



MAKING AN IMPACT

2010 Update on the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative

Presented by the Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team

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WORKING TOGETHER, MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Seven years ago, leaders from our rural Pennsylvania counties joined forces with the state to form a unique partnership called the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. Urged on by strong leadership and unprecedented financial support from the Commonwealth, the idea was to work with state officials, federal agencies, small businesses, local citizens, and nonprofit organizations to grow the region's emerging nature tourism industry. We aimed to revitalize our communities, create lasting economic opportunities, and improve quality of life – all while inspiring a stewardship ethic in visitors and residents. Would it work? No one knew. Few places in America had tried anything like it.

The concept, we knew, was sound. Once scarred by aggressive logging and decades of other high-impact uses, a century of reforestation and conservation had healed the region and opened it to new opportunities. Together, our counties boasted unparalleled natural beauty, as much public land as Yellowstone, diverse and robust wildlife, and a rich oil and lumber heritage that visitors found fascinating. Fifty million people lived within a day's drive of us. We didn't need to change who we were to attract tourists – we simply had to celebrate and share what we had, and be good stewards of our own communities and landscapes.

Our region has long been a popular place to hunt and fish, but



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the idea of promoting ourselves on a more systematic basis got a boost in the early 2000s when the Ridge Administration teamed up with the newly established Lumber Heritage Region to fund the Elk Watching and Nature Tourism study. The study revealed the tremendous potential of the region, not only for elk-based tourism, but for a wide variety of outdoor recreation experiences being sought by today's travelers. Shortly after Gov. Ed Rendell took office, he saw that potential first-hand while touring the region. He immediately charged the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to expand on the study, giving birth to the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative.

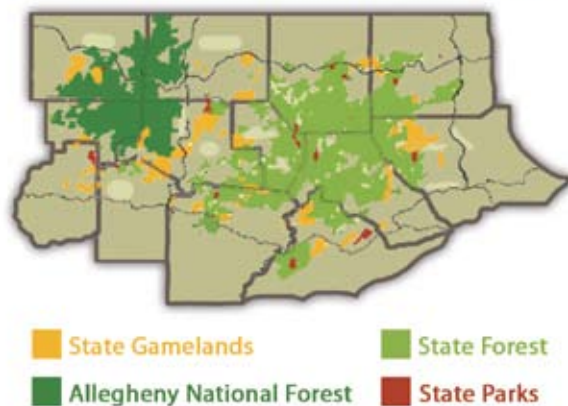
Many people in the region at first eyed the effort cautiously. Building a new industry doesn't happen overnight, and building one in a large rural area is especially daunting. Partners had to tackle planning, marketing, business development, community outreach, and infrastructure upgrades. Could state, federal and local leaders representing different viewpoints and sometimes competing interests find common ground and pull in the same direction? Would partners stand by their commitments? Only time would tell.

Now, we feel, it has.

Never before has state government focused so much energy and financial resources on helping rural Pennsylvania communities capitalize on their natural assets and community character. And never before have so many partners in the region taken ownership of such a large effort.

In this report you will find some of the incredible accomplishments in the young life of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. You will hear from small businesses that have benefited from an increasingly

Public Lands in the PA Wilds



vibrant tourism economy; a township supervisor who has seized on the Initiative to improve river access and local roads; a borough manager who worked with tourism and conservation officials, a major manufacturer and leaders from other communities to support high-paying jobs; a community group that used the PA Wilds Design Guide to refurbish a historic library.

The list goes on. No one person or group deserves the credit for the success of the Pennsylvania Wilds. What began as a vision shared by elected officials and state agencies has transformed into a grassroots effort involving dozens of partners and champions at the local, state and federal level. As the Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team, our role has been to facilitate their work, to bring the right people

to the table, to bring all possible resources to bear. Sometimes, that involves a phone call to people in the right agency to help a township supervisor get a public restroom built. Sometimes we provide technical assistance or inspi-

ration to communities looking for ideas. On occasion, we work for major strategic capital investments like visitor centers. Other days, we simply find a room, gather people from different communities together, and encourage them to share ideas.

We publish this report in the hopes that everyone who reads it – especially the people who live in the Pennsylvania Wilds, their state partners and elected leaders – will understand how this Initiative has become a driving force for investment and cooperation in our region. It deserves continued and enthusiastic support. Our work has only begun.

Respectfully,

The Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team

KEY PARTNERS IN THE INITIATIVE

PA Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources: Spearheads the Commonwealth's involvement in the Pennsylvania Wilds; also manages the bulk of the recreational and natural assets in the region through its state parks and forests systems; provides grant support to communities for various recreation, heritage and conservation projects.

PA Dept. of Community & Economic Development: Offers low-interest loan programs, such as the First Industries Fund, designed to encourage tourism business growth. Houses the Pennsylvania Tourism Office, which is responsible for the branding and marketing of the Pennsylvania Wilds. Also has programs to support community planning and revitalization.

PA Wilds Planning Team: Comprised of the region's county planners and more than two dozen stakeholders who represent tourism promotion, economic development, conservation, government, public lands management, education, heritage and cultural concerns, revitalization efforts and small business. Mission is to develop and implement strategies to encourage tourism growth while protecting and conserving both the region's treasured natural resources and its rural community character.

PA Wilds Tourism Marketing Corp: Comprised of the region's tourism promotion agencies. Primary goal is to market and brand the Pennsylvania Wilds as the premier destination for outdoor experiences in the eastern United States.

Governor's Task Force on the PA Wilds: Brings together leaders from the Commonwealth's various departments and commissions, as well as other partners, to work on issues related to the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative and report progress to the Governor.

PA Wilds Artisan Workgroup: Small group of professionals from various backgrounds who volunteer their time to help raise the visibility and profitability of the region's artisans through the Artisan Development Initiative.

Lumber Heritage Region: Played a central role in funding tourism studies prior to the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative that highlighted the region's tremendous nature and heritage tourism potential; it now provides project management and administrative assistance to the PA Wilds Planning Team. LHR also promotes the region's rich lumber heritage through project grant assistance.

PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor: Pennsylvania's US Route 6 is a designated state heritage area that serves four counties in the PA Wilds. PA Route 6 has worked with several PA Wilds communities to develop heritage tourism plans. Through the PA Route 6 Artisan Trail, the organization has also helped coordinate the PA Wilds Artisan effort; and PA Route 6's website, travel guide and other promotional efforts include information on the PA Wilds Region.

Local Partners: Part of the Initiative's strength lies in its local involvement. Chambers, rotaries, Main Street managers, local development districts, community foundations, local branches of federal agencies, educational institutions and many others have partnered with the Initiative.

STATE INVESTMENTS IN THE REGION

Since launching the Initiative in 2003, the Commonwealth has remained committed to its growth and success. The state's leadership and financial investments have made a tremendous impact on the region. The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has led the charge with major infrastructure and programming investments in the 29 state parks and eight state forests within our borders.

One of DCNR's early studies on the Pennsylvania Wilds noted that major infrastructure and programming improvements were needed to grow outdoor tourism. Partly because of their remoteness, many of the region's state parks and forests had gone without upgrades for many years. That has changed. As of 2010, DCNR has invested more than \$126 million building new destination facilities, and upgrading trails, restrooms, signage and facilities at its parks and forests in the region. Here are some examples:



When more people visit an area, one issue almost certain to arise is the need for more public restrooms. DCNR has addressed this by building new restrooms and washrooms (above) and replacing pit latrines with flushing toilets. In many places these improvements were accompanied by major upgrades to park water and sewer systems.



