

# DCNR Launches A New ‘Office Of Outdoor Recreation’

By Cindy Adams Dunn, Secretary, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources  
My message recapping 2023 highlighted new beginnings for the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). We brought in tremendous new leaders, launched a new Office of Outdoor Recreation, and focused on new strategic priorities for a changing landscape.

A year later, I am happy to report a successful 2024 that laid a foundation for stepping into the future as we celebrate our 30th anniversary!

## Preparing for our Future through the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps

Thinking about the past, I cannot help but look fondly at our team’s work to create the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps. When we launched this bold initiative 10 years ago, the founding principles were similar to that of the transformative Civilian Conservation Corps, with a twist of DCNR’s mission infused in the program.

Today, more than 1,400 young people have helped build bridges, clear trails, plant native species, and more on their path to being future conservation leaders. We are hopeful that a future secretary comes from their ranks.

Governor Josh Shapiro prioritized making the Outdoor Corps mightier with a \$5 million investment to help scale up the corps. Look for more from the Outdoor Corps as it celebrates its 10th anniversary this year.

## A New Brand and Steadfast Commitment to Increasing Access for ALL

Governor Shapiro launched the new tourism brand for the Commonwealth: Pennsylvania – The Great American Getaway, which included an RV tour of the state and overnight accommodations in a state park. The brand is centered around the idea that Pennsylvania is within a four-hour drive of 72 million people. Well, what is a better place to get away?

## Governor Josh Shapiro launched the tourism brand Pennsylvania - The Great American Getaway.

At Black Moshannon State Park in Centre County when Governor Shapiro joined us to launch color-correcting viewfinders, he noted that park staff often act as unofficial customer service representatives for Pennsylvania and its government. I’m pleased to agree that the smiling faces and helpful leaders connecting people to nature are the best, and they help everyone feel welcome when they visit public lands.

## Governor Josh Shapiro

And for the Governor, who is colorblind, there was an additional spark of joy when he saw the brilliant reds and bright yellows of fall foliage for the first time. It served as a testament to the work we do to continue to expand outdoor access for everyone through our Mosaic initiative, the



Governor Josh Shapiro, the First Lady and a group of DCNR staff stand behind a large poster of glasses showing the difference of fall foliage for colorblind people. A bridge and lake can be seen with trees in various shades of green and orange.



Governor Josh Shapiro and his family lean over a wooden railing overlooking a lush green valley.

department’s effort to create a more inclusive environment in outdoor spaces. Special thanks to our friends with the Pennsylvania Wilds Center and Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation for their support in bringing these viewfinders to 10 sites. We celebrated our first Outdoors for All Day in July and intend to make that a priority to help more people see themselves as outdoor users. Whether it is accessible playgrounds and trails, or interpreting our historic and cultural resources, we remain steadfast in our resolve to be more inclusive.

## Growing Outdoor Recreation and Connecting People to Conservation

It has been nearly four years since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. With little to do, many people turned to the outdoors for respite, mentally and physically. Many people who discovered the outdoors for the first time or rekindled their love of nature are still visiting our natural places for those same mental and physical health benefits.

Governor Shapiro has taken notice of the growing outdoor interest and has lent his full support to Elevate, a new business engagement initiative designed to strengthen Pennsylvania’s related outdoor recreation industry by engaging directly with the businesses that drive it.

## Nathan Reigner, Ph.D., serves as the Director for Pennsylvania’s Office of Outdoor Recreation

Our theme this year is 30 Years of Stewardship: Stepping into the Future. After all, public lands are special places because of the 40 million-plus people who vote with their feet and spend time in our beautiful state parks and forests. I hope to see you out and about, and encourage you to attend one of the many programs our staff offer.

Conservation work is hard work and a lot of it happens away from public view. Our educators, rangers, administrators, managers and other public facing staff are just a fraction of the dedicated employees that make DCNR the best agency in the Commonwealth. These public servants work tirelessly to protect our pollinators, plan new parks in our communities, fight wildfires exacerbated by climate change, map what is underground, oversee the construction of high-performance buildings in our system, and so much more.



Cindy Adams Dunn, Secretary, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)