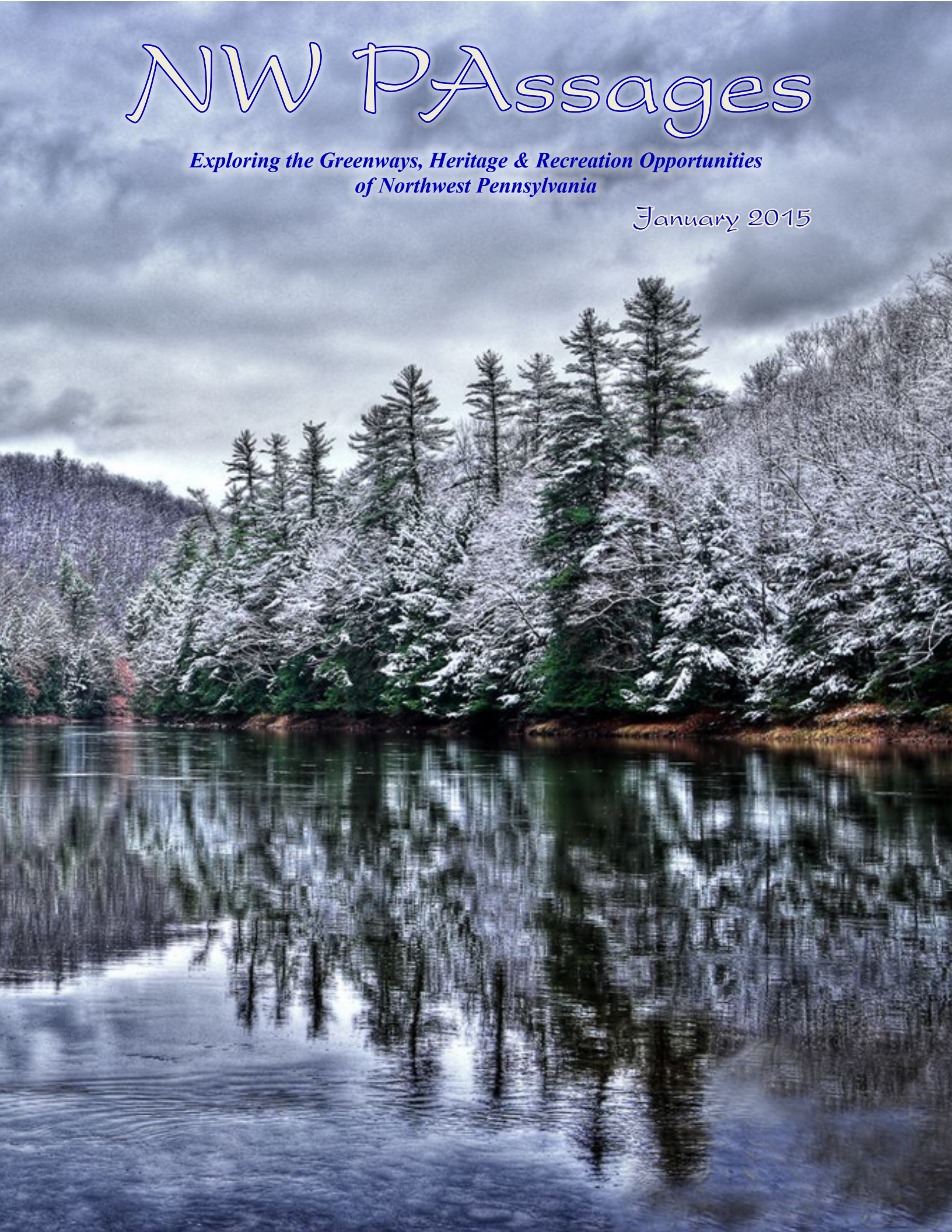
NW PAssages

Exploring the Greenways, Heritage & Recreation Opportunities of Northwest Pennsylvania

January 2015



NW PAssages

January 2015 Volume 1, Issue 7

Screech owl in the snowy evergreens of Oil Creek State Park, Venango Co.
Photo by John Monahan

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Letter from the Editors

Happy New Year! Welcome to *NW PAssages'* first issue of 2015. We hope you had an enjoyable holiday season.

In this edition, we're presenting the winners of the magazine's first photo contest, as well as honorable mentions. Thanks for all the amazing entries, and for the hundreds of votes that determined the top images. So many choices!

There are winter recreation opportunities galore in our region's state parks, which we've simplified and presented for you. Additionally, *Afield & Afloat* events feature two pages worth of fun and happenings for the whole family in January.

The partner agencies of *NW PAssages* share with you their accomplishments in 2014 concerning Greenways & Heritage, and take a look ahead to their projects planned for the upcoming year.

We hope you have a healthy, adventurous & prosperous 2015!