Two of DCNR's most well-known investments in the region are the new Elk Country Visitor Center in Benezette (above) and the new Nature Inn at Bald Eagle State Park. Both are slated to open in summer 2010. The facilities will inspire a conservation ethic in visitors and keep them returning to the region for years to come. The structures also serve as a model for how builders can incorporate green technologies, local artisan products and Design Guide principles into their projects. Another wildlife watching-focused visitor center is slated to open at Sinnemahoning State Park in Cameron County in 2011.



DCNR State Park and Forest Investments by County 2002-2009

Note: Investments may be listed more than once if they impact multiple counties; however, such investments are only counted once for the grand total listed below.

Cameron County - \$15.1 million - Includes new Wildlife Watching Visitor Center at Sinnemahoning State Park (slated to open in 2011); upgrades at Sizerville State Park including playground replacement and improvements to learning center; Elk State Forest District investments including new Elk Country Visitor Center, improvements to Hicks Run campsites and new public restrooms along the Elk Scenic Drive; and upgrades to several hiking trails (Fred Woods and Sizerville Nature Trail).

Clarion County - \$5.8 million - Investments at Cook Forest State Park include a new pool, bathhouse and campground upgrades; major rehab of Longfellow Trail with interpretive signage of old growth Cathedral Forest; repair of North Country Trail that runs through the park; and renovations at the Sawmill Center for the Arts. Also, improvements in Clear Creek State Forest District such as renovations of the Forest Resource Management Center.

Clearfield County - \$13.4 million - Includes major upgrades to restrooms, trails, campsites and park offices at Parker Dam State Park; design planning for a potential visitor/welcome center at S.B. Elliott State Park. Also, investments in Moshannon State Forest District such as snowmobile connector trails, and Quehanna Trail and Wild Area parking lots, trailheads, signage and new equine trails and equine camping area at Reservoir Road.

Clinton County - \$10.4 million - Includes new restrooms and campground upgrades at Hyner Run State Park; sewer and water upgrades to Kettle Creek State Park; and investments in Sprout State Forest District for projects including renovations to the Forest Resource Management Center, major road improvements across the district, West Branch river access improvements; and upgrades to Hyner View Challenge Trail and Bloody Skillet ATV Trail.

Elk County - \$10.6 million - Water and sewer upgrades and pool rehab at Bendigo State Park, and improvements to Lakeside Trail and boat launch parking area at Elk State Park; projects in Elk State Forest District including new Elk Country Visitor Center, major improvements to Thunder Mountain Equine Trail System and new public restrooms along the Elk Scenic Drive; \$1 million to the Allegheny National Forest to support recreation trails, predominately ATV and snowmobile trails.

Forest County - \$1 million - Includes support to the Allegheny National Forest to support recreation trails, predominately ATV and snowmobile trails. Also upgrades to the Lashure Trail in Complanter State Forest District.

Jefferson County - \$8.7 million - Includes major water and sewer system upgrades, river access improvements (including two river canoe campsites) and campground rehab

at Clear Creek State Park. Also, new pool and bathhouse at Cook Forest State Park and investments within Clear Creek State Forest District.

Lycoming County - \$17.5 million - Includes rehab of the dam, upgrades to water and waste water treatment systems at Little Pine State Park, as well as campground renovations and electrification; work within Tiadaghton State Forest including a new forest resource and visitor contact center, and Pine Creek Trail improvements including restrooms, signage, creek access, trail extension to trailhead parking, and restrooms at the Jersey Shore terminus. Also, upgrades to Golden Eagle, Bob Webber and other hiking trails.

McKean County - \$13.7 million - Includes upgrades at Kinzua Bridge State Park such as new observation trail, platform, and skywalk; design work for possible new visitor center; \$1 million to the Allegheny National Forest to support recreation trails, predominately ATV and snowmobile trails.

Potter County - \$25.2 million - Includes new restroom, astronomy viewing domes and night sky amphitheater at Cherry Springs State Park; campsite rehab and trail improvements at Ole Bull State Park; and new dam and campground upgrades at Lyman Run State Park. Also \$1 million to Susquehannock Forest District for improvements to multiple snowmobile and ATV trails.

Tioga County - \$7.8 million - Includes \$3.2 million to Tioga Forest District for major Pine Creek Trail investments such as the Wellsboro Junction trail terminus. Also includes improvements to the Turkey Path trail at Leonard Harrison State Park; Barbour Rock Trail improvements at Colton Point State Park; and new creek access sites on Pine Creek and other trail improvements such as a new bridge on Bee Tree Ski Trail.

Warren County - \$3.5 million - Includes new restrooms, campsite and day-use area upgrades, and water and sewage system improvements at Chapman State Park; \$1 million to Allegheny National Forest to support recreation trails, predominately ATV and snowmobile trails.

Centre County - \$9.7 million - Northern Centre County, adjacent to I-80, is considered part of the Pennsylvania Wilds region. DCNR investments include trail work (Dry Hollow and Smays Run) in the Moshannon State Forest District; the new Nature Inn at Bald Eagle State Park (slated to open summer 2010); and a variety of trail and other upgrades at Black Moshannon State Park.

GRAND TOTAL (with adjustments for double listings): \$126 million



In addition to new visitor facilities, DCNR has made many trail and signage upgrades. These efforts have included developing new trails; enhancing existing trails; upgrading trailhead parking; building connectors between trails and installing directional, safety and interpretive signage to enhance the user experience.



Connecting visitors and residents to the region's natural resources in a way that inspires a conservation ethic is a key element of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. DCNR has worked to achieve this through new kinds of park programming. Adventure Camps for kids and other kinds of hands-on recreation programming (e.g. learn how to backpack, kayak, geocache, etc.) are becoming more popular offerings. DCNR often teams up with private-sector partners to offer these new services.

STATE INVESTMENTS (continued)

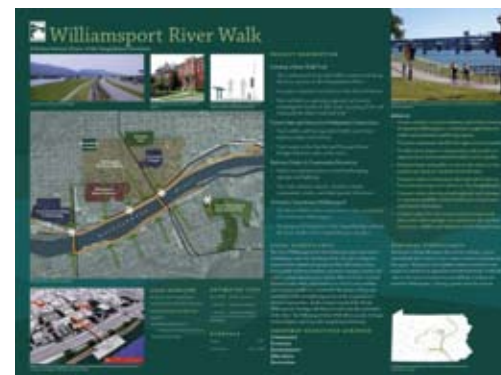
Improving amenities and access at our state parks and forests is not the only investment the Commonwealth has made in our 12 counties through the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. Considerable state resources have also been marshaled to brand and market the region; to further the goals of the Initiative through grant projects; and to help fund community planning and revitalization efforts.

Several state agencies have joined forces to fund strategic planning and development efforts in communities that are trying to capitalize on the Initiative or deal with the challenges of increased visitation. Some of these joint projects include:

Increased visitation to the Wild & Scenic Clarion River highlighted the need for better access and signage along the waterway. DCNR worked with the Allegheny National Forest, Lumber Heritage Region and a group of local stakeholders, the Clarion River Municipal Partnership, to fund infrastructure improvements along the river, such as the new signage pictured at right. The partners also helped fund community engagement programs such as an archaeological field school for local high school students (above right).



