



News for Immediate Release

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DCNR Dedicates New Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail Bridge

Jefferson Township – Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and other state officials today joined to dedicate the new Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail bridge over the Pennsylvania Turnpike in Somerset County. The span is used by up to 100,000 hikers, snowmobilers, equestrians and other visitors each year.

“For all of you who patiently awaited this new, beautiful structure, today is indeed a day for celebration,” said DCNR Secretary Richard Allan, addressing onlookers gathered for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at the span. “Once again the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail invites you to strike out in long, uninterrupted forays through some of the most scenic, uninterrupted and wild sections of our bountiful state.”

The new bridge crosses the turnpike just about midway between the Somerset and Donegal exits. It was opened Jan. 28 after construction began in spring 2011. It replaced an almost 40-year-old span that had become unsafe.

“Timing of this ribbon-cutting is two-fold: we wanted you to see this beautiful structure in beautiful weather, not in January sleet and cold,” Allan said. “Also, in just two days, we’ll be kicking off annual Hiking Week activities across the state, and on June 2, observing National Trails Day.

“What better place to remind you of these two upcoming outdoors highlights in the state than on one of its most highly acclaimed trails?”

Hiking Week events planned by DCNR and the Keystone Trails Association will take place in parks, forests, cities and towns across the state through Sunday, June 3. All of the scheduled hikes have leaders and include a variety of lengths and terrain. For information, including hikes already planned, dates and locations, visit <http://www.ExplorePATrails.com/hikingweek.aspx>.

The original Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail bridge, built in 1970, was closed in late 2009 after inspectors found conditions that could endanger hikers and snowmobile riders using the bridge, as well as motorists passing beneath.

“We know the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail is a major regional recreational attraction, drawing 80,000 to 100,000 hikers and other visitors a year,” Allan said. “We know this new span is invaluable to the economic vitality of the Laurel Highlands area and the diverse, all-season recreational enjoyment it provides.

“We at DCNR also know we would have liked to have seen an earlier replacement. We continued to push for an early as opening as possible, but weather conditions and material deliveries hampered this effort.”

The replacement span, built at the same site as the old bridge, reconnects various trail systems in the Laurel Highlands and will facilitate foot traffic as well as snowmobiles, mountain bikes and equestrians.

“I would argue that this bridge reconnects the most vital system of recreational trails in the state,” said Laurel Hill State Park Complex Manager Mike Mumau. “The LHHT, part of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, offers an incredible trail experience. In addition, this bridge allows us to reconnect the system of multi-use trails on the Forbes State Forest.”

Owned by the Bureau of State Parks, the bridge rejoins the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail, a 70-mile corridor running north and south through state parklands and Forbes State Forest. Part of the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail is a major regional recreational attraction.

The bridge project was awarded in March 2011 to the Pittsburgh-based Mosites Construction Co. The bid totaled nearly \$1.3 million for work on the 12-foot-wide, 184-foot-long span.

For more information, call Laurel Hill State Park Complex at 814-445-7725, or visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us (Select “Find a Park,” then Laurel Ridge State Park).

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