



## Development in State Parks

The Pennsylvania Environmental Council presents a timeline of its actions (in reverse chronological order) taken in response to House Bill 2013, a bill that calls for the creation of a politically-appointed board to consider proposals for private development in state parks.

The types of development specifically named in the legislation include office buildings, amusement parks, and golf courses.

### PEC Statements

**June 29, 2016**

[PEC Comments on State Parks' Bill Vote](#)

**June 28, 2016**

[Even With Amendment, House Bill 2013 Hurts State Parks](#)

**June 26, 2016**

[PEC Submits Letter to General Assembly in Support of State Parks:  
PEC Calls for the Rejection of House Bill 2013](#)

**June 22, 2016**

[Video: House Bill 2013 Would Impair DCNR's Management of State Parks](#)

**June 20, 2016**

[PEC Outlines Concerns With House Bill 2013](#)

### PEC in the Media

**June 30, 2016**

*The Allegheny Front:* [Bill Would Open Up State Parks to Private Businesses](#)

**June 29, 2016**

*Lancaster Online:* [Legislature Soundly Defeats Bill to Allow More Development in Pennsylvania's State Parks](#)

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:* [Pennsylvania Agency Designates New 'Wild Areas'](#)

**June 28, 2016**

*Bay Journal: Pa.* [Lawmakers Reject Bill to Open State Parks to Private Development](#)

*Penn Live:* [House Rejects Plan to Study, Pilot Plan to Commercialize State Parks](#)

*Philly Voice:* [Should Pennsylvania Allow Water Parks, Golf Courses in State Parks?](#)

**June 27, 2016**

*Philadelphia Magazine:* [Pa. Legislators Want to Put Golf Courses, Water Slides in State Parks](#)

*The Citizens' Voice:* [House Panel Revives Park Development Idea](#)

*Penn Live:* [Bill to Bring More Lodging, Recreational Opportunities to State Parks Now Ready for House Vote](#)

**June 22, 2016**

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:* [Proposals Would Open State Parks to Golf, Water Slides, and Hotels](#)

## **Complete Timeline of Events**

**June 30, 2016**

### **In the media**

*The Allegheny Front:* [Bill Would Open Up State Parks to Private Businesses](#)

**June 29, 2016**

### **PEC Comments on State Parks' Bill Vote**

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**Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation, Pennsylvania Environmental Council  
Encourage Dialogue on Ways to Address Needs of Pennsylvania's State Parks**

Marci Mowery, President of the [Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation](#), and Davitt Woodwell, President of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, today issued this statement after the House of Representatives voted on House Bill 2013 (Ellis-R-Butler) which would have opened Pennsylvania's State Parks to private development.

"First we want to thank all those members of the House who supported Pennsylvania's award-winning State Parks and their mission to provide nature-based, recreational opportunities for everyone in the Commonwealth.

"The vote shows an overwhelming majority in the House believe Pennsylvania's State Parks are not broken. It recognized the fact that right now they are an economic engine for Pennsylvania's economy, especially in rural areas of the state, that returns over \$12 for every dollar the state invests.

"We also believe the vote shows the public needs to be actively engaged in determining the future of our state parks.

"With this vote out of the way, we feel there is an opportunity to sit down and discuss the real needs of our state park system, its strengths, challenges and opportunities, as well as the needs of the public. We asked for an opportunity to sit down and discuss these issues before, and we extend that offer again.

"Such a conversation would serve everyone well and provide a real basis for consideration of any development of any type in the parks in the future."

***About Pennsylvania Parks & Forests Foundation***

For more information on programs, initiatives and special events, visit the [PA Parks & Forests Foundation website](#). [Click here](#) to sign up for regular updates from the Foundation, [like them on Facebook](#) or [follow them on Twitter](#).

## *About Pennsylvania Environmental Council*

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## **In the media**

*Lancaster Online:* [Legislature Soundly Defeats Bill to Allow More Development in Pennsylvania's State Parks](#)

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:* [Pennsylvania Agency Designates New 'Wild Areas'](#)

**June 28, 2016**

### **Even With Amendment, House Bill 2013 Hurts State Parks**

Dear Representatives, Senators, and Governor Wolf:

House Bill 2013 has been amended (P.N. 3647). Even with this change, the legislation still represents a frontal assault on Pennsylvania's state park system, and the very reasons that it has been so successful.

Our parks are not broken – they are award-winning, generate over a billion dollars a year in economic activity, and return over \$12 for every dollar invested. Those are twenty-first century numbers. Considering the array of awards bestowed upon DCNR for management and planning, it is easy to argue that our state parks are not only fully in the 21st century, they are leading the way.

