

Pennsylvania Wilds Case Study



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December 1, 2009

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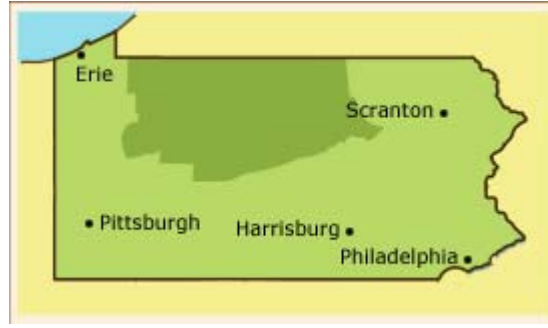
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I. Introduction

"The Pennsylvania Wilds is an economic and community development initiative grounded in wise natural and cultural stewardship."

Governor Ed Rendell

Early in his new administration, Governor Ed Rendell of Pennsylvania designated a vast and undeveloped area of Pennsylvania as the "Pennsylvania Wilds." This region encompasses 12 counties in the state and over 2 million acres of public lands, including 29 state parks, eight state forests, 50 state game lands, and the Allegheny National Forest. It is one of the most rural and sparsely populated regions of Pennsylvania, containing only 4.1 percent of the state's population (slightly more than 1 million people).¹ The nearly 2.1 million acres constitute almost a quarter of Pennsylvania's land area and is larger than nine U.S. states.



Pennsylvania Wilds Counties

Cameron	Jefferson
Clarion	Lycoming
Clearfield	McKean
Clinton	Potter
Elk	Tioga
Forest	Warren

Those living in the Pennsylvania Wilds and their ancestors have seen both the boom and the bust of industrial development—with timber, railroads, and mining—and now live with more limited opportunities for economic growth. Over the past decade, these communities have experienced consistent decline in both population and income. A recent report on the economic impact of the Pennsylvania Wilds notes that from 2002 to 2006, "while the Commonwealth had net increases of about 6,800 businesses and 143,500 jobs, the Pennsylvania Wilds region actually had net decreases of about 250 businesses and 1,400 jobs."² In June 2009, six Pennsylvania Wilds counties had unemployment rates topping 10 percent, with one county nearing 15 percent and another exceeding 18 percent unemployment.³

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that those who have stayed have good reasons to stay.

The area is, in fact, magnificent. The region has what has been called an "outstanding natural resource base" and its mass of public land is the largest between New York and Chicago. Wildlife is abundant and varied: it is home to the largest elk herd in the northeastern part of the nation; bald eagles abound; river otters have been reintroduced. Water resources include many of the finest headwaters in the state. Scenic rivers include the Allegheny, the Clarion and the Pine Creek.

¹ U.S. Census, 2007 population estimates.

² Econsult Corporation. *Pennsylvania Wilds Program Evaluation Report*. Revised Draft Report, July 31, 2009.

³ U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics website. <http://www.bls.gov/ro3/palaus.htm>. Accessed August 26, 2009.

These landholdings are comparable in scale and potential to national parks such as Yellowstone and the Great Smoky Mountains and are within a day's drive of 50 million people, yet the Pennsylvania Wilds remains relatively unknown to those outside the immediate region.

Rendell encountered the splendor and the economic challenges of the region in 2001 and 2002 during his campaign for governor. He recognized a paradox in the region: enormous natural resources juxtaposed against an increasingly bleak economic reality. The new governor articulated his interest in transforming the natural resources into a sustainable economic opportunity in a public statement:

This region has the resources to attract visitors to the Commonwealth through nature tourism. With more than 2 million acres of public lands, the Pennsylvania Wilds reflects the best of Pennsylvania's outdoors—a conservation and restoration success story the public can enjoy. Our vision for the Pennsylvania Wilds is to diversify and expand travel and recreation opportunities within the region, and to do it in a way that continues the careful conservation and protection of these resources and the communities around them.⁴

In 2003, the governor established a cabinet-level task force, which came to be known as the Governor's Task Force on the Pennsylvania Wilds⁵ and charged the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) with the task of organizing the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. In addition to DCNR, the task force included leaders from the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED), Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Department of Transportation (PennDOT), the Game Commission, Fish and Boat Commission, and the Historical and Museum Commission, as well as representatives regional organizations such as the Lumber Heritage Region, PA Route 6, North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission, Pennsylvania Wilds Tourism Marketing Corporation, the Allegheny National Forest, and congressional and county governments.

Four primary goals were set:

- 1.) Ensure stewardship of the public lands and character of the region's communities;
- 2.) Support and grow private businesses such as accommodations, services, and locally made products;
- 3.) Promote the renewal of the region's communities and appropriate community planning; and
- 4.) Invest in public infrastructure to enhance the visitor experience in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

⁴ Press Release. October 6, 2004. <http://www.state.pa.us/papower/cwp/view.asp?A=11&Q=438511>. Accessed August 26, 2009.

⁵ Formerly known as the Governor's Task Force on Elk Watching and Outdoor Tourism in North Central Pennsylvania.

The Governor's Task Force went far toward defining the broad interagency nature of this effort. DCNR, as the designated lead, took on a major role in the Initiative, but with issues of economic development, environmental restoration, transportation, and wildlife management all at hand—multiple agencies had significant roles, including funding projects. Important contributions made include, but are not limited to:

- DCED support for the marketing of the Pennsylvania Wilds through the Office of Tourism, Film, and Marketing and provision of technical assistance for planning/community development through the Governor's Center for Local Government Services in the Office of Community Affairs & Development;
- DEP leadership of the effort to clean up the West Branch of the Susquehanna, heavily polluted from acid mine runoff; and
- PennDOT assistance related to elk tourism including the Elk Scenic Drive, funding and technical support for a Pennsylvania Wilds Gateway Welcome Center on I-80 and strategic alignment of transportation funding for priority trail connections.

Over time, the Pennsylvania Wilds became a driving force for investment in the communities, local infrastructure, and improvements to parks and forests in the region. During the six years that this study covers, DCNR invested \$130 million in the 12 counties in the region related to this Initiative. While too early to declare an unequivocal success, a just completed study of the financial value of this investment points to growing and significant impact, largely linked to the growth of tourism in the region.

A 2009 economic analysis conducted by Econsult points to a 3.7 percent annual average growth in the gross domestic product of the Pennsylvania Wilds region from 2004-2007. The study found a 6.3 percent increase in tourism spending between 2002 and 2006.⁶

The Purpose of this Paper and Approach⁷

This case study of the Pennsylvania Wilds aims to tell the story of the development of an ambitious government initiative to bring sustainable development and best practices to the management of a large, sparsely populated, and remote area. This story offers important lessons to others working with communities across the country that are adjacent to large public landholdings. It also adds a practical perspective to recent scholarship on large landscapes.⁸ This effort has much to offer others in terms of the lessons about planning, organizing, and executing an initiative meant to bring about improved prosperity through efforts to sustain and improve natural resources. The case study also offers insight into an impressive effort to alter the culture of the lead state agency, with the goal of building a more involved and accountable agency at the helm of conservation efforts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

⁶ Econsult Corporation. *Pennsylvania Wilds Program Evaluation Report*. Revised Draft Report, July 31, 2009.

⁷ See appendix D for description of study design.

⁸ Frederick R. Steiner and Robert D. Yaro. "A New National Landscape Agenda: The Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 is just a beginning." *Landscape Architecture*, June 2009.

The paper is based on extensive interviews and focus groups with nearly every major constituency involved in the effort. During the eight months of data collection, the team conducted interviews or focus groups with nearly 100 individuals, including DCNR and DCED staff, local government officials, community-based business leaders, nonprofit staff, and residents.⁹ In addition to the interviews, team members observed several meetings of the DCNR groups established to guide the initiative: the DCNR Pennsylvania Wilds Leadership Team, the Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Team and the Team's Recreation Units, the Pennsylvania Wilds Regional Work Group as well as the external Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team. Data collection also included document review of a large number of reports, meeting minutes, newsletters, promotional materials, and other documents as well as DCNR and partner organization websites. DCNR grant and expenditure data have also been analyzed and included where appropriate.

Organization of the Paper

The remainder of this paper is organized into six sections. The next section provides the reader with information on the historical and current social and economic conditions in the region. Section III explains the rationale for and precursors to the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. The internal change processes undertaken by DCNR, along with challenges associated, are described in Section IV. Section V describes the Initiative's overarching strategies and their implementation, successes, and challenges, while Section VI looks more closely at implementation in the Key Investment Areas in the region. Finally, Section VII offers lessons learned for embarking upon landscape-level initiatives.

II. Social and Economic Background of the Pennsylvania Wilds

The Connection between the Forests and the Economy

To understand the Pennsylvania Wilds, we need to understand the people and history of the area. The region has been home to the bust and boom of a series of industries that have depended on the area's natural resources for their existence. The region has borne the scars of those same industries that extracted and depleted the resources and then abandoned the region for other opportunities.

In the late 1800s, Pennsylvania was the nation's top producer of lumber, and the Pennsylvania Wilds region was the center of the state's logging industry. Millions of logs cut from the mountains of North Central Pennsylvania were floated down the West Branch of the Susquehanna to saw mills in Williamsport. The region was also a center of the leather industry, which used the abundant hemlocks to produce tannic acid, a necessary ingredient for tanning hides.

Rampant timber cutting resulted in widespread deforestation and the loss of vast stands of old growth white pine and hemlock. Wild fires were a frequent occurrence on cut-over

⁹ See Appendix B for a list of interviewees.

land, and the massive amounts of cleared land exacerbated flooding and erosion. The forests were severely depleted, and the region's logging industry was in decline.

At the dawn of the 20th century, the unbroken forests of eastern America were laid to waste. The "Big Cut" stripped much of the northeastern US of its forests by the late 1800s, leaving behind heaps of burning debris, blighted mountain slopes and sediment choked streams. Pennsylvania forests were fated as well.¹⁰

After the establishment of the Pennsylvania's Division of Forestry (forerunner of DCNR's Bureau of Forestry) in 1895, the state began acquiring degraded forest lands and managing them for regrowth. Reforestation efforts accelerated during the 1930s, as a result of the efforts of the Public Works Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps, which supplied hundreds of workers to replant forests, restore wildlife habitat, construct fire towers, and establish recreational areas. These efforts helped build much of the infrastructure that is still in use in the region's state parks and forests.



The "Big Cut"



After reforestation efforts

These and parallel efforts on private land led to the recovery of a working forest. Former pine and hemlock forests have grown back primarily in hardwoods. The Pennsylvania Wilds region now has what has been called the world's most valuable hardwood forest, consisting of black cherry, red maple, sugar maple, and northern red oak.

Today's Economic Pressures: Fewer People and Fewer Opportunities¹¹

The economy of the Pennsylvania Wilds remains highly dependent on continued extraction of the natural resources in the area. In addition to logging and wood products, fossil fuel extraction is very important to the regional economy. High energy prices in

¹⁰ Fermata, Inc. *A Recreation Plan for the State Parks and State Forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds*. February 2006.

¹¹ Most of the information reported here is from the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission. *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Annual Update*. November 12, 2008.

http://web2.ncentral.com/ncentral/publications/Comprehensive_Economic_Development_Strategy_08AnnualUpdate.pdf

recent years have helped sustain the market for gas and oil, which play a large role in the economies of Elk, Forest, McKean, and Warren counties,¹² and coal, mainly in Clearfield, Elk, and Jefferson counties, although the coal industry remains depressed relative to former decades.¹³

While the region has long been a source of natural gas, an important recent trend has been increased exploration and extraction of natural gas from the Marcellus Shale. Marcellus Shale is a rock formation that underlies much of Pennsylvania, including most of the Pennsylvania Wilds, and portions of New York and West Virginia. High energy prices and new technologies for extracting gas from deep shale deposits have ushered in an exploration boom, as drilling companies, mostly from outside the region, have flocked into the area. While this has created some new jobs, the need for highly skilled workers means that much of the labor must be imported from outside the region or substantial workforce development is required.

While exploitation of the Marcellus Shale could yield substantial economic benefits, it also entails environmental threats, especially to the region's water resources. And widespread gas drilling operations could degrade the region's scenery and the appeal to tourists.

The other large employers in the area offer limited opportunity for the economy. North Central Pennsylvania—especially Elk, Clearfield, and Cameron counties—has been called “the powdered metal capital of Pennsylvania.” But a long-term decline in the industry was accelerated during the recent economic downturn, especially in the domestic auto industry, a heavy user of powdered metal products.

State universities in Lock Haven (Clinton County) and Mansfield (Tioga County), and the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford (McKean County) are significant employers. The health care sector has grown due to recent health system expansions in Williamsport, DuBois, Bradford, and other communities. However, these opportunities can expand only in as far as the population increases.

Potter County, once a telecommunications hub, has been severely affected by the recent loss of Adelphia Communications and a Time Warner call center in Coudersport.

In recent years, the Pennsylvania Wilds has delivered one of Pennsylvania's weakest track records in terms of economic performance. Key regional industries, including forest products and powdered metals, have been especially vulnerable to the recent economic downturn. Demand shifts in the forest products industry—including logging, sawmill operations, and the processing of secondary products such as furniture, flooring, and

¹² *Economic Workforce Brief: Role of Oil & Gas Operations in the Economy of Elk, Forest, McKean, & Warren Counties*. Penn State's Workforce Education & Development Initiative. January 4, 2008. <http://downloads.cas.psu.edu/naturalgas/pdf/GasIndustryValue.pdf>. Accessed September 23, 2009

¹³ North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission. *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Annual Update*. November 12, 2008.

paper—have been significantly affected as a result of the reduced demand for raw logs, furniture, and other products related to the housing market.¹⁴

So too, each wave of economic decline has produced declines in population.

Between 2000 and 2007, the population in the 12-county Pennsylvania Wilds region declined by 2.9 percent, compared to an increase of 1.2 percent in Pennsylvania as a whole. The population loss was most pronounced in Potter, Elk, and Cameron counties, with declines of 6.3 percent, 7.0 percent, and 10.2 percent, respectively.¹⁵

Population loss has been accompanied by an aging of the population as working-age people leave the region in search of better employment opportunities. In addition, retirees have increasingly moved into the region because of its quality of life and low cost of living. In 2007, 8.6 percent of the population of the Pennsylvania Wilds was aged 65 years or older. In Cameron County, the percentage was as high as 9.8 percent. This compares to a statewide average of 7.6 percent.¹⁶

Running counter to the otherwise fairly bleak economic outlook, tourism is stronger than anticipated in spite of higher fuel costs affecting travelers. “Hotel bed occupancy tax revenues have remained steady-to-higher during the year with an optimistic view toward late 2008 and all of 2009 being forecasted, especially if fuel costs decline.”¹⁷

The Independence of the Pennsylvania Wilds

The people of the Pennsylvania Wilds are used to thinking of themselves as a breed apart, distinct from and neglected by the “flatlanders” who control the state and much of their region’s land. In fact, many consider “north of I-80” as an important demarcation of the region from the rest of the state. Many are cynical about state government, viewing Harrisburg as distant, unconcerned, and uninformed about local realities, yet exerting undue power over local affairs.

Like other rural parts of Pennsylvania, the area is socially and politically conservative. Most counties in the 12-county region voted Republican in the 2008 presidential election. Elk County, which has traditionally had a sizable Democratic registration edge, was the sole exception.

Residents have a strong independent streak that is sometimes expressed as rabid anti-government sentiment. References to deep and extreme distrust of attempts at

¹⁴ Econsult Corporation. *Pennsylvania Wilds Program Evaluation Report*. Revised Draft Report, July 31, 2009.

¹⁵ U.S. Census, 2007 population estimates.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission. *Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Annual Update*. November 12, 2008.

“government takeover of the land” were not uncommon. Interviewees also mentioned plans for a United Nations sponsored biosphere and the presence of “black helicopters,” scanning the region for a planned takeover.

“The community’s opinion of the PA Wilds is getting better. The problem was lack of information. They didn’t do good job of telling the locals what they had envisioned. So there were a lot of rumors, negativity—the state is coming and telling us what to do. The worst case was that the UN was coming to throw people off the land to create a biosphere reserve.”

Emporium Focus Group member

These anti-government sentiments are echoed on various websites and blogs from area residents:

Landowners and sportsmen in Pennsylvania are beginning to learn how devastating, threatening and costly the Biodiversity-Socialist movement in Pennsylvania has become. It is not only a serious threat to hunting sports, but goes much further by threatening the very foundations on which this Nation was founded, namely, the 1st and 2nd Amendments to the Constitution and the basic right to own property.¹⁸

In our interviews, many said that their initial reaction to the Commonwealth’s involvement was to view it as “highly suspect.” However, as the Initiative has progressed, the community is responding more favorably.

“I like this program. I was skeptical. The program did a lot for community development and the working communities from everywhere in the Pennsylvania Wilds. I like the concept.”

Smethport Focus Group member

Hunters, anglers, snowmobilers, and other avid outdoor recreation users of the resources in the region are organized into powerful local political lobbies. These recreational constituencies have deep historical connections with the land and are particularly interested in ensuring access to resources. These efforts can pit these communities against each other and against the efforts of state regulators and planners. Snowmobilers and ATV users are united in their quest for trail access while environmentalists and wildlife watchers want to minimize human impact on the natural environment. Hunters advocate abundant deer, in opposition to those who seek to limit the size of the deer herd to reduce the impacts on the forest. State agencies must delicately juggle the management of these interests, ensuring that recreational opportunities are maximized without compromising visitor safety or commitments to environmental sustainability.

¹⁸ Dr. N. Charles Bolgiano. *The Biodiversity-Socialist Movement: Elk in Pennsylvania, in Virginia Next?* <http://www.vlrc.org/articles/21.html>. Accessed September 23, 2009.

III. Emergence of the Pennsylvania Wilds: A Bipartisan History

“The PA Wilds has provided a common focus that has brought a wide range of federal, state, and local agencies together to work on mutual issues we all face.”

Eric Patton¹⁹

The Pennsylvania Wilds can rightfully claim a strong bipartisan history. The interest in preserving the assets and the economy of the region goes beyond a single administration. While this Initiative was launched as a focused effort by Governor Rendell, a Democrat, its foundation was laid during Governor Ridge’s Republican administration (1995-2001), by its support and designation of the Lumber Heritage Region (LHR). In 2002, LHR released a report that articulated many of the guiding principles of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative.

The Pennsylvania Wilds can trace its origins back to a grassroots effort in the region to create a lumber heritage park. In 1991, the city of Williamsport received funding from the Department of Community Affairs (DCA)—a predecessor agency to DCNR—to conduct a feasibility study. Although the project was not completed and funds were returned, the movement to create a designated area to enhance and preserve the legacy of forestry and lumbering in the region was underway. By 1993, a multi-agency project, entitled the Northern Tier Documentation Project, interviewed local community members to record the region’s cultural heritage and form the foundation for the development of a cultural heritage plan. In 1996, the predecessor agency to DCNR funded another feasibility study to explore the creation of a region-wide heritage area. In 2001, as a result of increasing grassroots involvement, Governor Ridge designated 15 counties in the area as the Lumber Heritage Region.²⁰

The timing of the Pennsylvania Wilds coincided with a period of high public investment in land conservation and improvements to the infrastructure in natural environments. A combination of funds, some authorized by bills predating the Rendell administration, supported work in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

The Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund Act (Key 93) became law in 1993. Key 93 provides funding for recreation and land conservation activities, including community grants for planning, development, and acquisition, as well as support for programs such as Rivers Conservation, Land Trusts, and Rails-to-Trails.

