



# A Recreation Plan for the State Parks and State Forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds



Prepared for the Pennsylvania  
Department of Conservation  
and Natural Resources

Executive Summary  
May 2006



**FERMATA**  
Prepared by Fermata, Inc.  
of Austin, Texas

# Summary of the Plan Process



Black Moshannon State Park, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

Governor Edward G. Rendell launched the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative to grow outdoor recreation and heritage tourism across north central Pennsylvania consistent with responsible stewardship of the region's public lands. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) plays a lead role in the effort by providing outdoor recreation opportunities on the 27 state parks and 1.3 million acres of state forests in the Wilds.

In August 2004, DCNR established a process to develop a system-wide outdoor recreation plan for its Pennsylvania Wilds parks and forests. The goal is to improve access to recreation opportunities while maintaining stewardship responsibilities. Fermata, Inc. of Austin, Texas was retained to develop the

plan in conjunction with a group of professionals from the agency. The planning process included:

- an inventory of the recreational assets and natural features of state parks, state forests, state gamelands, Allegheny National Forest, and the major Corps of Engineer facilities in the region;
- an assessment of recreational experiences on key locations on state parks and state forests;
- an analysis of the outdoor recreation activity trends in Pennsylvania and the five surrounding states;
- special studies of Cherry Springs State Park and the Pine Creek Valley;
- public outreach and feedback through a project website, and a series of public meetings; and
- development of recommendations for staffing and organization, customer service and information, and infrastructure investments.

This document summarizes the most important findings and recommendations of the planning study. The full report including all the appendices and early action reports is available at: [www.dcnr.state.pa.us](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us). Click on PA Wilds.

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# The Pennsylvania Wilds

## A LEGACY OF CONSERVATION

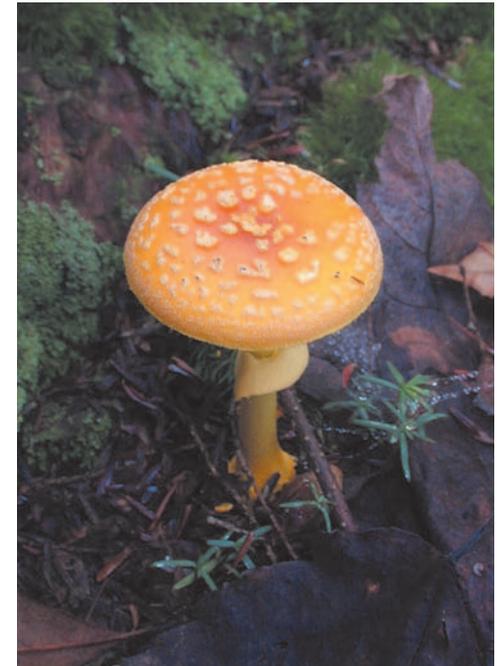
At the dawn of the 20th Century, the unbroken forests of eastern America were laid to waste. The “Big Cut” stripped much of the northeastern U.S. of its forests by the late 1800s, leaving behind heaps of burning debris, blighted mountain slopes, and sediment-choked streams. Pennsylvania forests were fated as well. But today, a modern traveler enters north central Pennsylvania to find a magnificent hardwood forest with elk, bear, white-tailed deer, turkey, and bald eagles. A century of conservation investments and efforts, spurred by the leadership of Pennsylvanians such as Gifford Pinchot, Joseph Rothrock, Myra Lloyd Dock, and Maurice Goddard, resurrected these forests and restored the region that has come to be known as the Pennsylvania Wilds.

For nearly a century, these efforts of Pennsylvanians have primarily focused on re-establishing the integrity and diversity of Pennsylvania’s natural patrimony. Professionals from the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and other resource agencies have spent their entire careers furthering this cause. The effort has been supported by conservation organizations, sportsmen’s clubs, and private landowners. Yet most Americans are unaware of these achievements of the past century, and these restored forests remain generally out of sight and thought, even among Pennsylvanians.

Today, the abundant natural resources within this region present DCNR and other public resource agencies with an unparalleled opportunity to grow and diversify the agency’s recreational offerings. The 2.1 million acres of public land in the Pennsylvania Wilds provide significant prospects to expand and strengthen public involvement in conservation through education and recreation programming.

Expected increases in recreational travel offer communities in the region the opportunity to expand and diversify their local economies. In addition, the Commonwealth is supporting local planning efforts to maintain the quality of life for area residents and the character and charm of their communities.

The goal of the Pennsylvania Wilds initiative is to capitalize on the achievements of the past century and to put these remarkable natural resources to work for all of the Commonwealth’s citizens. The public lands within the Pennsylvania Wilds are comparable in extent to Yellowstone National Park, yet the recreations these lands currently support are limited and constrained. The strategy detailed in this plan represents an opportunity for DCNR to provide high quality outdoor recreation experiences that match the quality and capacities of the exceptional natural resources of this region’s state parks and state forests.



Mushroom, Joel Flewelling

Today, the abundant natural resources within this region present DCNR and other public resource agencies with **an unparalleled opportunity to grow and diversify the agency’s recreational offerings.**

# The Public Lands & Natural Resources of the Pennsylvania Wilds

A TREMENDOUS OUTDOOR RECREATION ASSET



Wild blueberry, Rob Tizard/Fermata, Inc.

The core of the 12-county Pennsylvania Wilds market region is its outstanding natural resource base and its 2.1 million acres of public lands - the largest block of public land between New York City and Chicago. The region is close and accessible to the major population centers of the East with nearly 50 million Americans living within a six-hour drive. But perhaps most important, this is a landscape dominated by nature, with the state's greatest concentration of specially designated lands, streams, and rivers.

The amount and variety of special designated areas speaks to the quality of the experiences available in the Pennsylvania Wilds. With 65% of the state's natural and wild areas, this region has Pennsylvania's greatest concentration of unique and protected landscapes and regionally or nationally significant ecosystems, like boreal bogs and old growth forests. The success of conservation in the Pennsylvania Wilds is evidenced by the reintroduction and subsequent flourishing of extirpated species, the designation of scenic rivers that were once polluted, and the recognition from private organizations, like Audubon, that these public lands provide critical habitat for wildlife species.

