



NEWS FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Ceremony Officially Opens Ohiopyle State Park Office/Laurel Highlands Falls Area Visitor Center

Ohiopyle, PA - Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn today joined state and local officials and many civic partners in the formal dedication of the Ohiopyle State Park Office/Laurel Highlands Falls Area Visitor Center -- an energy-efficient building serving as the hub of public outreach and instruction at the increasingly popular Ohiopyle State Park in Fayette County.

"It's all here -- a river that thrills the boater and angler; trails that delight the hiker, biker and birder -- all enhanced by the rugged, unspoiled beauty that is the Laurel Highlands's trademark," Dunn said. "All combining annually to draw almost 1.5 million visitors, not just to the park, but also to the many communities whose economies and business they support along their way."

"The new visitor center casts a spotlight on all that Ohiopyle offers the outdoors enthusiast, this dedication celebration highlights all the partnerships and public support that made this building possible," said Dunn.

Noting Ohiopyle State Park serves as an inviting portal to the region and its Youghiogheny River, Dunn said the new visitor center enhances the wealth of natural focal points found on and near Route 381, the Laurel Highlands Scenic Byway. Among them are Frank Lloyd Wright's Fallingwater, the Historic National Road, Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail, and the Great Allegheny Passage.

Since the center opened in early September 2014, park visitors have enjoyed a full range of informational, comfort, orientation and interpretive services, the secretary said, while park employees are afforded sorely needed easy access to a public drawn to the park's captivating Ohiopyle Falls on the Youghiogheny River.

The 11,529-square-foot, fully ADA accessible building is located in the Falls Area of the park, along the west side of the Laurel Highlands scenic byway overlooking the Youghiogheny River, and adjacent to the Borough of Ohiopyle, a key community gateway along the east side of the byway.

The building's layout serves the public year-round with a large lobby for personal contact with staff, improved/increased comfort/restroom facilities, large interior/exterior interpretive exhibit space, and interior and exterior scenic viewing of the river gorge.

Site, structural and geotechnical engineering, surveying, and landscape architecture services all were undertaken with an eye toward achieving Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design LEED® Gold certification. Sustainable features include a biological wastewater treatment system; geothermal heating and cooling; two green roofs aiding in additional cooling and stormwater retention and cleaning; and other construction and landscaping features.

“This visitor center reveals the achievable results possible when experts in their chosen fields work together towards a common purpose,” Dunn said. “DCNR staff, the National Road office, PennDOT, construction contractors, green builders, interpretive planning and exhibit firms, museum quality sculptural artists, and multimedia interactive specialists all worked together in ways that have not been accomplished previously.”

A \$4 million grant from the Federal Highway Administration’s National Scenic Byways Program helped pave the way for much of the project, undertaken in close cooperation with the state Department of Transportation’s Byways and Recreational Trails Section.

“This grand opening is the culmination of the collaboration between PennDOT and DCNR in building this project,” said Joe Szczur, PennDOT’s district executive for a four-county region in southwestern Pennsylvania. “It demonstrates good team work and dedication leading to tremendous benefits for the community, visitors and businesses. Together, we have taken a step forward to call attention to the Laurel Highlands Falls Area Visitor Center and recognize the region’s Scenic Byways and natural resources.”

Among the center’s many features:

- Serving as the primary interpretive lens and providing four-season interior and exterior viewing areas for two of the region’s key natural assets: Ohiopyle Falls and Ferncliff Peninsula, a U.S. Department of the Interior-designated National Natural Landmark;
- Improved access, information dissemination, and visitor flow for approximately 100,000 commercial and private whitewater boaters launching annually on the iconic Lower Youghiogheny River;
- In partnership with the Laurel Highlands Visitors Bureau, provide the public with a centrally located, heavily visited location for acquiring maps, access to electronic informational kiosks, comfort facilities and regional venue brochures;
- Serve as the primary trailhead to orient and provide information to the public for accessing the Great Allegheny Passage (a non-motorized 135 mile trail for pedestrians and bicyclist from Pittsburgh to Cumberland, Md., that directly connects to the National Park Service’s C&O Canal Towpath through to Washington D.C.), and the Laurel Highlands Hiking Trail (a 70-mile wilderness trail for backpacking and cross-country skiing along Laurel Ridge from Ohiopyle to Johnstown).

The 20,500-acre Ohiopyle is Pennsylvania’s largest park, and is among the United States’ most heavily visited state parks, welcoming more than 1.5 million people annually. With the Ohiopyle Falls serving as its centerpiece and the Youghiogheny River flowing through, the park serves as a recreation and tourism hub amid 100,000 acres of public lands.

According to a 2012 analysis, both local and non-local visitors spent an estimated \$34,880,000 on their trips to Ohiopyle in 2010. This spending resulted in \$53,427,000 in sales, 604 Jobs, \$18,431,000 in labor income and \$30,374,000 in value added.

For more information on Ohiopyle and Pennsylvania’s other 119 state parks, call 1-888-PA-PARKS between 7 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Saturday; or visit www.dcnr.state.pa.us (Select “Find a Park”).

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