In 2000, the legislature approved a new source of funding—the Environmental Stewardship Fund, commonly known as Growing Greener I. This fund provided support to multiple agencies for clean water, sound land use, land reclamation, natural resource conservation, and community recreation. DCNR used these funds to invest in state park

¹⁹ Upper Clarion River Team: Collaboration and Real Results.

<http://www.pawildsresources.org/pdf/community/ucrt.pdf>. Accessed September 23, 2009

²⁰ The LHR is funded through DCNR’s Heritage Parks Program.

and forestry facilities as well as for grants for greenways, trails, open space, natural areas, river corridors and watersheds, community parks and recreation, and other efforts to conserve the biological diversity of the Commonwealth.

More recently, new support became available to DCNR through the Growing Greener Bond Fund or Growing Greener II, which was approved by a public referendum in 2005 to inject \$625 million into the conservation of open space, environmental protection, and agricultural farm preservation. DCNR's portion of this funding source was invested in state park and forest improvements, open space preservation, and municipal parks and recreation facilities.

It is reasonable to say that the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative emerged out of the confluence of opportunity created by the interest of the Rendell administration, the work of the Lumber Heritage Region, new activist leadership within DCNR, and the significant funding available through Growing Greener I and II.

Secretary DiBerardinis, recognizing the moment of opportunity, moved quickly to make on-the-ground gains in the Pennsylvania Wilds. In doing so, DCNR moved forward on projects and outreach while the strategic vision was still in formation. The strategy was highly emergent and refinements to the work continue to this day.

The Thinking behind the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative

Roots in Cultural Heritage

The core of the strategic thinking behind the Pennsylvania Wilds finds its genesis in a 2002 LHR-funded report, *Plan for Elk Watching and Nature Tourism in North Central Pennsylvania*.²¹ Fermata, Inc., a consulting firm specializing in sustainable recreation and tourism, was retained to develop a five-year plan that emphasized many of what ultimately became the most important features of the Pennsylvania Wilds. These included the need to improve visitor services, a focus on the long-term ecological needs of an expanded wild elk herd, ways to increase the economic benefit for local communities while managing the down side of mass tourism, and efforts to foster stewardship of the region's natural resources. Other recommendations supported capital projects to enhance the visitor experience and increase visitation to the region. These included establishing a scenic highway, building model viewing sites to provide quality viewing opportunities, constructing two major interpretive facilities, and developing a regional visitor center on I-80. Ultimately, these ideas all found their way into the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. Another prescient recommendation from this early plan was to establish a regional cooperative marketing effort consistent with the development of the new facilities.

²¹ In 2001, the Lumber Heritage Region funded the study in partnership with the North Central PA Regional Planning and Development Commission, DCNR, Appalachian Regional Commission, and the PA Game Commission.

Moving beyond the Elk: A Plan for Expanded Recreation

Managing elk herd viewing quickly became linked to the need to increase other recreational opportunities in order to diffuse the potential damage of mass elk tourism in one highly localized area of the region. Also to reach the kind of economic benefits envisioned by the governor, more recreational opportunities that could attract larger numbers of visitors were needed. DCNR anticipated that this larger public was likely to be more urban and would seek more diverse recreational activities with greater amenities than was historically the case of the hunters and fishermen in the region. The goal would be to develop a varied menu of activities that a broader range of visitors could engage in over a multi-day itinerary, thus increasing overnight stays and spending throughout the region.

DCNR commissioned Fermata, Inc. to develop a second plan – one focused on expanding and enhancing recreation to realize this broader vision emerging from the Governor’s Task Force. In 2006, the Department released this second Fermata study: *A Recreation Plan for the State Parks and State Forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds*.

The plan is remarkable in its range and scope and includes recommendations on improved or new visitor centers at key locations, reconstruction of state forest roads and bridges, rehabilitation of sewer and water systems, improved parking areas, upgraded restroom facilities at most full-service state parks, reconstruction and repair of dam structures, boat dock and spill ways, identification of key trail connectors, and needed upgrading of trails. Additionally, the report recommended a series of major infrastructure improvements directly related to the visitor’s experience.



Hang Gliding at Hyner View State Park

This plan set the broad vision, goals, and organizing structures of a recreation agenda for the region. It introduced the Bureaus of Parks and Forestry to the potential of a very different kind of visitor to the Pennsylvania Wilds. It advised DCNR that this market for the Pennsylvania Wilds would require the Department to improve its facilities, visitor information, public outreach efforts, and customer services. It specified the types of investments needed to maximize the recreational potential of the parks and forests in the region while simultaneously preserving the region's "wild and natural" state.

The signature and model sites in the Fermata plan became the seeds for DCNR's ten major areas of investment in the Pennsylvania Wilds. These focus areas are:²²

- **Clarion River Corridor**
- **Elk Country Visitors Center near Benezette at Winslow Hill**
- **Cherry Springs State Park/ Lyman Run State Park**
- **Bald Eagle State Park**
- **Gateway Welcome Center on I-80 at S.B. Elliott State Park**
- **Pine Creek Valley**
- **Sinnemahoning State Park**
- **Kinzua Bridge State Park**
- **West Branch Susquehanna**
- **Allegheny National Forest**²³

IV. Reforming a Bureaucracy: From Vision to the Hard Reality of Change

"If you don't love it, you won't save it."

Michael DiBerardinis, Former Secretary of DCNR

Rethinking How an Agency Relates to the Public

Leading the work in the Pennsylvania Wilds provided an opportunity to rethink the way the Department worked. DCNR was in fact an amalgam of several bureaus originating from other cabinet-level departments. During Governor Ridge's administration, the Department of Environmental Resources (DER) was split into two departments: the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and DCNR. The Bureau of Recreation and Conservation, formerly part of the Department of Community Affairs, was also incorporated into DCNR. Once together in DCNR, the various bureaus did not work together to any great extent. For example, Parks and Forestry remained highly independent operations even though their lands often intertwined. Nor did the bureaus,

²² Brenda Adams-Weyant and Meredith Hill. "River Corridor Planning in the Pennsylvania Wilds." Presented at the 2009 Recreation Resource Planners Conference, Pittsburgh.

²³ Because of their proximity and considerable overlap in the work of DCNR and its partners in the Clarion River Corridor and ANF, and the fact that ANF is federal land, these two investment areas are described jointly later in this report.

excepting Recreation and Conservation, have much engagement with county or local government officials.

As the newly instated Secretary of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Michael DiBerardinis aimed to change all of this. The secretary brought consummate passion for the outdoors to the job. A surprise to many, DiBerardinis conveyed a distinct urban edge to his work. He was a former community organizer who had worked for decades in the city of Philadelphia and was well recognized for his turnaround leadership of a moribund city department of recreation. DiBerardinis was also an avid fisherman.

Most would agree with the assessment that he is tireless, committed, smart, and relentless. He has deep respect for people, particularly those in poverty or struggling to improve their economic condition. He firmly believed that “If you don’t make a difference in people’s lives, you are screwing up.”

As the state’s manager and steward of public lands, the secretary believed that DCNR should strive to build a public constituency to promote stewardship of Pennsylvania’s natural resources among its residents. DiBerardinis was

“The Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative is a new way to connect people to the natural world, making them more likely to use it and want to protect the land for future generations.”

Meredith Hill, Director of the Pennsylvania Wilds

determined to invigorate the Department with an activist perspective, what he came to coin as a “new conservation ethic” built on a century of conservation efforts in the state led by notable Pennsylvanians such as Gifford Pinchot and Maurice Goddard. This “ethic” would drive the Department to:

- Engage Pennsylvania citizens in its efforts to advance conservation and good stewardship;
- Work on the ground in partnership with local communities and nonprofit organizations to articulate and advance a conservation agenda;
- Create high-quality experiences in parks and forests so that visitors feel an increased commitment to conserve the natural resources;
- Convene other agency leaders from Pennsylvania, other states, and U.S. territories to explore how land management and conservation practices and policies can serve as tools to achieve sustainability and address climate change; and
- Build long-term relationships with citizens and visitors through communication and outreach.

The secretary began to craft a strategy that would encourage staff to work across bureaus; hierarchy would be deemphasized such that any staff person could step forward to assume more responsibility and entrepreneurship would be rewarded. Staff were encouraged to reach out to the public to engage them, understand their needs and partner with them to develop new enterprises, new programs, and a deeper degree of customer orientation. From the secretary’s perspective, this approach to actively engage the public constituted much of what he considered to be “stewardship.” Over time this “practice”—

as the secretary was inclined to call it—of building stewardship through active engagement with the public about important landscapes took shape in what came to be called Conservation Landscape Initiatives (CLI).

The CLIs were led by teams with membership from across bureaus and levels and included outside constituencies from local and county government, nonprofit organizations, and the private sector. These teams would lead regional efforts to drive strategic investment and actions for sustainability and conservation goals and community revitalization. The Pennsylvania Wilds was the first among what ultimately became seven CLIs established throughout the state. The leadership of DCNR believed that focused attention on large landscape features could galvanize local governments, individuals, and businesses around common goals.

This vision would require major shifts in how every bureau in DCNR operated.

Working around and with Bureaucracy

In order to meet the ambitions of the Pennsylvania Wilds, the secretary ran the Initiative out of his office working through a series of teams and task force structures. Task force structures allowed the secretary to elevate the Initiative as a priority, bring talent from lower levels of the organization into the decision-making, and encourage cross-bureau decision-making and resource sharing. The teams and task forces include:

- The Governor’s Task Force focuses on high-level strategy and interagency policy and plans for the Pennsylvania Wilds. The task force includes leaders or their designates from each agency involved in the Pennsylvania Wilds. While organized under the governor’s office, it is chaired by the DCNR Secretary.
- The Leadership Team consists of the heads of each DCNR bureau and approves and oversees strategic decisions and operations related to the Pennsylvania Wilds. It reports to Jim Grace, Deputy Secretary for Parks and Forestry within DCNR. The team is charged with overseeing the execution of all DCNR responsibilities in the Pennsylvania Wilds, including assuring that infrastructure investments are completed and the Fermata Recreation Plan is executed.
- Also within DCNR is the Recreation Team, which oversees recreation efforts in the Pennsylvania Wilds, and assisting the Recreation Team are five Recreation Units—both the team and the units include members from the Bureaus of Parks, Forestry, and Recreation and Conservation.
- The Pennsylvania Wilds Working Group is drawn from the mid levels of the Department primarily from internal regional and field-level staff. The group meets approximately twice a year to provide feedback on plans and the experience at the more operational level.
- Operating outside of the involved state agencies is the Planning Team established in 2004 that has as its core the county planners from the 12 counties in the region. The team’s membership also includes representatives from the Lumber and PA Route 6 Heritage Regions, regional economic development commissions, tourist promotion bureaus, local government, and state and federal agencies. The purpose

- of the team is to work with local officials and communities to provide planning and technical assistance to help address community issues that arise in relation to increased tourism.
- The Tourism Marketing Corporation was formed in 2005 to unite the eight different tourist promotion associations (TPAs) that service the 12-county region and have them collectively market a new regional brand.

These task groups must intersect with the standing operating divisions (the bureaus) of the Department in order to realize the goals of the Initiative. While the teams set policy, plan implementation, or review execution, the standing operating divisions of DCNR finance and implement much of the actual work. This includes facility improvements, operations and maintenance, and visitor services and programming in the Pennsylvania Wilds, which are all carried out through the State Parks and Forestry bureaus.

The yeoman's share of internal coordination and planning as well as managing external community and government relations falls to Meredith Hill, the Director of the Pennsylvania Wilds. She has no staff, no budget, and no line authority. Much of her work is done by cajoling and influence. Within the last year, Hill has expanded her reach by seeking and acquiring funding to support key roles in the Pennsylvania Wilds. In this manner, she was able to hire Tataboline (Ta) Brant, the local Small Business Ombudsman, funded by DCED and Federal Appalachian Regional Commission grant money, and Sam MacDonald, the Community Outreach Specialist, funded to support the work of the Planning Team through a 50/50 cost share grant from DCED and DCNR.²⁴

Another source of support for the work in the Pennsylvania Wilds is the Bureau of Conservation and Recreation, which plays an important role in supporting communities. Two regional advisors from the bureau assist communities in developing grants, although Hill has a hand in focusing the grantmaking on the strategic needs of the Pennsylvania Wilds.

A notable feature of the work in the Pennsylvania Wilds CLI is the limited number of human resources directly dedicated to the work of the Initiative. While Growing Greener II created enormous infrastructure and land acquisition opportunities for DCNR, the administrative budget of the Department declined during the time of the Initiative's implementation. Another feature worth noting is that the complex array and combination of structures used to make and implement decisions were put into place to overcome bureaucratic resistance and traditions. With these structures, new faces and ideas became part of the process, but increased opportunities for confusion about responsibility, authority, and accountability also emerged. Matrix structures²⁵—such as those employed to execute the Initiative—raise substantial challenges in communications and implementation. While much good can emerge from these structures in terms of improved communications and breaking down organizational “silos,” they also require a

²⁴ Their roles are discussed in more detail later in the report.

²⁵ A matrix structure temporarily groups specialists from different parts of an organization to work on a task. Historically, it allows these specialists to share information more readily but they are also known to create mixed loyalties for participants.

great deal of leadership commitment to resolving the inevitable confusion that arises as staff attempt to straddle new roles and cross-bureau responsibilities.

Transforming a State Agency and Its Bureaus

To understand the Pennsylvania Wilds, it is important to have an appreciation of Secretary DiBerardinis' perspective on how system change occurs. At the heart of all the work is a dedication to building a set of deep values based on service—to community and toward aims of greater public commitment to and active stewardship of natural resources. These goals were larger than what the agency's culture had previously embraced.

He believed that “leadership had to come from deep down in the Department and up through the top.” The secretary would regularly point out that to have real and large-scale impact you “need hundreds of leaders to lead thousands of others.” He saw no obstacle to these leaders coming from the ranks of foresters, park managers, environmental educators, and anyone else willing to step out of their traditional roles to do more than the job required.

The secretary frequently expressed his deeply felt urgency to the work. He believed that there is generally only a narrow window of time during which “you can generate enough interest and attention to mobilize resources into action.”

Where the Rubber Meets the Road

Parks and Forestry feature centrally in both the vision and implementation of the Recreation Plan to create “world class recreational opportunities” within the Pennsylvania Wilds. The plan recognized that achieving this vision would require the Department to face the significant challenges involved in an effort to gear up a system that was not used to the numbers and types of visitors envisioned by the architects of the Initiative, and one that was experiencing the increased pressures exerted by shortages in staff. While the Bureaus of Parks and Forestry were, in fact, very good stewards of the land, they were not activists in working with communities or in fully engaging visitors in efforts to build stewardship.

Overall, these ideas represented clear challenges to the Department's internal bureaus. But the greatest resistance came from those within the Parks and Forestry bureaus, who consistently question the feasibility of the plan's assumptions. The Pennsylvania Wilds is large from any perspective: acres to be managed, facilities to run, lands to maintain, and people to engage and protect. Within Parks and Forestry, the jobs and the people in them are manifold, ranging from janitorial to educational and from managerial and scientific to creative and analytic.

Complicating matters is the fact, that DCNR had not previously functioned as a single agency and did not have a single coherent organizational culture—rather there were at least two that dominated in important ways. Ask anyone in the Department and they will say that Parks has a “clear chain of command” that regulates decision-making at all

levels. Sociologists would typify a Parks staff person as one who subordinates individual decision-making to that of the organization. The Bureau of Forestry, in contrast, is highly decentralized and highly individualized. One observer stated: “If you have met one forester, you have met one forester,” in essence suggesting that Forestry was decentralized down to the individual.

Part of the challenge for the Department was to forge an organization that could work productively toward a shared goal that emphasized entrepreneurial ambition, drive, and initiative in service of the betterment of the common good.

Bureau of State Parks

The Pennsylvania Wilds encompasses 29 state parks that operate under the aegis of two Park Regions. The parks span over 27,600 acres and include Bald Eagle, Bendigo, Black Moshannon, Bucktail, Chapman, Cherry Springs, Clear Creek, Colton Point, Cook Forest, Denton Hill, Elk, Hills Creek, Hyner Run, Hyner View, Kettle Creek, Kinzua Bridge, Leonard Harrison, Little Pine, Lyman Run, Ole Bull, Parker Dam, Patterson, Prouty Place, S.B Elliott, Ravensburg, Sinnemahoning, Sizerville, Susquehanna, and Upper Pine Bottom.

Budgets, interpretive and recreation program planning and delivery, facility operation/maintenance, and staff are managed by each park under the aegis of its respective district offices.

Pennsylvania's state park system won the 2009 National Gold Medal Awards for Excellence in Park and Recreation Management.

The Gold Medal Award is given by the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration and the National Recreation and Park Association. The winner was announced at the NRPA annual meeting in Utah in October. The other finalists were the state park systems in Georgia, Michigan, and North Carolina. The award honors excellence in long-range planning, resource management, volunteerism, environmental stewardship, program development, and professional development. Pennsylvania has 117 state parks, including 27 in the Pennsylvania Wilds, and three conservation areas. The system's nearly 300,000 acres and 1,800 full- and part-time employees play host to more than 35 million visitors each year.

Parks staff are implicated in the success or failure of DCNR's role in the Pennsylvania Wilds more than any other bureau. As the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative unfolds, Parks staff must accommodate more and different types of visitors with increasingly varied needs. The onus of launching the far more extensive and multilayered programming implicated in the Pennsylvania Wilds approach falls on Parks staff, who nonetheless, must execute the routine aspects of their jobs as well. State Parks staff are also responsible for all new building operations and management.

An important part of the change effort was to ratchet up approaches to recreation programming and interpretive planning. Both are done in the central office as well as in the field. Central office supports field staff from another 88 parks across the state in addition to their work in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

A principal challenge for State Parks staff is “to do more with less.” Also to adopt more of an entrepreneurial spirit to their work as they must become more agile, active, and customer oriented in their approach to recreation. In a hierarchical organizational model, this is no easy task.

Bureau of Forestry

The Pennsylvania Wilds includes eight state forest districts with over 1.3 million acres of public forest land. The state forests include Clear Creek, Cornplanter, Elk, Moshannon, Sprout, Susquehannock, Tiadaghton, and Tioga. The 513,000-acre Allegheny National Forest (ANF)—located on the western border of the Pennsylvania Wilds in the northwestern Pennsylvania counties of Elk, Forest, McKean, and Warren—is managed by the National Forest Service. However, DCNR provides money to the ANF to support their recreation facilities and programs.

The Bureau is responsible for ensuring the long-term health and viability of Pennsylvania’s forests and conserving native plants. It has a number of distinct and essential roles in managing the lands, including firefighting, pest management, ecological services, silviculture, and community forestry. It is the largest land steward in the state, actively managing more than 2.5 million acres of state forests, a majority of which is in the Pennsylvania Wilds region.

The Pennsylvania forest system supports multiple uses based on the principles of ecosystem management and is certified as managed “in an environmentally responsible manner” consistent with the sustainable forest management principles of the Forest Stewardship Council. Pennsylvania forest land is the largest tract of certified public forests in the nation.

