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COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
JOINT LEGISLATIVE AIR AND WATER POLLUTION
CONTROL AND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

IRVIS OFFICE BULDING
ROOM G-50
CAPITOL COMPLEX
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

PUBLIC HEARING ON THE CONTRIBUTIONS AND
CHALLENGES OF FRIENDS GROUPS FOR
PENNSYLVANIA'S STATE PARKS AND FORESTS

TUESDAY, SEPTMEBER 15, 2020
8:30 A.M.

BEFORE:

- REPRESENTATIVE PARKE WENTLING, CHAIRMAN
- REPRESENTATIVE CAROLYN COMITTA, VICE CHAIR
(VIRTUAL)
- REPRESENTATIVE DONNA BULLOCK, SECRETARY
(VIRTUAL)
- REPRESENTATIVE BUD COOK
- REPRESENTATIVE STEPHEN MCCARTER
(VIRTUAL)
- REPRESENTATIVE PERRY WARREN
(VIRTUAL)
- SENATOR PATRICK J. STEFANO
(VIRTUAL)

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ALSO PRESENT:

TOM HOLROYD, LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR,
SENATOR MARIA COLLETT'S OFFICE
(VIRTUAL)

TONY M. GUERRIERI, JLCC EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
COLEEN P. ENGVALL, JLCC RESEARCH ANALYST
(VIRTUAL)

DENISE M. PLUMMER, JLCC ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER
SAKURA UNG, JLCC PROJECT COORDINATOR

BRENDA J. PARDUN, RPR
REPORTER - NOTARY PUBLIC

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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

* * *

(See submitted written testimony and handouts
online.)

P R O C E E D I N G S

1
2 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Good morning,
3 everyone. I'm Parke Wentling, state
4 representative, 17th Legislative District.
5 I'm honored to serve parts of four counties:
6 Erie, Crawford, Mercer, and Lawrence. I'm the
7 chairman of the Joint Legislative Conservation
8 Committee.

9 I want to thank everyone for
10 attending this public hearing in person, and
11 we do have quite a few people who have joined
12 us virtually this morning.

13 Before we begin, I'd like to take
14 some time for introductions, obviously
15 beginning with my fellow committee members,
16 and we have one here.

17 If he'd like to introduce himself.

18 REPRESENTATIVE COOK: 49th District,
19 State Representative Bud Cook, parts of
20 Fayette and Washington counties.

21 MR. GUERRIERI: Tony Guerrieri. I'm
22 the executive director of the Joint
23 Legislative Conservation Committee.

24 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: So, just some
25 quick housekeeping items for today's hearing.

1 Each testifier here with us today will
2 present -- and also virtually -- will present
3 their information first. At the end of the
4 hearing, we will have questions from members
5 and those in attendance and also on the phone,
6 too, on the Internet. I'd kindly ask you to
7 hold your questions and comments until the
8 testimony has been presented.

9 We are under a little bit of a time
10 constraint today. This room is at a premium.

11 So, let's go ahead and get started.
12 So, this topic was brought to the committee's
13 attention by one of my colleagues and JLCC
14 member, Mr. McCarter, state representative.

15 And if Mr. McCarter is on the line,
16 he's welcome to join us with any kind of an
17 introduction.

18 In fact, speaking of introductions,
19 if we do have some members of the general
20 assembly that would like to take a moment --
21 including Mr. McCarter, if he's on the line --
22 to introduce themselves. We'll just give a
23 couple moments to sort through who wants to
24 shout out and say hello.

25 Thank you.

1 REPRESENTATIVE COMITTA: Chairman,
2 good morning. It's Carolyn Comitta,
3 representative from West Chester and vice
4 chair of the JLCC. Good morning.

5 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you.

6 I know that Ms. Bullock's out there.

7 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK: Good
8 morning. Can you hear me?

9 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes, we can hear
10 you loud and clear. Go ahead.

11 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK:
12 Representative Donna Bullock, secretary of the
13 committee.

14 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you, Donna.

15 Any other members of the general
16 assembly, senators, state representatives?

17 REPRESENTATIVE WARREN: Good morning.
18 This is Perry Warren, representative from
19 Bucks County, 31.

20 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you very
21 much for joining us, Mr. Warren.

22 Anyone else on the line? Potentially
23 any guests or state representatives, too,
24 senators. Go ahead.

25 SENATOR STEFANO: Senator Pat Stefano

1 here, 32nd District.

2 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you,
3 Senator Stefano.

4 Anyone else?

5 MR. HOLROYD: This is Tom Holroyd,
6 here on behalf of Senator Maria Collett,
7 Montgomery, Bucks counties.

8 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Very good. Thank
9 you.

10 And as we go through, if anyone
11 else -- you know, if your phones or -- you
12 know, if it's muted or something, you figure
13 out how to get on, just interrupt, introduce
14 yourself.

15 Let's go ahead and continue here.

16 So, again, this was brought to our
17 attention by Mr. McCarter, and the purpose of
18 the hearing is to examine the contribution and
19 challenges of friends groups, nonprofits who
20 support Pennsylvania's state parks and forest
21 lands.

22 There's currently -- and a lot of
23 people probably don't know this or maybe they
24 don't know a lot about the friends groups --
25 but there are currently forty-six state-level

1 groups contributing time, expertise, and
2 privately raised funds to support these
3 natural resources.

4 I've been very honored and blessed to
5 be involved in one of my friends groups back
6 home, the Friends of Goddard State Park. I
7 know that they raised money to help put in a
8 playground not too long ago.

9 Friends groups spend a good deal of
10 time and resources, raising funds to support
11 projects and programs in individual parks and
12 forests. They vary in size, structure, and
13 fundraising expertise. Some are small
14 volunteer organization, while others are
15 large-scale fundraising partners.

16 These groups also might donate
17 services, such as organizing a group of
18 volunteers and overseeing the work. Friends
19 groups are dedicated to engaging public
20 support for parks and forests and enhancing
21 public use and enjoyment of these resources.

22 Today's testifiers are
23 representatives from DCNR and friends groups,
24 who will discuss the work they're involved
25 with in helping to enhance Pennsylvania's

1 parks and forests as well as some of the
2 barriers that they have faced with their
3 initiatives.

4 Testifying this morning are -- we
5 have several testifiers: John Norbeck, deputy
6 secretary for parks and forests at DCNR; we
7 have Marci Mowery, she's the president of the
8 Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation; and
9 Andre Weltman.

10 Andre, did I get that right?

11 MR. WELTMAN: Yep.

12 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Okay. Andre
13 Weltman, chairman of Friends of Pine Grove
14 Furnace State Park.

15 Thank you for the testifiers that are
16 with us here in Harrisburg -- two are, and we
17 have one, I believe, on the phone -- and
18 sharing your insight. We look forward to
19 hearing more about this very important topic.
20 So, let us now begin the hearing.

21 Our first testifier today to begin is
22 John Norbeck, deputy secretary of Parks and
23 Forests for DCNR.

24 Mr. Norbeck, I see you right up on
25 the screen.

1 MR. NORBECK: Yes, sir. Thank you,
2 Representative Wentling.

3 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Oh, you're
4 welcome.

5 Go ahead. Thank you.

6 MR. NORBECK: I'm John Norbeck. I am
7 the deputy secretary of Parks and Forestry,
8 representing Secretary Dunn this morning and
9 all the great men and women who work with
10 DCNR. And we have provided written testimony,
11 so I'll save some time here and not read that
12 testimony. I believe you have a copy of it.
13 But I will hit a few highlights I'd like to
14 bring up.

15 First of all, the Department of
16 Conservation and Natural Resources was formed
17 twenty-five years ago. This is our
18 twenty-fifth anniversary. It was created
19 during the Tom Ridge administration. Our
20 first secretary was John Oliver. And some of
21 the guiding principles that the original
22 administration and John Oliver developed that
23 we use today at DCNR is that we operate under
24 the principles of partnership, service, and
25 stewardship.

1 And I think the partnership side
2 certainly rings throughout the entire
3 department. Most folks know about our grant
4 program, C2P2, which comes out of the Bureau
5 of Recreation and Conservation, but we also
6 have a lot of partnerships through our state
7 parks and state forests and our forestry
8 bureau.

9 And just a little bit about our
10 public land infrastructure. We have a hundred
11 twenty-one state parks. It's a large, rather
12 robust system, one of the largest systems in
13 the country, brings great economic value to
14 Pennsylvania and our local communities, about
15 300,000 acres of state park land, and we have
16 2.2 million acres of state forest land that's
17 used for much more dispersed recreation but
18 also for production of wood product.

19 Within those state parks and state
20 forest lands, we have over 4300 buildings, 133
21 dams, 3,000 miles of roads, almost a thousand
22 bridges. There's a lot of infrastructure
23 within state parks. It's value is probably
24 close to 4 billion dollars. So, it takes a
25 lot of work to keep those places up and

1 serving our public.

