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2011 Innovations Awards Application

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011- _____

State: Pennsylvania

Assign Program Category (applicant): Parks and Recreation

1. *Program Name:* Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Plan
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9. *Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.*

Pennsylvania's Outdoor Recreation Plan creates strategies to improve recreation in the state, to encourage adults and children to be more active, and to reconnect citizens with the great outdoors. In developing our federally mandated five-year outdoor recreation plan for 2009-2013, the Commonwealth took a new approach and transformed it into a dynamic ongoing public/private partnership program with robust implementation and well-documented successes.

10. *How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 28, 2011 to be considered.*

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) began scoping and design work for the 2009-2013 outdoor recreation plan in January 2008. The first Technical Advisory Committee of outside partners and state agencies was convened in April 2008 to begin developing the plan. The final plan was released at an event at the Governor's Residence on November 13, 2009, and its recommendations are currently being implemented. The current program will continue until a new outdoor recreation plan is developed and issued in 2014.

11. *Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?*

Every five years, states must adopt a new outdoor recreation plan as a precondition to receiving federal Land and Water Conservation Funding. The federally required elements of the plan include an assessment of the state's outdoor recreation needs and active steps or programs to enhance outdoor recreation. Pennsylvania has been preparing outdoor recreation plans since 1965.

In 2008 DCNR, as the lead agency for the plan, decided to greatly expand the scope, relevance, participation and energy of the next plan by looking beyond traditional "park and recreation" issues to address many emergent trends, challenges and opportunities, including the links between recreation and health, childhood obesity, community economic growth, opportunities for minorities and older Pennsylvanians, getting the "indoor generation" outside, and more. The research and recommendations behind the effort were aimed at assessing and meeting the Commonwealth's real and growing needs rather than simply checking off a federal requirement.

Pennsylvania has a rich heritage of recreating in the outdoors, and remarkable scenic beauty. However, a Governor's conference on the outdoors in 2007 revealed declining participation in traditional outdoor pursuits like hunting and fishing and the disappearing connection between 21st century youth and the natural world. Spurred by these findings, DCNR decided to use the requirement to prepare a new outdoor recreation plan to research trends, to engage the public, to seek out partners and to take action.

12. *Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.*

- DCNR co-organized and held the Governor's Conference on the Outdoors (October 2007) in which partners across the state recognized the need to get more children recreating outdoors and to build more recreational opportunities for underserved youth and adults.
- DCNR convened an internal taskforce including forestry, recreation, parks, and the policy office to develop a collaborative approach (Winter 2008).
- Identified funding requirements and necessary funds (Winter 2008).
- Entered into a memorandum of agreement Penn State University for research and public outreach components. (Spring 2008).
- Interviewed state agencies and partner organizations on top recreation issues and asked them to join a Technical Advisory Committee to guide the development of the plan (Spring 2008).
- Held five Technical Advisory Committee meetings (Spring 2008–Summer 2009).
- Held three public meetings (Spring –Summer 2009).
- Formed a DCNR writing team and drafted plan (Summer 2008 – Spring 2009)
- Released the plan *Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone for Healthy Living (2009-2013)* (Fall 2009)
- Printed 5,000 copies of the plan and developed a speaking and distribution plan to build awareness.
- Continued the Technical Advisory Committee meetings supplemented with topical working committees (Winter 2009 to present).
- Issued first annual update to the plan *The One Year Report: Success Stories and the Call to Action* (January 2011).
- Initiated regular quarterly meetings with state agency plan partners including Health, Transportation, and Fish and Boat (fall 2009 – present).

13. *Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?*

Our approach to developing this outdoor recreation plan was new and creative because it:

- Responds to growing needs highlighted by a statewide governor's summit and extensive statewide research – specifically, the growing gap between youth and time spent recreating outdoors, the need to provide recreational opportunities that match the interests of today's youth, and the need to provide access to recreation for groups who don't currently have ready access.