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## Natural Assets in the Pennsylvania Wilds

Site Type	Amount	Unit
Important Bird Areas	192,191	acres
National Historic Register	13	sites
National Recreation Area	23,100	acres
National Recreation Trail	19	miles
National Scenic Trail	107	miles
National Wild & Scenic Rivers	139	miles
State Scenic Rivers	46	miles
Pennsylvania Byways	131	miles
National Scenic Byway	29	miles
National Natural Landmarks	5,293	acres
State Natural Areas	42,879	acres
State Wild Areas	100,084	acres
Federal Wilderness Areas	8,940	acres

Opportunities for viewing wildlife are abundant and varied. The Pennsylvania Wilds supports the largest herd of wild elk in the Northeast, and visitation by elk watchers has increased significantly in recent years. Bald eagles nest in many corners of the region and Audubon has designated almost 200,000 acres as Important Bird Areas. River otters and

fishers have been successfully re-introduced to the region. The water resources are outstanding and include many of the state's finest headwaters, and 690 miles (65%) of its Class A Wild Trout Streams. Wild and scenic rivers include the Allegheny, Clarion, and Pine Creek. Lakes in this area are man-made and range in size from less than an acre to the Allegheny Reservoir's 8,000+ acres. The Reservoir is known as a trophy fishery for northern pike, walleye, and muskellunge, and its coldwater discharge supports a great trout fishery downstream.

About 80% of the region's six million acres is forestland including some of the best hardwood forests in the world. It supports a vibrant forest products industry, and is especially known for the world's finest black cherry timber. The Pennsylvania state forests support multiple uses based on the principles of ecosystem management. It has been certified as managed in an environmentally responsible manner consistent with the sustainable forest management principles of the Forest Stewardship Council. It is the largest tract of certified public forestland in North America.

### Public Lands for Recreation

Of the approximately two million acres of public land in the Pennsylvania Wilds, more than half is state forest, managed for multiple uses and offering a primitive to semi-developed recreational experience in a forested landscape. The 500,000-acre Allegheny National Forest provides a range of experiences from primitive to developed settings. State game lands are dispersed and undeveloped,

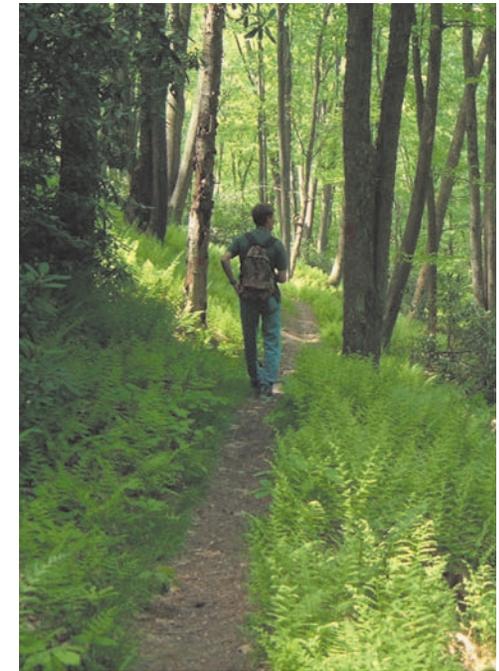
emphasizing wildlife management to support hunting enthusiasts. State parks offer a semi-primitive to developed experience in a setting that ranges from natural ecosystem to landscaped grounds. At Corps of Engineers lakes, the experience is primarily developed in a landscaped setting.

### Trails are the Region's Key Link to the Outdoors

There are over 3,836 miles of recreational trails in the Pennsylvania Wilds, and over 75% are on DCNR lands. These trails are a significant recreational asset for the region and provide access to the interior of the Wilds for visitors of nearly every interest and ability. Snowmobile enthusiasts enjoy the most extensive trail system totaling 1,837 miles, with hiking opportunities following with 1,628 miles.

Many of the state parks serve as trailheads for the major hiking, equestrian, and snowmobile trails on state forests, such as:

- Black Moshannon State Park: Allegheny Front Trail
- Hyner Run State Park: Donut Hole Trail
- Kettle Creek State Park: Kettle Creek Equestrian Trail
- Little Pine State Park: Mid-State Trail
- Ole Bull State Park: Susquehannock Trail



Beartown Rocks Trail, Kittanning State Forest, Brenda Adams-Weyant/Fermata, Inc.

### Opportunity by Trail Type

Trail Type	Miles
Accessible	81.66
ATV	267.53
Backpack	683.72
Bicycle	938.09
Equine	539.72
Hike	1628.25
Interpretive	15.17
Snowmobile	1837.70
Cross-country Ski	642.47

# Recreation Trends

## A CHANGING PATTERN OF DEMAND



Chuck Keiper Trail, Sprout State Forest,  
Brenda Adams-Weyant/Fermata, Inc.

Since about 50% of outdoor recreationists are only passively involved or engaged....attracting these individuals will require additional visitor support in terms of information, visitor services, signage, and recreational programming.

**T**he trends in outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania and the surrounding five states (the market region) indicate shifting demands and desires on the part of the recreational public. These changes will challenge how DCNR strives to serve its traditional customers as it reaches out to accommodate new visitors.

The plan researched recreational trends in Pennsylvania and the surrounding states - New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Maryland, and West Virginia - through a special analysis of the data contained in the National Survey of Recreation and the Environment, 1995-2004. The chart on page 7 summarizes the size and growth trends for the key outdoor recreation activities appropriate for the Pennsylvania Wilds.

### Regional Recreation Preferences

The recreational public within the six-state Pennsylvania market region is much more urban than the traditional customer base of the public lands in the Pennsylvania Wilds. As the marketing of the Pennsylvania Wilds expands beyond its traditional base, more of these urban recreationists will be introduced to the region. In order to provide quality outdoor recreation experiences to these uninitiated visitors from urban areas, DCNR will need to improve its facilities, visitor information, public outreach efforts, and customer service.

Since about 50% of outdoor recreationists are only passively involved or engaged, (a group which represents an important target audience for conservation education) attracting these individuals will require additional visitor support in terms of information, visitor services, signage, and recreational programming. The other half of outdoor recreationists is generally committed to one or more outdoor recreation pursuits. They include those groups preferring nature pursuits; water-based activities; hunting, fishing, and motorized activities; backcountry hiking and camping. These "specialists" have high information demands based on their specific recreation of choice, and if satisfied, many will find the Pennsylvania Wilds provides an excellent location for their sport.



Clarion River, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

### Size and Growth of Key Outdoor Recreation Activities, Pennsylvania and Surrounding States

Recreation	Size (millions) *	Growth (95-04)
Developed camping	9.7	33%
Primitive camping	5.2	18%
Visiting historic sites	21.1	8%
Visit prehistoric/archaeological sites	8.3	18%
Big game hunting	3.4	17%
Small game hunting	2.6	8%
Migratory bird hunting	0.5	-8%
Off-Road Driving	6.9	24%
Visiting an Interpretive Center	24.6	8%
Driving for pleasure	23.6	NA
Sightseeing	22.7	-5%
Road biking	16.8	37%
Day hiking	13.7	37%
Backpacking	3.7	23%
Visiting a wilderness or primitive area	12.6	NA
Mountain Biking	9.1	NA
Horseback riding	2.6	NA

Recreation	Size (millions) *	Growth (95-04)
View/photograph other wildlife	20.1	47%
View/photograph natural scenery	26.9	NA
View/photograph wildflowers, trees	19.9	NA
View/photograph birds	14.9	27%
View/photograph the sky (stargazing)	NA	NA
View/photograph fish	10.2	86%
Visiting a waterside	10.4	3%
Coldwater fishing	5.3	24%
Canoeing	4.0	24%
Kayaking	1.4	169%
Swimming in natural waters	18.3	4%
Warmwater fishing	8.2	10%
Snowmobiling	2.2	21%
Cross-country skiing	1.5	-1%
Sledding	8.2	26%
Ice fishing	0.6	24%
Snowshoeing	0.4	NA

\* Based on data collected from 2000-2004. Source: National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE).