2 We have seen, during the COVID
3 pandemic, visitation in our state parks
4 specifically has gone up. Last year our
5 visitation was about 47 million visits per
6 year, which is very high. And this year,
7 we're on track to being somewhere around 45
8 million for this year. We're seeing an
9 increase in some parks over 100 percent, but,
10 on average, we are about 36 or 37 percent
11 right now through the summer months.

12 So, I bring that up because it, when
13 you have more use, you have more needs, and
14 more maintenance and more programming
15 opportunities.

16 And we have two groups that really
17 help us, outside of the staff within the
18 department. We have the Pennsylvania Outdoor
19 Corps, which I think you probably know is a
20 work program, work development program the
21 DCNR runs, much like the old Civilian
22 Conservation Corps. We run that in
23 conjunction and with the assistance from the
24 Department of Labor and Industry.

25 But, however, the biggest boost that

1 we really get in providing those services to
2 the public is from our friends groups, and we
3 have two different types of friends groups.
4 We have what is commonly referred to as non-
5 affiliates, or friends groups, that basically
6 are their own 501(c)(3) standalone
7 organizations, like Friends of Delaware Canal,
8 Presque Isle Partnership, Friends of Tom Ridge
9 Environmental Center. Codorus State Park has
10 their own friends group. Moraine State Park
11 has their own friends group.

12 Then we have a relationship with
13 Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation.
14 And as you said, Representative, they have
15 forty-six groups that work in our state parks
16 and state forests, and they do a lot of
17 things, and I think that part of it is
18 certainly bringing tens of thousands of hours
19 of voluntary work annually to DCNR lands,
20 which saves us a lot of money but also
21 provides a great service to the public. You
22 mentioned doing a playground, fixing trails.
23 They fix bridges. They give programs where
24 possible. But I think the biggest thing
25 that -- service that they bring to DCNR is

1 they help build a bridge between the local
2 community and the park or the forest or the
3 forestry service that they're working for.

4 PFFF has been around since the late
5 90s, and they've done a tremendous job helping
6 DCNR out and providing service to the public.
7 They're very supportive to our mission.
8 Independent but very supportive. And we
9 appreciate that.

10 I think last year, we looked at about
11 60,000 hours of volunteer work that was
12 supplied by Pennsylvania Parks and Forests
13 Foundation. Marci Mowery has done an
14 excellent job in working with the department
15 and also working with those local friends
16 groups.

17 The folks, they host events for us.
18 We have some really large community events on
19 state park lands in particular. They do a
20 great job of doing that. As you said earlier,
21 it is -- part of that is fundraising, to put
22 amenities back into state parks and forests
23 that the local community likes to see. And
24 you mentioned the playground. You know, the
25 playground, other things such as ADA

1 accessibility, not just in our cabins and
2 places like that, but our playgrounds and also
3 boat launches. That's a great program that
4 we're looking at PPF for.

5 And they also purchase some
6 equipment. I think over the last few years
7 they've purchased some ADA-accessible
8 wheelchairs that we can use on our beaches,
9 which are used quite a bit by our busy public.

10 So, in closing, I'd like to just say
11 that all of the friends groups bring great
12 value to DCNR, and they bring great value to
13 the citizens of Pennsylvania. And they do
14 that through their knowledge, their skills.
15 We get really skilled work coming out of our
16 friends groups. They get also pride of
17 ownership in their park, which we greatly
18 enjoy. And the volunteer hours that they
19 bring to us, that helps us continue to connect
20 Pennsylvanians and visitors that are coming to
21 Pennsylvania state parks and state forests.

22 Thank you for the opportunity, and I
23 will stay on the line.

24 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you very
25 much, Mr. Norbeck, for your testimony. That

1 was excellent.

2 And I just want to take a real quick
3 moment to also recognize a special guest we
4 have here with us here in Harrisburg. John
5 Kline is here with us today. So, I did want
6 to recognize the fact that John is here.

7 If I may, John -- I'm sure you've
8 been recognized in the past -- is Lieutenant
9 Governor Ernie Kline's son, if that's okay.

10 And I'm really glad that you brought
11 up John Oliver. He's been a very special
12 friend to me. I do spend a lot of time on the
13 trail named after him at Goddard State Park,
14 working on the trail, and it's been such an
15 amazing resource for that trail, a real
16 attraction. And as you mentioned, especially
17 this summer, with all the things that were
18 going on, and so many people being out there,
19 just seems to have gone through the roof on
20 that.

21 We're going to go ahead and move on.
22 You know, we will do the questions at the end,
23 if that's okay, and -- like I mentioned. And
24 we will go ahead and move on to our next
25 testifier, and we have with us here in person

1 Marci Mowery. She is the president of the
2 Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation,
3 PPF.

4 So, Marci.

5 MS. MOWERY: Thank you very much.

6 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Oh, you're
7 welcome. And you have some slides to share
8 with us?

9 MS. MOWERY: I do.

10 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Excellent. Thank
11 you.

12 MS. MOWERY: Good morning. My name
13 is Marci Mowery. I'm the president of the
14 Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation, and
15 I'm pleased to be with you here today.

16 The foundation formed in 1999 as a
17 way of users and fans of our parks and forests
18 to give back to these special places. And we
19 have a mission to inspire stewardship of
20 Pennsylvania state parks and forests through
21 public engagement in volunteerism, education,
22 and recreation. And we do this in a number of
23 ways.

24 We communicate about the value of our
25 state parks and forests and the value of

1 outdoor recreation. We fund projects, like
2 Executive Secretary Norbeck mentioned, that we
3 raise money through private philanthropy, and
4 serve as nonprofit partner to our state parks
5 and forests.

6 One of the big things that we do,
7 though, is we serve as an umbrella
8 organization for forty-six friends groups --
9 we call them friends groups or chapters --
10 that are disbursed across the Commonwealth of
11 Pennsylvania.

12 And the slide that you're seeing now
13 shows the forty-six friends groups that
14 function under our umbrella, and there are
15 another fifteen groups that are independent,
16 many of them existed prior to PPF forming.
17 Some of those are actually -- we're in
18 conversation with them to come under our
19 umbrella. Because it's easier to be a friends
20 group under our umbrella because we do all of
21 the paperwork and all of the un-fun things so
22 that you can do the fun things and the
23 volunteerism on your public land.

24 So, these groups are geographically
25 disbursed. They represent more than forty-six

1 state parks and state forests, though. Some
2 of them represent complexes. An example would
3 be at Greenwood Furnace. They also represent
4 Greenwood Furnace, Whipple Dam, and Penn
5 Roosevelt State Park.

6 Those on forests represent just a
7 section of the forests, because forests are
8 very large entities and become overwhelming to
9 represent 200,000 acres.

10 So, let's talk a little bit about the
11 friends groups. We just started our strategic
12 planning process. And that process had us
13 surveying our members and donors, our
14 leadership, and our friends groups. And we
15 wanted to find out how long many of our
16 friends groups' volunteers have been with their
17 particular group, and you will see that some
18 of them have been with the group for more than
19 fifteen to twenty years. These are volunteers
20 who have a long-term relationship with the
21 park or forest that they represent. They are
22 committed to the betterment of that park or
23 forest to make it the best that it can be so
24 that it delivers a quality experience for the
25 visitors that go there.

1 And there's no one particular reason
2 why somebody joins a friends group. They
3 might be asked by another personal
4 acquaintance. They might want to be engaged
5 in volunteerism. They might have an
6 association with that state park or state
7 forest, representing a user group, like a disk
8 golf user group or a hiker or a biker, and
9 they want to get involved on a larger level.
10 And many volunteers have multiple reasons that
11 they give for engaging with a park or a
12 forest.

13 So, let's talk about what they're
14 doing. Now, we formed in 1999. I came on
15 board in 2005. And at that point we had eight
16 friends groups. So, we keep adding them on a
17 yearly basis. We have lost a few that went on
18 to become independent friends groups or they
19 were there for a particular project and they
20 completed the project. But we've been
21 growing.

22 So, in 2008, we started having our
23 friends groups complete annual reports so that
24 we would know what they were accomplishing.
25 We could toot their horn, they could toot

1 their horn, and we could all celebrate the
2 successes.

3 So, you can see over the course of
4 the last eleven years, the number of service
5 projects completed by friend groups, for a
6 total of over 2200 service projects. Some of
7 these might be small. It might be that they
8 planted a butterfly garden. Or they might be
9 large, like Andre Weltman will talk to you
10 about, the bridge that the Friends of Pine
11 Grove Furnace has put in.

12 So, the size of the service project
13 varies. It represents a lot of effort, a lot
14 of fundraising, and a lot of partnership
15 within the state park or forest within which
16 they work.

