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## **Laurel Hill State Park Celebrates its Forest Heritage**

**Somerset, PA-** Officials at Laurel Hill State Park in Somerset County today celebrated its forest heritage by recognizing the Hemlock Natural Area at the park as part of the Old Growth Forest Network, and rededicating the newly renovated Kooser Mountain Fire Tower. Both are important features in the Laurel Highlands landscape.

“There aren’t many places in Pennsylvania, or the country, where there is the opportunity to experience an old growth forest with trees that have lived for hundreds of years,” DCNR Acting Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn said at the recognition event. “We are pleased that this designation calls attention to this special feature at Laurel Hill to spotlight for the public the unique and exciting opportunities that we offer for outdoor recreation and experiencing nature in our state parks and forests.”

Pennsylvania state parks generate more than \$1 billion in economic activity in nearby communities and support almost 13,000 related jobs.

The Hemlock Natural Area in Laurel Hill State Park is a stand of about six acres boasting old growth eastern hemlock trees estimated to be 200-300 years old, some with diameters up to 3½-feet, that lines the banks of the scenic Laurel Hill Creek. The 1.2-mile Hemlock Trail loops through the natural area.

The Old Growth Forest Network is a national organization working to preserve ancient forests for the enjoyment of present and future generations. In counties capable of supporting forest growth the forest identifies at least one forest that will be protected from logging and open to the public.

The natural area at Laurel Hill is the 45<sup>th</sup> addition to the network. For more information on the network visit <http://www.oldgrowthforest.net/#>.

The Kooser Mountain Fire Tower, a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) era fire tower, has come back to life after being closed for many years. The Bureau of Forestry used the tower, which sits on Laurel Ridge above Hidden Valley, for many years as a lookout to detect wildfires in the area.

“The structure boasts a stunning vista above the canopy and will be an integral part of upcoming public programming celebrating the CCC,” Dunn said.

The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation helped to secure grant funding to rehabilitate the tower. Renovations included installation of new stairs, landings, a roof, and windows.

Laurel Hill State Park consists of 4,062 acres of mountainous terrain in Somerset County. The 63-acre Laurel Hill Lake is a focal point of the park. Laurel Hill is surrounded by thousands of

acres of pristine state park and state forest lands. A trail system invites visitors to explore the park and observe the diversity of plants and wildlife. The Jones Mill Run Dam and the Hemlock Trail Natural Area are two must-see destinations on a visit.

For more details on Laurel Hill State Park go to [www.dcnr.state.pa.us](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us) (select "Find a Park") or contact [ra-parkinfo@pa.gov](mailto:ra-parkinfo@pa.gov).

Laurel Hill State Park is one of many unique features in the Laurel Highlands Conservation Landscape, intended to protect the unique character of the Laurel Highlands and recognize its communities as world-class heritage/recreation destinations as well as wonderful places to work and live. For more information, choose "Conservation Landscapes" under "Quick Links" on the DCNR website.

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