- Created a new way of doing business within the agency itself by integrating a major writing and research project among four distinct parts of the agency - Parks, Forestry, Recreation/Conservation, and the Policy office. As a relatively young agency established in 1995, DCNR's program bureaus had traditionally operated in distinct silos. The agency now does more and more cross-cutting work across its bureaus.
- Engaged 13 different state agencies in the planning, technical assistance and development of the plan, where prior outdoor recreation plans have been developed solely by one agency. State agency partners contributed through interviews, participation on the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and continue to participate through ongoing subcommittees on health, trails and the outdoors.
- Engaged new private/public stakeholders as well as traditional partner organizations such as the Pennsylvania Parks and Recreation Society and multiple trail user groups. New partners included health and wellness organizations, environmental justice staffers, urban leaders, private industry such as outfitters and public utilities, community foundations, hang-gliding groups, and others.
- Worked with academic partners at Penn State University to broaden the plan's traditional research to include new methods and new audiences. Four separate surveys on outdoor recreation issues were conducted: a statewide comprehensive survey mailed to Pennsylvanians generally; a separate on-site intercept survey at representative state parks to capture more active recreators; facilitated discussion sessions with minority youth and Baby Boomers at cities across the state; and a survey of major trail user groups to identify issues and needs among many different kinds of trail users.
- Established an outside chairperson for the Technical Advisory Committee (a major foundation partner) and have kept the committee members convening regularly after the plan's publication. Also established and provided staff support to three active standing subcommittees of agency and nonprofit partners that continues to implement plan priorities.
- Developed an ongoing implementation process with web-based tracking, staff evaluation, and regular reports which included a report on accomplishments in the first year of work. Future reports are scheduled for each of the next three years of implementation.

14. *What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)*

The DCNR sought and received \$400,000 in federal funds from two partner organizations: the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (\$300,000), and the National Park Service (\$100,000), who authorized the use of Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars for the planning.

In addition, the program received funding from DCNR's Bureau of State Parks for state park survey work (\$30,000), as well as staff time from three DCNR program bureaus and its policy office (four key staff members part-time). The program was able to use existing supplies, materials, travel budgets and technology through DCNR and state partners.

15. *What are the program's annual operational costs?*

The program has used remaining dollars from its original two grants to support continued TAC coordination meetings, publication of the annual one-year report, maintenance of the dedicated website, and other incidental costs. Remaining costs, including staff time, are provided in-kind by the agency and its many partners.

16. How is the program funded?

The current program is funded on a small amount of remaining funds and a large percentage of in-kind contributions. The development, coordination and publication of the original 2009-2013 Outdoor Recreation Plan and associated research was funded by two federal grants totaling \$400,000 (see question 14).

17. Did the program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No, although the program itself is the result of a federal mandate to produce a statewide outdoor recreation plan every five years. One of the Outdoor Recreation Plan program's early "successes" was the Pennsylvania state legislature's preliminary vote to conduct a study into the economic implications of water trails, House Resolution 884, in November 2010; <http://e-lobbyist.com/gaits/text/29119>.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

Part of the funding for the project was used to create an interactive website for the planning process. It has been used to inform the public about the process, to solicit comments on the plan, and to post draft recommendations and plan summaries for review. All comments were posted on the website to maintain the transparency of the process.

The website will continue through the five-year life of the plan to facilitate ongoing input and to highlight accomplishments. More case studies on recreation and conservation were gathered than could be included in the plan. These are also available on the website. Most recently, the website was used to gather success stories for the first annual report *The One Year Report: Success Stories and the Call to Action*. Since funding is now limited, this update will not be printed in hard copy. It is now available to download or review online. See www.paoutdoorrecplan.com.

Another use of technology and software was the creation of an interactive statewide trail gaps map created for the Plan and a centerpiece of a set of recommendations on how to improve the access to and connectivity between trail systems in the state. The interactive map allows trail groups to send in updates, to nominate gaps in trails as priorities for future funding, and to network better with other groups and nearby partners. The map has its own interactive google website at: http://www.explorepatrails.com/gm_trails.aspx.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

No, states have been preparing State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORPs) for over forty years. What makes this innovative was adding multiple enhancements such as using it to strengthen the integration of a state natural resource agency, developing a plan that was based on research and reality, engaging and maintaining a large and committed Technical Advisory Committee, setting up an interactive web site, and most importantly actually implementing the plan's goals and recommendations and tracking the implementation.