17 We have our friends groups track
18 their volunteer hours. And you'll see that
19 there's been a steady climb. And the total
20 hours over the last eleven years is over
21 584,000 hours. That's significant,
22 particularly if you look at that in light of
23 the multiplier event. The independent sector,
24 on an annual basis, determines what the value
25 of a volunteer hour is. And in July, they

1 just did an update, and it's 27 dollars and 20
2 cents per hour is the value of a volunteer.

3 This chart represents the value in
4 each of the years that the data was collected.
5 But you can see, over the past eleven years,
6 friends groups in parks and forests that just
7 fall under our umbrella have contributed over
8 16 million dollars worth of labor to the
9 Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

10 They're not there to supplant state
11 park or state forest staff. They're there to
12 work shoulder to shoulder with state park and
13 state forest staff.

14 Volunteers are typically doing things
15 that volunteers do: trail work, gardening,
16 invasive plant removal. If they're doing
17 something that's a little bit different,
18 they'll work with the park or forest manager
19 and the maintenance staff. And we'll talk a
20 little bit later, if it's something that might
21 be in conflict with union issues, we'll work
22 with union and have a discussion about what
23 that could look like.

24 They host special events. I saw
25 Senator Stefano was on there. He has a group

1 in his district, Friends of Laurel Hill. They
2 typically hold an annual bluegrass festival
3 that attracts over 8,000 people to Laurel Hill
4 State Park. This year, because of COVID,
5 they're trying something different. They're
6 doing a drive-in bluegrass festival, where you
7 can get tickets, and they have areas marked
8 off, and you have to stay within your area.
9 And it's limited to 250 people. But they're
10 still having a bluegrass festival.

11 But they've had -- collectively, the
12 friends groups have had almost 1600 volunteer
13 events, special events, over the course of the
14 last eleven years. And that means about 1.1
15 million people, 1.2 million people who have
16 been attracted to these special events.

17 Now, I have to look at my cheat sheet
18 here. I looked at, you know, what does that
19 mean economically to the Commonwealth of
20 Pennsylvania when a friends group has an
21 event. And in 2010 -- so, this is using 2010
22 multipliers -- the Department of Conservation
23 and Natural Resources did an economic impact
24 study on visitors to state parks, and they
25 found that if you're a resident and you're

1 only visiting for a day, you typically spend
2 about X number of dollars. If you're a
3 resident and you're staying overnight, you
4 would spend about Y number of dollars per day.
5 And if you're a nonresident staying overnight,
6 you'll spend even more.

7 So, if we look at it from a day-use
8 visitation or an overnight from those three
9 different categories, those numbers could
10 equate to about 42.6 million dollars in local
11 spending for people that are just day use. If
12 you're a PA resident and a camper, that's
13 about 101 million dollars. And if you're a PA
14 resident staying in a cabin, that's over 200
15 million dollars invested into local
16 communities. These are people that are going
17 out and maybe buying ice, getting some food,
18 getting their bicycle tweaks, maybe -- I don't
19 know -- gasoline. So, they're spending
20 significant money in the surrounding
21 communities.

22 And a number of our friends groups --
23 and Pine Grove is one of them -- they have
24 fall events, which are bringing people into
25 what you would call the shoulder season of

1 visitation. So, they're bringing people into
2 the park when visitations usually start to
3 slow down. And they're keeping campgrounds
4 open longer, which means more money coming
5 into the local communities for a longer period
6 of time.

7 And then friends also serve as
8 fundraisers. The data that I'm sharing with
9 you is only about friends groups; it's not
10 about what PPF ourselves have done, it's just
11 the friends groups. And they have raised
12 close to 4 million dollars of revenue that
13 they've reinvested into your states parks and
14 state forests.

15 But one of the challenges that we run
16 into is the cost of insurance. And I know
17 that there's been legislation that was
18 introduced to look at liability and friends
19 groups, because it is getting cost
20 prohibitive. And this chart shows, for
21 directors and officers insurance, kind of
22 fairly steady. And we provide directors and
23 officers insurance for all of our friends
24 groups as well as our board of directors. And
25 then our general liability, which is starting

1 to climb.

2 But our friends, if they're doing a
3 special event, have to get a rider on our
4 insurance. And a special event might be a
5 race. It could be a -- we have local groups
6 that do women-in-the-outdoors type events, to
7 help women hone their skills of being in the
8 outdoors. It could be a run. But you can
9 see, for these -- these certificates of
10 insurance, the cost of them is starting to
11 climb. In fact, right now, we have been going
12 back and forth with our insurance carrier
13 because we had a group that wanted to do a 3-D
14 archery shoot, and the cost of the insurance
15 was going to be 500 dollars, and they
16 projected they were going to make 600 dollars.
17 We had a group that wanted to do some mountain
18 biking races. The insurance was going to be
19 over 1200 dollars.

20 We keep paying more for our
21 insurance. They're wanting to cover fewer and
22 fewer events, and, in fact, told us they're no
23 longer going to cover any sporting events, so
24 we have to go outside. Even though our costs
25 are going up, we have to go outside of our

1 carrier to find insurance to cover the events
2 of people engaging in recreation.

3 We have looked for other
4 insurance carriers. Nobody's really
5 interested because we're such a hybrid
6 organization.

7 Okay. We'll just stay there.

8 So, other challenges we have is -- is
9 that our -- when we're working on big
10 projects, we have to get approval for some of
11 those, such as the Bureau of Facility Design
12 and Construction. And there's not always
13 adequate staffing to approve the projects.

14 So, one of the interesting twists of
15 fate or the ironic twist of fate is that
16 volunteers could do more for DCNR if DCNR were
17 more fully staffed, because we work shoulder
18 to shoulder with DCNR staff.

19 Friends also function within the
20 confines as union labor. Many projects, such
21 as trail work, invasive species removal,
22 painting, et cetera, that's all recognized as
23 typical volunteer labor. But if the project
24 is going to be tackled outside of those
25 typical things, we work with the union to make

1 sure that we are not violating any union
2 agreements and union rules.

3 Many friends say that attracting new
4 volunteers is their biggest challenge. And,
5 in fact, every year we ask them, What was your
6 biggest challenge this year? And they say,
7 Attracting new volunteers.

8 So, we continue to explore ways for
9 our friends groups to recruit volunteers and
10 to train the leadership for the volunteer
11 groups and to make their life a little bit
12 easier.

13 And this actually could be an area
14 where the general assembly could assist by
15 promoting volunteer opportunities in your
16 constituent newsletters or even talking
17 about what they're -- if they have a friends
18 group within their district, talking about
19 what that friends group is doing and letting
20 people know that friends group exists, because
21 the best way to attract volunteers is to let
22 people know that you're there.

23 In closing, I want to thank you for
24 hosting this hearing on friends groups. I
25 believe -- and I am a bit biased -- that

1 friends groups are key players in the success
2 of not just our state parks and forests, but
3 in community parks, national parks, nature
4 centers, libraries, and museums.

5 If there is a way to address any of
6 the issues, the challenges that friends groups
7 face, we would love to have that conversation
8 and continue to make it possible for friends
9 groups to do the amazing work that they're
10 doing all across the state.

11 So, thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes. Thank you
13 very much.

14 Okay. Our next testifier is Andre
15 Weltman, chairman of the Friends of Pine Grove
16 Furnace State Park.

17 And you have some slides also?

18 MR. WELTMAN: Yes.

19 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Excellent. Thank
20 you.

21 MR. WELTMAN: Good morning. My name
22 is Andre Weltman. I'm the chairman of the
23 Friends of Pine Grove Furnace State Park.
24 We're organized as a chapter of the PA Parks
25 and Forests Foundation.

1 Our park is located in the far
2 southwest corner of Cumberland County, about
3 an hour's drive from Harrisburg. It's not
4 very large as state parks go, it's just under
5 700 acres. But it has two lakes, both with
6 swimming beaches and one of which is open for
7 boating.

8 As shown in these photos, we have
9 historic resources, some of which date before
10 the American Revolution, plus the Appalachian
11 Trail passes through the middle of the park.
12 The unique Appalachian Trail Museum is located
13 here, a logical place, since the midpoint of
14 the AT is nearby. Finally, note that the park
15 does not stand alone. It is a popular access
16 point for Michaux State Forest, which
17 completely surrounds us.

18 Despite our size, we are quite busy
19 at Pine Grove Furnace. In recent years,
20 visitation is, very roughly, 300 and 400,000
21 annually. We have certainly seen an increase
22 this year, as people seek a safe place to get
23 outside during the pandemic, and visits on
24 many months in 2020 have been 30 to 50 percent
25 higher than the same month in 2019.

1 Our friends group supplements the
2 great work of state park staff, facing limited
3 budgets and limited personnel. I'd like to
4 think of us a little value-added to help out
5 and make the place better for our many
6 visitors.