DCNR and DCED teamed up with the Pine Creek Council of Governments to fund local planning efforts in the popular Pine Creek Valley, helping address resident concerns about increased visitation.



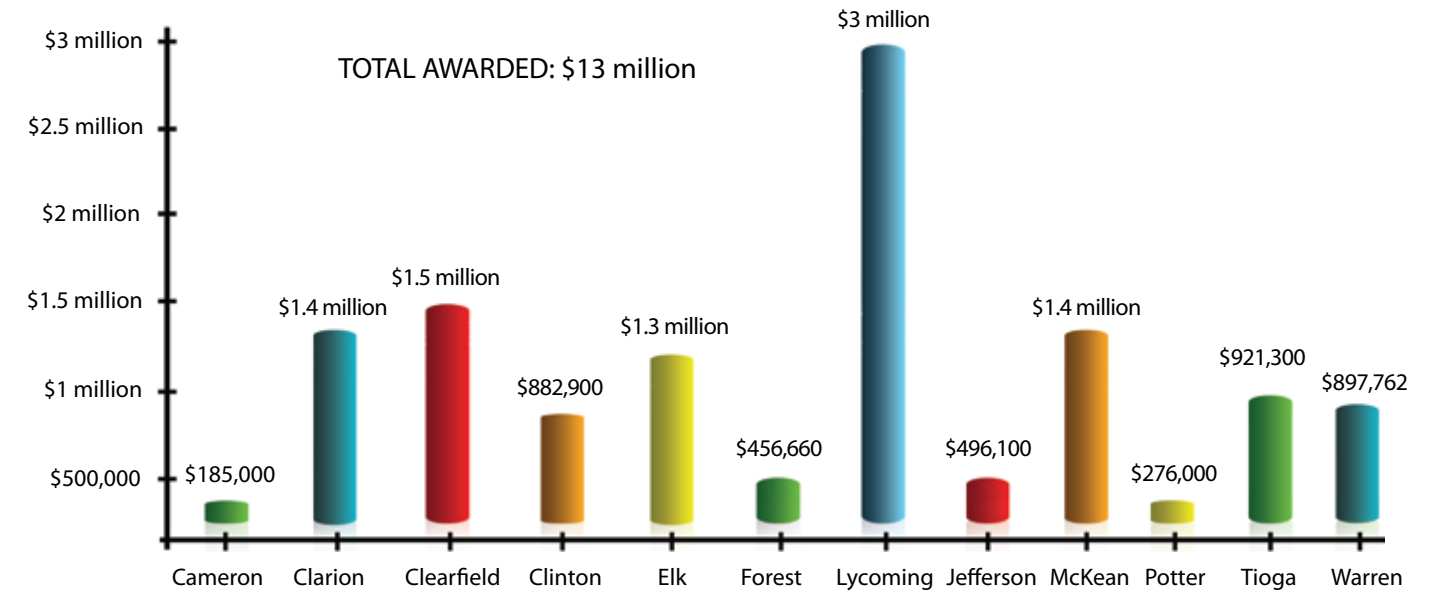
DCNR, DCED and PennDOT brought their collective resources to bear to help fund Williamsport's Susquehanna River Walk. "The river walk really has exceeded my expectations," Lycoming County transportation planner Mark Murawski told the *Williamsport Sun Gazette* in March 2010. Many people use the trail on weekdays; on weekends, they number in the hundreds, he said.



DCNR and DCED have worked together on a number of revitalization efforts, such as riverfront development projects in Ridgway and Warren, as well as efforts in Forest County, where this visitor center was recently rehabbed in Tionesta (above).

Grants Awarded to Community Projects in the PA Wilds

DCNR Community Conservation & Partnership Grant Program 2003-2010, Broken Down by County



NOTES: These are competitive grants that communities must apply for on their own. Grant projects included park, trail and greenway planning, feasibility, design and construction; water trail access improvements; land acquisition for conservation or recreation purposes; community recreation facilities (playgrounds, pools, etc.); and education and technical assistance. In addition to the amounts listed above, DCNR helps fund the two Heritage Areas serving the PA Wilds Region – Lumber Heritage and PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor. A total of \$9 million was awarded to these organizations between 2003 and 2010; they in turn make grants to communities in the region.

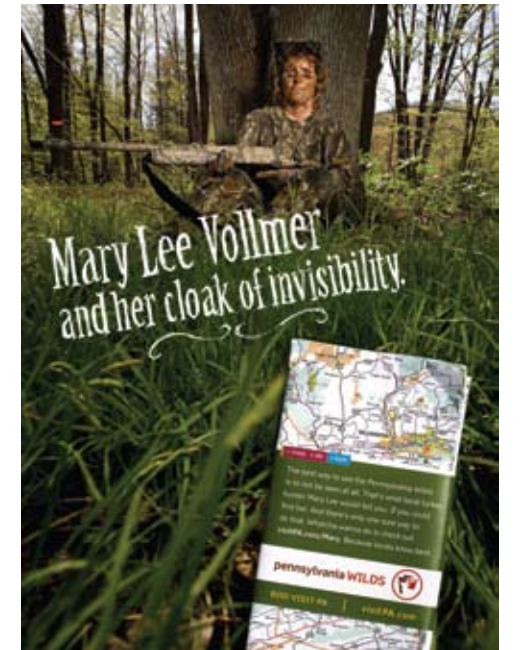
Source: PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources



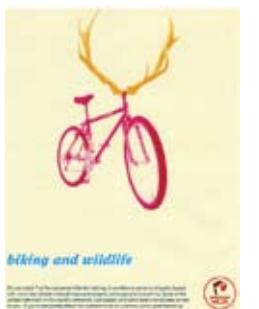
The PA Department of Community and Economic Development, one of the main partners in the Initiative, has invested millions in the region through the First Industries tourism business loan fund; and by supporting revitalization programs like Main Street and Elm Street, which alone have brought \$6 million to the region between 2003 and 2009. Above left: Ridgway's revitalization efforts pay off with business growth downtown. Right: DuBois' Main Street program bring crowds into downtown for 'Oldies Night' in 2009.



High-ranking officials from DCNR and DCED have visited the region on numerous occasions to better understand local realities related to sustainable tourism growth, and have been genuine about letting communities choose their own path. Retaining the region's rural community character is a key component of the Initiative.



The Pennsylvania Tourism Office has spent more than \$5 million marketing the Pennsylvania Wilds nationally in print, broadcast and online media.

