January 27, 2020

PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
Bureau of State Parks
Planning Section
Attn: Mr. Paul Zep
P.O. Box 8551
Harrisburg, PA 17105-8551

Dear Mr. Zep:

The Conservation and Natural Resources Advisory Council has reviewed the Penn’s Parks for All Preliminary Report. The Council appreciates the work of the DCNR team in overseeing the research and development of the recommendations contained in the report. We understand the need to prioritize resources to meet the many challenges you face with Pennsylvania’s changing demographics, climate change issues, technology advancements, and aging infrastructure. The final version of this important document is expected to guide the direction of the Bureau of State Parks for several years to come.

Overall, the Council supports the Preliminary Report and DCNR’s recommendations. The Council is pleased to see a number of its comments from its March 2018 letter (copy attached) addressed and offers the following additional comments for DCNR’s consideration:

1. Consistent with the Bureau of State Parks’ mission statement, DCNR should give “first consideration” to conservation of the parks’ natural and cultural resources when pursuing more active adventure activities and expanded/renovated overnight facilities. As DCNR moves forward with the many good ideas in the Penn’s Parks for All Preliminary Report, the Council encourages DCNR to preserve and even enhance recreational opportunities for park users seeking quiet and natural experiences.

2. State parks should showcase DCNR as a role model and leader in environmentally sustainable practices. For example, consider the following: partner with local farm market vendors (including food trucks) when evaluating state park concession operations; work with concessionaires and park visitors to increase recycling and composting while avoiding sale/use of hard-to-recycle items (such as single use plastics) in the first place; showcase and promote energy conservation projects such as rooftop solar, small-scale wind and energy efficiency practices; offer programming to train DCNR staff and the public in a “Leave No Trace” approach to outdoor recreation to minimize impacts to natural and cultural resources.

3. Pennsylvania state parks are as diverse as the people who visit them. One size does not fit all, and recommendations that work for one park may not work for another. The state-level Penn’s Parks for All strategic plan should be implemented in a manner that is consistent with and deferential to park-
specific strategic plans. The Council encourages local park staff involvement to ensure issues of local concern are addressed.

4. The Council strongly supports measures to promote diversity and inclusion in all aspects of state park management. From developing trails and water sport launch sites for people of all abilities to improving transportation from urban centers, we commend DCNR’s efforts to welcome a broader community of people to our parks. Likewise, the Council encourages DCNR to continue its initiatives aimed at increasing employee diversity within the agency.

5. The Council strongly encourages DCNR to solicit feedback from state park users on an ongoing basis in addition to the periodic surveys used for the development of strategic plans like Penn’s Parks for All. The Council suggests evaluating the possibility of collecting feedback through electronic means, such as information kiosks and apps for mobile devices and using the feedback to improve park user experiences.

6. The Council encourages DCNR to develop a Pennsylvania state park marketing campaign to attract diverse, new and inexperienced users to state parks. Such a campaign could build public awareness as well as awareness among legislators about the value of state parks. The Council suggests working with other agencies as needed to make this part of a broader Commonwealth outdoor recreation branding effort.

7. In this era of limited resources, DCNR should continue to evaluate how it can more wisely spend each dollar. The Council encourages implementation of Penn’s Parks for All in a manner that is cost effective, identifies opportunities to streamline operations, improves efficiencies, and achieves greater return on investment.

8. The Council encourages DCNR to continue its efforts to secure additional funding to address the many critical infrastructure issues in state parks.

9. The Council encourages DCNR to increase support for youth programs such as the PA Outdoor Corps Program. Council members have witnessed firsthand how the PA Outdoor Corps Program presents a win-win situation for DCNR and program participants. The PA Outdoor Corps Program provides an important recruiting tool for the Bureau of State Parks and DCNR, in general, and could facilitate implementation of Penn’s Parks for All.

The Council was pleased to support DCNR’s efforts to obtain public input on Penn’s Parks for All by hosting a meeting at the Bald Eagle State Park on October 2, 2019. The Council encourages DCNR to continue to actively solicit input on its strategic plans, and the Council is willing to support these efforts through its meetings and other outreach activities.
Again, thank you for all the work put into the Penn’s Parks for All Preliminary Report and for the opportunity to provide input. We look forward to seeing the final report.

Respectfully submitted,

Ephraim Zimmerman  
CNRAC Chair

cc: Cindy Adams Dunn, DCNR Secretary  
    Gretchen Leslie, DCNR Senior Adviser
Council Actions

After receiving several presentations from Paul Zeph, who is leading the efforts to develop DCNR’s Bureau of State Parks’ new strategic plan, council penned 10 recommendations as early input into the plan’s development. The following recommendations were presented to the Bureau of State Parks in March 2018:

1. Restore the Oil and Gas Fund to its original intent that is included in the Oil and Gas Lease Fund Act (Act No. 256) signed by Governor George Leader on December 15, 1955. The act authorized the expenditure of rents and royalties from oil and gas leases on Commonwealth-owned land for conservation, recreation, dams and flood control purposes including the acquisition of additional land.

2. Return the Bureau of State Parks’ revenues back to the Bureau as permitted in Act No. 51 of July 1, 1981, into a State Parks’ Major Maintenance Fund to be used for projects such as roof replacements, road re-paving, updating water and sewage treatment plants and building rehabilitation.

3. Oppose a state parks entrance fee or parking fees because of infrastructure limitations, personnel and budget implications and societal impact.

4. Focus future acquisition efforts of new state park land on lands that would add to existing state parks or would eliminate interior holdings. Any new state park should be a significant historic site or a unique natural area and come with additional staff and maintenance funds to operate the area.

5. Continue efforts to work cooperatively with federal, state and local agencies wherever and whenever possible. Examples would be to continue working with local agencies with the Conservation Landscape Initiatives and to connect existing trails to create longer trails.

6. Enhance efforts to promote Diversity and Inclusion in all aspects of state park management, including educational programming, park operations, and staffing. Include goals that further promote educational opportunities to park users and provide programs to increase environmental awareness and an appreciation of nature to people of all backgrounds.

7. Embrace the role state parks play in promoting active, healthy living and obesity prevention for all Pennsylvanians. As an example, state parks consider adopting a ‘no smoking/no tobacco’ policy for certain areas such as buildings, playgrounds, beaches, events and campgrounds.

8. Identify key strategic partners for state parks within the strategic plan and how those partnerships will be strengthened.

9. Fully engage visitors to get ongoing feedback about state park facilities and services to help improve customer experiences.

10. Build public awareness of the value of state parks and the benefits they provide by establishing and implementing the state park brand - who they are, what they do, and why they matter.

11. Acknowledge the threats to management of cultural, recreational, and natural resources from global climate change through education and programming objectives and establish opportunities to demonstrate solutions for reducing carbon emissions through green building and energy efficiency.