7 So, what does a friends group like
8 ours actually do? We help the park manager
9 and environmental educator by recruiting and
10 organizing volunteers. We raise money to
11 support conservation, education, and
12 recreation. Please take note, money raised by
13 our group stays at our park and doesn't go
14 into the DCNR general budget. If someone
15 donates to us or buys a shirt or hat from us,
16 the money is used for Pine Grove Furnace
17 specifically.

18 And I will say that I was surprised
19 when I first got involved with the state park
20 and forming a friends group that I was
21 surprised to learn that, up until our
22 formation, there were shirts and things of
23 that sort available for sale in the park
24 office. I assumed that they stayed to support
25 the park where I was buying them, and it was

1 quite a surprise to find out, no, it goes
2 straight into Harrisburg.

3 We work with park staff to maintain
4 our five miles of hiking trails, and we
5 contribute to a wide variety of projects, big
6 and small.

7 In the ten years since the friends
8 group was formed in August of 2010, we have
9 purchased and helped plant numerous trees and
10 other native plants to displace invasives. We
11 bought two playgrounds and a swing set that
12 park staff installed. We organized an annual
13 First Day Hikes. We raised 5,000 dollars to
14 install a protective concrete cover on the
15 iron furnace, which dates to around 1771.

16 We coordinate with the park during
17 Earth Day, National Public Lands Day, and
18 similar public volunteer efforts to improve
19 the park. We also promote educational
20 programming, whether led by the park's
21 environmental educator or our efforts to teach
22 and demonstrate the history of early
23 iron making in Pennsylvania.

24 And I just notice that both of the
25 photographs on the right side of the slide

1 here have a lot of smoke. We tried really
2 hard not to burn down our park. The bottom
3 right picture is the educator program on
4 camping and outdoor cooking. And the top
5 right is our living history demonstration, I
6 should say, to make charcoal fuel for the iron
7 furnace.

8 The biggest event of the year --
9 except, sadly, not this year -- is the Fall
10 Furnace Fest held in October. It includes the
11 famous pumpkin float and the Legend of the
12 Hairy Hand at Fuller Lake. Typically, we have
13 6,000 to 8,000 or more public visits for the
14 weekend festival.

15 Some of our projects are pretty
16 ambitious. Beyond simple trail maintenance,
17 in 2016, we used a combination of DCNR prep
18 work plus volunteer labor to assemble a
19 50-foot hiking bridge to reunite the two
20 halves of Mountain Creek Trail. That project
21 amounted to 35,000 dollars.

22 Now, we are almost ready to install a
23 second hiking bridge to connect the two park
24 trails. This project is around 120,000
25 dollars, of which 70,000 comes from two

1 grants, while 50,000 is from the friends' own
2 funds. This time, we are not constructing the
3 five-ton bridge ourselves. We're bringing in
4 professionals. It's by far the largest and
5 most complex thing the Friends of Pine Grove
6 Furnace has ever done.

7 While these and many other activities
8 are apparent to the public, I want to call
9 your attention to other ways we support our
10 park. I never thought, when I helped create
11 our group, that we'd be buying gasoline and
12 paint and similar materials, but the park
13 turns to us for help when it's more cost
14 effective or faster for us to foot the bill on
15 certain supplies or when their budget gets
16 abruptly frozen, as happened for a while this
17 spring.

18 Here are just a few examples. We
19 paid 13,000 dollars a few years ago to replace
20 every single door lock and padlock across the
21 park. In a place with scattered buildings of
22 varying ages, there was no simple key system,
23 and staff were always lugging around a heavy
24 bunch of keys. It's not something the public
25 would see, but we think it's made life much

1 better for park employees.

2 We're now providing around 20,000
3 dollars to pave a new campground entrance, a
4 capital improvement that the park manager
5 couldn't readily fit into his budget.

6 And as one lesser example of
7 behind-the-scenes support, a few years ago we
8 bought an herbicide sprayer to assist in
9 attacking the barberry that is choking out
10 native species all across our landscape.
11 We've even purchased items like a conference
12 room table for the park office and a microwave
13 for the employee break room. We're happy to
14 help out when and wherever we can.

15 How do we do all this? We work
16 closely with the park manager and park staff.
17 The manager sits on our board ex officio, and
18 we decide together what our priorities are and
19 where the friends can help.

20 We are fortunate to be a chapter of
21 PFFF, which handles the mundane back office
22 functions that keep a nonprofit group going.
23 No one offers to volunteer at a state park
24 merely to do spreadsheets and process
25 paperwork, although we do our own fair share

1 of that. PFFF helps with our 501(c)(3)
2 status, event and director insurance, bank
3 accounts, audits, and so forth.

4 I think our success arises from the
5 formula: volunteers plus time spent in the
6 park plus money. Let me speak briefly about
7 that last piece, money.

8 How do we fund all our activities?
9 Our income comes from donations, selling
10 firewood and merchandise, special events, and
11 grants for specific projects, like the two
12 hiking bridges mentioned. We sell a really
13 nice mix of merchandise in the park office and
14 at special events, ranging from patches and
15 pins and bumper stickers to hats, tee shirts,
16 jackets, maps, and history books and on and
17 on. Merchandise sales amount to over 10,000
18 dollars annually.

19 At the park campground, we sell
20 10,000 dollars of firewood at five dollars per
21 bundle. People love to have campfires, even
22 during hot summer weather. Having firewood
23 readily available is a convenience for campers
24 but also promotes use of wood sourced locally,
25 to avoid importing forest pests and pathogens

1 from elsewhere.

2 We expend a lot of volunteer effort
3 to cut and split logs brought to us by park
4 maintenance staff when trees fall on their own
5 or need to be cut down for public safety.

6 We hold a half marathon and a 5K
7 fundraiser race each June, which nets us 4,000
8 to 6,000 dollars, but we had to cancel it this
9 year due to COVID-19.

10 I already mentioned the Fall Furnace
11 Fest, which is not only a great community
12 event but also another important source of
13 income for friends. During the festival, we
14 bring more than 8,000 dollars from vendor
15 fees, merchandise sales, and donations from
16 corporate sponsors and from the public. None
17 of this is easy.

18 We recognize that DCNR always has
19 limited resources when compared to heavy
20 public usage of the wonderful parks in
21 Pennsylvania, and this is especially true with
22 the surge in visits during the pandemic.
23 Moreover, in a park like Pine Grove Furnace,
24 which dates to 1913 and includes buildings
25 from the 18th and 19th centuries, there are

1 special challenges from aging infrastructure.

2 As we do our best to support the
3 park, our friends group always struggles to
4 raise more money and get more volunteers. We
5 have been unusually successful, but it's a
6 never-ending task. I'd like to say that
7 running a friends group is like running a
8 small business.

9 On behalf of the thousands of people
10 who enjoy Pine Grove Furnace each year and our
11 dedicated DCNR staff and friends volunteers,
12 thank you for your attention.

13 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you very
14 much for your testimony.

15 If the testifiers would like to find
16 a mic up front, and we can open it up for some
17 questions.

18 We'll go ahead and start with a
19 question for our virtual guest here,
20 Mr. Norbick -- or Norbeck, excuse me.

21 Could you answer what I think would
22 be a pretty straightforward question: Does
23 DCNR have an official policy for friends
24 groups?

25 John, are you able to --

1 MR. NORBECK: Yes. I'm just trying
2 to figure out what you're trying to get at as
3 far as the response goes.

4 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: I guess maybe how
5 does that -- how does that relationship work?

6 Marci, if you want to chime in, too.
7 How does that partnership -- how is that
8 forged? How does volunteerism kind of fold
9 into --

10 MS. MOWERY: DCNR serves in an ex
11 officio capacity on our board of directors, so
12 we have regular communication. And then it's
13 required from the friends group level as well
14 that the park management -- manager or
15 district forester or staff member serve in an
16 ex officio capacity. So, we don't do any work
17 that hasn't been approved by DCNR. So, we
18 work in partnership that way.

19 MR. NORBECK: As Dr. Weltman has
20 said, they come up with a work plan. And if
21 you think about policy, those work plans are
22 developed in concert with the district
23 forester or, in his case, with the park
24 manager.

25 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Excellent. I

1 have a lot of different questions here that we
2 can go through, but I do want to take a
3 moment, if Mr. Cook, anyone on the line have
4 some additional questions, if anyone wants to
5 chime in? I have some other ones here, too.

6 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Yes,
7 Mr. Chairman? This is Representative Steve
8 McCarter.

9 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you very
10 much for joining us. Go ahead.

11 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: Okay.
12 Thank you.

13 I want to thank you very much for not
14 only scheduling this hearing but obviously
15 taking up this issue, which came to the fore
16 for me, I think, as I became aware of some of
17 the problems, obviously, for the friends
18 groups down in our region that may not be
19 working directly with our state parks but are
20 working with many of the city parks and other
21 regional parks down in Montgomery County as
22 well.

