



GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO

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Governor Shapiro Launches Pennsylvania Office of Outdoor Recreation, Highlights Largest Budget Investment in State Parks and Forests in Decades

The 2023-24 bipartisan budget invests \$112 million to improve state parks and forests, spur economic growth in the outdoor recreation industry, and make Pennsylvania the largest state to open an Office of Outdoor Recreation



Connellsville, PA – Today, **Governor Josh Shapiro** visited Yough River Park in Connellsville, along the 150-mile [Great Allegheny Passage](#) (GAP), in Fayette County to launch Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation and highlight the 2023-24 budget’s \$112 million budget investment in state parks and forests – the largest in decades.

“Our state parks and outdoor recreation industry are key to Pennsylvania’s economy – hosting nearly 40 million visitors each year and boosting local businesses and the local economy in and around our parks,” **Governor Josh Shapiro said**. “When we invest real money to make our natural resources more accessible for Pennsylvanians, it helps communities and businesses grow and thrive. The budget that I recently signed delivers on the promise of a new Pennsylvania Office of Outdoor Recreation to strengthen our communities and grow the Commonwealth’s outdoor economy.”

The Pennsylvania Office of Outdoor Recreation will be focused on growing the state’s outdoor sector, which adds \$14 billion to Pennsylvania’s economy and accounts for 152,000 jobs. The Office will coordinate efforts with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the departments of Community and Economic Development and Health, PennDOT, and others, to create a cohesive strategy for the growth and expansion of the outdoor sector.

“Governor Shapiro is making a tremendous down payment on our ability to improve visitor experiences at our state parks and forests,” **DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn** said. “It’s our public lands and trails that are the backbone that supports our outdoor recreation economy.”

Thanks to this budget investment, Pennsylvania becomes the largest state, by both economy and population, with an Office of Outdoor Recreation. Furthermore, the investments in state parks and forests in the budget signed by Governor Shapiro will help address a \$1.4 billion backlog of needed infrastructure work, ensuring Pennsylvania remains a premier destination for outdoor recreation.

“People and organizations across the Commonwealth see the need for statewide coordination to connect communities to meaningful and competitive growth opportunities,” **Pennsylvania Director of Outdoor Recreation Nathan Reigner** said. “We have gathered a significant amount of input and will continue to engage with stakeholders and communities to build up the sixth largest outdoor recreation economy in the country, while maintaining the fun and adventure the outdoors provides.”

“Outdoor recreation is thriving in Pennsylvania, and we recognize the opportunity to transform this sector by expanding partnerships and making strategic investments,” **DCED Secretary Rick Siger** said. “DCED’s mission is to strengthen our communities and grow our economy and the focus of this new office fits perfectly within those principles. Strong outdoor recreation is also a major advantage when trying to attract and retain people and businesses – a competition that’s fiercer among states than ever before.”

Thousands of bicyclists pedal through Yough River Park in Connellsville every year impacting many businesses beyond those directly connected to outdoor recreation. Bicycle visitors lead to shops, eateries, and accommodations catering to trail users. They in turn have attracted new housing, a medical facility, and other business growth.

“We are fortunate to have experienced significant economic revitalization from the direct impact of the Great Allegheny Passage and the boon in outdoor recreation,” **Connellsville Mayor Greg Lincoln** said. “Investments in the trail have created so many new opportunities for this city, and not just for outdoor recreation. The economic development brought by the trail now extends to new medical centers and new homes being built – the trail is transforming us.”

A [50-member advisory](#) group is helping create recommendations and actions needed for the new office to help support the outdoor economy. More than 500 people also participated during a statewide listening tour. A report with findings and action steps to guide the new office is being prepared.

The Great Allegheny Passage connects [Point State Park](#) in Pittsburgh, through [Ohiopyle State Park](#) and Pennsylvania’s [Laurel Highlands](#), to Cumberland, Maryland, and on to Washington, D.C., through its link with the C&O Canal Towpath.

The Commonwealth has invested tens of millions in the GAP over the past four decades, including more than \$9 million in grant funding to help communities like Connellsville thrive.

DCNR manages 124 state parks, 2.2 million acres of state forest land, and works with local governments and municipalities to provide grants, planning, and other resources to communities across Pennsylvania. Visit [DCNR's website](#) for more information about the agency and check out DCNR's [Calendar of Events](#) for events on public lands.

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