Hal Korber

The challenge for DCNR will be in diversifying its recreational constituency and audience without alienating traditional public land users such as hunters and anglers. Fortunately, this immense public landscape offers the agency the opportunity to accommodate a diversity of recreational interests and activities.

New visitors attracted to the Pennsylvania Wilds are likely to include those from the largest recreational activity groups, dominated by urban residents. Many of these prefer look-and-learn activities that require limited physical exertion. The plan recommends a special emphasis to develop programs for these activity groups:

- visiting nature/interpretive centers
- sightseeing/scenic driving
- biking (mountain, rail-trail and road)
- hiking, backpacking, primitive camping
- viewing and photographic activities (birds, wildlife, natural scenery)
- canoeing/kayaking

### Legacy Recreations (Hunting and Fishing)

Legacy activities (those outdoor recreations that are traditional in the U.S.) such as hunting, fishing, hiking, and camping remain strong interests within Pennsylvania and the adjacent five states, although their growth rates are generally sluggish. These legacy recreations have traditionally connected man to this land. The challenge for DCNR will be in diver-

sifying its recreational constituency and audience without alienating traditional public land users such as hunters and anglers. Fortunately, this immense public landscape offers the agency the opportunity to accommodate a diversity of recreational interests and activities.

DCNR currently provides an impressive variety of public hunting and fishing opportunities. Across the Commonwealth, the agency provides public access to 2.4 million acres of DCNR land for hunting and fishing; leases 3,000 sites for hunting camps and cabins; opens an additional 500 miles of state forest roads during hunting season; and maintains important habitat for game species through food plots and other forms of habitat management.

Yet there are additional opportunities, particularly within the Pennsylvania Wilds, to expand public hunting and fishing opportunities while elevating the quality of the recreational experience itself. Fishing, in particular, has demonstrated an ability to adapt to the changing social environment, and specialties such as fly-fishing may be important sources of expansion and recruitment. This will require a cooperative effort with the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the agencies that have primary responsibility for hunting and fishing in the Commonwealth.

# DCNR's Key Recreational Assets

## MODEL AND SIGNATURE SITES

The plan included a substantial inventory and assessment process in order to recommend the best sites that support the recreational activities appropriate for the DCNR parks and forests of the Pennsylvania Wilds. These sites are recommended as priorities for investment as well as promotion.

The process involved all 27 state parks and eight forest districts administered by DCNR in the region, and began with interviews of the key field staff managing these lands. It also included the development of a comprehensive inventory of all outdoor recreation sites, trails, and facilities. (This general inventory also included lands, trails, and recreational facilities of the Allegheny National Forest, State Gamelands, facilities of the Army Corps of Engineers, and Special Regulation Waters of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission).

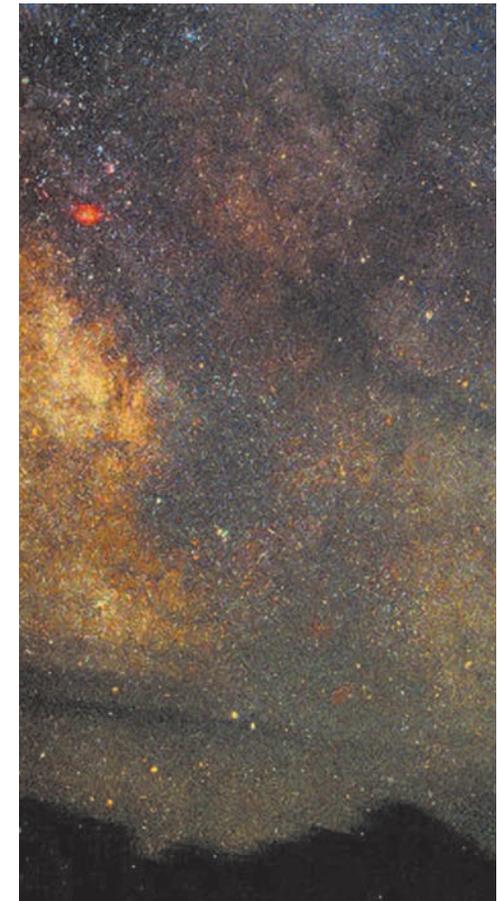
Site assessments were conducted at 64 locations selected in consultation with DCNR field and central office staff. The intent was to include several candidate locations for each recreational activity determined to be appropriate for the DCNR lands in the region.

Fermata staff conducted the site assessments using its Applied Site Assessment Protocol™ (ASAP) as a guide. This protocol assesses the value of any

specific natural location as a nature tourism destination, using a scoring system to rank sites relative to their tourism, rather than ecological, value. The result of the process is a set of recommendations identifying those locations considered to be *Signature Sites* where the resources are best suited for specific recreations. In addition, the process recommends some of the signature sites be developed as *Models*, and receive immediate attention and or investment. These *Model Sites* will serve as examples of the best in outdoor recreation that the Commonwealth has to offer in the Pennsylvania Wilds. The *Model Sites* are recommended as a priority for implementation and will serve as examples to guide the design and implementation of other *Signature Sites* (see table on pages 10 & 11).

The plan includes recommendations that would upgrade the quality of the facilities at *Model Sites* to provide the highest quality recreational experience for visitors.

A critical attribute of most of these *Model Sites* is the connection to surrounding communities. For example, the Pine Creek Rail Trail is a tremendous opportunity to connect downtown Wellsboro and Jersey Shore to a premier outdoor recreation experience. The Cherry Springs Dark Skies does the same for Galeton and may now influence the borough's lighting regulations in order to protect



Dave Wymer

## Model and Signature Sites

this resource. Ridgway is now involved in a riverfront strategic planning effort to enhance its connection to the Clarion River. These connections to communities give DCNR an opportunity to partner with citizens, businesses, and local governments to stimulate the renewal of communities across the Pennsylvania Wilds.

Trails are the critical connection between recreations and resources in the Pennsylvania Wilds. The plan recommends that recreational trails receive a priority for investment and that they be strategically examined to identify opportunities for additional links to communities throughout the region.