23 This, again, is such a critical
24 issue. I think, as you've already heard today
25 about the value of what the friends groups do

1 and that's mirrored by many, many other
2 friends groups all around the state, I'm sure,
3 that are working with other regional parks and
4 so on here, that the value is just
5 astronomical for the state.

6 And again, I guess, I really -- the
7 question I wanted to ask, I think, of -- from
8 the parks foundation or the parks and forests
9 foundation, if they have experienced any of
10 those problems also.

11 I know you mentioned the liability
12 insurance cost going up, but whether they
13 have, in fact, suffered from lawsuits directly
14 against any of the friends groups in other
15 parts of the state.

16 MS. MOWERY: We've been fortunate
17 that we have not suffered any lawsuits, which
18 is kind of a bit baffling to us why our
19 insurance rates continue to rise when we have
20 not had any claims against us. We take risk
21 assessment very seriously, and when we're
22 looking at having events, we do try to
23 minimize the risks as best we can.

24 But, you know, insurance is necessary
25 because it's a very litigious society, and you

1 have to make sure, even if we're cohosting an
2 event with DCNR, if a friend is named on that
3 bill as, you know, this is an event that the
4 friends groups are involved with, they stand
5 to be liable as well.

6 REPRESENTATIVE MCCARTER: I think,
7 Mr. Chairman, I think that kind of
8 illustrates, again, the fear, I think, as we
9 move forward that many of the groups face, and
10 some of them, unfortunately, have had to go
11 out of existence because of that potentiality.

12 So, again, I want to thank you very,
13 very much for your leadership on this and for
14 taking up this issue and look forward to
15 future activity as we go ahead here to try to
16 examine this issue and propose a solution.

17 Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

18 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes. Thank you
19 very much for your comments.

20 I'd like to build a little bit off of
21 that, if I may. Mr. McCarter referenced the
22 metro park, a county park, a city park
23 scenario. The PPF is specific to the state
24 parks and the state forests. Is there any
25 plans, sub groups, visions for anything like

1 that in the future for PFFF or something like
2 that, that they could maybe have partners in
3 some of those counties? Just kind of thinking
4 long term, something like that. If you'd like
5 to comment on that.

6 MS. MOWERY: Our mission has been and
7 probably will remain state parks, with one
8 hundred twenty-one state parks and 2.2 million
9 acres of state forests, that's a lot to
10 represent already. There is the Pennsylvania
11 Recreation and Parks Society that works a lot
12 with community parks, although they don't
13 serve as an umbrella organization like we do.

14 Where we have worked with community
15 parks is we have gone out and we've met with
16 groups that are interested in starting a
17 friends group, we have our expertise on
18 launching a friends group. And we have, on
19 our website, a resource section that we make
20 available to anybody that is involved with a
21 friends group. There's a lot of information
22 there. And if a friends group comes to us
23 with questions, we'll do all the research,
24 then we will put it up there. There are
25 sample contracts. There are how-tos. We make

1 it available to any friends group, because we
2 want to make the job of being a friend easy,
3 no matter where you're being that friend.

4 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: And again, to
5 build off that just a little bit more is --
6 you know, you mentioned the one hundred
7 twenty-one state parks, obviously state
8 forests, and -- excuse me -- some of them are
9 combo, you know, they cover maybe one small
10 piece or a bigger piece or multiple complexes,
11 as you mentioned.

12 What is the plan for PPF to
13 identify, recruit, work with the parks that
14 aren't necessarily a part of this? I know
15 that you're working with some different
16 members with kind of a friends groups previous
17 to the existence of the friends group model.
18 Do you have any insight on the potential, you
19 know, ground swell of getting folk, you know,
20 kind of folded into the organization, maybe
21 doing a little bit of work there or maybe an
22 asset that's there that you can build from?
23 If you want to comment on that.

24 MS. MOWERY: We are looking to
25 expand. In the ideal world, there'd be one

1 hundred twenty-one parks with friends groups
2 and all the forests would have friends groups,
3 but it takes time. It takes time on our part
4 to get them started. We have to find people
5 in the local communities who are committed.

6 And I shouldn't say just local
7 because we have friends groups that drive 100
8 miles or a one hundred fifty to two hundred
9 miles to go to a meeting at the park they
10 represent because that park means that much to
11 them. So, we are adding two, three, four a
12 year. And then we support the ones that we
13 have, the ones that we started. We don't just
14 say, Okay, you're a friends group.

15 You know, it's kind of like, being a
16 parent. You work with them. You answer
17 questions. You provide services. If
18 something in the law changes, we figure that
19 out. We communicate it back to the friends.

20 So, we're adding them in a manner
21 that we can sustain, because that's important
22 as well.

23 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes. Thank you
24 very much.

25 I know Mr. Cook here has a question,

1 if you'd like.

2 REPRESENTATIVE COOK: Thank you,
3 Mr. Chairman.

4 I wanted to kind of throw this out.
5 I kind of had a comment on the
6 27-dollar-and-10-cent value per hour for
7 labor. And, really, any of the testifiers can
8 weigh in on this.

9 I think the value of that is also
10 overmissed or sometimes overlooked, when
11 grants are being submitted, as gift-in-kind
12 value. And I wasn't sure which one to really
13 approach that to. But I know in our district,
14 they don't realize the value in that
15 gift-in-kind grants. So anybody can address
16 that.

17 MS. MOWERY: I think this is one
18 area -- we encourage our chapters to keep
19 track of their hours, because they can use
20 that as gift-in-kind. And if they have them,
21 they can go back to a funder and say, We're
22 able to provide this much of gift-in-kind
23 service. And that's really important, because
24 they may not be able to raise the revenue, but
25 they have the manpower and willingness to

1 match that grant if the grant requires a
2 match. So, we do encourage it.

3 And also, people -- a lot of people
4 are giving money. It's not just foundation
5 money. It's out of individual pockets. And
6 that's a way to go back to a funder and say --
7 or donor -- and say, This is what we're able
8 to do with the money. That hundred dollars
9 you gave us, this is what it leveraged.

10 MR. WELTMAN: It obviously depends on
11 the grant. They all have their own rules,
12 but, generally, they're a 50-50 match. But
13 that doesn't have to always be our dollars.
14 So, we have been lucky that some of our big
15 projects where we had more than one grant in
16 terms of our contribution, but we also take
17 careful note of the number of hours the park
18 staff put into a project and also our
19 volunteers.

20 So, in 2016, when we used volunteer
21 labor to assemble the pieces for a 50-foot
22 bridge, we couldn't have afforded that project
23 without monetizing the hours of park staff and
24 volunteers. Otherwise, at that time, we
25 didn't have money in the bank to match our

1 grants. So, it definitely is an interplay.

2 And, of course, you do have to follow
3 the grant rules. Some of them will allow
4 certain things to do and some are more
5 stricter.

6 REPRESENTATIVE COOK: I think you
7 touched on a good point, too, that I missed,
8 is when you go to your funding source and your
9 foundations or whatever, I think that has a
10 tremendous impact to show that you have that
11 type of participation in the folk.

12 So, thank you for all you do out
13 there. We really do appreciate it.

14 MS. MOWERY: You're welcome.

15 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Anyone out there
16 in cyber space that has some questions? I
17 have quite a few more here, but anyone else
18 out there?

19 Okay. I have quite a few different
20 ones here.

21 Marci, I guess this would be more for
22 you. And Andre, perhaps, too. But how does a
23 friends group enter an agreement with the
24 state park? I know you touched on that, but
25 just maybe walk us through how you would come

1 to some type of agreement to do a project or
2 become established or whatever that may be.

3 MS. MOWERY: The key ingredient to
4 starting a friends group is a willingness on a
5 park manager or district forester to have a
6 friends group. It does take time. And then
7 there has to be a willingness among people
8 that are using the park to set it up and give
9 up their time more to be a friends group
10 member.

11 And then we hold a memorandum of
12 understanding with the friends group outlining
13 what our expectations for them are. And one
14 of the expectations is that the park manager
15 or district forester has the final say in
16 anything that happens on the public lands.

17 And then we also have an article of
18 association that they sign, saying that
19 they're functioning under our nonprofit
20 umbrella and, as such, you know, we have to
21 follow all the nonprofit laws that guide us.

22 MR. WELTMAN: I can speak to the way
23 that Friends of Pine Grove Furnace was formed
24 in 2010. The park manager at the time had the
25 foresight that there were people around his

1 park who seemed to be there a lot, doing
2 things on their own, and brought together
3 seven or eight of us, I think, at the time,
4 from somewhat different user groups. Some
5 were more mountain bikers, using the park as a
6 point to get in the forest, where there were
7 trails and all sorts of byways. Some of us,
8 myself, was more into history and just doing
9 some academic research and also helping to
10 pull invasive plants.