Stephen & Beth West

We're open to your story ideas, event info, photos and suggestions!

Visit *NW PAssages* on facebook.

It's *free* to subscribe to *NW PAssages*, just email us with your request. *beth@westpamag.com*

Congratulations to the top vote recipients in the *NW PAssages* Photo Contest! Check out these winning images on pages 9-14.

Winners

Nature ~ *Elisha Boyd*
Recreaton ~ *Tina Eaton*
Heritage ~ *Tina Eaton*

Honorable Mentions

Nature ~ *Larry Slomski*
Recreation ~ *Joe Lowrey*
Heritage ~ *Dennis Keyes*

About the cover:

The peaceful Clarion River flows through a wintry landscape in Cook Forest State Park in Clarion Co. This image by Kyle Yates of Brookville received the editors' Honorable Mention in the NW PAssages Photo Contest.

This monthly electronic E-magazine was produced with financial assistance by the PA Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Recreation and Conservation via Greenways Block Grant Program grant to the County of Venango, awarded by the Northwest PA Regional Planning and Development Commission. Additional funds were provided by the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism; the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance; and the Council on Greenways and Trails. Opinions and information expressed in this E-magazine are not necessarily those of the County of Venango, DCNR, ORA, EPTA, the Northwest Commission or CGT.

As 2015 gets underway, NW PAssages' partner agencies take a look back at last year's accomplishments, and a look ahead at the projects underway for the upcoming year. The e-zine has three more editions to go on a 10-month contract, after which it will hopefully continue for another round, with additional counties and partner agencies coming on board. Thanks for your support and encouragement!

Stephen & Beth West, Publishers
NW PAssages E-zine

The NW Pennsylvania Regional Planning & Development Commission's Greenways Block Grant Program -- through the partnership with the Dept. of Environmental Resources and the Dept. of Conservation and Natural Resources -- continues to facilitate the implementation of the natural systems greenway recommendations contained in the *Northwest Pennsylvania Greenways Plan*.

In 2014, an additional twenty-three applications were received for funding consideration over two funding round periods. Seven awards for development, planning and technical assistance projects were made in the first funding round. The second round is still under review.

The Northwest Commission is pleased to administer this regional funding opportunity and will be submitting applications to both DEP and DCNR in 2015 for additional funding in an effort to continue this program.

Northwest Commission
395 Seneca Street
Oil City, PA 16301
(814) 677-4800
website: *northwestpa.org*

The non-profit Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry and Tourism, Inc. (ORA) was the partner featured in last month's edition of *NW PAssages;* please see that story for overview, or refer to *www.oilregion.org*.

During 2014, ORA provided administrative services on behalf of the County of Venango for *NW PAssages*, the new monthly email magazine focusing on greenways, recreation, and heritage in eight counties of the Commonwealth, plus along the southern portion of the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail. ORA is the fiscal agent for the Council on Greenways and Trails, assists EPTA, and helps coordinate detailed planning with the Blueprint Communities of Parker, Foxburg, and Emlenton.

Recently certified as part of the Trail Town network, ORA in December installed a new outdoor informational case at the front entrance to their office at 217 Elm Street in Oil City to provide trail information after hours. Also in December, winners in this year's Entrepreneurial Business Contest for new or expanding businesses that serve outdoor recreation users along the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail corridor from Hydetown to Foxburg were announced, with significant cash awards to the top three recipients. ORA installed more than 70 EPT logo signs in Cornplanter Township, Oil Creek State Park, and Oil City.

Required permits based on detailed engineering have been received by ORA for the new Oil Creek Memorial Landing, which will be constructed in 2015 along Route 8 beside Dollar General in Oil City. The year ahead will also see the production and installation of at least a dozen new outdoor interpretive panels at trails and historic sites throughout the Oil Region National Heritage Area. Amenities such as bench seating, informational kiosks, bike racks, and more will be installed at multiple trailheads during 2015.

Oil Region Alliance
217 Elm Street ~ Oil City, PA 16301-1412
(814) 677-3152

The Erie to Pittsburgh Trail Alliance (EPTA) is comprised of more than a dozen trail organizations which own and operate recreational pathways along its envisioned reach from the Lake Erie shore to The Point at the confluence of the three rivers in Pittsburgh.

During 2014, much of the focus was on strengthening and updating internal systems and matters. For instance, the EPTA Bylaws were significantly revised, including adjustments in the structure of its Board of Directors and officers. For the first time, families, individuals, businesses, non-profit organizations, trail advocates, and other supporters may purchase an optional membership to help provide unrestricted funds, while also receiving prompt information about EPTA programs and activities.