The Pennsylvania Wilds effort has challenged the Bureau of Forestry to engage more actively with visitors and collaborate with other public landholders in the region to create more seamless management and interpretation practices across different organizational auspices. Forestry also has an emerging larger role in recreation planning and programming. Foresters chair two of the Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Units. In addition, Forestry plays a major role in the building and maintenance of trails in the Pennsylvania Wilds and trail development is a central feature of the overall effort in terms of recreation and economic development.

At the outset of the Initiative, Forestry leadership recognized that “many people in the bureau would have to work differently. It is a whole new way of thinking.” In everyday parlance, as one put it, Forestry staff need “to come out of the forests and engage.”

V. The Strategy Behind the Pennsylvania Wilds

To paraphrase the secretary’s thinking, three fundamental beliefs about how people are motivated toward action served as the basis of the work in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

- The first is that people need to see the possibility that their lives will improve—that they have a chance to improve their economic means.
- The second is that people need to feel a connection to the natural resources in order to have the political will to conserve them.
- The third is that connections are most likely to be made through active engagement with natural resources rather than through abstract lessons and exhortations. The underlying assumption here is that if the public can experience the natural resources as active participants in sports, vacation, and outdoor recreation they will support efforts to sustain those same resources.

In sum, the strategy of the Initiative aims to balance preserving the natural assets and the character of the Pennsylvania Wilds’ rural communities with attracting more visitors to the region. DCNR believes that an improved visitor experience, connecting visitors to the outdoors, and providing high-quality information and education will create a culture of stewardship among those visiting the region. By involving local communities as partners in decision-making, the agency seeks to stimulate job creation and entrepreneurship in a manner that preserves the integrity of the local communities and the natural assets.

Three major lines of strategic work that involve multiple agencies, but predominantly DCNR and DCED, have emerged as central to achieving the aims of the Initiative. These strategies can be summarized as:

- **Recreation:** Building improved and enhanced recreational opportunities that can foster environmental awareness, public stewardship, and economic development.
- **Community Engagement and Development:** building awareness of the Initiative, improving government/community relations, and engaging communities in efforts to help sustain and improve the character of the existing built environment.
- **Economic Development and Community Planning:** providing opportunities for economic growth based on the development of sustainable tourism strategies employing marketing, technical and financial assistance, and business development.

While the goal to build stronger opportunities for increased and more committed stewardship lies in the bedrock of the work of DCNR and the Pennsylvania Wilds, it was not translated into a stand-alone strategy. Rather, it is woven throughout each of the major strategic approaches listed above.

“Stewardship” came to mean many different things as the work in the Pennsylvania Wilds unfolded. For the internal constituency of DCNR alone, it meant having stronger connections to the public by increasing direct staff contact with the communities in the region and the visiting public. Ideas about strengthening stewardship are found in the thinking that advanced plans for more varied and higher-quality opportunities for visitors to engage with the natural resources. Also, increasing economic opportunity by linking

business development to the natural resources features clearly throughout the work, based on the assumption that those who gain financially from the land will also advocate for its conservation.

The Key to Economic Opportunity and Improved Stewardship: Building the Recreation Industry in the Pennsylvania Wilds

*"Foster the greatest good to the greatest number of people and to the greatest diversity of wildlife."
Plan for Elk Watching and Nature Tourism in North Central Pennsylvania.*

The continued demographic shift of rural residents to urban areas, the pullout of traditional large-scale extractive industry, and the increasing marginalization of agriculture as a full-time occupation are phenomena that give particular importance to a planned, community-based approach towards nature tourism. A logical approach is to reach agreement on overall objectives, manage the tourism flow, and try to ensure that visitation does not continue to spiral ad hoc, but is instead channeled in a way that brings the greatest good to the greatest number of people and to the greatest diversity of wildlife.²⁶

Much of the strategic vision for the Pennsylvania Wilds came from the 2002 *Plan for Elk Watching and Nature Tourism in North Central Pennsylvania*. It provided a strong perspective about how to create safe and ethical means by which the public could view the elk herd and not inundate the local populace or violate their privacy while stimulating the economy and maintaining much of the character of the region. The architects of the plan sought to broaden visiting opportunities both to offset the problems of tourism and disperse economic opportunity in the region. A core goal of the plan was to diffuse visitation and thereby avoid the damaging aspects on quality of life often associated with mass tourism. The elk-viewing plan served as the basis for the broader 2006 study, *A Recreation Plan for the State Parks and State Forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds*.

The secretary strongly believed that the way to foster greater and deeper commitment to natural resources among the public is to get them to experience what nature has to offer firsthand. He believed that since stewardship was an active expression of this commitment that the best recruitment mechanism associated with stewardship was to engage the public with the Pennsylvania Wilds through recreation.

This recreational experience was to be varied and of top quality. The vision and the 2006 Recreation Plan included what were, in essence, centers of excellence, called "signature recreation sites," that could become high-quality models for the type of recreation located there. These included sites for hiking, viewing wildlife and photography, canoeing, biking and kayaking, and others. The Pennsylvania Wilds had several sites already noted to be of this caliber; the example most frequently cited being the Pine Creek Trail.

²⁶ Fermata, Inc. *Plan for Elk Watching and Nature Tourism in North Central Pennsylvania*. August 2002.

The Recreation Plan recommended major improvements in “the visitor experience.” This included everything from better directional signs, more and better information, maps, and improved and expanded recreational opportunities. The plan also reinforced the importance of the so-called “legacy activities”—hunting and fishing.

The plan recommended the creation of a coordination, implementation, and oversight group to be responsible for all aspects of developing the recreation opportunities in the Pennsylvania Wilds. The Fermata Plan also outlined a structure to implement the plan, including recommendations to establish a DCNR PA Wilds Recreation Team, Recreation Team Units, and a DCNR Recreation Leader. These all were implemented but with some differences that have become important.

Dana Crisp leads the post-Fermata recreation implementation planning in the Pennsylvania Wilds through two structures—the Recreation Team and Recreation Units. Crisp is also an Assistant Regional Manager of Region 1 within the Bureau of State Parks overseeing seven of the 29 parks in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

Trails: Linking recreation to the economy

The Pennsylvania Wilds placed a high priority to the work of building trails in the region, particularly those that linked towns to each other or those that linked towns to special natural features. Investments in the Pine Creek Trail area will soon link it completely to the historic town of Wellsboro. The town of Jersey Shore was connected to the trail in 2006. In the future, the town leaders hope to extend the Pine Creek connection through the town and link it with the Susquehanna River. The trail work in the Wilds creates a connection along a beautiful 60-mile stretch of the Clarion River, between the town of Ridgeway and Cook Forest, one of the only old growth forests in the state. In each instance, the experience of establishing trail heads in a town translates into increased economic opportunity.

- **The Recreation Team:** DCNR established a Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Team organized from staff within DCNR’s Bureaus of State Parks and Forestry. The five-person team officially began work in May 2006. The plan also recommended the creation of five Recreation Units within the region to help coordinate operations, maintenance, and programming within the parks, forests, and lands. Each of the team members serves as a liaison to one of the Recreation Units, which work full time on this effort. The goal of the Recreation Team is “to provide technical assistance, direction and support for the Recreation Units in their collective implementation of the PA Wilds Recreation Plan with focus on model and signature site priorities.”²⁷
- **The Recreation Units:** Each unit is led by a chair selected from among its members. Each unit has responsibility for a particular geographic area. The Recreation Units include district foresters, park managers, and cooperating agencies that provide recreational services: the PA Fish and Boat Commission, the PA Game Commission, the Allegheny National Forest, the Army Corps of Engineers, and DCNR’s Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. Their stated

²⁷ Pennsylvania Wilds DCNR Work Management Framework, October 10, 2008.

goal is to “Coordinate the work of state parks and forestry personnel, and partners as needed, to implement the Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Plan with focus on model and signature sites.”²⁸

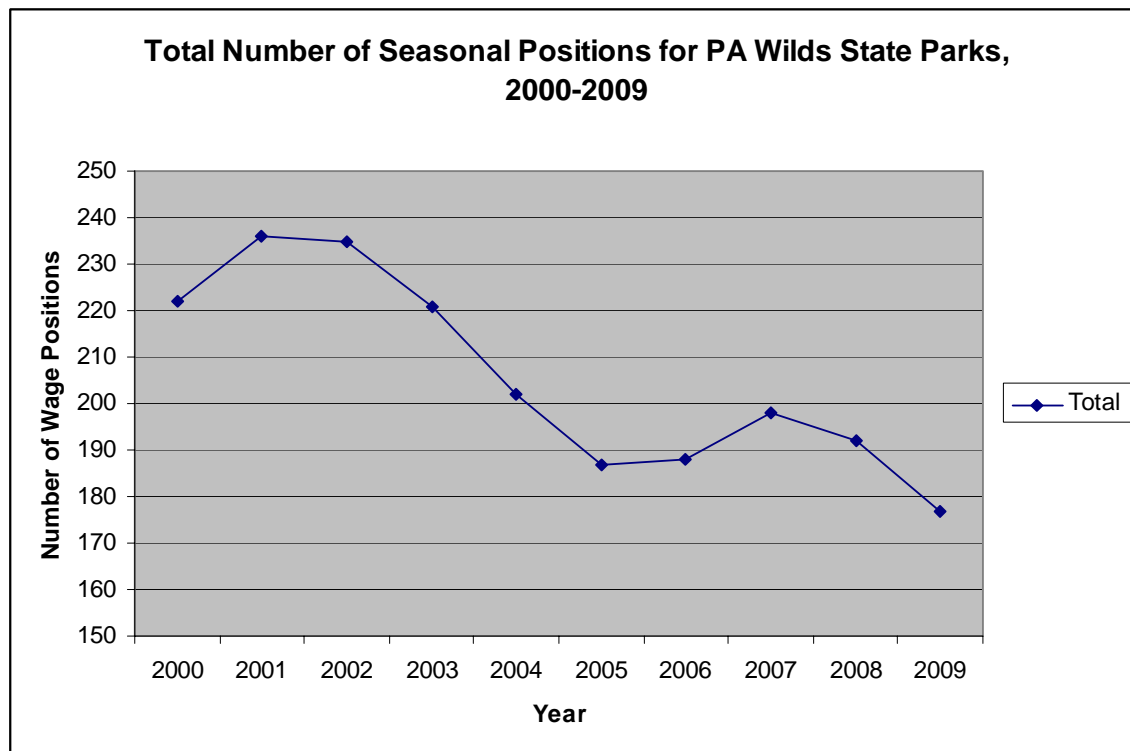
All of these recommendations required either new staff or the reassignment of existing staff.

Challenges

Implementing this vision, however, has not been without its challenges. Three surface as important areas for more consideration: staffing, structure/culture, and the need for outdoor recreation businesses.

Staffing

The vision behind the Pennsylvania Wilds was always larger than the staffing resources would allow. Between 2002, the year before the launch of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, and 2009 seasonal staff for both Parks and Forestry have decreased by approximately 25 percent. Salaried staffing numbers remained relatively constant.²⁹ Seasonal staff are in many ways indispensable to the Initiative as they provide the backbone of recreational programming.



²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Based on our analysis of DCNR internal staffing data.

This issue was well understood at the outset of the Initiative. In fact, the Fermata Recreation Plan identifies the inadequacy of staffing as a significant concern.

The report states:

On Parks: Restricted budgets have reduced staffing to a level where significant recreational growth may well stress the system. In truth, Fermata is concerned about the ability of the state parks to sustain a level of high quality facilities and staff even without substantial growth in public use. While the Pennsylvania Wilds has ample natural resources to support a robust outdoor recreation industry, the limited human resources within the state park system may well temper that growth.

On Forests: Future recreation growth and expansion in the Pennsylvania Wilds will also require additional state forest staff committed to recreation programming, planning, administration, and maintenance. Restricted budgets have curtailed the ability of state forest staff to respond to the rapidly evolving recreational population. As with the state park system, restricted staff represents a significant limitation to future recreation growth and expansion in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

Nonetheless, Fermata advised DCNR “to act on the recommendations within the report in advance of significant increases in staffing.” Although the report noted that “over the longer term recommendations on staffing will become increasingly critical.”³⁰

Later, these recommendations and Fermata’s advice to move forward became cause for considerable speculation about the advisability of going ahead with so much, so quickly.

As of this writing, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania does not have a budget and a frequently cited pawn in the political battle over state financing has been the possible closure of state parks. A number of parks in the Pennsylvania Wilds have been suggested for closure if one version of the budget were to go through. Interviews with staff have consistently highlighted frustration with “outsized expectations” in the face of decreasing numbers of staff.

Structure and Culture

The structure adopted to implement the Recreation Plan differed from the Fermata recommendations in several important ways. The report emphasized that the Recreation Leader should have overarching responsibility for outdoor recreation in the Department and that the leader should bring new ideas in recreation from outside of the Department. The report recommended that this position be located independent of the existing bureaus. The plan also recommended a range of recreation positions for the bureau and

³⁰ Fermata, Inc. *A Recreation Plan for the State Parks and State Forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds*. February 2006.

in the field. While individuals were hired into these roles, as implemented, they fall short of the robust roles recommended by Fermata. Also the Fermata recommendation to establish “a bureau level perspective on recreation issues, policy and management” has not come to fruition.

Interpretive planning has been particularly difficult in the midst of a highly matrixed structure of work. Under the traditional structure of the parks system, each park must develop its own interpretive plan. This has continued during the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative with the additional development of a “unit” interpretive plan. Two of the five Recreation Units were able to complete this effort, but their work demonstrated confusion about what their task actually was meant to accomplish. In the end, leadership decided to develop one overall interpretive plan for the Pennsylvania Wilds.

The challenge in this kind of structure is to identify what types of “value” can be added to the work already being done in parks. The Recreation Team and the Recreation Units would be well served to consider their role in terms of what makes the unit as such important and what might make it function well. Questions that some of the units might address (and some already do) include:

- Where could better coordination add to the visitor experience?
- What kinds of joint programming would create a strong sequence of experience?
- What kinds of joint investments would enhance the experience across multiple parks in the unit?
- What overall messages should be linked to the “Pennsylvania Wilds” experience and delivered throughout all programming?

Many of those interviewed speculate that a number of the core features of the different cultures of Parks and Forestry, including the differences between them, have hampered the performance of the Recreation Team and Units. The command and control atmosphere of the Bureau of State Parks is in many ways antithetical to the boundary spanning, entrepreneurial vision of the Pennsylvania Wilds enterprise. While community leaders were always quick to commend Parks staff on their politeness and general helpfulness, they always remarked that *if* they attended meetings, they always seemed reluctant to speak—“as though they were not allowed to speak for themselves.” From the point of view of Parks staff, the chain of command structure holds more sway than the entrepreneurial spirit that the secretary desired. Parks staff themselves expressed discomfort in reaching out to communities out of concern of reprisal from higher-ups:

“It’s not an official responsibility. Ought to be somebody’s. My hands are tied professionally because I’m not free to do that. Because anything I say, I want to make sure is officially blessed or I will get in trouble. I do think it’s important to interact with community.”

For some in Forestry, the opportunity to engage more is refreshing. But for many others, it is a distraction to the many labors of maintaining the huge expanse of land under their control. Forestry also operates in a highly decentralized manner and has not altogether

embraced the bureaucratic aspects of the Recreation Team and Units. A senior Forestry staff member, however, brings the perspective that the Pennsylvania Wilds “has been transformative” to his organization and that across the board, Forestry has “stepped up its commitment to recreation.”

This assessment, however, is not uniformly shared by others observing Forestry. For them, the change has not reached down deeply enough into the working structures—as they point to foresters who barely pay lip-service to reaching out to communities or participating in the work of the Pennsylvania Wilds.

There is much that is good, however, coming out of the engagement of staff through these working structures. For many, this is the first time they have had the opportunity to discuss some of the operational issues that cross between the auspices of the bureaus. A single trail, for instance, can cross the domains of Forestry and Parks and trail signage could change, much to the bewilderment of the hiker. Likewise, a single body of water could be managed under different levels of adherence to rules and regulations—again surprising the boater. The Recreation Units allow for the kind of discussion and consensual decision-making that can improve overall operations by enhancing the understanding of each organization. Repeatedly, DCNR staff expressed the sentiment that the structures were helping to “break down the silos,” although many of these same participants also expressed a great deal of confusion about the purpose and authority of the units and the team.

The Need for Outdoor Recreation Business Development

Finally, the success of the Pennsylvania Wilds depends on regular and productive communication between local DCNR staff and local businesses such as outfitters and concession operators. Local businesses need to be encouraged to utilize and promote state lands, and local DCNR staff should be informed of business resources available to visitors. These aspects of the Pennsylvania Wilds have not been adopted as part of the Recreation Leader’s portfolio. Instead, the Pennsylvania Wilds Small Business Ombudsman has picked up this work. However, more and better linkages with State Parks and Forestry staff are advisable.

In sum, a structure that allows for more engagement with the public and with entrepreneurs or those considering businesses would likely improve operations, communications, innovation, and satisfaction. However, this takes time, the will, and the capacity to engage in a more relaxed manner with others outside of the organization.

Engaging Communities

An Unprecedented State Initiative in an Often-Overlooked Region

"This whole idea of recreation as an economic development tool, the importance of conservation—at the end of the day it's all about partnerships. None of this work would happen without the partnerships."

John Quigley, Acting Secretary of DCNR

As with most things associated with government, the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative was at first greeted with considerable skepticism. Many community leaders feared it would be just an attempt by politicians to appease the region with empty promises. A common fear expressed was that the state was mounting a concerted campaign to acquire more land. Others expressed simple disbelief that the state would come through with its promises.

The secretary, however, demonstrated intense personal and organizational interest in the design and execution of the work in the Pennsylvania Wilds. Over a five-year period, the secretary visited the region approximately 18 times, logging in over 5,400 miles in visits to the area during his tenure. The purpose of the secretary's visits was both to learn about the Pennsylvania Wilds and to generate interest and involvement of the residents. DiBerardinis sat down and talked to people and allowed them to air their concerns.

Over time, the attitude of cynicism changed as communities have seen the Commonwealth follow through on its promises. When focus groups were asked what was their perception of the most important benefit of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, we heard time and time again "that someone saw real value in us."

There is, of course, continued skepticism and opposition from some quarters, such as those who suspect that the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative is anti-hunting, or that it is intent on commercializing the region, or even that it is a veiled attempt to depopulate the region and return it to pure wilderness. And there is ample criticism of the way aspects of the Initiative have been handled. Increasingly, however, local elected officials and other community officials have come to see the Pennsylvania Wilds as a boon to the region:

"This is much to our advantage. I initially thought this was just a scheme to placate North Central Pennsylvania. I saw it as superficial. But the County Commissioners of Clinton County have bought-in in grand fashion."

– County Commissioner

"I really like the program but I was skeptical myself at first. It did a lot for community development and the working communities, from everywhere in the Pennsylvania Wilds."

– County Commissioner

“The Pennsylvania Wilds in the best thing to happen in Renovo since the departure of the Pennsylvania Railroad.”

– A participant in the *Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Meeting on March 25, 2009*

Evidence of strong support from local leadership comes from the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, which formally expressed its support for “regional recreation and heritage-based tourism initiatives established in partnership by the Commonwealth’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and Department of Community and Economic Development, such as ‘Pennsylvania Wilds’” in a resolution adopted by its full statewide membership in August 2008. The resolution had been drafted and introduced by a county commissioner from Forest County and supported by his peers across the Pennsylvania Wilds region.