11 When you host an Earth Day event,
12 which is usually open to the general public,
13 people show up, and sometimes you see them
14 once and that's it, but there's certain
15 people, myself included, that kept coming to
16 all of those events. And at the time, Jason
17 Zimmerman, who has gone on to bigger and
18 better things at DCNR, saw that if he could
19 get us all in the room together and get us a
20 little organized, he could leverage that
21 enthusiasm. As it turns out, to my surprise,
22 really the amount of money that we also can
23 bring in.

24 So, sometimes I think it starts with
25 a park manager, on his own initiative or her

1 initiative, but other times I guess there are
2 some friends groups that focus around a
3 particular activity, and that was a
4 springboard and the value became more apparent
5 to DCNR leadership.

6 MS. MOWERY: Yeah. And then there
7 are also times that it's driven by a group of
8 volunteers that would approach us and say,
9 We'd love to have a friends groups. R. B.
10 Winter would be an example for starting a
11 friends group at R. B. Winter State Park, and
12 that's people coming to us, that we met with
13 the park manager and said, Would you be
14 interested? And she said, Absolutely.

15 Unfortunately, our first meeting was
16 supposed to be during the height of COVID, so
17 we decided we would hold off meeting, and we
18 will meet this fall to start that.

19 And it's a long process. We meet, we
20 talk about the needs of the park or forest.
21 We talk about what the friends -- the
22 potential friends have in mind. We kind of
23 whittle it down into a work plan that
24 everybody can agree on and then go from there.
25 So, it takes two to three months to get a

1 group up and running.

2 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Andre, you opened
3 up the window for history a little bit. Could
4 you just take a moment -- and I'm sure you
5 know this information, just somewhat for my
6 own edification -- could you talk very briefly
7 about the amount of wood that was consumed to
8 create that charcoal for the furnace just for
9 a moment?

10 MR. WELTMAN: One of my favorite
11 topics. So, I think many people are aware
12 that much of especially northern Pennsylvania
13 was cut down for lumber. The timbering
14 industry is perhaps more familiar than the
15 charcoal industry, which was critical for
16 making iron in Pennsylvania from the colonial
17 era onward, was a leader in iron and steel,
18 which is a product made from iron.

19 So, until the advent of the
20 anthracite coal fields, you had to cut down
21 trees and cut them and cut them and cut them.
22 So, we're talking, for a traditional furnace
23 like we have at Pine Grove or many, many other
24 examples across especially southeastern and
25 central Pennsylvania, you're talking about an

1 acre a day for each furnace. Not everyone
2 understands what an acre means, but think of
3 it as, you know, all the trees you can see
4 standing in one spot are clear-cut and then a
5 process of making them into charcoal, or fuel,
6 and then you have to do that for 200 or 300
7 days of operation for these old furnaces.

8 When you look at certain state
9 forests -- and Michaux's a great example of
10 this -- almost the entire Michaux State Forest
11 was cut down repeatedly. I'm talking three,
12 four, five times all through the 1800s. And
13 that's just to fuel old furnaces from Boiling
14 Spring, just outside of Carlisle, all the way
15 down to Mont Alto and Caledonia, the southern
16 end of the forest. So, that beautiful forest
17 that people enjoy now was once clear-cut and
18 clear-cut. And, you know, now we have
19 commercial lumbering managed by DCNR, but it's
20 scientific and doesn't involve that kind of
21 destruction.

22 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes. Thank you
23 for adding that information. I think that is
24 important, especially having you here with us
25 today.

1 Can there be two friends groups at a
2 single park? Do you have any models like
3 that? Do you have a friends group that's
4 specific to a certain asset and then maybe
5 another asset of the park?

6 MS. MOWERY: I think Deputy Secretary
7 Norbeck gave an example of Presque Isle.
8 There's the TREC Foundation and we have the
9 Presque Isle Partnership. But for the most
10 cases, we have single friends groups. But you
11 also might have other special user groups that
12 are investing in a park. Rothrock State
13 Forest, to give you an example, with the
14 Friends of Rothrock and the Nittany Mountain
15 bikers association, which is raising funds and
16 doing trail work as well.

17 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: What about -- I
18 know that you had mentioned about -- or I
19 think Andre had mentioned about having
20 merchandise available, you make about ten
21 grand a year from that. What about any other
22 type of concessions at all? I know there's a
23 great concession at the Tom Ridge
24 Environmental Center.

25 Is there -- are there parks, maybe,

1 Marci, that you're aware where they have
2 concession available?

3 MS. MOWERY: Yeah. Friends of Laurel
4 Hill has a good shop and a visitor's center,
5 and actually it was interesting because when
6 they first started, they still had five
7 members of the Civilian Conservation Corps
8 that helped to build the park still active at
9 the park, and so they did a museum to the
10 Civilian Conservation Corps and interviewed
11 these men, captured the oral history. And
12 they were engaged with the park until their
13 passing.

14 The Ohiopyle -- Friends of Ohiopyle
15 State Park, they have a gift shop and a
16 visitors center. Independent friends groups
17 that Secretary Norbeck mentioned, Codorus
18 State Park, they have a gift shop as well as a
19 store within the campground. And many of the
20 campgrounds have firewood sales.

21 And as Andre mentioned, that not only
22 provides a service to the campers, it reduces
23 the transport of wood and the potential to
24 transport invasive insects, like the hemlock
25 woolly adelgid and the spotted lantern fly, et

1 cetera. So, it really is an environmental
2 service as well as a camper service.

3 And, yes, I was campground hosting,
4 and it was 97 degrees, and people were having
5 campfires.

6 MR. WELTMAN: And ice. Some friends
7 groups, although not ours, also sell ice. You
8 know, there may be a park concessionaire. We
9 don't want to step on their toes. For
10 example, Pine Grove Furnace has a general
11 store and a couple beach hot dog-type places,
12 but we are able to sell things year-round,
13 which the concessionaires generally aren't.

14 And particularly the firewood is a
15 really big moneymaker for a lot of friends
16 groups.

17 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: And, Mr. Norbeck,
18 if you could talk maybe a little bit about
19 that. Can you tell us about the policy or
20 lack thereof regarding obtaining firewood in
21 the state parks and also in the state forests?
22 What -- you know, it's my understanding that
23 it's kind of -- kind of something you can
24 actually do, just acquire. But if you could
25 talk about that maybe briefly, if you're aware

1 of that policy.

2 MR. NORBECK: Unfortunately, I lost
3 the audio. You said the policy. Policy on
4 what?

5 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes. I
6 apologize.

7 The policy to obtaining, you know,
8 downed trees, firewood in the state parks
9 and/or the forests in general, if you wouldn't
10 mind.

11 MR. NORBECK: Yes. So, we have a
12 firewood -- an active firewood program. On
13 our state forest lands -- again, we have about
14 2.2 million acres of land -- and you can go to
15 the district parks office and buy a clear wood
16 permit for personal consumptive use. And they
17 will give you a designated location where you
18 can -- where you can put trees there.

19 In state parks -- again, they're --
20 comparatively in size, they're a lot smaller.
21 There's 300,000 acres of state parks
22 throughout the state. And each park manager
23 establishes a policy where you can cut trees.
24 And, generally, it's -- we don't want folks
25 cutting down trees only. That's a safety

1 thing. But they will direct them to specific
2 areas. And if there's areas where we have
3 endangered trees, like in a campground or a
4 picnic area, quite often the park staff will
5 come in and drop those trees and allow for a
6 friends group and/or the general public to buy
7 a fuel wood program from that.

8 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Can you speak
9 very briefly, if you're aware, how much one of
10 those permits, is it just nominal, just to
11 kind of register the individual, or is it
12 something that, you know, makes it economic or
13 expensive? If you could --

14 MR. NORBECK: It's a 10-dollar
15 permit.

16 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you very
17 much.

18 Just one more time here, we're going
19 to, in just a moment, see if there's anyone
20 out, again, in cyber space, virtually, that
21 wants to chime in with any questions, anyone
22 else here. I maybe have one or two more
23 questions before we wrap up.

24 So, I'll just take a pause.

25 (Whereupon, there was a brief pause.)

1 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Okay. I just
2 have a couple more hopefully rather quick
3 questions here. But, you know, the point of
4 the hearing is certainly to -- I think two
5 points, to certainly focus on the very
6 positive work on the PPF, but also how can
7 we, as a general assembly, you know, enhance
8 that work but also -- you did speak -- all of
9 you spoke briefly to the -- some of the
10 challenges, obviously the volunteerism. And I
11 think one of the things we really want to
12 focus on is the liability issue, officers and
13 directors insurance, you know, not getting
14 pulled into some type of lawsuit or anything
15 like that. And it is really, ultimately, in
16 the end, nothing you can do as far as getting
17 named. Hopefully, you don't get sued
18 successfully.