The Model Sites are recommended as a priority for implementation and **will serve as examples to guide the design and implementation of other Signature Sites.**

Recreation	Model Site	Signature Sites			
Developed Camping	Black Moshannon SP	Ole Bull SP	Clear Creek SP	Hills Creek SP	Little Pine SP
Visit Historic Sites	Implement Lumber Heritage Region Interpretive Plan				
Visit Prehistoric, Archaeologic Sites					
Visit Interpretive Centers	Sinnemahoning SP Portal	Cherry Springs SP Portal	Leonard Harrison SP Portal	Cook Forest SP Portal	
	SB Elliott SP Gateway				
	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Center at Benezette (tentative)				
Driving for Pleasure	Elk Scenic Drive	Bucktail Scenic Byway	PA 44/144 Scenic Byway Proposal	Clarion River Byway Proposal	US Route 6
Sightseeing	Implement Lumber Heritage Region Interpretive Plan				
Day Hiking	Cook Forest SP	Mount Brodhead Trail: Susquehannock SF	Fred Woods Trail: Elk SF	Ole Bull SP	Black Moshannon SP
		Clarion River Trail: Allegheny NF			
Backpacking	Quehanna Trail: Elk and Moshannon SFs, Parker Dam SP	North Country National Scenic Trail: Cook Forest SP, Kittanning SF	West Rim Trail: Tioga SF	Black Forest Trail: Tiadaghton SF	Chuck Keiper Trail: Sproul SF
		Susquehannock Trail: Susquehannock SF	Allegheny Front Trail: Moshannon SF		
Visit a Wilderness or Primitive Area	Hammersley Wild Area: Susquehannock SF	Quehanna Wild Area: Moshannon & Elk SFs	Letterman & Burns Run Wild Areas: Sproul SF	Pine Tree Trail Natural Area: Elk SF	Tamarack Swamp Natural Area: Sproul SF
		Cranberry Swamp Natural Area: Sproul SF	Squaretimber Wild Area: Elk SF (Proposed)		
Mountain Biking	Eagleton Mine Camp Trail: Sproul SF				
Railtrail Biking	Pine Creek Rail-Trail				

## Model and Signature Sites (continued)

Recreation	Model Site	Signature Sites			
Horseback Riding	Kettle Creek Equestrian Trail: Sproul SF and Kettle Creek SP	Thunder Mountain Equestrian Trail: Elk SF	Keystone Mountain Country Trail System: Tioga, Tiadaghton, Susquehannock & Sproul SFs		
View/Photograph Other Wildlife	Sinnemahoning SP	Hills Creek SP	Bald Eagle SP	Elk Scenic Drive	
View/Photograph Natural Scenery	Hyner View SP	Beartown Rocks: Kittanning SF	Leonard Harrison SP	Colton Point SP	Fish Dam Overlook: Sproul SF
View/Photograph Wildflowers, Trees	Forest Cathedral Natural Area: Cook Forest SP	Bald Eagle SP			
View/Photograph Birds	Bald Eagle SP	Cook Forest SP	Sinnemahoning SP	Black Moshannon SP	Susquehanna River Birding & Wildlife Trail
View/Photograph the Sky	Cherry Springs SP	Fish Dam Overlook: Sproul SF			
Visit a waterside	Black Moshannon SP	Wykoff Run Road: Elk SF	Pine Creek and tributaries	Rattlesnake Rock: Tioga SF	
Coldwater Fishing	Kettle Creek	Pine Creek and tributaries	Fishing Creek (Clinton County)	Clarion River	Allegheny River
Flatwater Paddling	Clarion National Wild & Scenic River	Pine Creek State Scenic River	Allegheny Wild & Scenic River	West Branch Susquehanna River	
Whitewater Paddling	Pine Creek State Scenic River				
Swimming in Natural Waters	Parker Dam SP	Bald Eagle SP	Chapman SP	Hills Creek SP	
Warmwater Fishing	Sayers Lake: Bald Eagle SP	Hills Creek SP			
Cross-country Skiing	Denton Hill Cross-country Trail: Susquehannock SF	Black Forest Area Cross-Country Ski System: Tiadaghton SF	Quehanna Cross-Country Ski Trail System: Elk and Moshannon SFs		
Winter Activities	Chapman SP				



Camping at West Branch Sojourn, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

Site assessments were conducted at 64 locations selected in consultation with DCNR field and central office staff. **The intent was to include several candidate locations for each recreational activity** determined to be appropriate for the DCNR lands in the region.

# Staffing and Recreational Programming

## RECOMMENDATIONS



Sproul State Forest, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

Fermata recommends organizing on two levels: a region-wide planning and administration team, and an operations and maintenance team at a multi-unit level.

Fermata has studied staffing levels and requirements in all of the state forests and parks within the Pennsylvania Wilds. The results of these studies have been incorporated into the full report. However, one fact derived from this research stands out above the rest. For DCNR and the Pennsylvania Wilds to expand, diversify, and offer the highest quality recreational opportunities, existing staff will need to be augmented.

Fermata is recommending the formation of recreation units (aggregations of existing state forests and parks) as a cost-effective approach to support and coordinate recreational activities in the region. In addition, recreational units will allow the agency to begin to view recreation and public use across bureau and unit boundaries.

Yet Fermata also believes that DCNR should be prepared to act on these recommendations in advance of significant staff increases. Additional resources already have been invested by the state in the Pennsylvania Wilds (such as the Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Team referenced below). With the cooperation of regional staff, opportunities exist to better allocate personnel and resources.

Fermata also recommends placing recreation professionals at all levels of the organization to improve the level of recreational service. The team structure Fermata recommends organizing on two levels: a region-wide planning and administration team, and an operations and maintenance team at a multi-unit level.

