevance of hunting to non-traditional audiences. Research on public attitudes toward hunting in Indiana found that programs such as Hunters Sharing the Harvest are a “top motivating factor” that might encourage non-hunters to hunt, and existing hunters to hunt more.¹⁸

We see exciting opportunities to connect more people with wildlife through activities like birding, wildlife viewing, wildlife photography, and wildlife-based nature tourism.

Numerous festivals and celebrations highlight the state's diverse wildlife and opportunities to enjoy it. Currently, festivals celebrating elk, bald eagles, woodcock and waterfowl draw numerous visitors every year. These events could be modeled and duplicated to

attract attention to other wildlife and natural features around the state, motivating new enthusiasts to appreciate and conserve these resources. The annual Festival of the Birds at Presque Isle State Park in Erie encourages families to enjoy and learn about migrating birds and the



unique habitats on Presque Isle peninsula. An annual “Ramp Festival” at Mt. Morris, Greene County, celebrates the regional Appalachian ritual of collecting and eating wild leeks in nearby forests. Along these lines, the Laurel Highlands of southwestern Pa. could celebrate spring warblers, as the

forested mountains there attract abundant and diverse migrating woodland songbirds.

Regional outdoor initiatives like the Pennsylvania Wilds engage residents and visitors through elk-viewing, birding, non-powered boating, fishing and hunting.

creative outreach to travelers to provide outdoor information is the Colorado Division of Wildlife's motorist broadcast paired with highway signs that encourage travelers to tune in to hear messages on Colorado fishing, hunting and wildlife viewing.

Pennsylvania's 117 state parks, several located near larger cities, have great potential for offering wildlife experiences. Many offer interpretive programs, which often highlight park wildlife.

The effectiveness and outreach of state, county and city park educational programs could be improved through the compilation of a database of all parks offering such programs and communication among agencies around shared resources, technical expertise, and promotional efforts.

Despite recent participation declines in some activities and the apparent distraction of younger people away from the outdoors, outdoor recreation wields a powerful impact on the nation's economy, contributing \$730 billion annually, supporting nearly 6.5 million jobs, generating \$289 billion in sales and services, and more than \$87 billion in federal and state taxes across the country. Encompassing biking, camping, fishing, hunting,



paddling, snow sports, trail use and wildlife viewing, active outdoor recreation in the Middle Atlantic census division (New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) generates \$38.3 billion annually, supports 357,258 jobs, generates \$28 billion in sales and services, and \$4.5 billion in federal and state taxes.¹⁹

Pennsylvania's abundant natural resources support many "traditional" businesses in an outdoor setting, such as farming and forestry, and an outdoor recreation sector of guides, outfitters and gear purveyors. Alternative energy development is creating new economic opportunities. And, as the state mounts its response to widespread landscape degradation from generations past, especially acid mine drainage, the environmental restoration industry continues to evolve. All these industries offer work experience and long-term career opportunities.

We should explore how to expand business support programs to include the many businesses that make up the outdoor economy. DCED's First Industries Program provides loans and grants in the agriculture and tourism sectors, and could be a model for expanding such efforts to support nontraditional outdoor businesses. **Reducing the liability exposure of out-**

door recreation providers would also help boost their growth and accessibility to more state residents and should be explored. The National Outdoor Leadership School in Wyoming is a possible model for addressing liability. NOLS provides risk management consulting and workshops that focus on

lion of investment, according to the 2006 report *Renewable Energy Potential: A Case Study of Pennsylvania*.

The growing environmental restoration sector offers new markets to existing Pennsylvania businesses in such areas as mining, construction, engineering and

Pennsylvania, and a firm connection to nature and the outdoors. The annual value of Pennsylvania farm products is about \$5 billion, and farm-related businesses support 15 percent of all employment in the state. Especially promising for new careers in agriculture, and for forging connections to nature among consumers, is Pennsylvania's growing emphasis on organic and locally-grown produce and meat products. Consumers spend about \$55 million each year on products bought directly from Pennsylvania farms.²¹

The diverse outdoor economy offers ways for people to go beyond recreation and connect with the outdoors through their daily work.

We should make a deliberate effort to connect our youth with this variety of outdoor careers. We can begin by understanding the range of skills required for these jobs, investigating current opportunities in education, training and workforce development, and communicating these opportunities to students. Sponsoring career days in the outdoors could be one approach. The apprentice program at Awbury Arboretum in Philadelphia illustrates another approach. Urban high school students in the program develop job skills

Big Idea: The outdoor economy is big business. Diverse "green" jobs and businesses can be an economic engine for Pennsylvania that also serves to connect people with the outdoor environment.



reducing risks for businesses offering outdoor adventures.

The job creation potential of national renewable energy investment in Pennsylvania is 14,306 (5,298 direct and 9,007 indirect) jobs created in wind, solar, geothermal and biomass for every \$1 bil-

agriculture, and could trigger new entrepreneurial start-ups. Efforts should be made to communicate with local businesses about opportunities in the restoration of lands and waters.