As with other Conservation Landscape Initiatives, an important resource in working with communities is the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. It plays an important role in identifying grantmaking opportunities to facilitate the work of the Pennsylvania Wilds. Meredith Hill has an important hand in focusing this work, working with two regional representatives from the bureau and other central office grants staff. From 2003 through 2009, the bureau made over \$19 million in grants to the region, including over 47 grants totaling \$13.6 million for projects earmarked as meeting strategic goals of the Initiative.³¹ These grants have been used for: planning (park, trail, and greenway); land acquisition for conservation and recreation; feasibility studies; river and water trail access and improvements; design and construction of recreation facilities; and education and technical assistance.

Grants facilitate the work in many ways. Some grants are small, such as a \$13,200 grant to St. Mary’s City for a master site development plan for Elk Creek Park that will include stream bank stabilization and trail linkage assessments. Smaller grants such as these are vital in connecting local organizations to the Initiative and in linking resources that are ecologically interdependent.

Larger grants can serve the purpose of land acquisition and development. Examples include a \$355,000 grant to Lycoming County to develop a trail connector between the town of Jersey Shore and the Pine Creek Trail and the \$150,000 grant that funded the addition of 1.4 miles to the Cook Farm Loop Trail in McKean County.

So too, DCED has spent more than \$5 million in tourism marketing and has been a major source of First Industries³² funds to the region. Additional money has come from other state agencies, including PennDOT, DEP, and the Fish and Boat Commission. The financial assistance has been matched by unprecedented interagency cooperation.

³¹ Source for grant total: “Grant Investments in Pennsylvania Wilds; DCNR Community Conservation and Partnerships Grant Program 2003-2009 By County.” Provided by Meredith Hill. July 31, 2009. Source for grant number total: Grant spreadsheet for Rounds 9-13 provided by Meredith Hill.

³² The First Industries Fund is a loan, loan guarantee, and grant program aimed at Pennsylvania’s agriculture and tourism industries and is administered by both the Commonwealth Financing Authority (CFA) and DCED. <http://www.newpa.com/find-and-apply-for-funding/funding-and-program-finder/funding-detail/index.aspx?progId=47>. Accessed September 21, 2009.

“I’ve been in state government a long time, and I’ve never seen any region that’s gotten this much attention. The coordination of different agencies—DEP, Fish and Boat, DCNR—it’s amazing.”

– *DCED official*

Another reason for the Initiative’s broad support should not be underestimated—DCNR’s efforts to build trust through personal engagement and relationship-building. While everyone understands that the Pennsylvania Wilds was the Governor’s Initiative, DCNR Secretary DiBerardinis is widely credited with being its main driver. His energy and personal commitment were expressed in frequent visits to the region, during which he met with people from all walks of life and got to know many of them on a first-name basis. Community leaders were able to deal directly with him, forming relationships of trust and mutual understanding.

“Secretary DiBerardinis was here for every important meeting. Anytime he was here, we all made a concerted effort to be there. It was exciting to see him excited.”

– *DuBois Focus Group member*

“In regards to Secretary DiBerardinis, he learned to ‘get it.’ When he started, he thought there should be lodges here to bring people from Philadelphia—a Poconos-type thing. It was a credit to him to be able to listen and change.”

– *Pine Creek Focus Group member*

Other high-level DCNR personnel, especially Meredith Hill, have been engaged on a personal level with communities throughout the region. Thanks to their efforts, the Pennsylvania Wilds has been seen as much more than just another state program run by a faceless bureaucracy. It is a different kind state program—one led by people they know, who are passionate about their work and willing to listen and respond to local concerns.

“Meredith Hill has exceeded every expectation.”

– *Secretary DiBerardinis*

“I’m amazed by the way people like Meredith have responded to our concerns.”

– *Pine Creek Focus Group member*

“The Pennsylvania Wilds has been an education and a challenge, but a rewarding experience. To see state agencies communicate with local agencies, and to see people from Harrisburg come and talk to us, that’s rewarding. To see them come north of I-80 is important to us.”

– *Benezette Focus Group member*

An example of a specific outreach program was a November 2007 workshop conducted by the Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team in concert with The Conservation Fund entitled “Balancing Commerce and Nature for Sustainable Community Development.”

Hill and members of the planning team encouraged community leaders to partake in the workshop as teams organized around issues of specific concern to their areas and to create “vision to action” plans to guide collaboration among diverse interests in their communities.³³ Seven of the twelve counties in the Pennsylvania Wilds were represented. Hill believes the workshop led to increased buy-in among communities on the idea of sustainable tourism and using natural resource assets as a rallying point for community revitalization. The teams continue to work actively within the region.

Challenges

Working intensively on the ground at the local level was not without challenges. Communities across the region have various levels of resources, political leverage, and interest available for working on regional initiatives. Weighing the “readiness” of communities became a vital diagnostic tool for strategizing how DCNR could achieve its goal, in part because community input and willingness to partner enabled DCNR to focus its resources toward areas of greatest need and potential. Some elements of readiness include: natural or economic assets, interest among community stakeholders about the environment and economy, political will of local elected officials, political skills and ability to work on teams and in partnerships, access to funding pools to generate matching funds for grants, planning and technical capacity, and a long-term perspective toward achieving goals.

Ridgway is an example of a community that had a high level of readiness. Ridgway had been actively organized since 1997, including a steering committee of six local organizations. The community was concerned over the deteriorating appearance of the downtown and interested in developing tourism as a strategy for economic development. In 1997, the Ridgway Heritage Council started façade improvements on the downtown by utilizing CDBG money. By 2000, the steering committee was active and started working with DCED’s Main Street Program. Ridgway had a resource that it wanted to protect, and was politically mobilized to leverage that resource through partnerships. Ridgway was therefore very receptive to the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. A number of leaders in the town were quite explicit in noting that they had the “wherewithal” to take advantage of what was “clearly a wonderful opportunity.”

Via the networking opportunities created through the Pennsylvania Wilds meetings, Ridgway feels that it has become a catalyst for other local communities to start downtown redevelopment initiatives.

For other communities a great deal of variation in capacity is evident. Communities may have some elements of readiness but not all. In other communities, competing political interests may prevent participation in a partnership. Political lobbies such as recreation groups may influence local politicians and steer political will. The emerging power of natural gas companies desiring access for shale drilling should not be underestimated. To

³³ Participating teams included: Upper Clarion River Recreation and Revitalization Team, Food Matrix Agri-Tourism Initiative, McKean County Route 6 Development Team, Team Clearfield Northwest, Sylvan Heritage Council, Tuna Valley Trails Association Team, and the Greater Renovo Vision to Action Team.

capitalize on community readiness and capacity, it is essential to rely heavily on community input, let this input steer early projects that can be quickly delivered, and communicate effectively the value of the work back to the community and as a tourism promotion message.

The Pennsylvania Wilds' Approach to Economic Development and Community Planning

A basic premise of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative is that the region's remoteness and ruggedness, its sparse population, and its large public landholdings—features that are often seen as obstacles to economic development—can be transformed into valuable economic assets. The forests, waters, and wildlife that were once so heavily exploited have largely recovered, restoring the region to its former natural grandeur. At the same time, a thriving market for outdoor recreation and nature and heritage tourism has emerged. Yet despite its proximity to the population centers of the East Coast, the Midwest, and southern Canada, North Central Pennsylvania has been virtually overlooked by the burgeoning outdoor tourism industry.

Building a tourism economy in the Pennsylvania Wilds has required both a demand-side strategy and a supply-side strategy. The demand-strategy has used branding and marketing techniques to increase recognition for the region as a desirable destination for outdoor and nature tourists, comparable to the Adirondacks or the Smoky Mountains. But, as leaders of the Initiative realized from the start, marketing is not enough. Given the region's limited capacity to accommodate an influx of visitors, it has also been important to build the supply side—to nurture and strengthen businesses that cater to visitors and also to help local communities provide the infrastructure to accommodate a growing tourist industry and develop in a way that preserves their character.

Branding and Marketing the Pennsylvania Wilds

Marketing the Pennsylvania Wilds has been a major effort of the Pennsylvania Tourism Office, a division of DCED whose mission is to promote Pennsylvania as a tourist destination for overnight visitors. A main goal of the office has been to establish an identity for the Pennsylvania Wilds as a single region and a unified approach to tourism marketing. This has been a challenge owing to the region's large size, its variety, and the fragmented nature of prior marketing efforts.



The first step in creating a coherent approach to tourism marketing was to develop a brand for the region as a whole. At the governor's request the Tourism Office took the lead in this effort, engaging a marketing firm and convening a branding session early in the project. The name "Pennsylvania Wilds" was chosen as a concise, easily remembered tag that emphasizes the region's vast natural landscapes and

its opportunities for nature-based and outdoor tourism. The bull elk logo image was chosen as an iconic symbol of the region. The Tourism Agency manages use of the trademarked name and logo to ensure that they are employed in ways that are consistent with the messages and themes of the Pennsylvania Wilds. As they put it, “DCNR manages the land; we manage the brand.”

The Tourism Office also took steps to create a more unified organizational structure for marketing the region. Throughout the state, the Tourism Office provides funding and support to Tourism Promotion Agencies (TPAs), which are designated by county commissioners and funded primarily through hotel bed taxes. Five of the Pennsylvania Wilds counties—Cameron, Clarion, Elk, Forest, and Jefferson—share a TPA known as Northwest Pennsylvania’s Great Outdoors, while the other seven counties operate their own TPAs. In addition, there is the PA Route 6 Tourism Association, whose members include the TPAs from the four northern-tier counties of the Pennsylvania Wilds (McKean, Potter, Tioga, and Warren). Prior to the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, these agencies operated more or less independently and promoted their areas in different ways with limited budgets.

To encourage greater coordination, the Tourism Office provided an initial grant of \$700,000 over three years to create a region-wide umbrella organization composed of the eight TPAs for the 12-county region. Known as the Pennsylvania Wilds Tourism Marketing Corporation, the new organization produced a marketing plan in 2006 to guide the tourism promotion efforts of the member TPAs.

An advantage of the new structure is that the Marketing Corporation, by pooling resources, has been able to undertake larger-scale marketing than the TPAs working individually. The Corporation has created an 800 number, a website (PAWilds.com), a visitor’s guide, a discovery map, and a fishing guide. They have also been able to place print advertisements in some national publications. Such efforts have been supported by grants from the PA Tourism Office totaling more than \$1.5 million between 2004 and 2008, as well as by the TPAs themselves.

Additional marketing for the Pennsylvania Wilds has been supported directly by DCED’s Tourism Office. Between 2005 and early 2009, DCED spent more than \$2 million on print advertisements (in publications such as *Field & Stream*, *National Geographic Adventure*, and *Outside*), radio and TV spots, billboards and bulletins, and events.³⁴ The Tourism Office has also helped generate “earned media” coverage for the Pennsylvania Wilds. Geographically, the marketing efforts have been targeted to the urban areas of the East Coast (such as New York, Philadelphia, and Washington) and the Great Lakes (including Cleveland, Buffalo, and Toronto).

The marketing effort for the Pennsylvania Wilds receives mixed reviews from community leaders in the region. Some express dissatisfaction with the brand, arguing

³⁴Econsult Corporation. *Pennsylvania Wilds Program Evaluation Report*. Revised Draft Report, July 31, 2009.

that the term “wilds” connotes “uncivilized” and fails to do justice to the region’s cultural heritage:

“In a tourism promotion meeting I attended, there were mixed feelings about the name ‘Wilds.’ For example, Smethport has a lot of Victorian architecture. That has nothing to do with the Pennsylvania Wilds.”

– *Smethport Focus Group member*

Similarly, there has been some objection to the use of the bull elk logo, especially in areas that lack elk.

“Most people see the focus on the elk, but here in Potter County, what does that do for me? There’s no elk viewing here.”

– *Coudersport Focus Group member*

These comments reflect the challenge of marketing for a large, varied region. From the perspective of the Tourism Office, the purpose of the brand is to arouse people’s interest and get them to visit. Once they arrive they can learn about the region’s variety and all it has to offer. Nevertheless, the desire of different communities and interest groups to emphasize their distinctive attributes conflicts with the goal of unified marketing.

Another source of tension is the ambivalence of many local people toward tourism promotion. While economic development efforts are universally welcomed, many fear being overrun by tourist-oriented commercialism:

“There’s a skepticism I hear a lot. We choose to live in rural Pennsylvania. There’s a fear that business owners have that we’re trying to commercialize the area. We don’t want to change the area that we call home.”

– *Smethport Focus Group member*

“Those of us who relocated here don’t want it to become like the Poconos.”

– *Coudersport Focus Group member*

Staff of the Tourism Office point out, however, that the amount of money being spent on marketing the Pennsylvania Wilds is simply not enough to generate a massive influx of tourism. They also argue that marketing efforts have been targeted to outdoor and nature-oriented tourists, and that mass marketing has been avoided.

However, what constitutes mass marketing is open to debate, as participants in one focus group pointedly asked, “Is advertising the Pennsylvania Wilds in every vehicle license renewal avoiding mass marketing?”

Part of the skepticism stems from the fact that the tourism promotion efforts target audiences outside the region, and many local people are unsure how the Pennsylvania Wilds are being marketed. Some argue that more effort should be spent on publicizing

the Initiative internally, building local awareness of the region's amenities and promoting the Pennsylvania Wilds as a good place to live and work:

“From a marketing perspective, the people outside know more than people who live in it. They have to market it to people in the area so they understand it but that's not the Tourism Office's job.”

— *Focus group member*

Some small businesses have also expressed concern about potential increases in competition with state resources:

“One of my concerns is that more state parks opportunities are being added—that's like a company that doesn't have to show the books on their profits. The state is building lodging in Bald Eagle State Park, which will be in competition with a local hotel. Artist galleries in state parks are competing with private storefronts.”

— *Small business owner*

Despite these reservations, a number of local businesses are seeing positive results that they attribute to the marketing efforts:

“Once they started marketing and branding the region, we watched our business quadruple. I attribute a lot of that to the Pennsylvania Wilds. There has been an immediate response to the marketing in the regions they are marketing.”

— *Focus group member*

An economic impact study on the Pennsylvania Wilds provides evidence that the tourism marketing efforts have indeed paid off.³⁵ In the years since the Pennsylvania Wilds was initiated, the region has enjoyed “impressive increases” in tourism, as measured by visitor spending, employment, earnings, and tax revenues. As the study summarized its findings, “during a period of otherwise mundane economic performances, tourism indicators for the Pennsylvania Wilds region were largely positive.”³⁶

Challenges

The challenges of marketing an initiative of this type are political, economic, and technical. Politically, the brand must be broad enough to represent the interests of all involved parties, but specific enough that it does not sacrifice the unique character of the region. One county official pinpoints these political considerations:

“Initiatives may focus on a certain part of the region or particular counties. Not

³⁵ Econsult Corporation. *Pennsylvania Wilds Program Evaluation Report*. Revised Draft Report, July 31, 2009.

³⁶ It should be noted, however, that a factor unrelated to the Pennsylvania Wilds may account for some of the region's tourism growth—Marcellus Shale gas exploration. Some bed and breakfasts report a steep increase in business customers associated with the gas industry.

everyone is going to be represented in every Pennsylvania Wilds effort. Folks need to understand that we are all going to get our turn. Some of the tourism assets are more mature, and some of the counties are more sophisticated with what they have available in terms of planning staff, TPA staff, and political positioning.”

The position of this brand is vital because it is the rallying point to engage local tourist promotion agencies and secure their financial commitment for executing the marketing strategy. Local TPAs and businesses are balancing commitments to other brand identities, so the value of accepting the brand must be clearly researched and communicated. For example, one local business owner states:

“The Route 6 Heritage Trail has done more for my business than the Pennsylvania Wilds has ever done. When people come into my store they are holding the Route 6 brochure or they got my name from the heritage website. I can’t tell you a single one that came because of the Pennsylvania Wilds.”

Although the target audience for the Pennsylvania Wilds was thoughtfully considered and well defined, there are mixed feelings about how the marketing strategy was executed. Some stakeholders feel that the strategy moved too far astray from targeted niche marketing and instead became too focused on mass market promotions. Some interviewees suggested that DCNR park management could work more actively with the tourism promotion agencies to provide ongoing information on visitor profiles. These data could be used to create refined promotional materials.

The hiring of Sam MacDonald as the Community Outreach Specialist is an effort to have a dedicated staff member on the ground working with community groups to ensure a relay of information between the community, businesses, and DCNR. The outreach specialist can also work to elevate local recognition of the work, which can lead to further buy-in and stronger relationships for DCNR. A DCNR administrator describes the issue:

“Lots of programs are affiliated with the Pennsylvania Wilds but do not use the logo. So people don’t know of all the work DCNR is doing. We’ve put \$70 million into the region but no one in the region knows that.”

Technical elements of the marketing campaign are also important considerations. Many businesses are eager to use the Pennsylvania Wilds logo on merchandise, but feel they are slowed by elements of the approval process. One interviewee stated:

“Before I can order t-shirts using the logo, DCED wants to see proofs and examples. This raises my cost in developing the product. We want to use the logo and want to get our products out the door but the red tape needs to be slimmed down.”

A small business owner echoes similar sentiments:

“They need to get logos out on t-shirts and souvenirs, but they’re very protective of the logo. DCED is starting to loosen up a bit.”

Business Development Assistance

Early in the development of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative it was recognized that the existing network of tourism-related businesses would be inadequate to serve the growing demand. This was a conclusion of Fermata’s 2002 “Elk Watching and Nature Tourism” study, which noted that “the ultimate long-term success of the elk and general nature tourism development strategy we have laid out for the elk region will depend upon providing assistance to businesses that seek to start-up or move to the region.” The report recommended several measures to address that need, including a business incubator for nature tourism-related businesses, a small business skills training program to be offered by Penn State Extension, and a revolving loan fund for nature tourism development.

While Pennsylvania Wilds has not implemented these specific recommendations, support for small businesses has been an important aim of the Initiative, particularly for DCED, which provides grants, loans, and technical assistance to businesses throughout the state. Working with regional economic development organizations such as North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission and Northwest Regional Planning and Development Commission, DCED has sought to use existing economic development programs to direct assistance to tourism-related business in the Pennsylvania Wilds. The most applicable program for this purpose has been First Industries, a loan, loan guarantee, and grant program aimed at strengthening Pennsylvania’s agriculture and tourism industries. This program has been used to provide loans to some tourist-oriented businesses in the Pennsylvania Wilds, including several hotels and restaurants as well as a winery. However, it is not designed to support small outfitters, liveries, and other outdoor recreation businesses. And as one partner commented, it has only benefited a “handful” of businesses in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

One program that has been applied with some success in the region is DCED’s Main Street Program, which promotes downtown redevelopment by strengthening and diversifying the economic base of business districts and enhancing their physical appearance. A number of Pennsylvania Wilds communities, including Ridgway, Warren, Jersey Shore, and Williamsport, have local Main Street Programs. The experience in Ridgway illustrates how the Main Street Program has complemented the Pennsylvania Wilds. Although the program is not designed to support tourist-related businesses, DCED has been able to direct Main Street funding to some hotels and restaurants that have needed financial assistance to buy or rehabilitate properties. However, the program can only assist businesses within participating downtown districts.