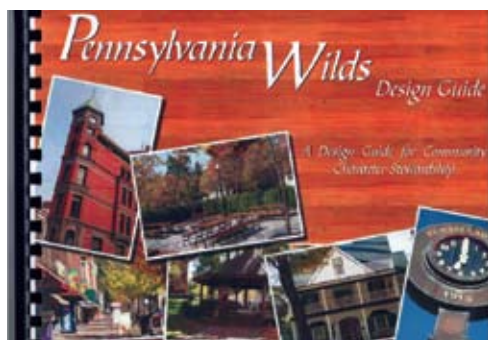


BUILDING REGIONAL CAPACITY

Many resources have been put into place since the PA Wilds Planning Team published its 2007 Planning Study, giving the region a strong foundation to build on. These resources include:

Staffing: In 2008, partners determined that two full-time staffers and one part-time administrator would be needed to move the Initiative's work forward. That led to the creation of the PA Wilds Small Business Ombudsman and Community Outreach Specialist positions, and a part-time administrator position shared between the Planning Team and the the Lumber Heritage Region. In 2010, DCNR, DCED, and the Appalachian Regional Commission committed to renewing grant funding for these positions for another two years.

Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide: The Pennsylvania Wilds contains authentic rural communities and an array of stunning natural resources. The *Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide: A Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship* was created to help communities protect these treasured characteristics while reaping and strengthening the benefits of economic growth. A product of the Planning Team, the Design Guide rolled off the presses in 2008. It serves as a resource for businesses, developers, architects and others embarking on new construction, renovations, beautification projects and the like. All of its guidelines are voluntary. Hundreds of copies of the Design Guide have been distributed for free throughout the region, and many communities are using the planning document to protect and enhance the look and feel of their towns. In 2008, the Design Guide won a Planning Excellence Award from the state chapter of the American Planning Association – a high honor given that it was up against projects from all of Pennsylvania's major cities.



Design Assistance Program: Community character is one of the region's most important economic resources. Our small towns have a history and cultural cache that animates a growing and increasingly important tourism market. The *Pennsylvania Wilds Design Guide* lays out a framework for



this kind of development. The Design Assistance Program aims to give communities and businesses an incentive to engage with the Design Guide and develop ways to enhance and sustain their own community character. In 2010, the Design Assistance Program

offered small grants (up to \$3,000) to improve local signage. The response was overwhelming, generating requests for more than twice the available funds. More importantly, applicants often offered far more local match than the program required. By summer 2010, the program will have resulted in the construction of 29 new community and business signs throughout the region. More importantly, each of these signs will serve as a model for how to implement the Design Guide's recommendations.

Other people interested in preserving community character will now have real-world examples to study and emulate. Efforts are currently underway to continue similar programs in order to seize on this interest and encourage even more local residents to capitalize on their communities' cultural assets.



Artisan Development Initiative: Modeled after similar economic development efforts around the country, the PA Wilds Artisan Initiative is designed to improve the visibility and profitability of the artisans and arts-related businesses in the Pennsylvania Wilds, which in turn enhances the visitor experience and helps to grow tourism in the region. The

Artisan Initiative has been guided by strategic planning and thorough market research and analysis (studies show branded artisan products garner twice the return than non-branded products). With relatively little money, the volunteers behind the project have made tremendous achievements in their first two years, including signing up more than two dozen retail partners to form an official Artisan Trail; jurying more than 100 artisans from the region; creating "Made in the Pennsylvania Wilds" hangtags and other product branding materials; publishing an Artisan Trail guide for visitors; and holding business development workshops for artisans. A promotional website, www.PAWildsArtisans.com, is slated to launch in fall 2010. Despite the project's infancy, many galleries and artisans say they are already seeing an impact on their bottom lines.

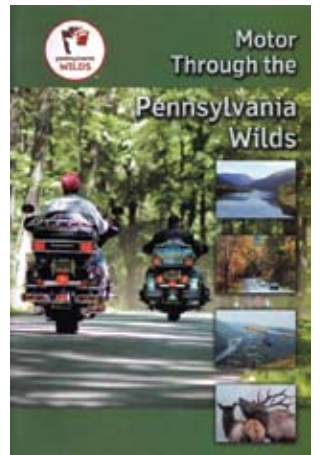


PA Wilds Resource Center: The Pennsylvania Wilds is a complex initiative with a lot of moving parts. It was clear early on that the region needed a clearinghouse website to keep residents and stakeholders informed about the Initiative's opportunities and successes. The ombudsman and outreach specialist created the PA Wilds Resource Center (www.PAWildsResources.org) to address this need. The site's main features include a database of all the loans, grants and technical assistance programs available to small tourism businesses in each county of the PA Wilds; free online classifieds for tourism businesses or projects; information on the PA Wilds Initiative and its programs (Design Guide; Artisan Trail; logo use, etc); and a database of grants available to communities to help with tourism and economic development projects.



More than 10,000 unique visitors have used the website since its launch in February 2009. The Resource Center has been used as a model for other regional economic development projects around the country.

PAwilds.com and Other Regional Marketing Efforts: Marketing is a key component of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. The Pennsylvania Wilds Tourism Marketing Corporation, with assistance from the Pennsylvania Tourism Office, has created and distributed a number of eye-catching print and online promotional materials to attract tourists. These include PAwilds.com as well as the Pennsylvania Wilds Regional Visitors Guide, Fishing Guide, Outdoor Discovery Map, Scenic Byways Brochure, and new in 2010 – the *Motor Through the Pennsylvania Wilds* brochure. Also in 2010, the Marketing Corporation hired a new marketing agency to assist the group in promoting the many experiences available in the 12-county region. The Marketing Corporation's future plans include a redesign of PAwilds.com and adding more social media to their traditional advertising.



Community & Business Outreach: Sometimes the best way to make an impact in rural Pennsylvania is to meet with people in person; to get community groups or business owners in a room and answer their questions. The ombudsman, outreach specialist and members of the Planning Team and Marketing Corporation have done a lot of that over the past two years. Together, the partners have made presentations to more than 100 chambers, rotaries and other groups. Some presentations are general updates on the Initiative; others are geared toward tourism business development or Design Guide use. The ombudsman has contacted more than 160 tourism businesses in the region, and assisted many of them. In January 2010, the ombudsman and outreach specialist also started publishing a monthly e-newsletter called the PA Wilds E-Update; it has 2,500 subscribers and continues to grow.



VISITATION: ANOTHER MEASURE OF PROGRESS

Tracking tourism statistics is notoriously difficult. Tracking them in a vast, rural region like the Pennsylvania Wilds complicates things even further. State parks and state forests are not like theme parks, with entry gates and turnstiles. Extrapolate that across an entire region, and it becomes challenging to count ‘visitors’ with any degree of certainty. Is the man filling up his tank at the gas station a local on his way to work, or is he a kayaker visiting the region to take advantage of our river trails? Is the hotel room being filled by people here to see fall foliage, or by workers brought here by oil and gas companies?

Many researchers advocate different methods for overcoming these difficulties, which sometimes can yield different results. Whichever method you choose, establishing a baseline allows us to track certain statistics over time and identify trends. The reports we used to compile this section of the document represent a systematic effort to begin wrestling with these numbers. They may not be perfect, but they do represent an honest, good-faith effort to get a handle on a very important data set. The studies were independently funded by three widely respected nonprofit foundations (William Penn, Heinz Endowments and Richard King Mellon) and conducted by qualified researchers. They point to many challenges in the region, but also highlight real accomplishments, of which we are quite proud.

Numbers are only part of the story. To complete it, you need people on the ground, tracking the anecdotes, the stories, the real-world impact of these policies. That is what members of the Planning Team and the staff of the Pennsylvania Wilds do, and what you see reflected in this report. The following statistics offer important details about what this region has to offer, how it is changing and where we should steer resources moving forward.