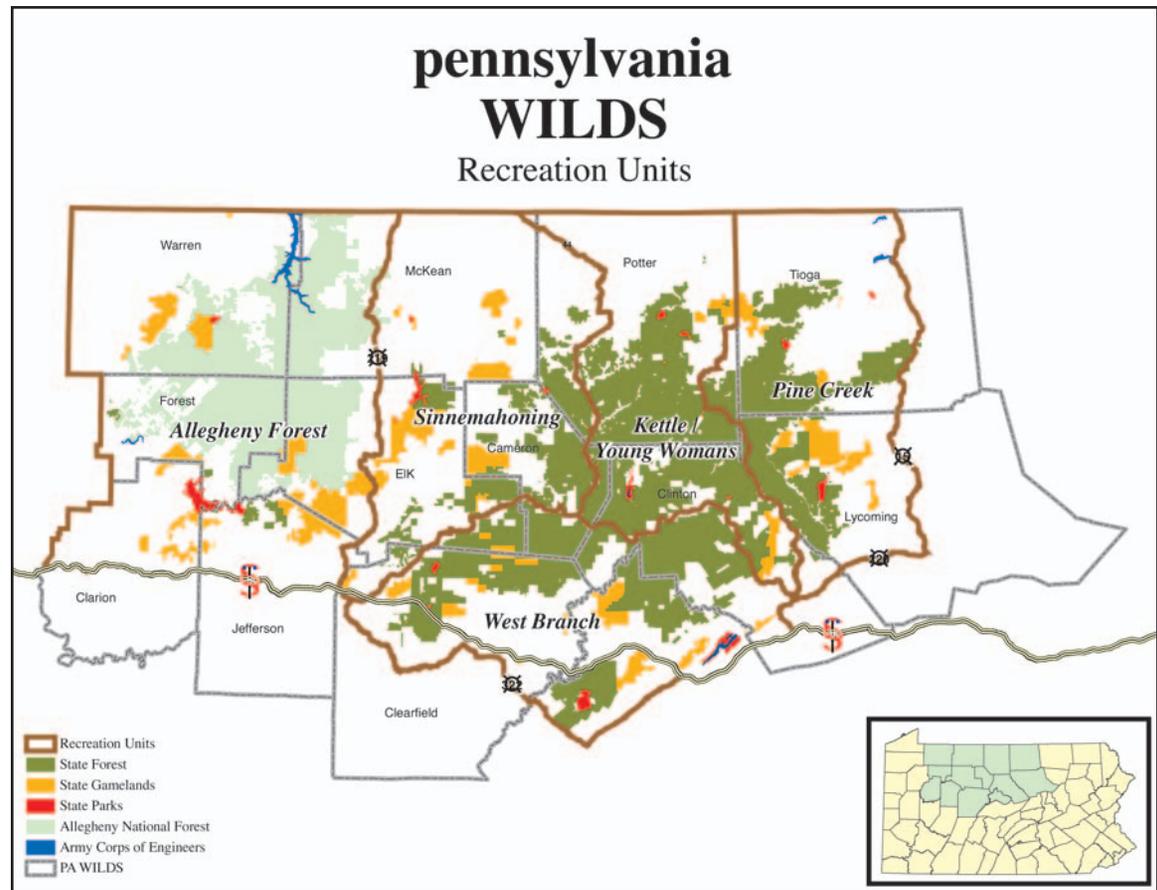
### Wilds Recreation Team

The DCNR Wilds Recreation Team (Team) should be comprised of planning, design, and interpretive staff with experience within all levels of the agency - central office, region, and units. This five-person

team is currently being created by DCNR and will be charged with the primary responsibility to insure implementation of the plan's recommendations in the field. The Team will provide interpretive planning, and coordinate improvement to visitor services, public information, and recreational programming. The Team will work to insure that service is customer focused; that policies protect resources without being overly restrictive; that information meets user needs as well as communicating agency messages; and that recreation is considered when other land uses are discussed. The end goal is to permeate the agency with a commitment to service quality. The Team should also develop service quality guidelines; insure the consistent application of the guidelines; evaluate the appropriateness of new recreations on public land; draft and recommend recreation and public use rules; and help prioritize capital investments.

### Wilds Recreation Unit Teams

Interpretive, operations, and maintenance staff are recommended to be coordinated as part of a support network within a specific Recreation Unit, defined for the purpose of this report as one landscape-scale resource (such as a watershed) with associated state parks and forests. Expected operational duties are those typical of any recreational facility, such as taking reservations, law enforcement, trail patrols, snowmobile trail grooming, lifeguarding, cleaning, and mowing.



The five recreational units recommended for the DCNR facilities in the Pennsylvania Wilds are shown in the map above.

These networks will be especially helpful to DCNR to provide technical support to make existing staff more effective. For example, state parks currently have staffing in place that is experienced in manag-

The end goal is to permeate the agency with a commitment to service quality.



West Branch Sojourn, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

...DCNR will need to offer a wide range of recreational programming at its state parks and forests. **Facilitation and nurturing of the recreational experience will be required to attract these underrepresented and underserved segments of the population to the Pennsylvania Wilds.**

ing recreation and these skills should be transferable to state forest settings as well. The recreation staff within each Recreation Unit should supply technical and labor support for field issues such as providing consistent approaches to law enforcement problems; identifying common maintenance problems and brainstorming solutions; sharing specialized equipment; advising agency staff on managing problem areas; assisting with storm damage cleanup; concentrating efforts to maintain trails; coordinating office hours to cover high use periods; and cross-training reception personnel to answer common questions within the Recreation Unit.

## Recreational Programming in the Pennsylvania Wilds

In order to reach out to a more uninitiated population, which is expected to grow across the region, DCNR will need to offer a wide range of recreational programming at its state parks and forests. Facilitation and nurturing of the recreational experience will be required to attract these underrepresented and underserved segments of the population to the Pennsylvania Wilds. Fermata suggests that DCNR develop programming with its own staff, with the private sector, and in partnership with non-profit organizations and the public recreation sector. Programming should range from basic skills training (how to pitch a tent, how to tie a fly) to offering more intensive long-distance hikes and canoe trips.

Expanded recreational programming should be pursued for traditional activities like hunting and fishing. Partnerships with sister agencies such as the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission would be important in developing such programming. In addition, area sportsmen's clubs (as represented by organizations such as the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs) as well as not-for-profits such as the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation and Trout Unlimited should be invited to participate in developing additional programming and training.

# Communications and Information

The connection between resource and recreation is communications. Without an effective communication strategy, the Pennsylvania Wilds will never achieve its full potential. However, to expand the recreational population traveling to the Pennsylvania Wilds, particularly among uninitiated urbanites, will require a more sophisticated and broad-based communications strategy.

The development of a high-quality communication and outreach program is far easier today with the technologies that are now available. The Internet, real-time imagery, pod casts, and blogs are all examples of high-tech tools that are at the agency's disposal. However, there is little use in speaking if no one is listening, and an effort is needed to raise the profile of the Pennsylvania Wilds, the public lands of DCNR, and the agency itself. Therefore, the plan recommends a high priority on the development of a diverse set of informational tools and products.

## Interpretation

All DCNR recreational programming within the Pennsylvania Wilds should include an interpretive component. Interpretation is the communication process that links meanings of resources to the experience and background of visitors in order to provoke a deeper understanding and appreciation

of those resources. Interpretation services are either personal (naturalist programs) or non-personal (exhibits or panels). Providing both will serve a wider diversity of visitors, as some people will seek out facilitated experiences and others will prefer independence. Regardless of their preference, there are many conservation messages that need to be communicated to visitors to increase their awareness, influence their behaviors, and enhance their experience.

