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## **Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Plan Focuses on Connection Between Health, Outdoor Activities**

**Pottstown, PA** – Pennsylvania’s new five-year Outdoor Recreation Plan to connect citizens to healthy outdoor recreation shows maintenance of existing park and recreation areas continues to be a top concern and priority for citizens and providers, and that park and recreation services are a central asset in combating societal health care issues like obesity and mental health.

As part of Governor Wolf’s initiative to create “Jobs that Pay” by promoting outdoor recreation, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn released the plan today at an event in Pottstown, along with many partners.

“Part of Governor Wolf’s vision to create healthy and livable communities that support jobs that pay includes successfully serving the recreation needs of those who live, work and play in them,” Dunn said. “The results of three in-depth surveys to support this plan show that Pennsylvania’s population continues to get older and more ethnically diverse; chronic diseases such as obesity are epidemic; and residents are calling for access to close-to-home recreation, walkable and bikable communities, protected lands and waters, and well-maintained park facilities.

“Based on this information, the plan outlines 20 recommendations and 83 action steps,” Dunn said. “We will now look for increased opportunities for partnership, strategic investments and coordinated programming to act on these recommendations.”

The secretary joined local officials, the Schuylkill River Greenway Association and the Pottstown Area Health & Wellness Foundation making remarks today amidst clinics and matches occurring on the first day of the Pottstown Rumble outdoor volleyball tournament being held in Memorial Park.

During the same event, the foundation highlighted its second annual “On Your Park, Get Set, Go!™” campaign—a month-long contest in which local parks (within the foundation’s service area) compete to achieve the highest number of votes, through community usage, to win grant funds for park improvements.

““On Your Park, Get Set, Go!™” is an excellent opportunity to raise awareness in the community as to the varied amenities and health and wellness benefits of our local parks,” said foundation President Dave Kraybill. “This year, we have 14 participating municipalities and encourage all to visit, vote and donate to further improve our region’s parks. Look for us in a park near you, beginning July 1!”

Some of the specific recommendations in *Pennsylvania’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan: Natural Connections* include:

- Maintain existing park, trail and recreation areas, and prioritize other infrastructure needs;
- Challenge communities to increase the portion of their municipal budget dedicated to parks and recreation to at least 5 percent;
- Support the creation of local park friend and advocacy groups;
- Link grant selection criteria to community projects that strengthen the health and outdoor recreation connection;
- Help communities become walkable and bike-friendly;
- Develop a Pennsylvania “prescription” program for health care providers to use to encourage physical activity in the outdoors;
- Launch a mobile-friendly website to help residents easily find local parks;
- Develop a unified brand for local parks and recreation with accompanying marketing strategy;
- Increase access to business development resources and incentives for small tourism and outdoor recreation businesses and entrepreneurs;
- Work with tourism partners to develop itineraries and travel packages that target the outdoor recreation product and experience;
- Provide templates so schools and youth-based organizations can incorporate outdoor activities into curricula; and
- Mitigate impacts of gas development to recreation and consider possibilities to develop new recreation opportunities.

As in the past, the plan identifies walking for pleasure or fitness as the most popular outdoor recreation activity in Pennsylvania. Residents also like to take scenic drives and visit historic places, picnic, and swim. Increasingly they also like to kayak, watch wildlife and participate in winter sports.

A majority of survey respondents said the main benefit they received from being outdoors is their mental and physical health. Outdoor places also are perceived as making communities more desirable places to live, providing children safe places to play, and protecting the natural environment.

Survey respondents said areas that should be improved included playgrounds, picnic areas, bike lanes, and lake/stream swimming areas. They listed rental cabins, bike lanes, natural and wildlife viewing areas, and dog parks as the facilities they would most like to see increased.

The public had many opportunities to contribute to the creation of the plan. Three stakeholder public meetings were held, and a total of three direct mail and online surveys also were conducted. More than 10,000 people provided input into the plan’s strategy development.

The completed plan keeps Pennsylvania eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation funding. Since 1965, Pennsylvania has received almost \$165 million to fund projects that support local parks and historic sites; conserved forests, rivers, lakes and wildlife habitat; and improved access to recreation.

To view the plan or for more information, visit [www.paoutdoorrecplan.com](http://www.paoutdoorrecplan.com).

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