“At a time and place in which demographics and economics would seem to suggest stagnation, tourism-driven economic growth in the Pennsylvania Wilds region has been a bright spot.”

- 2010 Econsult Report

- From 2004 to 2008, while national park attendance was relatively flat, attendance at state parks within the Pennsylvania Wilds region increased by +3.3 percent per year.

- From 2003 to 2007, the Pennsylvania Wilds region enjoyed a sharp increase in overnight leisure travel (+5.3 percent per year) and leisure overnight trip length (+4.6 percent per year).

- From 2002 to 2006, visitor spending within the Pennsylvania Wilds region grew by +6.3 percent per year.

- From 2002 to 2007, tourism employment within the Pennsylvania Wilds region grew by +0.5 percent per year, and tourism earnings within the Pennsylvania Wilds grew by +5.4 percent per year.

- From 2005 to 2008, state sales tax revenue from tourism categories within the Pennsylvania Wilds grew by +2.7 percent per year.

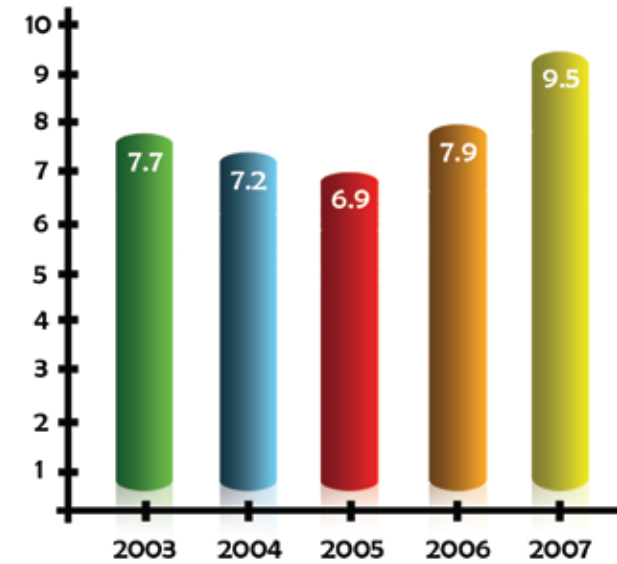
- From 2004 to 2007, hotel tax revenues within the Pennsylvania Wilds grew by +13.1 percent per year.

- From 2003 to 2008, the number of chain hotel establishments in the Pennsylvania Wilds grew from 31 to 43 — a 39 percent increase.

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Where to Find Full Reports: All public studies cited in this report can be found in their entirety at www.PAWildsResources.org.

Regional Tourism Statistics: At a Glance

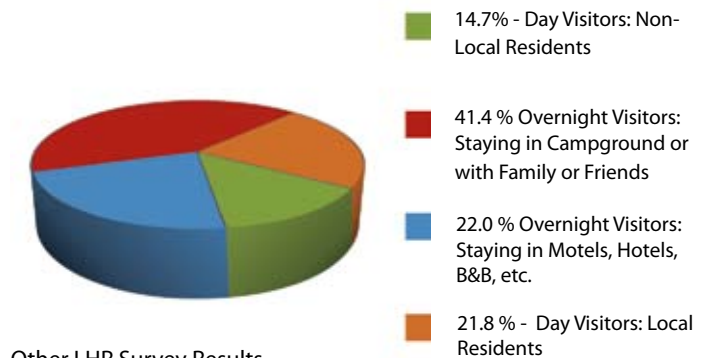
Estimated Overnight Leisure Visitor Volume to PA Wilds
 (in Millions of Person-Days):
 1.8 Million More Visitors from 2003 to 2007



Source: DK Shifflet & Associates (2008), Econsult Corporation (2009)

Working Together: Economic Impact of Lumber Heritage Region

All 12 of the Pennsylvania Wilds’ counties fall inside the Lumber Heritage Region’s boundaries, making the PA Wilds and LHR natural partners in the effort to promote tourism in the region. In 2008, eight of Pennsylvania’s 12 heritage areas conducted surveys to gather more information about their visitors. Who are LHR’s visitors – our visitors? Below is a snapshot of what LHR’s survey revealed.



Other LHR Survey Results

- Visitors from out of state: 25.3%
- First-time visitors to LHR Region: 44.2%
- Average party size: 3.16 people
- Parties traveling with children: 18.3%
- Total estimated visitor spending: \$30.4 million

Source: Economic Impact of Pennsylvania’s Heritage Areas, 2008 (released 2010).



Did you know ...

Stories about the Pennsylvania Wilds have been featured in national media on several occasions. In 2007, the *New York Times* published this full-page story in its “Escapes” section. They wrote: “The observation field at Cherry Springs, in remote Potter County, a 275-mile drive from New York City, has become a magnet in recent years for passionate astronomers, as well as for people who just want to tilt their heads back and ponder the vast majesty of the universe.” This increased interest led one local resident and astronomy guru, Stash Nawrocki, to start a small business, “Crystal Spheres: Adventures in Stargazing.”

“After volunteering at Cherry Springs for several years, the crowds became so large that Chip Harrison, Park Manager, suggested I think about starting a private stargazing business,” Nawrocki explained recently. “Many tourists like to have personal attention and deeper information than one can give a crowd of several hundred. So Crystal Spheres was born. This (2010) will be my third season and I have had customers from Chicago, Atlanta, New York City, Long Island, Washington, D.C. and of course, all over Pennsylvania.”

SUCCESS THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS

Working across traditional boundaries is a common-sense approach to tourism development in rural Pennsylvania. It strengthens ideas, capitalizes on resources and fosters understanding. Partnerships and regional cooperation are hallmarks of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative.

Consider these examples:

Early on in the Initiative, the region's 12 county governments signed a groundbreaking intergovernmental cooperative agreement stating they'd work together to grow tourism in the Pennsylvania Wilds. Never in the Commonwealth's history had such an agreement covered such a large geographic area – a quarter of the state. The agreement gave birth to the PA Wilds Planning Team and paved the way for new funding sources.

The PA Wilds Tourism Marketing Corporation is also built on partnerships; it is comprised of the tourism promotion agencies, or visitor bureaus, serving each county of the PA Wilds, who come together to work on marketing from a regional standpoint. The Artisan Workgroup brings together a similarly diverse group of professionals from across the counties to help move the Artisan Development Initiative forward.

Partners involved in the Initiative also work closely with PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor and Lumber Heritage Region, the two heritage areas serving the Pennsylvania Wilds, so as to not duplicate efforts and to make the most out of available resources.

A variety of agencies have stepped forward to do the less visible but equally important work of the Initiative. The Potter

County Education Council, for example, handled the initial grant paperwork and accounting for the outreach specialist position. The North Central Regional Planning & Development Commission hosts the monthly Planning Team meetings and provides the team with administrative support. Headwaters RC&D and Penn Soil RC&D have been instrumental in bringing federal dollars and technical assistance to recreation projects.

Several community teams were invited to attend a "Balancing Nature & Commerce" workshop in 2007 to further develop sustainable tourism projects in their areas. The classes were designed to hone leadership skills and help participants take their ideas from vision to action. Many projects from the 2007 class, such as the Clarion River Municipal Partnership and McKean County's 'Trail Central' concept, have since garnered widespread involvement from federal, state and local partners.