There is no single Fermata recommendation that would have more immediate impact on the public than the development of comprehensive interpretive plans at the recreation unit level. A key component in any such strategy will be the development and installation of interpretive signs that deliver a consistent and concise set of DCNR messages. At present, there are few interpretive signs on DCNR lands and in the absence of interpretive staff, visitors are left to their own devices.

Fermata recommends developing a series of interpretive messages through both personal and



Interpretive kiosk at Hicks Run, Rob Tizard/Fermata, Inc.

...to expand the recreational population traveling to the Pennsylvania Wilds, particularly among uninitiated urbanites, will require a more sophisticated and broad-based communications strategy.



Wood sorrel, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

The objective (of the website) is to provide detailed information that would **not only entice people to visit but to facilitate and nurture their travel as well.**

non-personal interpretation that communicate the critical role that DCNR and its predecessors played in the restoration and renewal of the Pennsylvania Wilds. Current visitors to the public lands in the region may well believe that the lands there are “wilderness” rather than the result of a century of conservation effort. Pennsylvania can certainly claim to be the “cradle of conservation” in American history, and the Pennsylvania Wilds represents the finest example of that concept. The development and installation of a universal interpretive sign detailing the agency’s history, its ethic, and its responsibilities is a simple, cost-effective approach and should be given a high priority.

### DCNR Website

The plan recommends that the DCNR website be enhanced to provide more detailed information on specific recreation facilities and experiences available on public lands within the Pennsylvania Wilds. The objective is to provide detailed information that would not only entice people to visit but to facilitate and nurture their travel as well. The website should also provide the kind of detailed information that would satisfy the needs of the more experienced and committed recreationist for particular information about conditions, locations, trailheads, etc. An effective website should incorporate redundancy that guarantees that viewers will find what they are looking for regardless of the way they search.

### Fermata recommends DCNR:

- structure the entire website by recreational activities as well as by park and forest units. Information about state park recreational opportunities presently can be obtained by either identifying the park or the activity (for example, the “find some fun” feature). The state forest website should mirror this structure and the activity component should encompass all DCNR activities and not be separated by bureau.
- expand the state forest pages that describe hiking opportunities. Each trail system should have its own page (backpack trails, ATV trails, equestrian trails, snowmobile trails, cross-country ski trails, and State Forest hiking trails). Likewise, each state park should have a page that provides details about each trail in the park.
- display similar information with similar detail for all state forests. Consistency will be critical in meeting the expanded demands and expectations of travelers to the region. The following general categories of information should be provided for each state forest: history, recreational activities, accessibility, wild and natural areas, resource management, and a selection of state forest maps.
- provide the same kinds of information at the same level of detail for all parks (consistency is the key).
- provide links to private outfitters and guides as an important customer service. If the agency is

restricted to listing private businesses that have an agreement or permit, work with the local tourist promotion agency or Pennsylvania Wilds Corp. to link to a website that lists outfitters and guides services that includes as much detail as possible. This will be particularly important as the Wilds Recreation Team begins to implement additional recreational programming in partnership with the private sector.

### State Forest Public Use Maps

The plan recommends that DCNR improve the quality of these maps and:

- use larger scale maps to reduce clutter and provide more detail.
- display all roads and designated trails on maps. Recreationists are challenged to navigate through state forests if important roads and trails are absent from maps.
- use road and trail names on maps, and insure that they agree with on-the-ground signage.
- provide detailed information on what to expect within state forests. Many visitors arrive with expectations that cannot be met.
- provide interpretive information on local history, land management, and conservation practices.
- use consistent language in referencing specific types of trails, employing the four designations of

trails: National Scenic, State Forest Hiking Trails, local district trails, and interpretive trails.

- remove trails from state forest public use maps that are no longer visible (or viable) on the ground.

### State Park Maps

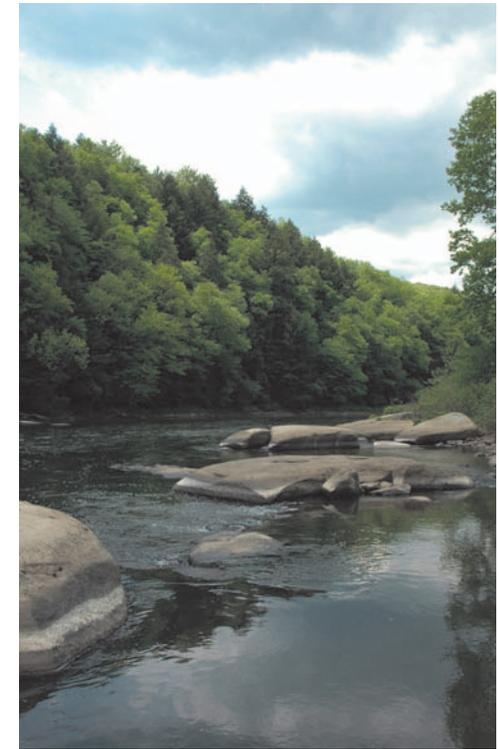
The plan recommends that DCNR:

- use a larger map format because it provides more detailed information on specific trails and resources.
- use a stand-alone, larger scale trail map for parks with extensive trail networks.
- insure that maps provide interpretive information on local history, land management, and conservation practices.

### Visitor Information at Local Offices

Fermata recommends aligning hours of operation at recreational unit visitor offices with customer expectations, particularly during high-use seasons. For example, most recreational use is focused on the weekends, days when most state forest offices are closed. By establishing a single visitor service center for each recreational unit, not all DCNR offices will be required to be accessible during these same periods.

Fermata believes it is critical for reception employees, for many the public face of DCNR, to have excellent customer service skills and be well informed of recreation opportunities in the region. Not all



Clarion River, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

Fermata believes it is critical for reception employees, for many the public face of DCNR, to have excellent customer service skills...



Pennsylvania Wilds Directional Sign,  
Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

...many new travelers need  
signage to help them face the  
challenge of navigating through  
this relatively remote area.

visitors will research their opportunities prior to their visit and many will rely on stopping by the office to obtain the necessary information. In truth, many visitors look forward to talking to the “ranger.” For many visitors to DCNR land, this may be the only interaction they have with an employee.

Fermata recommends the co-location of unit visitor offices with local tourist promotion agencies (TPAs) where feasible to minimize cost and meet most visitor needs. The TPA staff will also know about private services in the area and can answer many of the visitor’s travel-related questions. Fermata recommends that DCNR provide a kiosk or service center outside the office with maps and pamphlets for visitors who are looking for information after hours. Such service centers should be lit at night and provide a pay telephone if cell service is not available in the area (as it often is not).

The Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Team should develop DCNR Pennsylvania Wilds information packets for TPAs and local establishments. These partners will need assistance in adapting to new recreation populations that will be attracted to the Pennsylvania Wilds. The development and provision of these packets insures that the DCNR conservation message will be consistently and accurately communicated at the local level.

### Signage

Signage, whether oriented to motorists on a road or hikers on a trail, is a critical and cost-effective component in enhancing the recreational experiences

of visitors to the Pennsylvania Wilds. The signs that greet and inform visitors may well be the only DCNR “voice” that visitors hear. As stated before, DCNR must facilitate and nurture recreation in the region if it wishes to expand and diversify its audience. In addition, many new travelers need signage to help them face the challenge of navigating through this relatively remote area.

The plan recommends developing sign plans for each Pennsylvania Wilds recreation unit. The way-finding signs developed and installed by PENNDOT for the Elk Scenic Drive provide an excellent model for directional signage. Planning at the unit level will insure that signage programs will transcend bureau boundaries. In addition, unit-level signage plans will insure consistency in graphics and design throughout the region.

Visitor Information Boards should provide essential detailed information to minimize the need for information signs elsewhere. These information boards should focus necessary information to a single location where visitors can be oriented to using the specific forest or park. Recreation activity information to be displayed includes registration requirements (if appropriate), environmental messages (Leave No Trace), user etiquette, program or event schedules, regulations, and safety and emergency information.

DCNR should develop regulatory signs that address common regulatory problems with a positive tone that are posted at Visitor Information Boards but not throughout the site. When space permits, explain the reasons for protecting the area. Use

graphics to support the friendly tone. Use signs specific to an issue at problem sites. Signs with a short, clear message have a greater chance of being read and complied with than the fine-print posters.

Trail Signing is another important element to identify trail routes and communicate their designated uses. The Wilds Recreation Team should discuss designation and how trail signage should be used to demarcate that designation. The Pennsylvania Wilds offers a wide variety of trails and roadways, many of which have never been designated as such by the agency. It is important to note that once a trail has been designated, DCNR quality guidelines should apply to ensure a rewarding and safe experience.

### Information for the Specialized Outdoor Recreationist

Collateral materials provide essential information for trip planning, will enhance the visitor's experience during their visit, and can memorialize their visit once they return home. Fermata recommends that DCNR develop an online store where visitors can purchase maps and guides specific to the DCNR units including:

- detailed trail maps and guides with a consistent style across DCNR recreation units. Consider a set of detailed topographic maps that span the Pennsylvania Wilds and include all hiking trails. Maps should be available on waterproof, durable paper. Fermata also recommends that DCNR closely monitor emerging technologies and offer maps in a variety of media (DVD, I Pod, GPS);

- wildlife checklists for each state park and forest (based on actual sightings, breeding bird surveys, etc). These checklists should form the basis for a wildlife-watching guide for the Wilds. The guide should include viewing techniques, explain common species by habitat type, describe rare and unique habitats, and explain how viewing opportunities vary by season; and

- expanded recreation guides, modeled after the Elk Scenic Drive Guide, that cover byways, old growth tours, U.S. Route 6, state parks, natural areas, and wild areas. These explorer's guides should provide details on flora and fauna, historic sites, unique natural features, and interesting local lore.

Fermata believes it critical that DCNR be aware of emerging technologies. More importantly, we recommend that the agency become "early adopters" in putting these new technologies to work. For example, we recommend enlisting the help of Pennsylvania public television in developing programs specific to the Wilds. Such programming can be made available through a variety of media (for example, as DVDs available in a local gift shop).



Cherry Springs State Park, Mary Jeanne Packer

...information boards should focus necessary information to a single location where visitors can be oriented to using the specific forest or park.

# Key Infrastructure Investments



Yellow Warbler, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

S.B. Elliott State Park, located at the intersection of Interstate 80 and PA Route 153, is perfectly situated to function as a front door or gateway to the Pennsylvania Wilds.

This section summarizes the significant infrastructure investments the plan recommends on the state parks and forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds. These have been developed throughout the series of studies that have been conducted for the initiative. DCNR has already begun the site specific planning and design of many of these key facilities.

These proposed facilities and enhancements would expand DCNR service to reach both its traditional customer base, as well as the expected growing visitation of urban recreationists. Many of these new visitors may not be familiar with the outdoors or the rural character of the Pennsylvania Wilds, and these improvements will facilitate and nurture the experiences of those who are approaching the outdoors for the first time. They will also insure that those who experience the Pennsylvania Wilds leave with a clear understanding of the conservation and resource management challenges in the region and the role of DCNR in meeting these challenges.

## Gateway to the Pennsylvania Wilds at S.B. Elliott State Park

S.B. Elliott State Park, located at the intersection of Interstate 80 and PA Route 153, is perfectly situated to function as a front door or gateway to the Pennsylvania Wilds. The proposed S.B. Elliott Gateway is

being designed to facilitate and nurture recreational travel into the region, and would include a combined welcome/nature center and a nature lodge. The objectives of the gateway are to connect visitors with the region's exceptional outdoor recreation opportunities on a "real-time" basis; interpret its great conservation and lumber heritage; and to provide accommodations that allow direct access to the trails and other resources of the area. The building's design will emphasize energy conservation and use Pennsylvania forest products in all visible wood components.

The Gateway would work in concert with the new facilities discussed below to facilitate and interpret outdoor recreation in the region. The facilities would be interlinked through the Internet, allowing visitors to any facility to see precisely what the recreational opportunities might be in the Pennsylvania Wilds at that moment in time. This system of interpretive and visitor centers will reach out to encourage the uninitiated recreationists to visit the Pennsylvania Wilds, rather than vacationing in more familiar surroundings.

## Elk Watching and Wildlife Education Center

This project will provide elk viewers a high quality opportunity to see Pennsylvania's wild elk and to learn about their life history, their restoration in the state, and the habitats they depend on. Currently,



Moss, Cook Forest State Park, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.

elk watchers have traditionally gone to Benezette and Winslow Hill, and with no interpretive facilities available, elk watching has evolved as a “drive by” experience.

A new Elk Watching and Wildlife Education Center, near Benezette at Winslow Hill, is proposed as a cooperative partnership between DCNR and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF). The proposed facilities include an interpretive center, year-round public restrooms, exhibits, and a series of trails to viewing platforms and blinds to provide high quality viewing and photography. When completed, this facility will be the only interpretive center of its kind east of the Mississippi River.

### **Sinnemahoning State Park Wildlife Watching Center and Trail**

An additional portal is being developed at Sinnemahoning State Park that will focus more broadly on the general wildlife watching and nature tourism experiences in the region. DCNR is developing a new visitor’s center at the park, as well as constructing a wildlife-watching trail. The center and wildlife trail will provide opportunities for visitors to experience the exceptional habitat of the park that supports a

small population of elk, nesting bald eagles, beaver, coyotes, and a variety of songbirds and waterfowl. A unique feature at Sinnemahoning State Park will be the capacity of the new center to house several small nature tourism-related businesses and to conduct training workshops for those in the private sector interested in taking advantage of the growth in nature tourism and outdoor recreation in the region.