During the past year, the Initiative has taken an important step toward improving hands-on assistance to small businesses by hiring Ta Brant as the Small Business Ombudsman. The new position is funded and managed by DCED. A native of Warren County with a background in communications and experience with a canoe livery in the Pennsylvania

Wilds, Brant's role is to help entrepreneurs and existing small businesses develop tourism-related services and connect them with financial and technical resources. This includes developing and managing a website (pawildsresources.org), which provides information about the Pennsylvania Wilds in general and offers resources for businesses. The site includes a database of all the loan, grant, and technical assistance programs available to small tourism businesses in each county as well as news, success stories, and forums to encourage businesses to learn from one another. In addition, the ombudsman offers workshops to help businesses capitalize on the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative and take advantage of available resources.

While acknowledging that obtaining low-interest loans and grants is a challenge for many small businesses in the Pennsylvania Wilds, Ta Brant notes that local businesses can benefit from a number of technical assistance programs. For example, there are several Small Business Development Centers in the region that provide excellent consultation and assistance to start-ups. Businesses in Warren and Forest counties can enroll in the Grow a New Enterprise (GANE) enterprise, which consists of a 10-week training program, upon completion of which participants can apply for small loans up to \$5000. In addition, a program called PennTAP provides free assistance to help small businesses with questions related to the internet, web development and other technology issues. While acknowledging that obtaining low-interest loans and grants is a challenge for many small businesses in the Pennsylvania Wilds, Brant notes that local businesses can benefit from a number of technical assistance programs. For example, there are several Small Business Development Centers in the region that provide excellent consultation and assistance to start-ups. Businesses in Warren and Forest counties can enroll in the Grow a New Enterprise (GANE), which consists of a ten-week training program, upon completion of which participants can apply for small loans of up to \$5,000. In addition, a program called PennTAP provides free assistance to help small businesses with questions related to the Internet, web development, and other technology issues.

Web development is particularly important because websites have emerged as the top marketing tool for small tourism businesses, yet many Pennsylvania Wilds businesses lack a presence on the Internet. The Northern Tier Planning and Development Commission has a program that provides small business matching grants of up to \$1,000 for website development. Unfortunately, Tioga County is the only county in the Pennsylvania Wilds served by this program.



One Pennsylvania Wilds program is providing assistance to a specific class of tourism-related businesses—artists and artisans. The Pennsylvania Wilds Artisan Workgroup, created in 2006, is co-chaired by Bob Veilleux of Penn State Cooperative Extension and Terri Dennison of the Route 6 Heritage Corporation.³⁷ The Network has identified more

³⁷ The Route 6 Heritage Corporation has operated its own artisans' trail for the past several years. This is a separate initiative, but it overlaps with the Pennsylvania Wilds Artisans Workgroup in the four Pennsylvania Wilds counties traversed by Route 6.

than 300 artisans in a range of disciplines, many of whom have expressed interest in a program to increase their visibility and profitability. To participate, artists must go through a jury process and are judged for quality, salability, and appropriateness for the region. Those who qualify are allowed to display a logo identifying them as Pennsylvania Wilds-juried artisans.

Twenty-six shops and galleries featuring local artisan products have signed up as partners, and they are featured in a Pennsylvania Wilds Artisan Trail guide published in March 2009. Park gift shops are participating; juried artisan products are being sold in gift shops at Parker Dam and Sinnemahoning State Parks.

Challenges

A challenge for DCED in the Pennsylvania Wilds is the fact that most existing economic development programs are geared toward assisting relatively large industrial operations in highly paid industries. As one DCED official explained:

“We had a dilemma with the array of state programs. They are not well designed to address small businesses and small retail and service businesses in particular—the kind of businesses targeted by the Pennsylvania Wilds. So there was a bit of disconnect between what we could do on the business assistance side and what we wanted to do.”

Another challenge is the limited resource capacity allocated to business development. For several years there was no one specifically dedicated to assisting small businesses in the Pennsylvania Wilds, and the lack of support in this area led to some unmet expectations:

“Local businesses expected that the Pennsylvania Wilds would bring hands-on assistance to businesses. People were expecting more than just a marketing plan. I don’t know if it was made clear in the initial presentation: here’s a marketing plan; it’s up to you to take it on.”

– *Coudersport Focus Group member*

Ta Brant was hired through a two-year grant to cover the entire Pennsylvania Wilds region. While this is a positive step, her time is a finite resource both in terms of what a single person can accomplish in such a large region without support and possibly in terms of sustainability of the position.

“We recognize we need to have more people on the ground engaging. For businesses that is particularly critically. DCED got grant money for two years for the Small Business Ombudsman position. My big fear is they are only funded for two years. Need to figure out how to keep them beyond the administration.”

– *DCNR staff member*

Community Planning & Design

In addition to helping build the capacity of the region's tourism-related businesses, Pennsylvania Wilds has sought to help local communities prepare for increased tourism and associated development. This includes ensuring that the region's infrastructure is adequate to meet future needs. It also involves guiding tourist-oriented development so that it

"I believe this is a new model for state agencies to relate to local and county governments."

– Michael DiBerardinis, Former Secretary

preserves and enhances the region's character, rather than diminishing it with commercial sprawl and shoddy development, as has occurred in so many other tourist areas.

The main organizational vehicle for promoting community planning and design activities associated with the Initiative is the Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team. The 12-county partnership was formalized in 2005 through an intergovernmental cooperative agreement, the largest such agreement in the Pennsylvania in terms of geographic extent. The intergovernmental agreement qualifies the Planning Team for state funding under DCED's Shared Municipal Services Program, and it is testimony to the counties' support for the Pennsylvania Wilds.

"We've got the collaboration working across county lines through the intergovernmental agreement. The Planning Team was created by ordinance by county commissioners from all 12 counties. That's a powerful instrument. It commits those counties to participate. They are providing time and travel expense for people to attend. They are starting to buy in."

– Pine Creek Focus Group member

This is not a region prone to intergovernmental cooperation but the counties have embraced the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative and are working toward significant co-ownership of the Initiative in order to see it sustained.

"One thing now is an effort of co-owning Pennsylvania Wilds so it lives past this administration. Individual county representatives and partners from the Planning Team are putting together a strategy and documentation. They will meet with each Board of Commissioners in each county to encourage financial support to say to Harrisburg that counties are buying in."

– Pine Creek Focus Group member

Composed of county planners, regional economic development and heritage organizations, local government associations, and other stakeholders, the Planning Team meets regularly to share information and conduct activities to help communities take advantage of, and prepare for, tourism development associated with the Pennsylvania Wilds.

Because this is a region where planning and zoning are weak and where many communities object to land use regulation,³⁸ the Planning Team has emphasized voluntary design guidelines rather than mandatory regulations. In 2006, the Planning Team arranged workshops, featuring noted sustainable development expert Ed McMahon, to advise communities on how to accommodate growth and commercial development while retaining the qualities that make them attractive.

The Planning Team's best-known contribution to date is the Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship. Prepared by T&B Planning with grant support from DCED and DCNR, the Design Guide provides suggested design guidelines for new development that respects local community character and harmonizes with the natural setting. Themes include applying the Pennsylvania Wilds logo extensively throughout the region; making ample use of wood and timber; preserving and rehabilitating historic buildings; and incorporating natural design elements such as wildlife, water, glass, and stone. The Design Guide won a 2008 Planning Excellence Award from the state chapter of the American Planning Association, and it has been well received throughout the region:

“The Pennsylvania Wilds helps make people aware of what we have here, and not just outsiders. We’ve made some strides—for example, the Design Guide. That’s the most accepted piece of the Pennsylvania Wilds...The Design Guide has been a wonderful document.”

– *Focus group member*

“If someone decides to build hotel or motel, the Design Guide comes into play. We don’t want neon signs or glitz. We’re trying to preserve night sky.”

– *Focus group member*

Nevertheless, there is a need to educate business people and elected officials about the Design Guide and its use. That is a main role for Sam MacDonald, a Ridgway native and professional writer who was recently hired as the Pennsylvania Wilds Community Outreach Specialist. Funded by grants from DCNR and DCED through the Planning Team, this position was created to support the Planning Team and work with the Small Business Ombudsman to advance the Initiative’s community and economic development objectives.

Another important product developed by the Planning Team was a planning study produced by Mackin Engineering³⁹ and completed in December 2007. The study assesses local, county, and regional planning capacities; identifies critical infrastructure needs near the DCNR investment areas; assesses emergency services in the region; and identifies potential trail links between communities and public lands.

³⁸ A notable exception to this generalization is Lycoming County, which has one of Pennsylvania’s stronger county planning programs and a history of cooperative intergovernmental planning.

³⁹ Funded by grants from DCED, DCNR, and the Appalachian Regional Commission.

Based on the study's findings and recommendations, the Planning Team is trying to align infrastructure investments with Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative priorities. For example, it has created a transportation committee that is prioritizing transportation projects relevant to the Pennsylvania Wilds, and working to ensure that these projects make it onto the "TIPs" (the Transportation Improvement Programs—lists of regional transportation projects used to prioritize state and federal transportation investments). The Planning Team is also urging counties to update their comprehensive plans to make them consistent with the planning study and help legitimize requests for infrastructure investments.

The Bureau of Recreation and Conservation grants in tandem with DCED grants support highly localized planning needs of communities such as Jersey Shore and Pine Creek Valley. An example of this is the \$60,000 feasibility study and master site plan for the development of the Clarion River riverfront in downtown Ridgway, entailing resource inventories and technical evaluation. In the Pine Creek Valley, a planning grant allowed the community to have a strong hand in defining their future.

VI. Key Investment Areas in the Pennsylvania Wilds

The Governor's Task Force realized that elk viewing alone would not be enough to create a sustainable tourism industry. In the Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Plan, Fermata suggested several major, model and signature sites for investment.

After some adaptation over time, these priorities are now incorporated in ten identified "Key Investment Areas" where DCNR is making grants and capital investments and where they have concentrated more effort in building community understanding and support.

The following is a series of profiles of the major investments made in the Pennsylvania Wilds. We have organized them to highlight specific lessons emerging from the experience:

- Forging a strategy linked closely to community development
 - Clarion River Corridor and Allegheny National Forest: Ridgway to the Allegheny National Forest
 - Elk Country Visitors Center
 - Cherry Springs State Park/Lyman Run State Park
 - Pine Creek Valley
- Making major infrastructure investments to greatly enhance tourism
 - Bald Eagle State Park—Birding Portal
 - Gateway Welcome Center on I-80 at S.B. Elliott State Park
 - Sinnemahoning State Park—Wildlife Watching
 - Kinzua Bridge State Park
- Reclaiming an environmental and recreational resource
 - West Branch Susquehanna

Forging a Strategy Linked to Community Development

"The Pennsylvania Wilds provided forums for community groups to get together to discuss ways to reinvent and keep their communities vital."

Focus group member

A central strategy of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative is connecting the natural resources to the community in order to stimulate local economies through tourism. As such, DCNR sought to include local communities as partners in decision-making and made strategic investments to build community capacity and link communities to the resources, physically and economically. DCNR engaged local officials and community members to build awareness of the Initiative and to use the knowledge and expertise of local citizens in planning and implementation efforts. Direct involvement of DCNR leadership early on created goodwill among local communities, and quick action in some key investment areas helped to reinforce the increased good will. Although some communities remain cautious about state government, several of those in the key investment areas have developed unusually successful partnerships with DCNR, leading to positive outcomes for both the communities and DCNR.

Promoting and Preserving the Majestic Elk Herd

The Pennsylvania Wilds contains the largest free-roaming elk herd in the northeastern United States. Throughout the 20th century, elk-viewing opportunities were largely unorganized, straining the elk's natural habitat, the region's infrastructure, and tensions between private landholders and visitors eager to have a firsthand encounter with a bull elk.

Visitors viewing elk at Winslow Hill



The magnificence of the elk has drawn a growing number of visitors, and with growing numbers come equally notable hazards. In towns like Benezette, visitors were overusing the few public viewing locations. Cars driving along Route 555 were regularly stopping in 55 mph traffic to watch elk grazing along the roadside. Signs for elk crossing and local street signs were stolen—signs that were important tools for emergency responders. The absence of tourist infrastructure created havoc as visitors would trample through private gardens for better viewing and take to the woods to meet their personal needs—only sometimes the “woods” were on private land. There was little if any programming to translate the elk-watching experience into meaningful knowledge. To respond to local concerns, DCNR staff held numerous public meetings to gather input on how to best protect the elk, visitors, and local communities.

A major response was the development of the Elk Scenic Drive. The goal of the scenic drive was to disperse elk viewing along a 127-mile corridor passing through Clinton, Clearfield, Centre, and Elk counties. It is comprised of two state scenic byways, routes 144 and 120, and passes through three state forests and three state game lands. The drive takes pressure off of individual communities such as Benezette and spreads potential tourism burdens and benefits to other communities and facilities.

Access to the drive is reached from two exits along I-80. DCNR, the PA Tourism Office, PennDOT, the Game Commission, and the PA State Police worked cooperatively to implement the plan for the drive. The first component of the drive involved increasing interpretive resources. Information kiosks were installed at four rest areas along I-80 that provide maps and information about the Elk Scenic Drive: 150 signs were installed along the route, as well as information kiosks at signature wildlife-viewing areas. The Elk Scenic Drive features multi-paneled kiosks and waysides at five viewing areas: Hicks Run, Hoover Farm, Beaver Run Dam, Two Rock Run Scenic View, and the Russell P. Letterman (formerly Fish Dam Run) Scenic View. In 2005, the partners produced the Elk Scenic Drive Guide, which highlights 23 points of interest along the route.

Elk viewing activities have long been centered on Winslow Hill in Benezette Township. The history of problems—such as trespassing, illegal parking, and visitor and resident safety issues—and mounting concern and political pressure from local communities over the elk made it clear that an organized approach must be taken to manage and protect the elk, enhance the elk-viewing experience, and connect to local interests. The 2002 *Plan for Elk Watching and Nature Tourism in North Central Pennsylvania* recommended several actions to address these issues, including the development of a state-of-the-art conservation education center in Benezette that could serve as an orientation and focal point for visitors coming to the area to see the elk herd.

In September 2004, utilizing a \$1.4 million grant from the Richard King Mellon Foundation, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation purchased the 245-acre Winslow Hill Property that will serve as the site for the Pennsylvania Wilds Elk Country Visitor Center. The center will be a premier elk-watching and conservation education facility. The 8,400-square-foot, eco-friendly building will house interpretive programs, anchor wildlife trails and viewing blinds, and provide year-round restroom and parking facilities

for visitors. Other financial supporters include the Dominion and Thoreson foundations, Safari Club International, and many individual donors. Construction began on the center in May 2009 and the grand opening is slated for summer 2010. Annual attendance is expected to reach 160,000 visitors per year by 2016.

Two additional visitors' centers, one at Sinnemahoning and a gateway visitor's center adjacent to I-80 at S.B. Elliott State Park, are also part of this investment area. They are discussed later in the report. Work is continuing on the management/maintenance and interpretative planning for Elk Scenic Drive.

Capturing the Night Skies at Cherry Springs: An Entrepreneurial Park Manager Protects and Enhances a "Star-Gazers' Paradise"

Symbolizing DCNR's focus on leveraging the power of connected resources is the 48-acre Cherry Springs State Park. A key feature of the park lies not in the park's boundaries, but around it, and above it. The park is surrounded by the 262,000-acre Susquehannock State Forest. This natural buffer provides exceptionally dark night skies. So dark, in fact, that in 2000 DCNR declared Cherry Springs a "Dark-Sky Park." From atop the 2,300-foot mountain at the center of Cherry Springs, visitors can peer deep into the Milky Way from four observatory domes.

The International Dark-Sky Association designated Cherry Springs State Park a Gold Tier International Dark-Sky Park, the first to be so designated in the U.S.

The Park Manager in charge of Cherry Springs, Harry "Chip" Harrison, embodies the entrepreneurial spirit Secretary DiBerardinis sought to cultivate within DCNR. Even before the creation of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, Harrison recognized the economic development opportunities that Cherry Springs could bring:

"I think those of us in the field have always known Cherry Springs State Park was a special place, but it wasn't until the early 1990s that we started noticing amateur astronomers gathering in a nearby field and realized it was more than that... DCNR...designated Cherry Springs State Park as Pennsylvania's first official Dark-Sky Park. Around that time, we realized that the resources at Cherry Springs State Park could be valuable tools for sustainable tourism in our region."⁴⁰

Harrison developed and enforces lighting standards in the park to minimize light pollution, worked with local elected officials to pass lighting ordinances, and provides educational materials for residents and businesses in the area. On September 6, 2008, the Pennsylvania Outdoor Lighting Council presented Harrison with a plaque recognizing his

⁴⁰ *Voices from the Pennsylvania Wilds: Finding a "Stargazers Paradise" in the Pennsylvania Wilds.* <http://www.pawilds.com/press-room/index.aspx>. Accessed August 26, 2009.

active promotion of the principles of responsible outdoor lighting at Cherry Springs State Park.⁴¹

Through Harrison's efforts and the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, DCNR made strategic investments to enhance the visitor experience of dark-sky viewing, and to encourage surrounding communities to adopt design guidelines that would help preserve the dark skies and in turn preserve tourism revenue. Visitation at Cherry Springs has increased every year since the start of the Initiative and total park attendance has grown 36 percent since October 2006.⁴²

To enhance dark-sky viewing opportunities at Cherry Springs, DCNR has installed observation domes, low-impact lighting, and interpretive signage and updated park infrastructure. In 2006, the park installed a Night Sky Amphitheater with seating and telescope piers. Park management has developed focused interpretive programming, which includes joint programming conducted by a local astronomer who runs a star-gazing tour business called Crystal Spheres. Management hopes to use the dark-sky viewing experience as an opportunity to promote nature stewardship among park visitors. This increased stewardship ethic has led to strong private support through the Dark Sky Fund, a donation-based fund organized through the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation. A Dark Sky Fund Advisory Council, comprised of local volunteers and astronomers from around the county, directs the funds toward park improvements to benefit amateur astronomy.

Beyond the park boundaries, Cherry Springs has been a focal point for DCNR in reaching out to local communities. In June 2008, the park hosted a Dark Sky Lighting Workshop to educate and encourage local community and elected officials about the need to preserve the dark skies through lighting management. An interview with a director of a county planning office confirmed that local officials are moving forward with incorporating the recommended design guidelines, specifically on the issue of lighting hooding and direction, into their county comprehensive plan. DCNR, in concert with sister agency DCED, has committed grant money to assist communities in implementation of the design guide. In 2006, Galeton Borough, the gateway to the park, received a \$75,000 Community Conservation and Partnership grant from DCNR to further develop its Center Town Park with specific support to utilize dark-sky friendly lighting.

⁴¹ <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/news/resource/res2008/08-0910-cherryspringssp.aspx>. Accessed August 26, 2009.

⁴² Source: *Update on Major DCNR Facility Investments*, Michael DiBerardinis, February 14, 2008.

Balancing World Class Recreation and Community Needs in Pine Creek Valley

“You understand that trails connect communities and people to our natural resources. They also connect communities and economies to our natural resources.”

John Quigley, Acting Secretary of DCNR, speaking to a group of cyclists and community partners participating in the Greenway Sojourn on the Pine Creek Trail

The magnificent 68-mile Pine Creek Valley extends through Tioga and Lycoming counties from Wellsboro Junction to Jersey Shore and includes four state parks (Colton Point, Leonard Harrison, Little Pine, and Upper Pine Bottom) and parts of the Tioga and Tiadaghton State Forests. Much of the valley is publicly owned land, including the Pine Creek Rail Trail, a 64-mile (and growing) hiking and biking trail that is a collaboration of DCNR and the counties and municipalities.

