



REMARKS BY TINA MOLSKI, VICE CHAIR,  
PENNSYLVANIA PARKS & FORESTS FOUNDATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Hello and welcome. My name is Tina Molski and I am the Vice Chair for the Pennsylvania Parks and **Forests Foundation. I am also the director of operations for REI's east coast distribution center in Bedford, Pennsylvania.**

I am here, serving as the Vice Chair for PPFF. I am on the board for PPFF because of my affiliation with REI and my own personal passion for outdoor recreation.

**As someone who works in the recreation industry, I know the value of Pennsylvania's state parks and forests.** These resources provide unparalleled outdoor recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. They provide 180 boat ramps, 56 swimming beaches, 50 fishing piers, 18 swimming pools, 30,000 picnic tables, 280 cabins, 2 golf courses, and thousands of miles of trails for hiking, snowmobiling, and horseback riding.

A study done in 2015 by VisitPA.com found that \$6.9 billion in tourism industry sales in PA were associated with recreation, making it the 3<sup>rd</sup> most profitable industry in the state (behind transportation and the food/beverage industry). The Outdoor Industry Association has found that outdoor recreation in PA accounted for \$21.5 billion in consumer spending, 219,000 direct jobs, \$7.2 billion in wages and salaries, and \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenue, which places PA 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation in outdoor recreation spending.

And yet, the lack of a reliable, dedicated source of funding to maintain and improve existing **recreational infrastructure in Pennsylvania's state parks and forests is harming its potential.** For instance, the removal of the sediment that has built up in many of our state park and forest lakes – which impairs boating, swimming and fishing opportunities - is estimated to cost \$35 million. At Presque Isle State Park in Erie – which is the most visited park in the system – its infrastructure needs are estimated at \$50 million, which includes replacing aging restrooms at the beaches, repaving roads and parking lots, improving the water and sewer facilities on-site, and connecting the park to the city of Erie via a bike and pedestrian trail.

**And it's not just about the economics...outdoor recreation has huge benefits for human health.**

Visiting parks and forests can reduce medical costs, make people less stressed out, lower BMI and obesity risks, and enhance social bonds between friends and family members.

**Pennsylvania's population is aging, so we must to consider the needs of a changing demographic** and what recreational requirements they will have in the future. Between 2005 and 2015, the number of residents aged 60 and older grew by nearly 22 percent. We also need to consider the growing ethnic populations and the different recreational opportunities they seek and yet do not **find in today's state parks and forests. We want Pennsylvania's state parks and forests to be** accessible and inviting to all residents of, and visitors to, the state.

REI opened our Bedford distribution center in 2007 after an extensive search for the right location. Since we cover the entire eastern half of the US comprised of 70 stores, including 4 in Pennsylvania, and all online shipments in the east, we had a pretty large area from which to choose. We landed on Bedford for three primary reasons:

We are a distribution center, so road infrastructure was critical

We require a large number of employees and found Bedford to have an amazing workforce

Finally, at REI, we believe that a life outdoors is a life well lived. It would not be authentic if **we selected a location where our own employees couldn't enjoy outdoor spaces nearby.** In Bedford, we have several state parks and forests, game lands, hiking trails, waters trails and great cycling all within easy reach.

When my husband and I came on our first house hunting trip to Bedford, we took an afternoon and hiked at Shawnee State Park. Finding outdoor recreational opportunities is one of the first things we do when we move or travel.

From a personal perspective, as a business leader and as a taxpayer in Pennsylvania, I ask that you support funding for our amazing yet deteriorating state parks and forests.

To further showcase the importance of funding these great natural and recreation resources, I would like to introduce:

Katie Hess: Director of South Mountain Partnership

Katie Hess practices the emerging specialization of Landscape Conservation and works toward ecological sustainability for the South Mountain region in southcentral Pennsylvania by developing solutions that are economically, culturally, and environmentally sustainable. She facilitates connecting communities, organizations, and people with one another and with the resources that they need to overcome challenges and helps to develop solutions to sustain vibrant and healthy communities, habitat, and water in the South Mountain landscape region.

Maria Montero: Immediate past Chair and current member of the Board of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forest Foundation.

John Kline: representing the PA Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists

Andre Weltman is the chairman of the *Friends of Pine Grove Furnace State Park*, a busy Friends group in a busy little park nestled in the Michaux State Forest, just 30 miles down the road from **where we're standing today. Andre has lived for more than 20 years on the edge of the State Forest near Pine Grove Furnace, and makes use of the park or forest essentially every day.**

Richard Lewis

Next, I welcome Richard Lewis the elected President of the Pennsylvania Forestry Association, **our Nation's oldest forestry association, to the podium. In addition to his current PFA** responsibilities, Richard is also the Vice President of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, an Executive Committee member of the five state Allegheny Society of American Foresters, a former Vice President of the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited and the former President and CEO for 30 years of the Washington-based National Forest Resources Association.

And finally, I would like to introduce Marci Mowery. Marci is the President of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation which is the parent foundation for 43 volunteer friends groups across the commonwealth.