In 2009, the Planning Team sponsored the first-ever PA Wilds Trails Workshop to bring together trail experts, trail users and local leaders to discuss how to develop land and water trails in a way that gives local economies a boost. Another gathering of regional trail groups is slated for 2010-2011.

Pennsylvania Wilds and Lumber Heritage – A Natural Fit

The Lumber Heritage Region has greatly expanded its symbiotic relationship with the Pennsylvania Wilds during the past five years. Behind the scenes, LHR provides administrative and project management support to the Initiative. More publicly, it provides grants to projects that improve heritage and conservation assets in the region. LHR has leveraged funding from DCNR's Heritage Park Program to produce some exciting projects in recent years. One example is the Big Bend Bird Viewing Station in Warren County (pictured right), a handicap accessible facility where visitors can spy American Bald Eagles where they nest along the Allegheny River. Another recent project is a life-size bronze statue of a 19th century Pennsylvania woodsman, which sits atop the banks of the West Branch and is part of the Williamsport River Walk and Timber Trail. Whether enhancing existing attractions or creating new ones, LHR is helping capture the story of rural Pennsylvania and making the region a more attractive destination.



REAL RESULTS: VOICES FROM THE REGION

Nothing speaks more to the impact of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative than real-life stories from people who live here. In the following pages, small business owners, elected officials, families, community groups, non-profits, artisans and others explain how the Initiative has made a difference in their lives and communities.

Initiative is about more than just tourism promotion

The real value [of the PA Wilds Initiative] has been the networking and getting to know the people within our communities. That's the big thing I got out of the [Balancing Nature & Commerce] retreat. I had the preconceived idea that the PA Wilds was just about tourism promotion. When I got there and they explained the mindset of the program, I was impressed. We are trying to improve these communities because we live here. We want to invite people up here to enjoy the things that we enjoy. It's not so much marketing it as a place to visit, but as a place to live. It has really strengthened the bonds between the communities up here. ... We knew we had to put aside our parochial interests about our individual communities and try to do something as a group.

Joe DeMott
McKean County Commissioner

PA Wilds web development services a big help

I attended the web design and tourism workshop last week in Bradford that [PA Wilds and PennTAP] conducted. I wanted to express my utter pleasure of being able to participate in a well designed, highly informative session that provided me exactly the tools and guidance I needed. I recently created our webpage and you helped me identify what flourishes we need to incorporate to make it more productive. Although I work in New York, I reside in Eldred, Pa. and believe that this by far was one of the best uses of our tax dollars I have experienced. Please keep up the good work!

Susan Avery, Naturalist
Pfeiffer Nature Center
www.pfeiffernaturecenter.org
Potter County



PA Wilds marketing helps bring more foot traffic to local stores

Clarion River Trading Company has had a very successful summer [2009]. Sales are up and 80 percent of my sales are derived from tourists from all over. The store location on the 219 corridor has had a valuable impact on the store. The foot traffic has increased, and PA Wilds marketing of the elk viewing, fishing, camping, hiking and biking is showcasing what we have to offer. I am looking forward to the fall and winter season with a whole new venue of tourists.

Tim Leathers, owner
Clarion River Trading Company
<http://crt-bc.angelfire.com>
Elk County

PA Wilds branding, marketing helps Lock Haven outfitter expand



I started my business in 2004 as the PA Wilds was getting started. Tourism in the area was okay. There are several hiking trails, creeks to paddle and the Pine Creek Rail Trail is not far away. When I opened my store I started with eight kayak rentals and a passenger shuttle van. Six years later, I have 20 kayak rentals, two shuttle vehicles and four bike rentals. The shuttle business is going strong as is the rentals of kayaks and bikes. I sell anywhere from 60 to 80 kayaks a year. I started with one line of kayaks (Heritage); now I have three lines. I cater to a wide range of people from all over the state and northeast region. Church groups, men's groups, and just friends who don't want to drive more than one or two cars to their favorite area. ... In the winter I sell and rent snowshoes.

The bottom line is this: The PA Wilds has started growing at a rapid pace as a place to go and have fun in the outdoors. This is only the beginning. At least once a week I get a new customer in the store that has heard about the area from the ads and decided to take a trip to see what it is all about.

*Rick Henrich, owner
Rock River & Trail Outfitters
www.rockriverandtrail.com
Clinton County*

Artisan Trail gets high marks in Punxsutawney

The PA Wilds Artisan Trail brochures have brought new customers to my store... The brochures helped to broaden my reach to potential customers who are searching for local and creative products. Participating in this Initiative has helped our sales. Customers do ask what the hang-tag means and how the artists came to have it on their art.

*Beverly Fairman
Fairlady & Company
Jefferson County*

Artisan Trail garners support across the region

The Initiative has already brought new customers to our gallery and they have appreciated the trail guides. I am out of the guides already.

*Don Kline – Valley Gallery
www.donkline.com/gallery-valley.html
Lycoming County*

The Initiative provides direction and education to our residents and neighbors on where to find unique, one of a kind gifts of art, and how they can more easily support the local artists.

*Wendy Reber – The Artisan's Shoppe
www.artisanshoppe.com
Tioga County*

Regional marketing benefits local businesses

Our basic business planning for guest cabin lodging in the Bennett's Valley of Elk County started during and at the completion of the initial Elk Tourism Study. With a serious overall lack of lodging available for visitors to the area, we saw an opportunity to develop a good and very workable business model. The Wilds Initiative continues to generate interest for visitors to stay with us – to view our wildlife, hike our trails, taste our local wines and beer and just enjoy the woods, streams, mountain and valleys of our area. Although our guest cabin business was expected to obtain decent growth levels with regular visits from elk watchers and outdoor enthusiasts, the Wilds Initiative has been a large help with increased exposure, advertising and education of the traveling public about what our area has to offer. We have seen continuous growth over our first six years, have developed a good bit of favorable word of mouth marketing as well as retaining the interest of guests for repeated return visits. The

PA Wilds continues to be the lead focus to maintain marketing for the area as a whole...with more things coming, e.g., the new Elk Country Visitor Center.



*Steven Kronenwetter
Wapiti Woods
www.wapitiwoods.com
Elk County*

Creating opportunities for the next generation

The Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative was a factor in my husband and I moving home and going into business in Warren County. We were in our late 20s and had good careers elsewhere but wanted to settle down in the place we'd grown up. But jobs were scarce. The Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative helped give us the confidence to purchase two small canoe and kayak liveries on the Allegheny River. We thought the businesses had great potential and it helped us to know there was an organized effort underway to grow the region's outdoor tourism industry. We have since grown our businesses by about 300 percent and are about to undergo a major expansion to become a year-round outfitter. We've created a river paddling guide to help pass our foot traffic to other businesses and have also worked with the U.S. Forest Service, local manufacturers, banks, business organizations and outdoor groups to hold an annual five-day river cleanup.



The Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative has helped all these efforts. We use the PA Wilds logo on many of our products and have had customers reference Pennsylvania Wilds advertising. But as important as the marketing is the community and business outreach, new programs and infrastructure investments – these are really helping the region engage in a meaningful conversation about what sustainable tourism development is and how it can benefit the people who live here in a variety of ways.