Agriculture remains a major economic engine in



in urban forestry, landscaping, and green space development and maintenance. On the national level, the U.S. Department of Labor's Job Corps provides skills training, academic opportunities and career support for youth in outdoor professions such as urban forestry.

We can watch and learn from early 'green-collar' job training and placement initiatives across the country such as Oakland, California's Green Job Corps to see how Pennsylvania might adopt successful models and seek funding through the Federal Green Jobs Act of 2007. Green collar jobs are "blue collar jobs in green businesses—that is, manual labor jobs in businesses whose products and services directly improve environmental quality." Examples include jobs in bike repair, furniture making from environmentally certified and recycled wood, non-toxic residential and business cleaning, park and open space maintenance, solar installation and maintenance, and car and truck mechanic, production, and gas-station jobs related to alternative fuels.²²

We should engage professional associations, regional and statewide sustainable business networks, employment advocacy organizations and many others in ex-

Big Idea: Giving Pennsylvanians increased and improved access to natural areas is an essential precursor to maintaining and increasing outdoor use, both on private and public lands.



ploring strategies to support and grow our green economy. Public input during the post-conference process ranked improved access to outdoor sites as critically important in connecting people to nature. **One place to begin improving access is to talk with, or survey, Pennsylvanians to understand how they use outdoor resources and how they would like to use them in the future.**

A good vehicle for public outreach is the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, currently undergoing a five-year update. The plan update includes broad surveying on various outdoor recreation needs and interests, and could be fine-tuned to explore physical barriers to access and cultural barriers

such as language on signs, maps and brochures in greater detail.

People recreate in nature on both public and private lands. **We can provide better access to the public resource of parks, forests, trails and rivers by adding new public lands of significant natural value.** Most important in the immediate future would be public acquisition of tracts that connect people to existing public lands.

We should also assess our interpretive and directional signs and printed materials to make sure that the invitation to enjoy the outdoors is extended to various ethnic or cultural groups. For example, the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum in

Philadelphia, operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provides signage and access for non-English speakers and disabled visitors.

Privately owned fields and forests comprise about three-quarters of Pennsylvania's surface area and will always play a huge role in outdoor recreation, in some cases for the general public, in others for the owners and their guests. **We need to develop a better understanding of landowners' attitudes toward recreational use and identify opportunities to keep private lands open for public use where it is compatible with landowner values.**

Public access to fishable waterways is critically important to Pennsylvanians' opportunity to connect with the outdoors through fishing. Currently there are several areas in the state where public access to streams is in jeopardy. The steelhead trout streams that flow into Lake Erie provide an example of a popular outdoor resource that depends on public access to private land, where proactive efforts to maintain access are meeting with success. Fishing for these large, powerful trout attracts a large number of anglers to a small number of streams, most of which flow across



private land. The Fish and Boat Commission is working with local angling clubs to improve relations between anglers and landowners. On stream sections where access is critically threatened, the Commission is acquiring public access rights. This is a successful, though expensive, course for the agency, and the cost limits the degree to which it can be replicated across the state.

Another way to address this access concern is to work with municipalities and private industry to establish greater fishing and non-powered boating access to rivers in our large cities.

Liability concerns also influence public access to private property. We should provide landowners with an understanding of the Recreational Use of Land and Water Act, which limits liability of property owners who make their land available to the public for recreation free of charge.

We recommend development of a guide to public access, with model permits and hold-harmless agreements for private landowners. As an example, the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association has created a variety of model easements for landowners and land trusts, many of which include hold-harmless language as an encouragement to owners with lands in conservation



easements to keep those lands open to appropriate forms of outdoor recreation.

Educational programs are another important tool for promoting respect for landowners and outdoor stewardship among those engaged in activities including fishing, hunting, boating, hiking, camping and motorized outdoor sports such as ATV, snowmobile and personal watercraft riding. For example, the PA Game Commission's *Hunting Digest* provides information on hunter etiquette on private lands. PGC also holds classes for hunters on the subject.

We should also explore development and distribution of model signage that would enable landowners to permit some activities of their choosing while restricting others. For example, some landowners who currently restrict all forms of hunting might be willing to

allow quiet, inconspicuous types of hunting, such as archery or turkey hunting, if signs announcing that intention were available. The Game Commission's existing Cooperative Safety Zone program provides landowners with warning signs to alert hunters of nearby dwellings, easing landowners' concerns about keeping land open to public hunting. The program is popular among farmers and other landowners and could be a building block for other creative uses of signs.

Establishment of a liability or insurance fund, or tax credits for private landowners who permit appropriate public use could also help keep lands open.

Time affects access to the outdoors at least as much as physical, cultural and legal constraints. Numerous surveys identify a lack of time as the main reason people drop out of an outdoor pursuit or

fail to try it. **Pennsylvania's resource management agencies could examine and test adjustments to fishing and hunting seasons that make it easier to participate in the midst of demanding personal schedules.** There may be possibilities to adjust start/end dates for hunting and fishing seasons to include available weekends and holidays, or to take advantage of different climatic conditions across the state. An excellent example of more creative scheduling is the Fish and Boat Commission's dual opening of the trout season, which opens two weeks earlier in southeastern counties where the weather warms earlier in the spring. The relatively minor change results in several additional weeks of fishing opportunity.

