



REMARKS BY KATIE HESS, DIRECTOR
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Learning from our shared heritage and using it to inform our future is something I do every day as director of the South Mountain Partnership. The South Mountain region is one of 7 Conservation Landscapes created by the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to drive strategic investment and action around sustainability, conservation, community revitalization, and recreational projects – in short, Asset-Based Economic Development - development that adds true wealth and value to our communities based on heritage and local assets, informed not only on national trends but on the needs and quality of life of our residents and visitors. Our state parks and forests are a very important piece of the larger conservation landscape work.

The legacy of Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests goes back 125 years. Over the last 125 years, Pennsylvania’s landscapes have been logged, mined, and industrialized. Yet visionaries like Joseph Rothrock – the Father of Pennsylvania Forestry, Gifford Pinchot – the Father of Conservation, and Maurice K. Goddard – the man who created a state park within 25 miles of every Pennsylvanian, saw what was happening and took action to build the infrastructure of what we now know of as Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests.

Many of the structures within PA state parks and forests were built in the Civilian Conservation Corps era between 1933 and 1942 and the Goddard era between 1955 and 1979. In fact, there are 500 structures within our state parks currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places and more than 5,000 culturally or historically significant sites within state forests -And these lists only contain places that we know about and have surveyed. These places and structures tell us important stories about our past – and they are literally our heritage - but age and wear-and-tear of time are starting to show.

The legacy of PA’s state parks and forests is under threat, and this is a concern to me and those I work with through the South Mountain Partnership because these public lands are economic engines for many of the towns and municipalities at the heart of our region. A study by Penn State shows that **visitor spending to Pennsylvania’s state parks and forests directly contributes \$628.7 million in sales**, which supports more than 9,000 jobs. In Cumberland County alone - The Return on Environment Report estimates that \$521.5 million dollars is spent on outdoor recreation each year, creating as many as 6,600 jobs, and generating \$38.9 million in state and local taxes. The top revenue producing outdoor recreation activities – Hiking, Camping, and Bicycling. For every dollar invested in state parks, \$12.41 of income is returned to the state economy. Without continued investment in our state parks and forests to maintain this infrastructure of health and economic vitality, how will our small towns and landscapes like the South Mountain region survive?