*Piper Lindell, owner
Allegheny Outfitters
www.alleghenyoutfitters.com
Allegheny River Paddling Guide, publisher
Allegheny River Clean-Up, founder
Warren County*

Branding of region's artisan crafts generates sales, interest

The PA Wilds Artisan hang-tag represents a symbol of quality, recognized by collectors and tourists as they shop our gallery. It is a tool that has helped our staff in finalizing sales and engaged shoppers in conversations regarding the trail.

*Abbi Peters
Elk County Council on the Arts
Elk County*

State park upgrades lead to business growth

With our hardware store, which is located 6 miles from Lyman Run [one of DCNR's investment areas], we have seen an increase in sales in not only camping supplies but in almost every department since the lake has reopened. Browsing traffic is up as well, which is always good for future sales. From 2007 to 2008, sales jumped \$100,000, and from 2008 to 2009, sales have jumped another \$100,000. This is really incredible for a very rural area and also given the economic climate.

Pine View Lodge [our second business] is located two miles from Lyman Run and five miles from Cherry Springs State Park. While this is a relatively new endeavor for us, we had a very good first year and many reservations for next year. We have done some advertising but most renters have just gone by the cabin and taken the number off the sign on their way to one or both of the parks.

Personally, Lyman Run especially is a part of mine and my husband's childhood, and we were thrilled to be able to share it with our children the last 2 summers and make it part of their memories of growing up in the PA Wilds.

*Julie Cimino, owner
Cimino Hardware Inc
Pine View Lodge LLC
www.pineviewlodgepa.com
Potter County*

Design Guide gets high marks in Wilcox

We've just completed a streetscape project in the Village of Wilcox so the library now has new sidewalks in front and along the side, and Victorian-style street lamps. The Design Guide stresses the importance of just this type of construction - wood over vinyl; no lighted gawky signs hanging off the building, etc. ... Those of us from the community who worked on the project are very much into the "PA Wilds" movement, so to take examples from the Guide was second-nature. In fact, the guide is a common sense approach to what a community should strive to look like.

*Laurie Storrar
Jones Township Secretary
Elk County*

Read more Voices From the Region...

PA Wilds branding, marketing pays off for rental cabin business

The PA Wilds has enabled me to tap into the desire of everyday suburban and urban dwellers for the experience of the great outdoor wilderness. Our guests have come from as far away as Maryland, Michigan and Washington, DC. Whether for Cherry Springs State Park and the Dark Sky Facilities, the miles and miles of hiking trails or ATV trails at Denton Hill State Park or the PA Lumber Museum -- they all come to get outdoors and give themselves something they cannot get where they live. The grouping together of counties into various "theme" destinations here in PA was a literal stroke of genius. Thank you.

Chris Brennan, owner
A Cabin by the Stream
www.acabinbythestream.com
Blue Skies Lodge
Potter County

Artisan Trial leads more customers to Johnsonburg gallery

My art business has grown since getting involved with this Initiative, with customers in state and out of state picking up the brochures in visitors centers or from the website and coming to the gallery. I am increasing the hours which the gallery is open in the near future to accommodate this improved flow.



Stephanie Distler
Flemish House Gallery
www.stephaniedistler.com
Elk County

We're only just beginning

The Towers Victorian Inn's business has quadrupled since the inception of the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative. The special marketing efforts provided through the Tourism Office along with the various infrastructure improvements to our attractions are responsible. I believe that we have only scratched the surface, and it is surprising how well local tourism related businesses have fared during the recession.

Dale Fox, owner
Towers Victorian Inn
www.towersinn.com
Elk County



PA Wilds serves as "blueprint" for local revitalization efforts

Pennsylvania Kinzua Pathways (PKP) is a volunteer-driven community project that aims to upgrade existing tourism assets in and around the Allegheny National Forest near the Allegheny Reservoir, and to connect these assets through a system of trails. Historic awareness, stewardship, and creating small business opportunities are key components of this multi-phase project, which has garnered widespread support.

"One of the initial, and key, partnerships that PKP established early-on was with the PA Wilds. The Wilds' partnership philosophy, promotion of the area as a whole and stewardship messages are well thought out and the blueprint that should be followed for the re-building of northwest PA. PKP modeled our approach and recommendations on the successful projects initiated and supported by the PA Wilds.

The networking and other key partnerships we have established throughout the region all tend to have connections to the PA Wilds. The network they have been able to establish in a relatively short amount of time is pretty amazing and has, no doubt, been an integral part of the rejuvenation of the 12-county Wilds region. Any progress that has been made in terms of tourism promotion and/or introducing resource providers and stakeholders to one another can be directly linked to the PA Wilds program.

One of the most consistent and frustrating hurdles PKP has faced since the inception of our project is the tendency for county tourism promotion agencies and elected officials to focus solely on what lies within their borders. Our project is looking to break those tendencies and to promote the area as a whole. We see that as the key to success in our region. The PA Wilds program had been and continues to do this already.

The PA Wilds has come a long way. It has won the respect of many within this region. It has created partnerships, awareness and cooperative efforts that would have never been realized in the past. The best of PA Wilds is yet to come."

Joe Colosimo, chairperson
Pennsylvania Kinzua Pathways (PKP)
www.pkp.com
Warren County



PKP's proposed new visitor center for Kinzua Point, Allegheny National Forest.

Business outreach is an important part of the Initiative

PA Wilds has offered seminars to small businesses. The first seminar the chamber sponsored was how to make the PA Wilds work for your business. The speaker gave a wonderful presentation on the Initiative and then answered specific questions from business people in attendance. This free seminar proved to be invaluable to the small business owners in Cameron County. Many of the seminars are offered in surrounding counties adding to the time the owner must be away from his/her shop. Having the ability to offer the workshop within a 10 minute drive is the key to attracting business owners. A second seminar on web pages is planned for later this month. Because of the quality of the first seminar, numerous business owners have signed up. I look forward to a continuing relationship with the PA Wilds Initiative.

Tina Johns Lorson, Executive Director
Cameron County Chamber of Commerce
www.cameroncountychamber.org
Cameron County

Initiative helps diversify local economies

The PA Wilds team encourages the various industries in rural PA to align interests where possible for the benefit of the community. That's what happen in Port Allegheny when industry and tourism came together to work on a glass plant expansion that would also open up river access for tourism and recreation developments.

"We want to build a dike so [St. Gobain Glass] can expand the plant, but also for public protection. There have been several serious floods over the years, floods that have destroyed a good bit of local housing stock. They want to add two more melting tanks, too. ... These are good jobs. These are jobs that a kid who comes out of a local school with a lunch pail can make \$60,000 a year. ... We will not only do the warehouse project, but also gain public access to the Allegheny River. We'd like to see canoe rentals, trails and other recreational uses. ... We want to utilize the PA Wilds for the benefit of people living along Route 6. It's all together. We have to have both. We need to have hard-core manufacturing. We need to have tourism. We have to have a mix. We can't live and die by one thing alone. If we want to bring some professional people in, we need to have recreational assets. We need clean water. We have it all right here. It's all together. And it's all intertwined."

Dick Kallenborn
Port Allegheny Borough Manager
McKean County

Pennsylvania Wilds helps foster pride

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. It has helped us think about the area from a regional standpoint. Another very important aspect of the Wilds is how it has fostered pride in our local communities among the residents, not just visitors to the region.