We can also look at the impact of a school year that begins before Labor Day on outdoor recreation, outdoor businesses, and family travel opportunities in Pennsylvania. Starting the school year one week later could give families an additional three-day weekend to travel, enjoy the outdoors and one another, and support recreation-based businesses across the state.



carrying the connections into the future

Big Idea: To continue this good work, we need ongoing collaborative efforts among the entities that influence and incentivize Pennsylvanians to connect with the outdoors.

The Governor's Outdoor Conference Task Force has been honored to serve the citizens of Pennsylvania by developing this report. Our assessment of the issues, coupled with our review of relevant literature, shows that for a growing number of people in Pennsylvania and beyond, everyday experiences offer fewer and diminishing contacts with the natural world. It is also clear that the widening gap between outdoor connections and routine human experience is linked to falling levels of physical activity, a major contributor to obesity and related health problems.

The deepening divide between people and nature, propelled by a lack of free time, sprawling development and other familiar aspects of modern life, does not serve Pennsylvania's 12 million people well, nor does it point to a healthful and productive future. Familiarity with Pennsylvania's streams, woods and wildlife motivated our original conservationists and inspired public support for Pennsylvania's enviable program of environmental stewardship. Pennsylvanians like Gifford Pinchot and Rachel Carson worked to conserve natural resources because living things and wild places were a part of their own life experiences. As our generation's relationship with nature weakens from simple and avoidable lack of contact, future Pennsylvanians may feel no inspiration to conserve, protect and steward their natural outdoor heritage. It is an indisputable truth that people seldom care for that which they have not known.

Our work as a task force leads us to conclude that if Pennsylvanians are to enjoy the best possible health, the highest quality of life, and sustainable prosperity in the future—a prosperity rooted in livable landscapes that will attract and nourish economic investment—we must now rebuild, create and maintain connections between ourselves and nature.

The charge of the Governor's Outdoor Task Force is complete, but its findings justify a greater work to be carried forward, tapping the creativity, cooperation, and resources of private business, outdoor organizations, government and committed individuals. Our natural resources and our people—in other words, our future—merit the effort.

We therefore recommend formal establishment of a **Governor's Commission on People and Outdoor Connections**, comprised of representatives from state agencies, local governments, non-profit organizations, and private sector businesses, with a charge from the Governor to work with all relevant parties, public and private, to engage the public and to carry forward the work set forth in this report.



To be successful, this work will need to be more comprehensive, more continuous and of longer duration than an entirely volunteer effort can be expected to accomplish. The Commission should engage professionals capable of planning, communications and monitoring functions. Furthermore, it should be required to submit an annual report to the Governor, detailing its activities and its achievements.

As a guide to establishing the Commission, we propose the State Conservation Commission as an appropriate model. The SCC carries out a program of protecting and managing soil and water resources throughout the Commonwealth. Several structural and organizational features of the SCC are attractive, such as its board of 11 seats reserved for diverse representatives from many aspects of the public and private sectors and annually alternating chairmanship shared between relevant state agencies.

There has been widespread and fervent support for maintaining outdoor connections expressed through the Governor's Outdoor Conference process. The Governor now has the opportunity to shape a cooperative body to carry forward the values and ideas from that process in the way that he establishes the Commission, delineates its board representation, and offers and solicits shared resources to carry out its work.

It will be important for the Commission to think creatively about financial resources from its inception. Funding of Pennsylvania's natural resource conservation, outdoor recreation, public lands and environmental education initiatives is a major concern and will become more critical in the future. The state's Growing Greener programs, which include funds for watershed restoration, county-based conservation initiatives, and key public lands acquisition will expire in the next few years; sales of hunting and fishing licenses, which pay for fish and wildlife conservation and support the outdoor recreation it provides are declining; and school district budgets are stressed. Meanwhile, our environmental challenges will grow more complex, and our citizens' need for outdoor opportunities will become more diverse. Due to the strategic importance of outdoor connections in the health and welfare of Pennsylvanians we recommend that the Governor's Commission on People and Outdoor Connections initial mandated responsibilities include:

- Establish a strategic plan against which it will measure the outcome of its efforts and report its progress;
- Study and report on current conservation/outdoor funding in Pennsylvania and how it impacts people's connections to the outdoors;
- Consider and explore other state examples for policy choices regarding methods to broaden inclusion and outreach to stakeholders and funding support;
- Make recommendations on the above as appropriate; and
- Function, together with partners, as an advocate for outdoor connections in Pennsylvania and for new funding streams to support those connections as appropriate opportunities arise.





Our vision for the future

Finally, we thank the Governor for the opportunity to study the issue of outdoor connections in Pennsylvania. It is our hope that the collective work resulting from the Governor's Outdoor Conference grows and spreads to nurture in all citizens an ethic of environmental responsibility and active, healthy living. So endowed, their personal choices will improve the quality of life for all Pennsylvanians today, and ensure a vibrant and sustainable future.





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Preserving past traditions, creating new connections

governor's outdoor task force



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