“My heart leads me here.”

– Pine Creek Valley focus group member

Pine Creek Valley, through its vast natural resources, offers a variety of recreational experiences, such as bicycling, hiking, backpacking, cross-country skiing, canoeing and kayaking, trout fishing, camping, and horseback riding. The valley, its towns, and the Pine Creek Rail Trail have received many accolades—the Trail was named one of the “Top 10 Great Bike Tours” in the world by *USA Today*, Wellsboro was named the “Top Paddling Town” by *Canoe & Kayak* magazine and the “Best Sports Town,” by *Sports Afield* magazine, and *Outdoor* magazine named the area’s West Rim Trail the “Top Hike in PA.”

Pine Creek Valley has seen a steady decline in its population and now has few year-round residents, primarily retirees. Residents cite a lack of emergency response infrastructure and septic systems that often cannot handle increased usage of the growing number of tourists as major concerns. As the population declines and the average age of residents increases, there is a growing interdependence between Pine Creek Valley and nearby towns, particularly Wellsboro to the north and Jersey Shore to the south. To ease the burden of visitors in the Valley, the Pine Creek Valley residents see Wellsboro and Jersey Shore as anchors that can house tourism amenities such as hotels and restaurants.

“Since 1975, Jersey Shore and Wellsboro were seen as gateway communities. We tried to get that into the Pennsylvania Wilds concept. We made a recommendation—instead of motels and hotel in the Valley, put them in Wellsboro and Jersey Shore. People are happy to stay in nice accommodations and be in the Valley in 15 min.”

– Pine Creek Valley focus group member

Fermata conducted and delivered an early implementation plan for the Pine Creek Valley to DCNR in 2005. The plan, recognizing the fragility and uniqueness of the area, emphasized focusing on attracting “low impact, low volume, high yield” visitors to maintain the character of the area. Recommendations included strategies for alleviating visitor overload such as redirecting visitors to adjacent lands rather than just staying on the creek and rail trail; concentrating infrastructure in the gateway towns of Wellsboro

and Jersey Shore, including extending the trail to these towns; and promoting shoulder season activities.

DCNR has largely followed the recommendations of the Fermata Early Implementation study and made major investments in extending the trail to the towns of Wellsboro and Jersey Shore. Jersey Shore, capitalizing on the opportunity brought about by the new trail connector, has used the trail connector project as the catalyst to embark on a larger plan that will bring more visitors to the town.

“One of the future phases would connect us with Clinton County and come into Jersey Shore and would become part of the old historic canal bed. And it would connect with the connector. We would have a trail system. That trail connector is the key that lets us open the door that lets us do these other trail projects and the boat launch.”

– *Jersey Shore focus group member*



Pine Creek Gorge, also known as Pennsylvania's Grand Canyon, is a National Natural Landmark. The gorge has several old-growth stands and offers spectacular views of its steep, 1000-foot walls.

DCNR has also funded community planning studies, developed interpretive displays and better directional signage, and made facilities and trail improvements, such as funding the design of a pedestrian bridge over Slate Run and upgrading restroom facilities along the trail. A Visitor Center for Leonard Harrison, recommended in the Fermata Plan, is not going forward. But the Tiadaghton Forest Management Resource Center, south of Waterville, broke ground in 2008 and is slated for completion in early 2010. A Pine Creek Valley interpretive plan is in progress.

Pine Creek Valley residents are protective of the natural resources and, as such, have a long history of skepticism of government and outsider interest and actions in the area. The Fermata Plan largely was perceived by community leaders as aligning with the protectionist position of the various communities along the valley.

“Unfortunately with government, when new people come into government, they mean well but don’t always start the ball rolling based on the promises made by those before them. We’re always concerned about what affect it will have on the Valley. We don’t want to ruin the very thing we have. The reason people come here could be destroyed. Then we wouldn’t have it anymore.”

– *Pine Creek Valley Focus Group member*

Pine Creek Valley is an activist community with many strong opinions expressed in a lively fashion. Interviewing a group of some of the most involved of its citizens, we heard skepticism and appreciation for the efforts in the Pennsylvania Wilds. DCNR’s challenge in investing in the Pine Creek Valley was to honor the community’s concerns *and* help grow the economy through the natural resources in a way that protects the small town character that all cherish. Following the Early Implementation Plan, DCNR held public meetings in Pine Creek Valley for further community input. DCNR continues to seek community input into decision-making for the Pine Creek Valley investment area. DCNR and DCED funded the Pine Creek Council of Governments to undertake a Planning Study to identify key tourism infrastructure challenges and solutions, and to complete a Pine Creek Valley Design Guide modeled after the Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide aimed at helping Valley communities consistently address common issues with a stewardship ethic.

Most recently, the Rails-to-Trails Conservancy, a national nonprofit organization, nominated the Pine Creek Rail Trail to be an initial inductee into the Rail Trail Hall of Fame. DCNR brought the issue to the Pine Creek Rail Trail Advisory Committee, a group of public officials convened by DCNR to offer input into the construction and management of the trail. The committee ultimately voted against the designation amidst concerns about the carrying capacity the increase of visitors might bring that would be in conflict with the “low impact, low volume, high yield” approach.

“What is there to be gained by giving us an award? We saw it as another marketing technique. Just an idea of what will happen—news releases, publications—how does that help us?”

– *Pine Creek Valley Focus Group member*

“We came back to it a number of times in both biological and social carrying capacity. People love Pine Creek the way it is and don’t want to see it changed. What may be technically or biologically capable of additional activity might not go down well with change in the lifestyle.”

– *Pine Creek Valley Focus Group member*

Although DCNR could have accepted the Hall of Fame designation over the objections of the committee, it honored its wishes and declined the designation. DCNR staff saw the growing community relationships as more important than the trail designation.

“We had more to lose by accepting than we had to gain with the local community and the local people.”

– *DCNR Bureau of Forestry staff member*

“If we accepted this honor, we would erode the trust.”

– *DCNR staff member*

“I think it’s a positive thing that a group was allowed to make its own decision and we are taking that advisement.”

– *PA Wilds Recreation Team member*

Clarion River Corridor and Allegheny National Forest

“I do see a lot of people taking an interest in the river. When I was a kid, I don’t remember anyone coming out here to clean up the trash. But we just had a river cleanup and we had a ton of people out here helping. I see people coming out on their own and picking up trash.”

Eric Patton⁴³

These two investment areas are inextricably linked because of their proximity to one another and the ongoing partnership between DCNR and the Allegheny National Forest (ANF). Once one of the most polluted rivers in Pennsylvania, the Clarion River is now part of the National Wild & Scenic River system and has become a popular paddling and fishing destination and a southwestern gateway to the Pennsylvania Wilds. In comparison to other parts of the Pennsylvania Wilds, DCNR does not have vast landholdings in this investment area but holdings include two state parks: Cook Forest, known for its rare stands of old growth forest, and Clear Creek, popular for its exquisite access to the banks of the Clarion. The heavily visited Longfellow Trail through the Cathedral Forest, a National Natural Landmark, is the primary attraction at Cook Forest.

Much of the land in this part of the Pennsylvania Wilds is privately owned or part of the ANF. The ANF adjoins the Clarion River and is a popular wintertime destination for snowmobiling.

“Local governments need to be involved and actively coordinate their efforts in order to protect the unique character of this region and to maximize tourism benefit while minimizing potential burdens.”

– *Fermata Clarion River Recreation Assessment, 2007*

⁴³ Upper Clarion River Team: Collaboration and Real Results.
<http://www.pawildsresources.org/pdf/community/ucrt.pdf>. Accessed September 23, 2009.



Trail in Cook Forest

DCNR's intensive community engagement approach in the Clarion River Corridor initially met with skepticism from communities who for years endured planning efforts by outside entities with which they felt very little buy-in. Secretary DiBerardinis met with local county commissioners and offered DCNR's resources to the communities in their own planning and implementation efforts under the form of the Clarion River Recreation Assessment Project. Working closely in the effort with Meredith Hill, Pennsylvania Wilds Director, Denny Puko from DCED's Center for Local Government Services played a large role in helping communities along the corridor get organized. Eric Patton, a Millstone Township, Elk County supervisor, after strong early resistance, became a local advocate in communicating the potential benefit of the Pennsylvania Wilds to the communities.

During the budding partnership between the counties, DCNR, and ANF, DCNR offered the services of Fermata, Inc. to conduct a rapid assessment of the opportunities and challenges facing the corridor. In December 2006, Fermata's recreation planner evaluated the recreation facilities and access roads along the river. Three public input workshops were then conducted in February 2007. Initial findings were presented back to the community in three additional workshops in March 2007.

The Clarion River Corridor was already suffering from popularity at the time of the Fermata Plan. Many of the recreation resources, such as trails and canoe launches, were in serious disrepair from overuse and lack of maintenance. The heavily used Cook Forest trails were identified as deteriorated and urgently in need of rehabilitation. In addition to badly needed infrastructure improvements, Fermata made a number of other recommendations for this corridor through the Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Plan and the Clarion River Recreation Assessment:

- Better management of primitive camping
- Improved directional signage and access
- Improved visitor information
- Support for community revitalization, including riverfront redevelopment in Ridgway
- Trail connectors from Cook Forest to Ridgway
- Intergovernmental cooperation



Archeological dig along the Clarion River

Ridgway, a town situated along the Clarion River, was already “on a path” and had partnerships in place working toward community improvements compatible with the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative’s goals. A strong community group had been working for nearly ten years prior to its connection to the Pennsylvania Wilds. They had strong leadership and were able to link in quickly to the larger, corridor-wide effort.

In speaking of the Pennsylvania Wilds:

“We were already trying to make it happen. It gave us a tool. Also, the state recognition of preservation and conservation helped us develop an identity...The river ties communities together. We formed a steering committee of six different groups, involved hundreds of people. We’ve been organized since 1997.”

– *Ridgway focus group member*

Despite early resistance to state government involvement, the high level of cooperation found in the Clarion River Corridor paved the way for the creation of the Clarion River Municipal Partnership (CRMP) under the leadership of Eric Patton. Established in 2007,

CRMP is an intergovernmental cooperation agreement⁴⁴ among ten municipalities of the Clarion River Corridor. This agreement was particularly significant given a history of anti-government sentiment in this part of region. This multi-municipal cooperation opens up DCED's Shared Municipal Services funding stream to support its work, although this funding stream has yet to be utilized. Working with the ANF, CRMP received support in 2007-08 from Headwaters RC&D in the form of two VISTA volunteers. It also has received grant support from Elk County and the Lumber Heritage Region, and technical assistance related to river access improvements from the PA Fish and Boat Commission. In July 2008 and 2009, CRMP along with partners at the ANF, Clarion University, Elk County, and DCNR, conducted an archaeological field school and study program for high school students. The partnership has also come together to conduct river cleanups and community outreach events.

DCNR and ANF have long partnered on trail projects, with DCNR providing multiple year grant support for improvements to motorized recreation opportunities. This, coupled with the formation of CRMP and a willingness among all parties to engage in joint decision-making, has resulted in an impressive number of projects benefiting the Clarion River Corridor.

Through the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, DCNR has invested heavily in the Clarion River Corridor with grants for new visitor amenities like restrooms near river access points, better signage and maps, additional fishing access, improvements to boat launches, and feasibility studies for communities like Ridgway and Johnsonburg who stand to benefit by making closer connections to the river

The agency is also finalizing a land swap with the PA Game Commission that will transfer lands in the river corridor to DCNR. Stemming from a specific recommendation from county officials involved in the Clarion River Recreation Assessment engagement effort, this will allow for enhanced recreation opportunities in the corridor that were not possible when under the ownership of the PA Game Commission. When complete, DCNR will prepare a corridor management plan for the newly acquired lands and work closely with the ANF on alignment with its proposed Clarion River Wild and Scenic Management Plan to ensure a common approach to recreational use with visitors and ultimately an enhanced visitor experience on the river.

⁴⁴ Article XI, Section 5 of the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code, 53 Pa.C.S. §§ 11001 et seq., provides "A municipality may . . . cooperate or agree in the exercise of any function, power or responsibility with, or delegate or transfer any function, power or responsibility to, one or more other governmental units including other municipalities or districts, the Federal government, any other state or its governmental units, or any newly created governmental unit."

Major Infrastructure Investments

The huge influx of funding for improving infrastructure in Parks and Forestry provided much-needed resources for bureaus that suffered from decades of underfunding.

“Our infrastructure is so far behind the times—even with what’s been done, we are just starting to catch up. Most of our infrastructure came out of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s. We got to the ’50s and got stuck in time. [Through Pennsylvania Wilds] we’re doing what we should have been doing for the past 50 years.”

– DCNR Staff Member

With the Fermata Recreation Plan as the blueprint, DCNR embarked upon repair and restoration of existing facilities and building projects in many of the key investment areas. Although these investments were on state land, they play a critical role in DCNR’s strategy of creating stewardship among the public by enhancing the visitor experience.

Dynamic Leadership at Sinnemahoning State Park

Sinnemahoning State Park, an eastern anchor of the Pennsylvania Wilds, stretches through both Cameron and Potter counties, and sits approximately eight miles north of the small, historic village of Sinnemahoning and 35 miles south of Coudersport. This 1,910-acre park surrounded by Elk State Forest is a key elk-viewing location and serves as the eastern anchor of the Elk Scenic Drive. The park also boasts numerous other wildlife-watching opportunities, including bald eagle, coyote, and abundant birds, amphibians, and insects. Wildlife habitats are highly varied ranging from “a rich riparian corridor meandering along an exceptional value stream and lake to reverting fields surrounded by contiguous forests.”⁴⁵

Recent improvements in Sinnemahoning State Park include new trails and a wildlife viewing blind at Forty Maple pond and wetland.

The rich and varied wildlife and the park’s central location in the Pennsylvania Wilds led to the selection of Sinnemahoning State Park as the site of a new wildlife-watching/visitor center, a major capital investment for DCNR. A new wildlife-viewing trail will link to the center, which is scheduled to open in the spring of 2010.

Sinnemahoning also serves the important value of dispersing elk viewing beyond Benezette, helping to absorb some of the visitor burden for the communities along Elk Scenic Drive. Its close proximity to another of the Pennsylvania Wilds investment areas, Cherry Springs State Park, provides opportunity for cross programming and packaging of recreation experiences.

⁴⁵ DiBerardinis, M. Internal DCNR memo, February 14, 2008.

Sinnemahoning is perhaps the most remote of all the parks in the Pennsylvania Wilds as it is 35 miles from the nearest town of any size, that being the Cameron County seat of Emporium. Community building and economic development were, therefore, less of a concern in this park than in others in closer proximity to towns. Nonetheless, the park has reached out to engage in local initiatives taking place in area communities such as the village of Austin and as part of the Sinnemahoning Watershed planning effort.

A key feature of the park is its dynamic manager. Lisa Bainey brings enthusiasm, a strong conservation ethic, and a bias toward active recreation linked to a strong stewardship message. The park has been recognized for its outstanding interpretive programming, which includes pontoon boat excursions and guided elk-watching trips. Sinnemahoning was named the 2009 Park of the Year by the Pennsylvania Parks and Forestry Foundation.

While the Fermata Recreation Plan identified Sinnemahoning to function as a site for a nature tourism-oriented business incubator, this plan did not come to fruition. The incubator was conceived as a partnership between DCNR and other entities, including the North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission. It was to offer training in nature tourism-related activities such as hospitality and backcountry safety and provide a revolving loan fund for development. DCNR ultimately did not move forward with this recommendation as leadership believed that a more decentralized approach, such as that used by the Small Business Ombudsman, could be more effective.⁴⁶

Recent accomplishments in Sinnemahoning State Park include the completion of the wildlife-watching trail, which includes a trailhead, parking lot, interpretive signage and kiosk, and wildlife-viewing pull-offs and blinds. The park has also initiated and managed very successful “Women in the Outdoors” weekend programming that actively engages people in a variety of outdoor recreation experiences while delivering an important stewardship message.

S.B. Elliott State Park and Bald Eagle State Park

S.B. Elliott State Park and Bald Eagle State Park, both on the southern edge of the Pennsylvania Wilds, are poised to serve as entry points to the region for many Pennsylvanians. S.B. Elliot State Park, a small, heavily wooded 318-acre park surrounded by Moshannon State Forest, is situated directly along I-80. Bald Eagle State Park is less than ten miles from I-80 and is a premier bird-watching location in Pennsylvania. The mountain ridges around Bald Eagle are excellent flyways for migrating birds. Visitors can see a variety of birds year round, including songbirds and water fowl. Quality wildlife viewing at Bald Eagle is not limited to birds; the park has abundant reptiles, amphibians, and insects—butterflies and rare dragonflies and damselflies. In its Recreation Plan, Fermata noted, “The park yielded more species and diversity of species than most other sites Fermata assessed.”

⁴⁶ Interview with Michael DiBerardinis, August, 2009.

I-80 is one of the busiest east-west traffic corridors in the country with 250,000 cars passing S.B. Elliott every day. Because of its proximity to I-80, S.B. Elliott was identified early by Fermata as the ideal location for a “Gateway Visitors’ Center,” visible from the highway, that would orient visitors to the entire Pennsylvania Wilds region. The Gateway Center will house interactive displays as well as information about the natural and historical assets and key visitor destinations throughout the Pennsylvania Wilds. The center will also serve as a trailhead for the trails in Moshannon Forest, where visitors can hike, cross-country ski, and snowmobile.

In developing the Gateway Center, slated for construction in 2010 or 2011 pending plan approval, DCNR has been able to leverage PennDOT funding for construction and eventual staffing through its Welcome Center program. Local tourism personnel could also potentially provide staff support. Original plans for the Gateway Center included an 80-room Nature Lodge, which was removed from the plans. However, an approximately 15-room Nature Inn is under construction at Bald Eagle State Park and another has been proposed for Parker Dam, nine miles from S.B. Elliott. The Gateway Center project has been re-scoped without the Nature Lodge component and agreed upon by the partnering agencies.

Groundbreaking for the Nature Inn at Bald Eagle State Park took place in October 2008. This eco-friendly inn is the first of its kind in Pennsylvania and is slated to open in the spring of 2010. The inn will support the overarching goals of the Pennsylvania Wilds by providing a high-quality recreation experience designed to encourage stewardship among visitors while bringing economic benefit to the area in a way that preserves the natural resources. At the groundbreaking, DCNR Secretary Michael DiBerardinis said, “We know there are many people who would spend more time using our parks if we offer them something beyond the traditional camping experience. We also believe that visitors will help support local economies for goods and services during their stay.” One example of tying the Nature Inn to the local economies is the plan to incorporate furnishings and artwork produced by Pennsylvania Wilds artisans into the Nature Inn, connecting it to another key investment made in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

The Nature Inn has raised questions and concerns among some DCNR staff and among community members. Overwhelmingly, staff did not know why Bald Eagle was selected as the site. Several expressed that other locations both within the Pennsylvania Wilds and in other regions of the state were more logical choices for an investment of this kind.

“Why ultimately that was picked, I’m not sure. I think they thought that with the proximity to State College, they will get people to stay there. They were worried about profit and needed a sure bet to fill rooms. But I don’t know if rooms are needed there. Sinnemahoning needs some rooms. That’s where I would have put it.”