With the amendment this legislation is now, marginally, less bad than it was before. The amended language now calls for a study to determine potential public-private partnerships within the parks, and for the agency to act upon that study. However, the language and perceived intent is to push for development and “pilot projects.”

The parameters of the proposed study itself are nebulous, including examination of “additional recreational, lodging, and ancillary facilities” that might be developed “to the benefit of the general public.” This is, perhaps, discussion-worthy, except that the definition of those facilities still focuses on amusement or water parks, outdoor sports facilities (stadiums?), hotels, et cetera. Further, the bill focuses almost exclusively on additional facilities without considering what is currently in place.

Nowhere in the amended legislation is it suggested that DCNR undertake a study or review of how the parks are working, what has worked (or not worked) in other states, or what is really best for the parks and for Pennsylvanians. Nor is there any consideration that the defined uses may well be best located on private lands adjacent to state parks, as so many businesses are today, or whether private development on state lands will lead to long term burden on the Commonwealth.

It also ignores the stark reality that our state lands have been starved of revenue, with decreased funding and diversion of revenues from the Oil and Gas Lease Fund – revenues that were designed for such purposes.

If the goal is really to understand the unique and vital role of state parks and what development is or is not appropriate, then fund DCNR to do a thorough review of the park system, its strengths, challenges, and opportunities, recognizing the needs of the people. Such a study would serve everyone well and provide a real basis for consideration of any proposed development in the parks, as well as the state of current concessions and leases.

This would also give an opportunity to involve the public in that discussion, something required by the General Assembly in almost every other DCNR action involving state lands. And, of special concern given ongoing state fiscal issues, such a process would daylight any fiscal concerns related to future development.

The state parks are not lands that time forgot, but they do represent a century of investment and public trust that must be treated with due consideration and care. There is no reason to rush this bill with finalization of the state budget in the hours or days ahead, nor advance a solution in search of a problem.

We ask you to table this bill, allow additional dialogue, and ensure that we are doing the right thing for the mission and values of our public lands.

*Marci Mowery*

*President*

*PA Parks and Forests Foundation*

*Davitt Woodwell*

*President*

*Pennsylvania Environmental Council*

## **In the media**

*Bay Journal:* [Pa. Lawmakers Reject Bill to Open State Parks to Private Development](#)

*Penn Live:* [House Rejects Plan to Study, Pilot Plan to Commercialize State Parks](#)

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**June 26, 2016**

### **PEC Submits Letter to General Assembly in Support of State Parks: PEC Calls for the Rejection of House Bill 2013**

Dear Governor Wolf and Members of the General Assembly:

The General Assembly has before it a bill, H.B. 2013 (P.N. 3575), that calls for the creation of a politically-appointed board to consider proposals for private development in state parks. The types of development specifically named in the legislation include office buildings, amusement parks, and golf courses. While there are already two golf courses in state parks, one built in the 1800s and the other in the 1920s, that does not mean that building more is a good idea.

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) already has the ability to accommodate private operations, where appropriate. Today more than 150 concessionaires operate a range of activities on state land. House Bill 2013 would fundamentally alter this dynamic by allowing a politically motivated board to advance proposals to the Department, regardless of whether DCNR's professional staff thought there was public value or need.

Even worse, the bill's approach to accountability is to favor allowing private developers to transfer structures or facilities to DCNR after 25 years – just about the time that all kinds of deferred maintenance costs are due – leaving the Department to clean-up the mess and pick-up the tab.

Pennsylvania's 121 state parks are a marvelous system that span the Commonwealth, offering a wide variety of recreational opportunities that attract millions of visitors each year. As far as economic development goes, the parks serve an amazing role, bringing in more than \$1 billion to local economies and returning \$12.37 for every dollar that DCNR spends on them.

Besides undermining the principle of our public lands, this legislation would result in unsustainable projects that cost taxpayers more, and hurt those providers who have made tremendous investments close by the parks who depend on park visitors. There is no shortage of communities and landowners looking for this kind of economic development.

Pennsylvania's state park system is properly recognized as one of the best in the country. While our public lands desperately need investment – DCNR faces a tremendous backlog of unfunded infrastructure projects – bartering our lands out to private developers is not the way to go.

This idea has been rejected by past administrations as bad policy that didn't make environmental or economic sense. Our state lands have been painstakingly built and protected by over a century of public investment; they are treasured by the citizens of Pennsylvania. We urge you to do the same and reject this bad legislation.