19 Anyway, so could you maybe talk just
20 a little bit more about the whole liability
21 issue, anything we can do as a general
22 assembly? I know that Mr. Driscoll had a bill
23 that I think more related to the metro-type
24 parks, the city, county parks, maybe not
25 necessarily directed towards PPF. We have to

1 look at that a little further. I just became
2 aware of that late last night.

3 Could you maybe talk more about that,
4 if you could?

5 MS. MOWERY: We have followed the
6 legislation and presented some language that
7 would expand the definition of a friends
8 group, because it's not just the community
9 friends groups around the greater metro Philly
10 area that are having this challenge but all
11 friends groups across the Commonwealth are
12 having this liability challenge. Even if we
13 haven't had a lawsuit, prices are escalating.

14 And when I talk about all friends
15 groups, they're not just friends groups at
16 state parks and state forests and community
17 parks. There are also national park friends
18 groups that reside within Pennsylvania. We
19 have Pennsylvania Historical and Museum
20 Commission lands that have friends groups. We
21 have local museums. We have libraries.

22 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: If I may, if I
23 may inject one more. Rails to trails.

24 MS. MOWERY: Absolutely. How could I
25 forget that, Chairman? That was an oversight.

1 Yeah. Rails to trails have friends
2 groups. All of those friends groups could
3 benefit from some protection against lawsuits
4 and liability.

5 And we had been shopping around to
6 find a different provider. We talked to three
7 different providers last year. None of
8 them -- they all looked and said, No, we can't
9 help you.

10 We went all the way through the
11 application process with a provider this year
12 and then we never heard back from them.

13 This year, we have ourselves and all
14 of our work, and we have forty-six chapters.
15 And it's, I guess, the beast that nobody wants
16 to dance with.

17 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Have you -- you
18 know, have you considered the possibility --
19 and I'm just throwing this out there -- that
20 being the responsibility of the local friends
21 group to acquire that officers and directors
22 insurance locally? And maybe they are, maybe
23 they aren't, maybe they should be. I'm not
24 sure. But you've got the umbrella for all of
25 the friends groups from across the state.

1 So, if you want to talk about that
2 briefly.

3 MS. MOWERY: I will. I mean, our
4 friends groups are across the spectrum. We
5 have some friends groups that are very small,
6 and, you know, they're raising a little bit of
7 money. They're doing more volunteerism. And
8 then we have friends groups fundraising, that
9 are raising larger sums of money. And, you
10 know, it's -- we don't want to see their --
11 the money that they're raising going to
12 liability insurance. That money really should
13 be reinvested back into the parks or forests
14 that they're representing.

15 So, it's a service that we can
16 provide and we will continue to provide,
17 because it makes it easier for them to do
18 their job and to raise the money and to go
19 back to their donors and say that 100 percent
20 of this is staying here in our park, rather
21 than -- for some of our friend groups, you
22 know, a 3,000-dollar insurance policy would be
23 all the money they raise in a year.

24 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: That does make
25 sense. And that certainly is a fear.

1 I know you have, obviously, some
2 friends groups that are certainly very, very
3 small and providing that butterfly garden or
4 something, maybe they came together to build
5 an ADA fishing pier, and all that money that
6 they raised, for them to have that liability
7 insurance policy that they have to implement
8 locally.

9 And if we want to take a moment for
10 all three of our testifiers maybe to kind of
11 wrap up here. Can you maybe name, list,
12 highlight some things that we in the general
13 assembly could do here, you know, to help
14 local friends groups across the state?

15 MS. MOWERY: I think, that, you know,
16 looking at legislation that has been
17 introduced is one. I believe that, you know,
18 mentioning a friends group in your constituent
19 letters. They don't have to be a PPF friends
20 group. They could be a rail trail friends
21 group. I know the Mon trail is in your
22 district. You know, libraries, as I said,
23 museums. There's a lot of different volunteer
24 groups across the Commonwealth that do really
25 good things for the citizenry of the

1 Commonwealth. And to be able to recognize
2 them and put them on the radar for the general
3 public to know that they're there and to know
4 that they are, you know, always looking for
5 volunteers and looking for leadership.

6 As I said, that's the biggest
7 challenge that friends have, is recruiting
8 leadership, people that are willing to be
9 there at that monthly meeting, make decisions,
10 and not just be there for the fun stuff. So,
11 talking about the value of the volunteerism
12 and acknowledging those friends groups that
13 exist in your district is a very important
14 thing. And going out to those events. Wow.
15 They appreciate that they're recognized. And
16 that's something you can do.

17 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Marci, before we
18 move on to the others two, can you talk about
19 the recognition, annual gala ball recognition
20 that you do provide for the friends groups.

21 MS. MOWERY: Yes. We do an annual
22 awards banquet. We look at -- we have four
23 different volunteer types of awards that
24 people can nominate friends groups or
25 individual volunteers for. We also have a

1 government award and the Cliff Jones Keystone
2 Legacy award. Cliff Jones is one of the
3 founding members of the foundation. And the
4 President's Choice Award. Why be president if
5 you can't pick something, right?

6 And we -- on an annual basis, we
7 recognize the greatness of what's happening.
8 But we also try to recognize our friends
9 groups throughout the year. This is an
10 unusual year, but we try to get out to visit
11 all of the friends groups on an annual basis,
12 and we try to have regular communications with
13 them. So, yeah, we do recognize them with an
14 awards banquet and a ceremony. And we try to
15 do as much as we can.

16 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you.

17 And we have two other testifiers, if
18 you want to weigh in on that. Just to remind
19 you, what can we do as a general assembly to
20 help the local friends groups?

21 MR. NORBECK: I can chime in here
22 just a little bit. I do want to thank you for
23 having this hearing today and inviting the
24 three of us to testify. I think that's a
25 great step forward.

1 I believe that we have to cast aside
2 old assumptions about recreation and parks and
3 forests. I think, quite often, some folks
4 think of parks and forests as being like the
5 icing on the cake and nice to have but not
6 necessarily essential. I think we have seen
7 very clearly, through the COVID pandemic, that
8 certainly out-of-doors and public lands are
9 essential for quality of life and essential
10 for good health for our citizenry.

11 Looking at it from that perspective,
12 I would ask for support for state parks and
13 state forests. We have logged 45 million
14 visits this year. There's 12 million folks
15 that live in Pennsylvania. Just a tremendous
16 amount of visitorship.

17 The parks and forests were there
18 when, you know, a number of location were
19 closing down, even public lands were closing
20 down. We had some national parks close during
21 that time period. And folks turned to their
22 state parks and their state forests for that
23 recreation and quality of life.

24 I'd also ask to recognize the
25 economic value that public lands brings to

1 Pennsylvania. Again, about 29 billion dollars
2 in Pennsylvania, with, like, 1.9 billion
3 dollars just in tax money alone comes from the
4 recreation industry. So, it is a large
5 industry in Pennsylvania. It's a large part
6 of our economy, and much of it is based on our
7 public lands.

8 And probably the last thing is, our
9 public lands really could not -- could not
10 survive without strong volunteerism and
11 through organizations like the Pennsylvania
12 Park and Forests Foundation, providing that
13 support. Frankly, government can't do it all,
14 and most locations shouldn't do it all. But
15 the local community is stepping up and helping
16 make their local park or their local forest or
17 county or municipal park that much better for
18 the local citizenry and to add to that quality
19 of life in Pennsylvania.

20 You know, we get about 25 percent of
21 our visitation in our parks and forests are
22 folks coming from out of state. They
23 recognize the great values that we have here
24 in Pennsylvania. And state government, along
25 with our partnership with PPF, our

1 non-affiliate friends groups really makes that
2 happen for us, and it makes it happen for
3 local communities in a very economic way.

4 Thank you for that.

5 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes. Thank you.

6 And, Andre, if you wanted to --

7 MR. WELTMAN: Well, I'll echo what
8 the deputy secretary just said, as a
9 Pennsylvania citizen and also looking at it
10 from my narrow perspective at one state park,
11 fully fund the DCNR. Because we find
12 ourselves, as a, you know, successful friends
13 group, able a raise money. We're doing things
14 like paving campground entrances. We're
15 replacing padlocks and door locks, things that
16 I am really happy we're able to help with but
17 perhaps not what most people would think of as
18 the goal of the friends group. So, we are, in
19 some ways, substituting our efforts for things
20 that ideally would be handled by the agency if
21 they had the resources.

22 MS. MOWERY: Can I add one more
23 thing?

24 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Sure thing.