– *DCNR staff member*

“For whatever reason, it went to Bald Eagle. Many of us thought that was the dumbest of all locations. I’m low in management. The feeling across the board was ‘why Bald Eagle?’ It did not make it up the chain of command. Now it has an impact on our system forever and ever.”

– *DCNR staff member*

Moreover, several staff expressed concern that ongoing maintenance of the new building would divert badly needed resources from other parks and would be a “white elephant” for staff responsible for Bald Eagle.

Staff members could not point to a business plan for the Nature Inn. If one exists, it has not been shared widely either within DCNR or among partners. This lack of a solid case showing the economic benefits of the inn has resulted in a lack of support for the project internally and externally.

“You build a new facility, there’s an initial building cost, but also long-range maintenance costs. Bald Eagle is an example. It has implications. You need to be thoughtful in the process for anything that costs long-range funding. You need buy-in all the way down. *Real* buy-in is to be more thoughtful in the initial proposal... They are investing in something that does not have a plan. That doesn’t seem thoughtful to those of us in the field. You need to have your rationalizations line up.”

– *DCNR staff member*

“The Bald Eagle Nature Inn is close to Lock Haven. First time in PA. It will have full hotel capacity and catering. But it’s too much money—\$16 million for 16 beds.”

– *County Commissioner*

“One of my concerns is that the state parks are being added—that’s like a company that doesn’t have to show a profit competing. The state is building a B&B in Bald Eagle State Park that is in competition with a local hotel. Artist galleries in state parks are competing with private storefronts.”

– *Business Owner*

When a Tornado Strikes; Rebuilding the Kinzua Bridge Experience

In 1882, the 300-foot tall, 2,053-foot long Kinzua Viaduct was constructed—the tallest bridge in the world at the time. From the opening of the 316-acre Kinzua Bridge State Park in 1970, the engineering landmark was a major tourist destination, complete with a scenic excursion steam train running over the bridge from Marienville. The bridge met a surprising fate in July 2003, when it was largely destroyed by a tornado. The collapse of the bridge led to decreased tourism to the region, particularly in the Mt. Jewett, Bradford, and Smethport communities located along Route 6 and the park. These communities also connect visitors to the nearby Allegheny National Forest. DCNR recognizes the tremendous asset of the bridge, valuing the historical perspective it adds to the area's natural resources, and has rallied to infuse resources into the park. The park remains popular for foliage viewing, hunting, and viewing of the collapsed bridge.



Between 2003-2006, DCNR invested approximately \$8.2 million in state capital, T-21 Transportation Enhancement, and Keystone funds for emergency repair and restoration



work needed on the bridge and park after the tornado. In addition, in late 2008, DCNR worked with PennDOT to secure \$1 million of Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA) funds to complete the massive stabilization project involving the remaining sections of the bridge. DCNR contributed an additional \$4 million to this undertaking. The stabilization is scheduled to be completed in early 2010.

In addition, DCNR is moving forward with ambitious plans to revitalize the park and add new visitor amenities. A sky walk overlook with a partially glassed floor is being created for viewing the Kinzua Creek Valley. DCNR is partnering with the Allegheny National Forest Vacation Bureau to develop the interpretive plan for a new visitor center, which is expected to go to construction late in 2010. The center will include interpretive displays

and programming, and will also serve as a trail hub between the Allegheny National Forest, local communities, and the Allegheny State Park across the border in New York. Completion is expected in 2011 or early 2012. Plans are underway to further develop the regional trail system in McKean County. The county is also spearheading a multi-county effort to study the feasibility of a potential 70-mile rail trail from the park, through the heart of the ANF ending in Knox, Clarion County. DCNR anticipates that these efforts will help redevelop tourist interest in the bridge and surrounding communities.

Reclaiming an Environmental and Recreational Resource

Work on the West Branch of the Susquehanna River represents strong interagency collaboration. DCNR is partnering with DEP and local organizations on a focused



environmental cleanup effort to remedy acid mine drainage and runoff into the watershed. The emphasis of the work is on restoring this environmental resource and developing and executing a long-term plan to increase access and usability of the river as a recreational asset. DCNR views this increased recreational use as an opportunity to foster a stewardship and conservation ethic among citizens that will translate into increased political will to protect the river into the future.

The West Branch of the Susquehanna River is a 160-mile stretch that drains the mountainous region of the Allegheny Plateau, meeting the North Branch near Northumberland, Pennsylvania. Although the West Branch has tremendous recreation opportunities, a history of coal mining and agriculture in the region has left it heavily polluted with acid mine drainage and other pollutants. In 2005, the Susquehanna River was named “America’s Most Endangered River” by American Rivers, a national conservation organization. Cleaning and protecting the river is vital not only to increasing recreational opportunities, but also to protecting its connecting watersheds. The river is known for its relatively undeveloped banks, excellent opportunities for canoeing and camping, and a slow but steady return of trout, bass, and muskellunge populations.

As chair of the West Branch River Task Force, the Department of Environmental Protection has taken the lead on coordinating cleanup efforts. Major partners include Trout Unlimited and the Susquehanna River Basin Commission. The DEP is utilizing funds dedicated to the Growing Greener program to support local cleanup efforts. For example, in 2009, \$148,528 was given to the Clinton County Conservation District to expand and improve an existing mine drainage treatment system to treat mine discharges on the South Fork Tangascootack, a tributary of the West Branch Susquehanna.

Numerous watershed associations, conservation districts, conservation groups, businesses, conservancies, and regional coalitions have been active in the restoration work. Three West Branch Susquehanna Restoration Symposia have been hosted at State College, where stakeholders have met to strategize around cleanup efforts.

DCNR is a large landholder in the region, with approximately 1.4 million acres of state forest land, 250,000 acres of state game land, and 29,000 acres of state park land. Since the inception of the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, a regional effort to increase recreational opportunities and protect wildlife habitat, DCNR has been a major funder in the region. DCNR has been active in acquiring land and securing public access along the river and has been working in concert with the PA Fish and Boat Commission. Through the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative, DCNR has emphasized a grantmaking strategy that seeks to assist West Branch communities such as Jersey Shore, Williamsport, and Lock Haven in connecting to the river's natural assets and to surrounding recreational opportunities like the 60-mile Pine Creek Trail. For example, DCNR partnered with DCED, PennDOT, and the federal government to fund \$2.3 million for the planning and construction of the four-mile Susquehanna Riverwalk, a paved walk/bikeway in Williamsport. In addition to recreation opportunities, the Riverwalk will include the Timber Trail. Funded by the Lumber Heritage Region, the trail will provide interpretive signage and artwork providing information about the region's historical connection to the lumber industry. Williamsport will eventually be linked to the Pine Creek Trail and on to Lock Haven.

Recent accomplishments include the completion of a West Branch River Stewardship Plan, completed in partnership with the Northern Pennsylvania Conservancy and funded through DCNR Rivers Conservation grant monies. The identification and establishment of additional access (e.g., Karthus, Hyner, Baker's Run, Bennetts Branch) and camping opportunities is ongoing, with additional riverfront acreage acquired for new access near the Route 120 bridge in Hyner in April 2009. DCNR worked with The Nature Conservancy and Clinton County on this acquisition not only to support increased recreational access, but also to secure an alternate landing zone for Hyner View hang gliders—a need brought to DCNR's attention by Clinton County officials.

The focused work on the West Branch is already providing results. Fish populations are growing, and a local outdoorsmen magazine reported that a 20-inch holdover rainbow trout was landed this spring near Curwensville. In April, the Hyner View Challenge brought over 650 people from around the country to participate in a 25-kilometer trail run along the ridges overlooking the river. Organizers focused on "greening" the event and connecting to local businesses. Local sponsor Kathy's Cafe of Hughesville donated cases of biodegradable corn-based cups that were used for water at rest stations for the runners. Both nature and people are returning to the river, and with it is developing a renewed interest in protecting and enjoying the watershed.

VII. Challenges, Conclusions, and Lessons Learned from the Pennsylvania Wilds

Top Line Conclusions

Significant strides have been made toward meeting the major goals of the Pennsylvania Wilds. We have documented substantial and tangible progress along each goal: Large-scale investments have been made to improve the infrastructure of the public system, to engage communities, and to inform the public about the assets. Although hampered by limited types of public financing for small business development, efforts were made to maximize the use of all of those available.

Perhaps most importantly, significant efforts were made to ensure the long-term stewardship of both the public lands and the character of the communities in the Pennsylvania Wilds region. The effects of these efforts are intended to be symbiotic across major relationships in this system. Improvements in parks and forests redound upon communities. Communities can redeem the increased value of the surrounding land and water in tangible economic ways. And these investments can translate into meaningful and satisfying experiences for the visiting public who in turn can reinvest in the land and resources, and so it goes.

But this virtuous cycle has needed—and will continue to need—tending in order to take hold in a sustainable way. At the center of this cycle of investment, growth, and reinvestment sits the willingness of public officials to engage the public. While more public involvement has meant more time spent by public officials communicating about the goals and ideas behind the effort, it has also meant that public officials have listened more carefully to the concerns and interests of those living in the region. Through these conversations, struggles, and efforts, there is evidence of greater trust and more tangible stewardship shared across the divides of interests separating segments in many of the communities in the region.

Stewardship is not found directly when examining the “strategy” of the Initiative. But it is actually everywhere, if we consider the premise behind much of the work, which is: If people have the opportunity and knowledge to act responsibly, they will and they will indeed act as responsible stewards of the assets they control. This will only come about, however, through time and through the trust built by real engagement, real delivery on promises, and authentic interaction with those most involved.

However, stewardship is also somewhat of a luxury if the fundamental needs of people are not met. While the forests, waters, and wildlife that were once so heavily exploited have largely recovered, they will again fall prey to extractive industries unless people can see reasonable and sustainable economic options. Without options, the local public’s willingness to eschew what may be seen as an easier and more certain route to economic self-sufficiency will be limited. Tourism is a highly uncertain option and requires financing and human capital to establish itself.

The architects behind the Pennsylvania Wilds have understood that certain bridges to success would need to be built for the public to buy into the time it will take for the returns of the Initiative to manifest themselves. This takes trust.

It is quite clear that much of what has “stuck” in the Pennsylvania Wilds are those efforts bolstered by leadership attention and physical presence. It is difficult to argue with the conclusion that trust and relationship matter in important ways, since the single greatest benefit of the Initiative that we heard expressed in dozens of interviews with residents was that “someone saw value in us.” These sentiments are not the kind of cynical comments heard at the start of the Initiative. Rather, they give rise to hope that the new forms of engagement have had and will continue to have an effect in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

It was not just leadership that mattered. So too did a number of solid investments and efforts to provide the organizational space for otherwise disparate community constituencies. The Planning Team in the Pennsylvania Wilds laid an impressive stake in joint municipal governance—previously unheard of in the region. This was replicated in the area of the Clarion River Corridor as well and in the communities along the Pine Creek Valley. This work was all supported by government grants and the need for the support was identified by government workers.

The outcomes of these efforts have not always aligned with the desires of those leading and staffing the Initiative. But impressively, these public stewards have respected the decisions made by the communities taking up their own role as stewards in their own right, even if the decisions they make seem to run counter to some of the goals of the Pennsylvania Wilds. In the long run, the give and take and the mutual respect built will likely translate into the kind of social and community capital that the Initiative can bank on in the future.

The bottom line: There is good reason to hope that tourism will deliver some of the options needed to sustain public interest. In the Pennsylvania Wilds, tourism has grown significantly and it has outpaced the performance of the sector overall in the Commonwealth.

Lessons Learned

The lessons raised by the work in the Pennsylvania Wilds are both unique and common to other CLIs. But because of the size of the investment in terms of funds and effort and the critical challenges raised by the economy, these lessons have a more urgent message. The first set of lessons relates to thinking about the strategy at large; the second set relates to issues of implementation.

- **The defining parameters of a landscape matter in many and important ways.** If building stewardship is to be part of the goals of managing a landscape, then the definition of the landscape must make some prima facie sense to those involved. This was not always the case in the Pennsylvania Wilds. Its parameters were largely defined by casting a large enough net over the geography to encompass most of the major holdings of public lands, regardless of the linkages among subsets of the land or ideas about historical identity or shared culture. This became problematic as the regional “brand” was formed and marketed by government tourism experts. The local public was as often offended or mystified by the coinage of the term—Pennsylvania Wilds with an elk stamped on the logo—as they were curious or engaged. This is not to say that the Pennsylvania Wilds brand is wrong; we learned that it clearly reflects some portion of the region but not nearly the whole. Rather, important information about both real opportunities and barriers to implementation is lost when large segments of the regional constituency are ignored.
- **Working in conservation landscape management is inherently political (small “p”) in nature.** Conservation efforts will always run into tradeoffs and opposition in a large landscape setting as many dissenting factions will claim part of the landscape as theirs. The politics of working with all those laying claim to a significant interest in the Pennsylvania Wilds—including hunters, ATV and snowmobile enthusiasts, residents who are against development, residents who hope to exploit the effort for personal gain, and those residents who resent government influence of any kind—will require leaders and staff suited to the process of hearing and working with oppositional points of view.

The work is inherently a balancing act juggling complicated sets of goals that must be managed for progress to occur. Goals of eco-friendly development require both limits to growth and incentives for growth but of a type and usually of a kind consistent with the overall aims. This type of partnership often requires greater capacity to “influence” rather than regulate the parties at the table.

Also, this work is more difficult when there is limited infrastructure or resources for community planning and virtually no presence of nonprofit organizations to analyze decisions, build community capacity, or advocate for good policy or practice.

The point to be made is the need to consider these factors in staffing for efforts such as this. It was the previous Director of the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation who inserted this perspective into the early thinking about what was needed to make the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative a success. His intervention led to the hiring of Meredith Hill, a specialist in community relations and planning who is extremely well suited to meeting the challenges raised here.

- **There is reason to believe that the Pennsylvania Wilds is too large.** On the upside, its size likely stimulated the governor's interest. Also the size of the endeavor was exciting for many in leadership positions, presenting interesting and challenging issues and forcing creative solutions.

On the downside, its magnitude while inspirational, defied management. Over the years, its outsized scale surfaced problems with definition of the region as a "whole" by those residing within its parameters. The matrix management structure could not expedite decisions in a fast enough time frame to assure relatively uniform levels of implementation; instead the standard operating procedures of bureaucracy tended to win out. It was difficult to communicate clearly and consistently across a region as large as this. Other, varied implementation issues have arisen and, at least in part, the problems have been associated with the inordinate scale of the effort.

- **Initiatives need to scale their efforts to existing levels of community capacity.** Linked to the issue of scale is the understanding that communities inevitably bring different levels of capacity to any enterprise. In the Pennsylvania Wilds, the Ridgway community was able to jump on the opportunities offered. But then again Ridgway had organized itself nearly six years ago in an effort to build economic opportunity. Other towns brought similar abilities to the table. However, this was not uniformly the case as we learned in the community focus groups—where we heard the plea "We need more than the brand, we need help."

While staffing resources continue to decline, it is important to factor into the equation that organizing communities to help themselves takes time and staff. Again, this point calls the size of the Initiative into question.

- **A big vision about what government can do: Making good on what people want and what government can deliver.** While a number of the "larger than life" features of the Pennsylvania Wilds spawned problems of implementation, the vision of the social benefit of "good government" was essential to motivate, move, and inspire staff to rethink their roles and renew their commitment to their work. Countless times staff referenced that their experience with the Pennsylvania Wilds reminded them of why they worked for the Department in the first place. As one leader in the Department stated: "It made us want to take up the mantle of being 'the leader' in conservation. It forced me to stretch myself to reach into new realms and feel my way into a new leadership role."

Time and again, with consistent passion, the vision for change was articulated and illustrated and served as a basis for discussion, group interaction, and plans. This helped to create an increasingly shared internal vision of the potential behind the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative for the people and the communities and for each person working in the Department.

Issues of Implementation

This is a summary of issues arising during the implementation of the Pennsylvania Wilds strategy.

- **Building relationships with other state agencies.** The Pennsylvania Wilds helped open the door for DCNR to forge deeper collaborations with other state agencies. Relationships are much improved overall with other agencies. Success in partnering varies by both agency and type of engagement. DCNR was able to leverage multiple funding streams administered by other agencies.

DCED has been DCNR's most consistent partner and that agency plays a large role in the Pennsylvania Wilds through the Office of Tourism, Film, and Marketing and the Governor's Center for Local Government Services in the Office of Community Affairs & Development. As noted, DCED's tourism marketing assistance has been a key part of the Initiative and has contributed to significant increases in tourism. Nevertheless, people in the region express ambivalence and in many cases strong dissatisfaction about the Department's marketing messages and strategies. The size of the region made the "one size fits all" approach of the Department inappropriate for parts of the region. Marketing opportunities for elk viewing where they don't exist has raised significant concerns for many. In other cases, some of the misgivings surfaced stem from inadequate communication. Better communication between DCED marketers and local leaders might have alleviated concerns about how the Initiative has been marketed. Likewise, closer coordination between DCNR and DCED with respect to marketing might have helped DCNR staff keep local leaders better informed about the state's marketing strategy and activities.

Another challenge in the relationship with DCED has been the difficulty in directing assistance to small businesses, especially outfitters, liveries, and other outdoor recreation providers. In part, the problem results from the fact that most of DCED's existing economic development programs are oriented toward assisting larger businesses. Technical assistance and micro-loan programs to help small businesses and start-ups do exist, but businesses need guidance on how to access them. The Small Business Ombudsman, funded by DCED, has been a tremendous help in this regard. But the delay in creating this position contributed to a perception that small businesses were not receiving the help they had been promised—a perception that might have been avoided had the position been created earlier.

DCNR's relationship with PennDOT continues to build. PennDOT has been a co-funder on a number of community projects, including substantial investments in trail building. The PA Fish and Boat Commission has been a good partner with staff available for consultations and participation in team meetings but its overall stake is less sizable as it has few resources to lend.

Recently, DCNR and the Game Commission have engaged in land swaps that benefit the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative (Clarion River Corridor). DCNR seeks to improve its capacity to partner with Game Commission, which some see as not invested in the goals of the Pennsylvania Wilds. DCNR, however, takes its share of responsibility with the Commission:

“We’ve done well on most of the opportunities, but have fallen with the Game Commission. We need to work on it. There have been lots of changes in leadership and this has created distance and we have grown apart. We are the two largest land managers in state. They have 1.4 million acres. And they have land where we don’t.”

On the other hand:

“The Game Commission is opposing multiuse of their lands (like for horseback riding). They go beyond where they have to go in enforcing their regulations—like fining horseback riders. It conflicts with the mission of the Pennsylvania Wilds to grow tourism. There is a stewardship aspect, but it can conflict with tourism goals.”

aspect, but it can conflict with tourism goals.”

- **Forging a single organization out of nine bureaus.**⁴⁷ The Pennsylvania Wilds has greatly advanced inter-bureau relationships by building more and better conversation among all of the bureaus. Most internal leaders expressed their satisfaction with how the relationships have developed and what they admitted to be initial “disbelief” that a more unified agency could emerge.

Efforts to break down the well-recognized silos have had the most noticeable impact on the Bureaus of State Parks and Forestry. And the benefits are easily perceived by the public. For example, the Bureaus of State Parks and Forestry worked together to resolve different policies and regulations on one trail that crossed back and forth between Parker Dam State Park and Moshannon Forest (adjacent to each other). This would not have occurred prior to the Pennsylvania Wilds.

