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September 24, 2015

DCNR Plans Series of Public Meetings To Review Draft State Forest Management Plan

Harrisburg, PA - A series of 12 statewide meetings has been planned by the state Bureau of Forestry to seek continued public input on changes to its master management plan charting the course of Pennsylvania's state forests for future generations.

"Implementation of our last State Forest Resource Management Plan in 2007 gave us a solid foundation from which to manage our 2.2 million acres of state forest land, but eight years brings new threats, challenges and potential," said Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn. "Changes proposed today enable us to better plan for tomorrow."

"Gifford Pinchot defined conservation as 'wise use of the earth and its resources for the lasting good of men,' and that tenet is embodied in this plan," Dunn said. "I invite all our state forest visitors to attend these sessions and learn more about the woodlands they know and love. Their attendance is crucial for the understanding of proposed updates, and these meetings are in line with the bureau's ongoing commitment to continuously interact with the public on state forest management."

The secretary noted the state's wealth of forestland provides an abundance of benefits to Pennsylvanians, including wildlife and aesthetic beauty; vital timber products; water purification; and a variety of healthful recreational opportunities. Successfully balancing various forest uses, resources, and values requires thoughtful and deliberate measures, she said, which, since 1955, have shaped State Forest Resource Management Plans (SFRMPs) guiding both management and communication of its principles and goals to the public.

"The 2015 SFRMP is the culmination of months of hard work to encapsulate all the efforts and priorities of the Bureau of Forestry, and it sets the course for sustainable management of state forest land for years to come," Dunn said. "While society continues to place increasing needs on state forestland, such as greater recreational use and resource extraction, the forest also is under pressure from environmental stressors, such as climate change and invasive plants, insects, and disease. In light of these challenges, the bureau must carefully plan its management of state forestland to ensure sustainable ecological, social, and economic benefits now and for future generations.

"A very important part of this management plan's development has been the incorporation of public input," Dunn said. "To initiate the planning process for the 2015 SFRMP, the bureau conducted a public opinion survey, prompting more than 3,250 responses. This fall, the open public comment period and series of public meetings will provide additional opportunities for the citizens of Pennsylvania to have a say in how their forestland is managed."

Dunn said the 2015 SFRMP upholds the policies set forth in the bureau's Strategic Plan -- Penn's Woods -- and builds upon principles of ecosystem management outlined in that document.

"Ecosystem management can be defined simply as a holistic approach to resource management, where the interdependency of biological and non-biological systems and cycles is the focus," Dunn said. "In this approach, humans are considered part of the ecosystem, and human needs and impacts must be taken into account when developing management strategies."

State Forester Daniel Devlin said the bureau's latest plan relies upon Penn's Woods and previous SFRMPs to build "an array of principles, goals, and objectives which will move the forest into the future."

"The 2015 SFRMP is the first management plan update in eight years," Devlin noted. "As such, one accomplishment is to memorialize the various planning and management activities the bureau has undertaken over the past eight years into one comprehensive document."

The latest management plan provides a broad framework from which the bureau can develop future district-level plans focusing on local resources and values, and incorporating increased public input.

The 2015 SFRMP also provides points of emphasis for future management, such as climate change, conservation of wild character, prescribed fire, lakes, river islands, cultural resources, and communication via social media and interpretative opportunities. Also, the latest plan has been stream-lined to make it more useable and accessible -- for both for staff reference and public consumption.

Beginning Tuesday, Oct. 6, in the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton area, DCNR's Bureau of Forestry has scheduled 12 public meetings across the state to seek comment on revisions to its forest management plan. Starting at 6:30 p.m. and lasting about two and one-half hours, these meetings specifically will focus on proposed plan revisions. The plan can be found at <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/stateforestmanagement/sfrmp/2015sfrmp/index.htm>.

Scheduled meeting dates and locations are:

- Wilkes-Barre/Scranton, Oct. 6, The Woodlands Resort;
- Stroudsburg, Oct. 7, Stroudsmoor Inn;
- Philadelphia: Oct. 8, Fairmount Park Horticultural Center;
- Renovo, Oct. 21, Renovo High School Cafeteria;
- Coudersport, Oct. 22, Pa. Lumber Museum, Josh Roth;
- Bedford, Oct. 27, Bedford Travelodge, Kathy Leonard;
- Pittsburgh, Oct. 28, Double Tree Hotel, Monroeville;
- Clarion, Oct. 29, Park Inn by Radisson;
- State College, Nov. 3, Ramada Inn-Nittany Room;
- Carlisle, Nov. 10, Comfort Suites;
- Williamsport, Nov. 12, Genetti Hotel-Terrace Room; and
- Harrisburg, Nov. 17 or 18, Rachel Carson State Office Building.

Written comments will be accepted until November 30. Interested parties may submit comments at StateForestPlan2015@pa.gov; at one of the public meetings; or by mail at: Bureau of Forestry Planning Section, P.O. Box 8552, Harrisburg PA 17105-8552. There is also a web-based survey, available at the above website, which is a convenient way to provide feedback on the plan.

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