### **Pine Creek Valley**

The Pine Creek Valley and the surrounding state forests and state parks provide a stunning natural landscape for outdoor recreation. The Pine Creek Valley extends from Ansonia at U.S. Route 6 to Jersey Shore, where the creek flows into the West Branch of the Susquehanna River.

The plan recommends a number of actions to improve the quality of the Pine Creek recreational experience and maintain the relatively undeveloped character of the Valley. The key recommendations include:

- complete the sections of the trail on DCNR lands and work with Jersey Shore and Wellsboro to

A unique feature at Sinnemahoning State Park will be the capacity of the new center to house several small nature tourism-related businesses and to conduct training workshops for those in the private sector interested in taking advantage of the growth in nature tourism and outdoor recreation in the region.



2004 Black Forest Star Party,  
Cherry Springs State Park/Greg Granville

The plan recommends a series of improvements and management actions to improve Cherry Springs State Park as **one of the most significant dark sky facilities in the eastern U.S.**

extend the trail into their downtown areas. This is intended to support the growth of development and service opportunities in these towns;

- improve directional and interpretive signage to improve the visitor experience and interpret the exceptional conservation history and natural resources of the region; and
- disperse and diversify visitation by a coordinated promotion and management program for all of the recreational opportunities on nearby state forest trails and state parks.

### Cherry Springs State Park Dark Skies Program

The plan recommends a series of improvements and management actions to improve Cherry Springs State Park as one of the most significant dark sky facilities in the eastern U.S. Discovered in the early 1990s by amateur astronomers searching for dark sky sites in the East, the park has now become a well-recognized destination among a small cadre of regional sky-watchers. In April 2000, DCNR recognized the importance of this resource and designated Cherry Springs as the first Dark Sky Park.

Recommendations for the park to improve its service as a sky-watching destination include:

- installation of low-level lighting and concrete pads for telescopes with electrical connections;

- improved parking areas, roads, and restroom facilities;
- construction of all weather observatory domes for four season star gazing; and
- addition of a full-time interpretive staff to conduct dark skies programs throughout the year.

### Cook Forest State Park and the Clarion River

Cook Forest State Park, which sits along one of the most beautiful stretches of the Wild and Scenic Clarion River, is known throughout the U.S. for its relict old growth forest. The primary attraction in the park is the Longfellow Trail through the Cathedral Forest, a National Natural Landmark. The trail is the primary way visitors experience the park's ancient white pines and hemlocks. The condition of the Longfellow Trail, however, has become degraded through decades of use.

The plan recommends that DCNR rehabilitate the trail to provide a quality hiking experience and to protect the precious trees on the site. In addition, the plan recommends development of an interpretive plan and interpretive signage, which portrays the history of the forest and the value of these ancient trees to today's visitors.

Fermata also recognizes the importance of connecting visitors to nearby communities and recom-

mends the establishment of a scenic byway along the Clarion from Cook Forest State Park to Ridgway. This would complement efforts underway in that community to revitalize its riverfront through a comprehensive riverfront redevelopment plan and to improve public access to the river's resources.

### **Kinzua Bridge State Park**

The most pressing matter for this state park relates to the destruction of the primary draw to the facility - the Kinzua Viaduct. The historic railroad bridge collapsed during severe weather on July 21, 2003. The woodlands surrounding the bridge were also severely damaged by the tornado. Combined with the loss of the Knox-Kane excursion train, McKean County has suffered a severe blow to its tourism base.

The plan recommends that DCNR work with local interests in the development of a new approach for the park. The stabilization of the remaining bridge and the development of a new visitor's center are components that have already been funded. Additional aspects of the strategy being considered include opportunities for hikers, bikers, snowmobilers, cross-country skiers, and those visitors who simply wish to experience the exceptional scenery of the area.

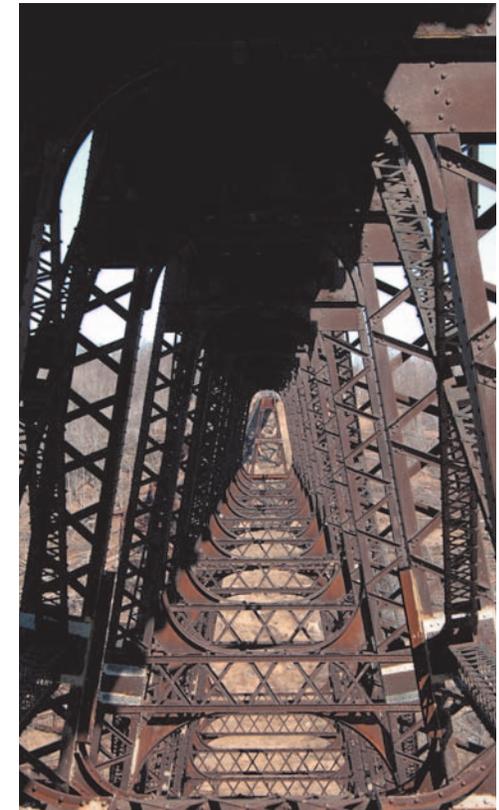
### **Other DCNR Investments in the Pennsylvania Wilds**

In addition to the investments recommended above, DCNR will be making significant investments in the

infrastructure on the state parks and state forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds over the next five years. These investments are made possible through the funds available under Governor Rendell's Growing Greener II Initiative. These will include upgrades to restroom facilities at most full-service state parks; improved visitor centers at key locations; reconstruction of state forest roads and bridges; rehabilitation of sewer and water systems; improved parking areas; and reconstruction/repair of dam structures, boat docks, and spillways. These investments will be an important aspect of creating a quality experience for visitors and residents alike across the region.

#### **A Final Note**

*The DCNR public lands in the Pennsylvania Wilds represent a once-in-a-generation opportunity to connect the public to the conservation ethic espoused by this agency. In 21<sup>st</sup> century America, the pathway of choice for people finding nature is recreation. People use what they understand or know (such as the recreational opportunities present in the region), and they value what they use. The DCNR lands in the Pennsylvania Wilds offer this agency a unique opportunity to invite the public into an intimate relationship with the world outside. Through this relationship, the public will gain an appreciation for the agency's responsibilities and challenges. More importantly these public lands, once tangential, will become primary contributors to each individual's quality of life. The lands, once discounted, will be seen as having irreplaceable value.*



Kinzua Bridge, Ted Lee Eubanks/Fermata, Inc.



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