Eric Patton, Millstone Township Supervisor
Clarion River Municipal Partnership member
Elk County

Read more Voices From the Region...



PA Wilds helps bring diverse partners to the table

One way the PA Wilds helped us was the three-day [Balancing Nature & Commerce] workshop. We brought together a really diverse team of public and private interests. It included the ANF, DCNR, economic

development representatives from the University of Pittsburgh at Bradford, me, and several local trails associations. We talked about funding and organization, which helped us formulate a plan for the region. That was very helpful. That was where we came up with the idea of "Trail Central." We realized that we had these trail resources, but the recreation dollars were not impacting the local communities. The trails didn't connect to the towns, and often did not connect to each other. So the question was, how do we connect our existing trails on public lands to our communities to take advantage of those dollars? ... This quickly became a county-wide forum. We have worked with the commissioners and they have initiated a Greenways plan. The ANF Visitor's Bureau has initiated a branding campaign. People throughout the region have taken the concept and built on it.

*Linda Devlin
Allegheny National Forest Visitor Bureau
McKean County*

Hang-tags a great idea

I was surprised at the success of the hang-tags. At first, I didn't think the idea was a good use of resources. However, after receiving the tags and putting them on my products, I have seen great customer reaction. They now make the connection that my products are made here ... They make my work look more professional, not only to me, but also to others, and that surprised me very much.

*Doug Firestone – Firestone Forge
www.firestoneforge.com
Potter County*

Design and grant assistance helps business grow

DCNR and PA Wilds continue to support Myles Group's efforts to grow business in Wellsboro. This year one of our goals was to replace Tioga Central Railroad's old, tired sign on Route 287. We felt the new sign should complement the area since many people traveling to and from Wellsboro use this road. To ensure the best design, the railroad began working with local sign companies and sought PA Wild's guidance in the design and implementation. This resulted in the railroad being awarded a PA Wilds Signage Grant, which ensures a complete success for the community. In 2009, Myles Group followed PA Wild's guidance in the design of the Wellsboro & Corning Railroad repair shop and the building has received accolades on its minimal impact and aesthetic enhancement of the surrounding area. This project enabled the railroad to achieve significant growth and has brought work and jobs to the area. Myles Group considers design and concept input from DCNR and PA Wilds important and looks forward to working on upcoming projects including a new passenger station and associated facilities.

*A.T. Myles, CEO, Myles Group
Tioga County*

MOVING FORWARD

The Pennsylvania Wilds has come a long way. Those who have worked on the Initiative have much to be proud of. But there is still much more to do.

Partners working on the Initiative have many goals for the coming years. The Artisan Workgroup is exploring the idea of selling limited-edition artwork online. The Planning Team wants to hold another regional trails workshop, and would like to help more communities take their ideas from vision to action through assistance like the Balancing Nature & Commerce workshop held in 2007. The ombudsman wants to publish an Entrepreneur's Guide for tourism start-ups and expansions in the Pennsylvania Wilds, and is trying to start a matching grant program to help small tourism businesses improve their online presence. The outreach specialist is working to secure funding for a variety of community programs, such as the signage grants offered in 2010. The PA Wilds Marketing Corporation plans to continue working with tourism businesses, travel writers, tour developers, packagers and other travel professionals to further establish our region as a premiere outdoor recreation destination. The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources plans to open a new Sinnemahoning Wildlife Watching Center in Cameron County – just one of several infrastructure projects it has in the works for the Pennsylvania Wilds in coming years.

Will all these things happen? We're optimistic. One thing we can promise is that making them happen will require us to all keep pulling in the same direction. Here's to working together as a region and building on our successes so far.

The Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team

Did you know ...

In 2008, county commissioners from across the Pennsylvania Wilds passed a resolution in support of the Initiative in the hopes of seeing it continue into the next state administration. "A branding effort of any type needs some consistency and the term of one governor is just not long enough for that to happen," said Forest County Commissioner Basil Huffman, who spearheaded the CCAP resolution. Huffman said the Initiative is the right approach to tourism development in the region. "The economic development portion of the PA Wilds is the vital part." County Commissioners Association of PA Executive Director Doug Hill echoed that sentiment: "The Pennsylvania Wilds is a singular success story, with county, state, and municipal governments demonstrating foresight, leadership, and cooperative effort in developing and promoting this exemplary regional recreation and heritage-based tourism initiative," he said.

The Pennsylvania Wilds Planning Team

CORE MEMBERS

Clearfield County Planning Commission
Potter County Planning Commission
Elk County Planning Commission
Warren County Planning Commission
Cameron County Conservation Office
Clinton County Planning Commission
McKean County Planning Commission
Tioga County Planning Commission
Lycoming County Planning & Development Commission
Jefferson County Office of Economic Development
Forest County Office of Community & Economic Development
Clarion County Planning Commission
PA Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources
PA Dept. of Community & Economic Development
North Central PA Regional Planning & Development Commission
Northern Tier Regional Planning & Development Commission
Northwest PA Regional Planning & Development Commission
SEDA-COG
Lumber Heritage Region
PA Route 6 Heritage Corp.
County Commissioners Association of PA
Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs
PA State Association of Township Supervisors
PA Wilds Tourism Marketing Corporation

PARTNERS

Penn State Cooperative Extension
Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
Potter County Education Council
PA Dept. of Environmental Resources
U.S. Forest Service -- Allegheny National Forest
Centre County Office of Planning & Community Development
Penn Soil Resource Conservation & Development Council
Headwaters Resource Conservation & Development Council
Jerry Walls
Bob Imhof
Farley Wright

STAKEHOLDERS

U.S. Rep. Glenn Thompson's Office
The Conservation Fund
Pennsylvania Lumber Museum
Ridgway Main Street Program
Downtown DuBois Revitalization Group
Greater DuBois Chamber of Commerce
The Conservation Fund
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

STAFF

Tataboline Brant, Small Business Ombudsman
Sam MacDonald, Community Outreach Specialist
Val Shelley, Administrative Assistant



New Elk Country Visitor Center will benefit local area

Our business [giving people wagon tours through elk country] began just five months ago. Given the difficult economic times we thought the number of tourists visiting PA's elk range would have decreased this past summer and fall. But it did not seem like that occurred ... The PA Wilds initiative seems to have played an important role in holding tourism at previous levels or possibly increasing. ... We have had discussions with many of the local businesses and they too believe tourism has either held steady or increased. Tourists into the area seem to enjoy their visit and many plan to return. Tall Pines Belgian Adventures is

pleased with the response by tourists as well as by DCNR and the PA Great Outdoors

Visitor Bureau. ... Overall we believe the PA Wilds initiative will be a success and has been so to date. The completion of the Elk Country Visitor Center will be the largest benefit [to our area]. The Elk Country Visitor Center will become a destination for many new visitors and solidify the PA Wilds Initiative.

*Jess and Cody Cogan
Tall Pines Belgian Adventures
Elk County*

To download a free copy of this report,
or to learn more about the Pennsylvania Wilds Initiative,
go to www.PAwildsResources.org.

To sign up for the monthly PA Wilds E-Update newsletter, email tbrant@pawilds.com.

For things to do and see around the region, visit www.PAwilds.com.

