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For Immediate Release

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2018 MARKS THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF PENNSYLVANIA'S STATE PARKS AND FORESTS – HERE'S WHY THAT'S IMPORTANT

Camp Hill, PA – The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF), the official nonprofit foundation of the Commonwealth's state parks and state forests, wants you to be involved in a statewide celebration. 2018 marks the 125th anniversary of Pennsylvania's state parks and forests, and there are many ways for you to get involved. But first, a refresher on why these public lands are so important.

Pennsylvania has 121 state parks and 2.2 million acres of state forest land. In 2009, our state park system was named the BEST in the nation by the National Recreation and Park Society, and our state forests are national certified sustainable by the Forest Stewardship Council.

There are more than 40 million annual visitors to Pennsylvania state parks and forests, generating more than \$1 billion a year for our economy through visitor purchases of hotel rooms, dinners, souvenirs, and other amenities. In fact, a 2012 study by Penn State University showed that the return on taxpayer investment in our state parks alone was estimated at nearly \$12.41 for every \$1 invested.

But it's not just the economics that are important. Spending time in our state parks and forests is great for your health. Studies show that outdoor recreation reduces stress, anxiety and depression, lowers the risk of obesity, helps regulate blood sugar and cholesterol levels, and reduces your risk of cardiovascular issues. Thankfully, there are many recreational opportunities at Pennsylvania's state parks and forests to keep you healthy, including 180 boat ramps, 56 swimming beaches, 50 fishing piers, 18 swimming pools, 280 cabins, 4 ski areas, 2 golf courses, and 2 model airplane airports, among so much else.

Pennsylvania's state parks and forests provide many ecosystem services too, including clean air and water. In fact, our state forests act as a 2.2 million-acre water treatment system. These public lands also provide habitat for a wide variety of plants, insects, and wildlife.

Our state parks and forests do so much for us, how can we help them? Marci Mowery, executive director of PPF, says there are several ways for people to celebrate the 125th anniversary and help state parks and forests at the same time.

“In honor of the 125th anniversary of Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests, PPF is seeking 125 new members for our organization, as well as asking people to donate \$125, which will go toward improvements at state parks and forests. We have a “needs list” on our website that outlines the many projects across the Commonwealth that we need to raise funds for. Any donation, no matter how big or small, will help us and our volunteers keep state parks and forests going for generations to come.”

PPF has developed a variety of outreach materials and tools to promote the 125th anniversary and how people can get involved. These include a booklet of more than a dozen activities, 125 trivia facts about Pennsylvania state parks and forests, and a calendar of events specifically focused on celebrating the anniversary. They also recently released a report that details the \$1 billion in infrastructure needs within the state parks and forests. All these can be found at www.paparksandforests.org.

“We are excited to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests with all citizens of Pennsylvania,” said Mowery, “but we are even more excited to start preparing for the next 125 years. The legacy of Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests is thanks in part to forward-thinkers like Maurice Goddard and Gifford Pinchot, as well as members of the public, who recognize the value of these public lands. We need every resident of the Commonwealth to get behind our state parks and forests, so they will be here for generations to come.”

To learn more about the 125th anniversary celebration and find out how you can help, visit www.paparksandforests.org.