



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 30, 2016

DCNR Secretary, Others Dedicate French Creek State Park Phase of Big Woods Trail in Berks County

Elverson, PA - Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn today joined Bureau of State Parks officials and others in dedicating the French Creek Phase of the Big Woods Trail on grounds of the park near the Berks-Chester county line.

Emerging as a signature trail project of the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape, the Big Woods Trail is proposed to cover 13 miles and link major natural features of the area, including the Schuylkill River Trail, French Creek State Park, Hopewell Village National Historic Site and state game lands.

“This segment dedicated today represents a vital link in what is proposed to be a 13-mile trail in a rapidly developing area that introduces so many to so much,” Dunn told a gathering of state officials and trail supporters. “We want to especially thank the Natural Lands Trust which emerged as a vital partner in this effort, assisting DCNR in acquiring the properties to make the physical connection to French Creek State Park and the Schuylkill River Trail.”

The DCNR secretary noted the “long-term strategy for trail development in Pennsylvania is to have a trail within 15 minutes of every Pennsylvanian.

“We are going to accomplish that by focusing on closing trail gaps. Currently DCNR has data for 248 priority trail gaps, collected from local trail-building organizations, but we know there are more out there.”

The ADA-compliant trail stretch dedicated today links the Thun Trail section of the Schuylkill River Trail with the French Creek State Park. The Big Woods trail project eventually will cover 13 miles, passing from the Thun Trail through the state park; over to Hopewell Furnace National Historic Site; and southward to the Boars Back Trail.

“This first section of the Big Woods Trail has taken eight years of planning to first secure the land and funding to now have this connectivity between Schuylkill River Trail and French Creek State Park,” Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Carol DeWolf. “This 2-mile section offers a great view of the Highlands. It is the result of numerous partners working together in landscape to make this happen. Natural Lands Trust has spent years assisting the Bureau of State Parks to make this very significant connection.

“This is phenomenal trail section offering a wonderful expansive view of the highlands while getting its users outdoors to recreate.”

Measuring two miles and to be used by bicycling and walking enthusiasts alike, the trail passes through active and former agricultural lands, and offers areas for scenic views of the Schuylkill Highlands at the summit of a large hill.

“This new trail brings us one step closer to connect the Schuylkill River Trail's 2 million annual users to French Creek and Hopewell Furnace,” said Schuylkill River National Heritage Area Executive Director Silas Chamberlin. “The trail promotes heritage tourism, which each year contributes \$590 million to the region's economy and sustains more than 6,000 jobs. We want to see connections like this made up and down the Schuylkill River, as we reconnect residents and visitors to rivers, trails, and historic sites.”

Once an industrial complex for the fledgling United States of America, today French Creek State Park is an oasis for people and wildlife. Straddling the Schuylkill Highlands, the 7,730-acre park is the largest block of contiguous forest between Washington D.C. and New York City. The forests, lakes, wetlands, and fields are a destination for the people of southeast Pennsylvania to hike, fish, camp, and bike.

Those same habitats are homes to many animals and plants that are rare in this corner of the commonwealth. French Creek State Park is an Important Bird Area and Important Mammal Area as designated by the National Audubon Society and also has Pine Swamp, a State Park Natural Area.

For more information on French Creek and Pennsylvania's other 120 state parks, visit www.dcnr.pa.gov.

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