20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

Again almost every state has developed a SCORP and a review of recent good examples from other states was an early action by the Pennsylvania DCNR to glean the best ideas. These included the SCORPs from Oregon, Tennessee and Virginia. Some of the key elements from these other plans included the need to engage a wide range of partners, the need to develop an attractive readable document that documents provides examples, and a contemporary look at real-world recreation needs, particularly for youth more engaged with electronics than their peers of five or 10 years ago.

21. *Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?*

No. The Pennsylvania plan covers the period from 2009-2013. Results of the first year of the plan's implementation are summarized in a January 2011 publication, *The One Year Report: Success Stories and the Call to Action* (http://www.paoutdoorrecplan.com/downloads/one_year_report.pdf). This one-year report documents many successes to date, but many recommendations and action steps have yet to be implemented. Examples of unfulfilled recommendations include building recreation resources (trails, parks) into brownfield redevelopment sites, and the imperative to get health providers behind the idea of actively promoting outdoor recreation. The plan has three more years of implementation to go, so many new recommendations are likely to be advanced through the work of the three active subcommittees on trails, getting kids outdoors, and health.

22. *Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.*

The accomplishments within the first year of the program are considerable, but far from complete. The program still has three years of implementation to go, so we anticipate many more of our recommendations will be addressed. The first-year anniversary report lists the following tangible accomplishments, by goal area, as a sampling of what has been accomplished to date.

Goal 1: *Strengthening Connections between Outdoor Recreation, Healthy Lifestyles and Economic Benefits in Communities* has nine recommendations and 27 accompanying action steps. Progress has been made on many action steps. A TAC Health sub-committee has been formed and met quarterly in 2010 to help advance three action steps: 1) develop an active/healthy/green community designation; 2) expand Get Outdoors PA as Pennsylvania's statewide campaign to promote healthy recreation in the outdoors; and 3) work is beginning on conducting a health summit in spring 2011 to explore ways to connect the health provider network and outdoor recreation. PennDOT continues to coordinate with other state agencies on its progressive Smart Transportation Initiative by identifying lessons learned and capturing case studies on this website: <http://www.smart-transportation.com/>. In partnership with numerous organizations, the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association launched in January 2010 a one-stop conservation tools website. (Visit <http://conservationtools.org/>.) Considerable progress has been made in researching the economic benefits of outdoor recreation. DCNR created a web page: <http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/indexeconomic.aspx> to feature examples of economic impact studies that demonstrate the value of conservation and outdoor recreation. The Green Space Alliance in southeast Pennsylvania has completed an economic impact study of parks and open space in November that will serve as a model for other regions to follow. However, there remains an ongoing need to conduct research on the economic as well as the health benefits of outdoor recreation.

Goal 2: This goal strives to *Reconnect People to the Outdoors* through the seven recommendations and 31 action steps listed to broaden outdoor recreation opportunities statewide. Communities partnering with local governments are redeveloping abandoned industrial lands and creating green spaces for community gathering and outdoor education and enjoyment. Programs like WalkWorks and Smart Transportation are educating children about healthful outdoor activities as well as bringing communities together for outdoor events. There is still a need to provide opportunities in schools for students to experience outdoor activities for education purposes as well as health benefits. This is a concern across the Commonwealth and entire country, and action is strongly urged to develop outdoor education and activities in the school setting.