Respectfully,

*John C. Oliver*

*Former Secretary, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources*

*Davitt Woodwell*

*President, Pennsylvania Environmental Council*

*Marci Mowery*

*President, Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation*

**June 22, 2016**

## **Video: House Bill 2013 Would Impair DCNR's Management of State Parks**

[Click here](#) to watch PEC President Davitt Woodwell discuss how House Bill 2013 would impair the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (DCNR) management of state parks.



### **In the media**

*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette:* [Proposals Would Open State Parks to Golf, Water Slides, and Hotels](#)

**June 20, 2016**

### **PEC Outlines Concerns With House Bill 2013: PEC and the Pennsylvania Chapter of the Nature Conservancy Submit Comments to Tourism and Recreation Committee**

Dear Representatives:

We are writing to share the concerns of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council and the Pennsylvania Chapter of The Nature Conservancy regarding House Bill 2013, Printer's Number 3219, scheduled to be considered at the June 21 meeting of the Committee on Tourism and Recreational Development.

House Bill 2013 would amend the Conservation and Natural Resources Act to establish a Public-Private State Park Partnership Board (Board) to review and approve contracts with private sector entities for development, financing, construction and operation of recreation, lodging, and ancillary facilities in Pennsylvania State Parks.

Pennsylvania's system of 120 state parks is an incredibly valuable asset from which the citizens of the Commonwealth derive multiple benefits. State parks provide opportunities for affordable and healthful outdoor recreation, nature interpretation and environmental education, while conserving important natural, scenic, aesthetic, and historical values. They also make meaningful contributions to community quality of life and economic development, generating more than \$1 billion in local expenditures across the state and returning \$12.37 in economic value for every dollar invested.

What's more, Pennsylvania's State Parks have been recognized as one of the best-managed systems in the nation, receiving a National Gold Medal Award for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management.

This successful record of management includes oversight of more than 130 concession operations. DCNR has existing authority to enter into concession or lease agreements, including long term contracts for large-scale recreation facilities. Through their extensive experience providing Pennsylvanians with quality outdoor recreation opportunities, state park professionals have learned which types of public-private partnerships work best.

Accordingly, we question both the need for and value of a separate entity like the proposed Board. We believe its functions at the very least would duplicate decision making responsibilities of state parks professionals, and potentially could result in recommendations that are inconsistent with the mission of Pennsylvania's State Parks and the best professional judgment of state park managers.

Our specific concerns include the following:

- Under House Bill 2013, the newly-created Board would enjoy considerable leverage and influence, and as such, DCNR could find it difficult to reject the

Board's recommendations for development projects, even if they conflict with state park management goals and priorities.

- The above concern is particularly noteworthy, when observing that House Bill 2013 provides no criteria for the Board to use in its review and approval of proposed projects. The bill contains a reference to developing guidelines for sponsors to use when submitting proposals, but does not identify specific factors the Board will consider in evaluating such proposals (e.g., potential effect on existing park users/uses, potential impact on natural resources/habitat, compatibility with park character and local land uses, level of long term maintenance and reinvestment required, demand for service/amenity to be offered, etc.).
- House Bill 2013 would require DCNR to provide all necessary assistance to the Board, including retention of legal, financial, and technical consultants. The additional responsibilities and related costs associated with the Board's inventory, solicitation, and evaluation of proposed projects could be substantial. The legislation provides no additional source of funding for these activities.
- House Bill 2013 also imposes long-term maintenance costs on the Commonwealth by transferring management responsibilities to DCNR after 25 years — typically when substantial upkeep and repair will be needed. The legislation provides no source funding for these obligations.
- Although it would create a new process for approving potential development projects in Pennsylvania's State Parks, and such projects are likely to be of considerable interest to the public, House Bill 2013 does not provide opportunities for public review and comment as part of the Board's approval process.

Because of the concerns noted above, we are unable to support House Bill 2013, PN 3219. We encourage the Committee and sponsors, rather than moving forward with this legislation, instead to explore working with DCNR and its Recreational Advisory Committee and Conservation and Natural Resources Advisory Council to update the study on State Park concession and lease operations conducted by Penn State ten years ago. Such a review could provide helpful information on the views and preferences of visitors regarding recreation opportunities at State Parks and the experiences of DCNR and park agencies in other states with the private operation of park infrastructure and facilities of all sizes and categories.

Sincerely,

*John Walliser, Senior Vice President-Legal & Government Affairs, Pennsylvania Environmental Council*

*Ronald L. Ramsey, Senior Policy Advisory, Nature Conservancy Pennsylvania Chapter*