25 MS. MOWERY: And, you know, I

1 mentioned earlier that we never developed to
2 supplant DCNR, to reduce the amount of
3 staffing. In fact, we would call for more
4 staffing for DCNR, but not only would it
5 benefit the citizens of the Commonwealth, it
6 would allows us and our volunteers to do more
7 for the citizens of the Commonwealth and for
8 the local communities.

9 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: And if I may, I
10 know that one of the things you mentioned
11 was -- because I'm involved with a friends
12 group, too -- is expedience was a nice option
13 with the friends group, too. I know that,
14 obviously, there's situations where you cut
15 the red tape and you're able to get some cash
16 basically to the manager and implement
17 something quick. So, with the friends group,
18 that does seems to work a little better. But
19 I understand what you're saying from the
20 perspective of funding.

21 So, was there anything else from
22 anyone here at the hearing or anyone else on
23 line at all that wants to chime in? I will
24 try to be quiet just for a moment.

25 (Whereupon, there was a brief pause.)

1 Okay. One final question that we
2 were contemplating here is, is what are -- I'm
3 somewhat familiar, on a personal level, with
4 the metro parks and how county and metro parks
5 and how they work in Ohio. It's a little bit
6 different model than what we have here in
7 Pennsylvania. Now, that could be very
8 helpful. Obviously, the taxing model, I think
9 directors pay people and so on and so forth,
10 and I assume they have a state system, too.

11 Is anyone familiar with the, you
12 know, how the friends groups -- or maybe this
13 is more for on you, Marci -- what are the
14 other friends groups doing around the state --
15 excuse me -- around the country? Is there
16 other models for this? If you're not
17 familiar, that's fine, too. But --

18 MS. MOWERY: We have a national
19 association of state park foundations. There
20 is about thirty-eight states that have
21 organizations similar to the Pennsylvania
22 Parks and Forests Foundation. We're all a
23 little bit different in what we do and how we
24 do it. But there are friends groups models
25 all across the country.

1 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Are you familiar
2 with anything that they're doing better,
3 worse, different, same, things that we could
4 borrow from? I'm a former teacher, and we
5 always were taught, too, you know, emulate, I
6 think was the term, borrow and utilize.

7 MS. MOWERY: I think we're all doing
8 things very similarly. You know, they --
9 Florida is different than us in that they rely
10 very, very heavily on their volunteers in ways
11 that we don't. They're not unionized; they're
12 state workers. They have a lot of retirees
13 who are volunteering almost like a second
14 career.

15 In California, they have formed a
16 state park foundation and then an organization
17 just to represent the friends groups.

18 So, they're all a little bit
19 different and, you know, but all essentially
20 doing the same things, trying to work along
21 with the park or forest staff, the community
22 parks or the libraries or whatever and to make
23 it better and that's actually their own
24 passion, too.

25 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: So, I just

1 thought of something as you were speaking
2 about the volunteerism and retirees and so on.
3 Do you see any crossover, any relationship how
4 folks that volunteer perhaps for Game
5 Commission and creating habitats and doing
6 things in the Game Commission and maybe their
7 ability to do more or less, perhaps, as
8 volunteers of the friends groups? Do you have
9 anything to add to that perhaps? Like -- or
10 even the Fish Commission. You know, I know
11 the Fish Commission, I'm certain, uses
12 volunteers to help a lot of their efforts.

13 So, maybe you could speak to that or
14 maybe that could be maybe a resource for
15 volunteers to share or something. Or maybe
16 they're able to do more of those organizations
17 and they figured out a way to cut some of the
18 red tape. Just want you to comment on that.

19 MS. MOWERY: We have done some things
20 with other agencies, not so much the Game
21 Commission, because they have their own lands,
22 but with --

23 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Some of that --

24 MS. MOWERY: -- for Pheasants
25 Forever, et cetera. We have worked with the

1 Fish and Boat Commission, because they have
2 the lakes, you know, the lake habitat, so
3 we've done fish enhancement devices.

4 I know that DCNR has partnerships
5 with some of the agencies as well, to look at
6 how to manage habitats and to manage
7 waterways. So, we do work with those groups.
8 We do work with those entities, as I said,
9 Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, Grouse
10 Society, the elk, grouse, the turkey, yeah.

11 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: I guess more I
12 was focused on as far as, like, maybe we can
13 look at some of the models that the volunteers
14 were able to be leveraged, you know, at game
15 lands with the Game Commission and also, you
16 know, through the fish commission or the state
17 agencies that don't necessarily have a friends
18 group, per se, but I was just thinking, you
19 know, kind of out loud about that.

20 MS. MOWERY: I think John Kline can
21 speak to Wildlife for Everyone, which would be
22 more so with the Game Commission and thus the
23 volunteers.

24 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: John, would you
25 like to step up, take a mic, if you'd like.

1 If you'd like.

2 MR. KLINE: So --

3 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: John, you go
4 ahead. I apologize, John.

5 We are going to get John Kline to
6 speak but -- go ahead, Mr. Norbeck, if you
7 want to speak first, go ahead, and then we
8 will have John Kline speak.

9 MR. NORBECK: Too many Johns in the
10 room.

11 I just want to say that we enjoy a
12 great working relationship with the Game
13 Commission, also the Fish and Boat Commission.
14 And I will say that, with a fairly new
15 executive director, Bryan Burhans, at the
16 Pennsylvania Game Commission, and Tim
17 Schaeffer, at the Fish and Boat Commission, we
18 meet on a regular basis now and share best
19 practices and looking at opportunities where
20 we can leverage each other's capabilities and
21 abilities to all our agencies' best benefit.
22 Certainly looking at volunteer opportunities,
23 like Marci Mowery said. We're looking at a
24 lot of habitat work on both state parks and
25 state forests, in conjunction with our

1 volunteers and friends groups and also with
2 the Fish and Boat Commission.

3 But that's a great idea and we can
4 dive into that a lot deeper.

5 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Thank you very
6 much.

7 Mr. Kline, if you'd like to comment.

8 MR. KLINE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
9 I'm John Kline, Kline Associates in
10 Harrisburg. I work with and represent the
11 Wildlife For Everyone Foundation in State
12 College.

13 And this is a -- what the deputy
14 secretary just said and Marci mentioned I
15 think is a great segue and a real opportunity
16 that I believe, because I work with various
17 sportsmen's groups -- and I say "sportsmen," I
18 mean women, too; it's a tough -- it's not a
19 good word, I got to find something else -- but
20 I think it's an opportunity for people that
21 hunt, fish, and trap all over Pennsylvania on
22 state parks and on these state forests to form
23 friend groups. I think that friends groups,
24 in the eyes of what -- those of us who are
25 people that hunt and fish we call "hook and

1 bullet" people -- we think of those groups as
2 simply as working on bridges and environmental
3 centers, all those sorts of things, that is
4 true.

5 But an enormous amount of people that
6 hunt in Pennsylvania, me included, hunt on
7 state forest land. And there's a lot of
8 improvements that need done. And I would ask
9 sportsmen's groups to consider forming park
10 and forest friends groups. And -- because a
11 lot of the activity and a lot of the work that
12 needs to be done benefits not just those who
13 are there for day trips but people that hunt,
14 fish, and trap. I think it's a great idea.

15 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Yes. Thank you
16 very much.

17 And just as a -- kind of addition to
18 that, we mentioned forests. We mention the
19 park properties. But the Game Commission also
20 has a lot of property in both -- I assume the
21 forests, I know for a fact the parks -- but
22 they actually have game lands, too. They
23 overlap and consume the same property. So,
24 that's just -- I wanted to add that in there
25 for folks who may not have known that.

1 Any other comments, questions?

2 Tony, you have anything else?

3 MR. GUERRIERI: I think we're good.

4 CHAIRMAN WENTLING: Okay. we're
5 going to go ahead and wrap this up.

6 I do want to make a mention, we're
7 highlighting, I know, the good work.

8 Obviously, we had, today, the Friends of Pine
9 Grove Furnace State Park here, with Andre
10 Weltman, was able to be here in Harrisburg
11 today.

12 There are plans -- I don't know if
13 they're public yet -- but there are plans to
14 take the show on the road and go out into
15 Pennsylvania. I know we're going to be --
16 we're planning on spending some time with
17 Mr. McCarter down in the southeast to
18 highlight the good work there. And the
19 potential of another visit in Pennsylvania.

20 So, we do have some tentative plans
21 to get out on the road with this to highlight
22 the good work of Marci and all of her
23 friends.

24 So, with that, we'll wrap this up.
25 And thank you, everyone, for joining us

1 today.

2 Thank you.

3 (Whereupon, the hearing concluded at
4 9:58 a.m.)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I HEREBY CERTIFY that I was present upon the hearing of the above-entitled matter and there reported stenographically the proceedings had and the testimony produced; and I further certify that the foregoing is a true and correct transcript of my said stenographic notes.

BRENDA J. PARDUN, RPR
Court Reporter
Notary Public