Goal 3: There are six recommendations and 20 accompanying action steps to satisfy Goal 3 – *Developing a Land and Water Trail Network*. Much work has already taken place or is currently taking place to develop such things as a one-stop trails website, uniform trail construction guidelines and funding criteria, and signage to aid water trail users. Many trail projects are rolling in towns and communities, and sharing these ideas is simply one of the best methods to ensure programs' success and growth. At the time of this Plan's one-year anniversary, TAC officially began organizing and laying plans for the statewide trails committee, which convened for the first time during the November 2010 TAC gathering. Because

trails are such a large part of recreation issues, it is necessary for trail experts and decision-makers to collaborate through such an inclusive assemblage. For example, an advocacy message on the value of trails is best developed and delivered by partner organizations across the state; and training on trail construction and maintenance may be a joint initiative between state government agencies and trail partners. This committee will be charged with carrying out a number of action items in the future and like the plan itself, the group's success is dependent upon an enthusiasm for the work, active participation and implementation of ideas/programs.

Goal 4: It's good to report that many of the six recommendations and 20 action steps listed under Goal 4 – *Enhancing Outdoor Recreation through Better State Agency Cooperation* – are underway. We are greening our grant programs, and holding regular meetings between DCNR and PennDOT to better align trail designs and discuss water trail signage. We are building marketing and economic incentives into our conservation landscape initiative work in places like South Mountain (Adams, Cumberland and Franklin Counties) to protect orchards and forests. Most importantly, we continue to meet as the TAC and are developing the three working committees on trails, health, and the outdoors called for in the Plan. Two recommendations that we would like to see move forward that have not made much formal progress to date include providing more recreation opportunities for underserved urban and rural communities, and identifying collaborative opportunities among state and local agencies to share project planning, training, and project implementation and maintenance. These are priorities that outside groups are encouraged to pursue, including identifying good pilot projects.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The new programmatic approach to writing the five-year Outdoor Recreation Plan changed significantly and to some extent organically as it progressed. First envisioned as a university-team-led plan with university research, analysis, and writing – with state agency funding and supervision – the program changed quickly when the primary university researcher/writer unexpectedly left the project. None of the remaining researchers felt qualified to fill the plan writing role, so the writing – and to a large extent analysis -- function reverted to state agency staff. A “core writing team” of four agency staff, advised by a broader group of 15 agency staff from different disciplines, stepped in to organize the research findings, develop recommendations, develop a public input and outreach effort, share findings with other state agencies and partners, and – most importantly – created a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) that would help with all of these efforts *and* ensure that the recommendations were implemented once the plan was completed and distributed.

Once the plan was published, the program continued to evolve and change. The plan was released through a formal event at the governor's office, with multiple state agency secretaries highlighting parts of the plan most relevant to their work. Previously, the plan was issued quietly and disseminated largely to local park and recreation groups. The TAC has continued to meet, helping form committees in the major recommendation areas to move the work forward. Standing subcommittees on health, getting kids outdoors, and trails continue to meet and make progress. Rather than have DCNR do all the heavy lifting, TAC agency and nonprofit partners have remained active participants, adopting various recommendations as their own to carry out. In addition, regular monthly inter-agency meetings between DCNR and other state agencies – particularly Health, Transportation, and Fish and Boat Commission – continue to move projects forward.

DCNR has also done some internal work to tease out “lessons learned” through this long and innovative effort to make sure the next five-year plan benefits from the experiences of the recent past. Perhaps the most important change of all is that the current PA Outdoor Recreation Plan is being used on a regular basis, and not just sitting on a shelf. Because the plan was written broadly and includes so many different recommendations (98!), it is also remaining relevant despite major changes in the state, including drastically lower state and federal funding levels for recreation, declining staffing, limitations on partner travel, and a new administration with new priorities. The recommendations were actually written anticipating these changes, so many are revenue-neutral by design – another innovation.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Undoubtedly the current economic climate would make the upfront investment in research, plan development, and printing that went into the Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation plan more difficult. However, the approach that the Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation plan has taken - focusing and integrating the programs and work of the lead agency DCNR, focusing and claiming the related work of state agencies and public/private organizations, developing a powerful web presence, and finally tracking and promoting the states accomplishments in the area of outdoor recreation is very doable. It is a cost effective way to work and has built a culture of communication and collegiality around an issue that all Pennsylvania's value.

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