



Permanent and Stable Funding for Parks and Recreation

Commonwealth 2023 Legislative Priority

Parks and recreation is not just fun and games—it's how communities thrive. It is indispensable, year-round services like meals distribution, emergency management, and environmental sustainability. It is personal health and community wellness, and social connections to nature and neighborhoods. It is economic stimulation, community resilience, and so much more.

Such services proved their essential worth during the pandemic, and our continued recovery from its aftershocks reinforce their importance to ensure healthy communities and robust economies. As a national sector, parks and recreation generated \$225 billion in economic activity and supported 1.25 million jobs in 2020. Such gains are realized at the local level, benefitting both rural and urban communities. See the PRPS statement on [Parks and Recreation Investment](#).

Public funding helps acquire new parklands, build trails, connections and infrastructure, and keep facilities in safe and usable order—which further provides healthful opportunities to residents and visitors of the Commonwealth. However, most of these funds are over-demanded and constantly subject to budget cuts and diversion to other purposes.

Deferred maintenance is a chief problem facing our state and local parks, forests, and recreation areas. Limited funding, aging infrastructure, increasing demand, and limited capacity challenge stewards' abilities to keep our public spaces safe, clean, engaging, and ready-to-use, while responding to the demands and expectations of a changing and more diverse public.

The PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' (DCNR) popular Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) has funded projects in every Pennsylvania county, and in 70 percent of all municipalities – in which more than 90 percent of Pennsylvanians live. More than 40 percent of Pennsylvania's 6,200+ local parks have received a C2P2 grant. However, the demand for C2P2 grants continues to outpace available funds. Since 2012, annual applications have increased 30 percent, while funding requests have more than doubled. On average, DCNR is able to fund only about half of the grant dollar requests.

The [Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund's](#) more than 25 years of success in providing grants for parks, trails, open space, libraries, and historic preservation must be celebrated and preserved. New sources of permanent and stable funding are required to invest in our communities' economic, environmental, and social prosperity, and to address the huge backlog of infrastructure improvements in our parks, forests and public spaces.

Last year PRPS worked with many partners to help the General Assembly and Governor Wolf pass the largest investment—nearly \$700 million—in conservation, parks and recreation in almost 20 years. DCNR received \$100 million in federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding for an Outdoor Recreation Program that will fund investments in state park and state forest infrastructure, community parks and recreation centers, trails and greenways, riparian buffers, and other purposes. The agency also received additional money in the budget for the creation of three new state parks, a new area for motorized recreation, and funding to fill 31 new staff positions.

While this funding is greatly appreciated, it should be thought of as a down payment on the large structural debt of infrastructure needs in state and local park and recreation facilities such as the \$1.4 billion needs in state park and state forest infrastructure. The Commonwealth needs a long-term, sustainable plan to continue investments in these vital assets.