But there is far more to do as the differences go deep. One leader points out the pervasive nature of the differences among the bureaus but particularly between State Parks and Forestry:

⁴⁷ The nine DCNR bureaus are: Administrative Services, Facility Design and Construction, Forestry, Information Technology, Human Resources, Recreation and Conservation, State Parks, Topographic and Geologic Survey, and Wild Resource Conservation Program.

“The divide between the two landholders is large and it manifests itself everywhere: Each has its own way of budgeting and structuring its work, of how it manages the land itself and how it relates to people. This is a deep cultural issue and change will take getting the 2nd and 3rd tier leaders on board.”

- **Matching vision to implementation.** The Fermata Plan foretold the major challenge to the success of the Pennsylvania Wilds—insufficient number of staff. While the vision grew over the time of the Initiative, operating budgets declined and cuts in seasonal staff hit 25 percent between the first year of the Initiative (2003) and 2009.

In part, leaders believed that specific staff roles would shift more than they realistically could. In some cases, service foresters could make the shift from working with individual landholders as they had for years to working with county commissions. But this was, for the most part, the exception. So too, environmental education staff could not easily shift their efforts from interpretive planning to directly offering active recreation programs. The barriers encountered were sometimes related to civil service and sometimes related to professional perspectives.

As more responsibilities accrued, few were taken off the plate. As Jim Collins the author of *Good to Great* would say: there was no “stop doing” list. And to some extent the problem is that leadership has not consistently delivered a message clarifying priorities, the shifts in roles and responsibilities that they expect, and the types of decisions staff are authorized to make.

Many staff, nonetheless, have more than stepped up to the challenge, in part responding to the opportunity to reach beyond the confines of their jobs. Others have tried to ignore the effort believing that it will eventually go away.

- **Integrating structures that promote innovation with traditional bureaus.** DCNR leaders used structures that in essence create a matrix organization, crossing line operations with the new objectives of the Pennsylvania Wilds. These matrix structures were used to free decisions from the traditional lines of decision-making. But as time goes on, their roles and use come into question. These structures were used to mixed results, working better for launching than for seeing efforts through to completion. Matrix structures are never easy to implement. Leadership should assess how these structures function toward advancing the goals of the Initiative and how they work in relation to the bureaucratic lines that control most of the strategic decisions, budget, and staff affecting the Pennsylvania Wilds. Within a matrix structure, data are needed *across bureaus* to track investment and implementation.

Conclusions

The communities of the North Central Pennsylvania have a unique relationship with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The large amount of land in state ownership gives the Commonwealth an unusual degree of influence over the daily lives and economic affairs of local people. At the same time, this is a region that is easily overlooked by decision-makers in Harrisburg. With its sparse population and weak economy, it lacks political clout and is often overshadowed by the more populous and prosperous parts of the state. No wonder local people have been more likely to view state government as a threat to their independence than as a partner in achieving their goals.

The Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative is changing that relationship. Based on the conviction that the region's vast public landholdings can be used more effectively to spur economic growth, the Initiative is focusing state resources as never before on this remote part of Pennsylvania. Local communities have seen state agencies back up their promises by making large monetary investments. And perhaps even more surprisingly, they have seen high-level officials make frequent trips to the region, develop first-name acquaintanceships with local people, and demonstrate their personal commitment to the region. They have also started to see results. Although the economic impacts of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative have not yet been dramatic, there is evidence that it is already paying off in terms of increased tourism. While some local people complain about aspects of the Initiative, and a few remain suspicious of its motives, more and more are becoming convinced that state government can be a force for good.

In attempting to transform the state's relationship to the region, the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative is also transforming the way state bureaucracies operate. As Secretary DiBerardinis recognized from the start, DCNR's existing structures and ways of working were simply inadequate to meet the Initiative's ambitious goals. Refusing to be confined by bureaucratic constraints, the secretary and other Pennsylvania Wilds leaders have chosen to work around them. They have created work teams that cut across bureau lines. They have cultivated leadership at all levels and empowered employees to assume high-level responsibilities, regardless of their rank in the formal hierarchy. They have encouraged staff to go beyond traditional roles and engage in new and deeper ways with members of the community. And they have created new relationships involving partners in state, county, and local government as well as in the private sector. These innovations constitute a new mode of "practice" that is bound to have a lasting impact on DCNR and may well serve as a model for other land management agencies around the country.

Appendix A: Grant Investments in the Pennsylvania Wilds

**Grant Investments in PA Wilds
DCNR Community Conservation and Partnerships Grant Program
2003 - 2009 By County**

Grant Projects Funded Include: park, trail, and greenway planning; feasibility, design, and construction; river/water trail access improvements; land acquisition for conservation or recreation purposes; community recreation facilities (e.g., playgrounds/pools, etc.) planning and development; and education/technical assistance related to previous categories.

County	Grant Investment
Cameron	\$170,000
Clarion	\$1.3 million
Clearfield	\$1.3 million
Clinton	\$819,900
Elk	\$1.3 million
Forest	\$440,410
Lycoming	\$3.0 million
Jefferson	\$496,100
McKean	\$1.3 million
Potter	\$276,600
Tioga	\$921,300
Warren	\$881,512
GRAND TOTAL	\$13.6 million

Note: Above does not include Heritage Park funding and grants provided over this same time period, which are as follows: Lumber Heritage Region = \$5.1 million for operations and \$409,650 for grant projects and PA Route 6 = \$3.1 for operations and \$323,000 for grant projects.

It also does not include DCNR support for PA Wilds Planning Team and Outreach Specialist that adds up to approximately \$220,000 (06-10).

State Investments for DCNR State Parks and Forest Districts in the PA Wilds 2002 - 2009 By County

State Park Investments Include: upgrades to sewer & water systems and restroom facilities, bridges, roads & parking lots, campgrounds & picnic areas, interpretive signage, rec facilities including trails & trail heads, and new and upgraded structures including visitor centers.

Forest District Investments Include: bridges, roads & parking lots, trails & trail heads, interpretive signage, restrooms, and upgraded structures including district resource management centers.

Allegheny National Forest Investments Include: DCNR provide approximately \$1 million per year to the USFS to support recreation trails predominantly ATV and snowmobile trails. Elk, Forest, McKean, and Warren counties benefit from this investment collectively so that investment is attributed to each of the four counties.

Note: Boundaries for park and forest land do not neatly follow county boundaries, therefore assignments have been made to counties for this exercise.

County	Grant Investments	Details
Cameron	\$15.1 million	State Parks: \$6.4 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sinnemahoning SP (includes new Wildlife Watching Visitor Center to open in 2010) Sizerville SP Elk FD: \$8.7 million
Clarion	\$5.8 million	State Parks: \$4.1 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cook Forest (includes major investment at the Sawmill Center, Pool & Bathhouse) Kittanning FD: \$1.7 million
Clearfield	\$13.4 million	State Parks: \$5.5 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parker Dam SP (includes major upgrade to park office and restrooms) S.B. Elliott SP (includes new Pennsylvania Wilds Gateway Welcome Center) Moshannon FD: \$7.8 million (includes Susquehanna cleanup)
Clinton	\$9.9 million	State Parks: \$3.4 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hyner Run (includes major park infrastructure improvements) Kettle Creek (includes major sewer & water upgrades to lower cpgrd.) Sproul FD = \$6.5 million
Elk	\$10.6 million	State Parks: \$0.9 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Elk Bendigo

		Elk FD: \$8.7 million (includes Elk Country Visitor Center) *Allegheny National Forest: \$1 million
Forest	\$1.0 million	*Allegheny National Forest = \$1 million
Jefferson	\$8.7 million	State Parks: \$7.0 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear Creek (includes major water & sewer system upgrade) • Cook Forest Kittanning FD: \$1.7 million
Lycoming	\$17.5 million	State Parks: \$2.5 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little Pine (includes upgrade to dam and waste water treatment system) Tiadaghton FD = \$15 million (includes major investments in Pine Creek Trail)
McKean	\$13.7 million	State Parks: \$12.7 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinzua Bridge (includes new visitor center proposed for 2011) *Allegheny National Forest: \$1 million
Potter	\$25.2 million	State Parks: \$24.2 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cherry Springs • Lyman Run (includes major investment in the dam) • Denton Hill • Ole Bull Susquehannock FD = \$1.0 million
Tioga	\$7.8 million	State Parks: \$4.6 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hills Creek • Leonard Harrison • Colton Point Tioga FD: \$3.2 million (includes major investments in Pine Creek Trail)
Warren	\$3.5 million	State Parks: \$2.5 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chapman (includes major park infrastructure items) *Allegheny National Forest: \$1 million
Total	Approximately \$116 million	<u>Note:</u> this total is adjusted to account for double counting under several counties. (i.e.) Elk and Kittanning SFs counted 2x; ANF counted 4x and Cook Forest SP counted 2x

Centre County**	\$9.7 million	State Parks: \$9.7 million <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bald Eagle (includes new Nature Inn—to open summer 2010) Black Moshannon
Total (Including Centre)	\$126 million	

** Portions of DCNR landholdings in Centre County are considered part of the Pennsylvania Wilds.
Data provided by DCNR courtesy of Meredith Hill.

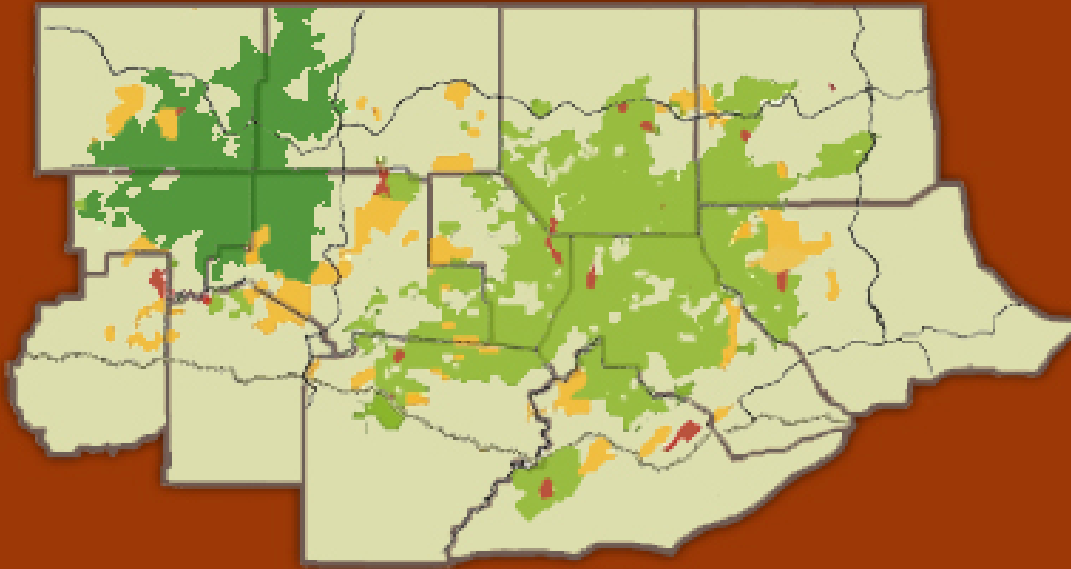
Appendix B: Interviewees

Lisa Baine	DCNR Park Manager, Sinnemahoning SP
Matt Beaver	DCNR, Bureau of Forestry, Recreation Section
Heather Bennett	DCNR Outdoor Recreation Manager
Brenda Barrett	DCNR Bureau Direction, Recreation and Conservation
Sandy Fink Barrett	Clearfield County Recreation and Tourism Authority
Michelle Bogacki	Ridgway-Elk County Chamber
Tom Bosser	Clinton County Commissioner
Ta Brant	PA Wilds Small Business Ombudsman
Eric Bridges	North Central Pennsylvania Regional Planning and Development Commission, Executive Director
David Brooks	Potter County Visitors Association, Director
Rick Carlson	DCNR, Policy Director
Judy Church	McKean County Commissioner
Cliff Clark	Cameron County Industrial Planning Corporation
Steve Cleveland	Bi-Lo Grocery Store, Owner/Manager
Rawley Cogan	Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Dana Crisp	DCNR, PA Wilds Rec Team/ Asst. Regional Mgr., Reg. 1
Gene Comoss	DCNR, Dir, Bureau of Facilities, Design & Construction
Miranda Crotsley	DCNR, Parks, Outdoor Recreation Services Section
Mitch DeLong	Food Matrix
Joe Demott	McKean County Commissioner
Terri Denison	Route 6 Heritage Corridor, Exec Dir.
Dan Devlin	DCNR, Dir., Bureau of Forestry
Cindy Dunn	DCNR, Deputy Secretary
George Durrwachter	Pine Creek Preservation Association
Jack Engel	Borough of Jersey Shore, Manager
Ted Eubanks	Fermata, Inc.
Wes Fahringer	DCNR, North Central Regional Advisor, BRC
John Ferrara	DCNR, Manager, Bald Eagle SP
Joe Fiedor	DCNR, Assistant State Forester
Jason Fink	Lycoming County Visitors Bureau
Becky Fough	Lycoming County Chamber, Regional Main Street Prog.
Dale Fox	Ridgway Heritage Council
Neil Fowler	DCED Appalachian Regional Commission
Tammy Gonzalez	Jersey Shore State Bank
Jim Grace	DCNR, Deputy Secretary
Beth Grove	DCNR, Park Manager, Parker Dam SP
Amber Hancharick	Kane Chamber of Commerce
Tom Hanes	DCNR, Pa Wilds Rec Team
Chip Harrison	DCNR, Park Manager, Leonard Harrison/Hills Creek Complex
Meredith Hill	DCNR, Director—PA Wilds
Jean Marie Holjencin	Sylvan Heritage Council
Toner Hollek	Pine Creek Valley COG
Sarah Hopkins	DCNR, Parks Division of Outdoor Programming Services
Jim Hyland	DCNR, PA Wilds Rec Team

Lauren Imgrund	DCNR, CLI Coordinator, BRC
Bob Imhof	Ridgway Heritage Council
Phil Jones	Cameron County Commissioner
Les Jordan	Smethport Chamber of Commerce
Mike Krempasky	DCNR (retired)
Jim Keagle	
Ken Klothen	Montgomery County Economic Development
Terri Kromel	DCNR, Parks, Outdoor Programming Services
Steve Kronewetter	Wapiti Woods Guest Cabins, Owner
Tina Johns Larson	Cameron County Chamber of Commerce
Brook Lenker	DCNR, Office of Communications & Partnerships
Gretchen Leslie	DCNR, Director, Office of Comm.
Debra Lunden	McKean County Planner
Sam MacDonald	PA Wilds Outreach Specialist
Rose Mape	Pennsylvania Tourism Office
Jim McCloskey	Benezette Township Supervisor
Kim Mccullough	DCNR, Regional Advisor, BRC
Kevin Mcjunkin	Lycoming County Planning & Community Development
Nancy Micks	Greater DuBois Chamber of Commerce
Tim Morey	DCNR, PA Wilds Rec Team
Helen Nawrocki	Potter County Education Council
Chris Nicholas	DCNR, District Forester, Susquehannock SF
John Norbeck	DCNR, Dir., State Parks
Eric Patton	Millstone Twp. Supervisor, Clarion River Partnership
Jeff Prowant	DCNR, District Forester, Tiadaghton SF
John Quigley	DCNR Acting Secretary
Joyce Raesner	Cummings Township Supervisor
Spring Reilly	PA Fish and Boat Commission
Bert Reis	Elk Lick Campground
Eric Rensel	DCNR, PA Wilds Rec Team
Ken Rowe	Elk Country Business Association
Elizabeth Sechoka	DCED, Statistics
Diane Sheeley	Bradford Chamber of Commerce
Roy Siefert	DCNR, District Forester, Tioga SF
Joanne Smith	Cameron County Commissioner
John Snyder	Olgas Gift Shop, Coudersport
June Sorg	Elk County Commissioner
Shelly Speirs	Pennsylvania Tourism Office
Julie Stewart	DuBois Main Street Program
Dan Surra	Adviser to PA Wilds
Alex Tatanish	DCNR, BRC
Jerry Walls	Lycoming County planning commission (retired)
Jeanne Wambaugh	DCNR, District Forester, Elk SF
Joy M. Wilhelm	DCED, Governor's Center for Local Government Services
Mike Wennin	Lumber Heritage Region of Pennsylvania, Inc.

Appendix C. Public Landholdings in the Pennsylvania Wilds

Public Lands in the PA Wilds



■ Allegheny National Forest ■ State Gamelands ■ State Forest ■ State Parks

Appendix D. Study Design

Study Design and Purpose

The Pennsylvania Wilds is a descriptive case study that is one component of a multiple case study design to examine DCNR's CLI approach through the lens of the Department's goals to:

- 1) Improve stewardship and management of state parks and forests;
- 2) Promote statewide land conservation;
- 3) Build and maintain sustainable and attractive communities; and
- 4) Create outdoor connections for citizens and visitors.

The purpose of the overall study was to improve and inform future implementation of the CLI work in the Commonwealth and to share this knowledge with others contemplating similar efforts to improve, manage, and sustain large landscapes.

Research Questions

The major research questions that guided the work for the Pennsylvania Wilds case study are:

- 1 What was the major motivation of the Commonwealth to undertake the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative? How did it evolve and why?
- 2 What are the major drivers, motivators to participate in the Pennsylvania Wilds from various perspectives?
- 3 What is DCNR's role and how did it evolve?
- 4 Who are the key partners in the Pennsylvania Wilds? How has the Pennsylvania Wilds work influenced partner organizations and communities? State government agencies? Local governments? Nonprofits? Other organizations and businesses?
- 5 What have been the major accomplishments of the Pennsylvania Wilds thus far? And how did these come about? What is the likelihood that longer-term goals will be reached?
- 6 What have been the major challenges and limitations thus far? How have DCNR and others worked to overcome these challenges?
- 7 What are the lessons to be learned for the Department, philanthropies, and other partners? What effective practices have the potential to be exported elsewhere?

Data Collection Methods

The case study employed a mixed-methods approach to data collection, utilizing interviews, focus groups, direct observation, document review, and quantitative analysis of administrative data.

- **Interviews and focus groups:** Through purposive sampling, the team conducted extensive semi-structured interviews and focus groups with nearly every major constituency involved in the effort, including but not limited to DCNR staff, staff from other state agencies, local elected officials, residents, business people,

county planners, and nonprofit staff. During the course of data collection, the team interviewed close to 100 individuals.

- **Direct observation:** Team members observed several meetings, including the following DCNR groups established to guide the Initiative: the DCNR Pennsylvania Wilds Leadership Team, the Pennsylvania Wilds Recreation Team and the Team's Recreation Units, the Pennsylvania Wilds Regional Work Group as well as the external Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team. In addition, DCNR staff gave the team multiple tours of the landscape, highlighting important natural features and providing the physical context for data collected during the interviews.
- **Document review:** Data collection included review of a large number of reports, meeting minutes, planning documents, memos, newsletters, promotional materials, and other documents as well as DCNR and partner organization websites. These materials provided background information on the history, mission, and organizational structure of the Pennsylvania Wilds CLI. They also served to raise questions for the interviews and focus groups.
- **Analysis of administrative data:** Quantitative data analysis was conducted on DCNR grant and expenditure data as well as data on DCNR staffing levels for the Pennsylvania Wilds region over time.