Recognition of the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail continues to grow as funding partners put high priority to helping achieve the full vision of an uninterrupted physical trail suited for bicyclists stretching along the identified 270-mile corridor. *(cont. p. 4)*

EPTA's Holden Memorial Ride at the Jersey Bridge near Titusville in Sept.
Photo ~ Marilyn Black

Many of the organizations affiliated with EPTA have received approvals for public and/or private grants toward engineering, construction, operation, and/or maintenance of their respective segments of EPT. Standard EPT logo signage was installed along several segments in 2014.

Thanks to a RecTAP grant from the PA Parks and Recreation Society, EPTA has begun strategic planning to set the stage for the next five years of this collaborative endeavor; the resulting plan will emerge in 2015 after much input from EPTA Board and other key stakeholders. Early in 2015, its website will be reformatted and then updated often; see ***www.eriepittsburghtrail.org.***

Communities which are said to have a strong "sense of place" will often also have a strong identity and character, deeply felt by residents and by many visitors. This feeling is derived from a mix of natural and cultural features in the landscape, generally including the people who inhabit the place. The projects undertaken by the Council on Greenways & Trails (CGT) showcase the region's trails and natural greenways as the connectors to this place.

In 2014, our region became part of a state-wide pilot project called Nature-Based Placemaking (NBPM), wherein natural assets such as parks, trails and waterways are recognized and developed as economic opportunities. The Allegheny and Clarion Rivers, along with the trails, are some of the building blocks to our region's economic growth. For more, view *NWPA Greenways'* videos *"Assets in Our Towns"* at youtube.com.

The Trail Town Program® is an economic development and community revitalization initiative working in "Trail Towns" along the major trail corridors, now including the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail (EPT). The program's purpose is to ensure that trail communities and businesses maximize the economic potential of their trails. Representatives of 49 communities and businesses recently attended the first Trail Town & NBPM Summit along the EPT.

The trail systems are growing and improving. A feasibility study for the East Branch Trail project was completed for another 10.6 miles and has now grown to include a gateway area leading to Corry, Erie Co. Steps are being taken to spur construction of the missing three miles of Oil Creek State Park Trail (OCSP). Emlenton Borough completed an engineering plan which routes the trail through town on River Avenue, and is developing a signage plan to guide trail users safely and also point them to businesses.

The visibility and recognition of the CGT members is also growing. Franklin renewed their national Bicycle Friendly Community status at the Bronze level, and may rise to Silver when the newly funded Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan is completed. The Allegheny Valley Conservancy placed boundary signage around one of their fee properties, increasing the visibility of this conserved land which protects French Creek and its habitat.

Events attracted visitors from many different states to experience our region. GeoTrain 2014 in August attracted 90 people and 3 GeoDogs during a full weekend of fun. The Clarion Co. Trails Assn. Outdoor Adventures Day in August showcased trails in the county. This annual fundraiser also celebrated the Redbank Valley Trail as the DCNR's first Trail of the Year.

In 2015, work continues with obtaining funding and partners, and coordinating the regional big picture. For example, the Redbank Valley Trail in Clarion Co. will grow with a repair project to open the Climax Tunnel. Informational kiosks are being planned for several towns along the EPT. The Allegheny Valley Conservancy is connecting with the national Land Trust Alliance to better protect natural habitat. New websites will be a link to everything which visitors, local residents and business owners need to know about the trails and other assets that make our region special.

The AVC purchased this property near Dotter in Venango County to conserve and protect the important habitat along the Allegheny's riparian corridor.

We will continue to promote greenways and trail systems, provide information to the public and media, and increase visibility through signage and trailhead enhancements. The NBPM and Trail Town programs will grow, as will the CGT itself, as our progress attracts greater state and national attention, along with larger regional initiatives that are crossing state lines. Moving forward, the Council on Greenways & Trails will be a vital piece of this puzzle.

Story by Debra Frawley, CGT Coordinator
217 Elm Street ~ Oil City, PA 16301-1412
(814) 677-3152 Ext. 116 Fax: (814) 677-5206

"Recognizing the worth of natural, heritage and recreational resources . . . Planning now, enjoying forever."

Winter Wonderland at NW PA's State Parks

The natural wonders of our Commonwealth offer plenty of wintertime fun and adventure, especially throughout the state park system. For the cross-country skiing enthusiast, more than 330 miles of marked cross-country ski trails are offered on Pennsylvania's 2.3 million acres of state forest, plus nearly 400 miles of cross-country ski trails in many of the 120 state parks. Here's an overview of these wintery opportunities in our region.

Pymatuning State Park ~ Crawford County

The Commonwealth's largest state park includes Pymatuning Lake, which is PA's largest lake. The PA Fish and Boat Commission operates a fish hatchery and visitor center at the park, and the PA Game Commission provides a learning center & wildlife viewing.
Cross-country Skiing: Most open areas of the park are open to cross-country skiing.
Sledding: The slopes of the dam are good for sledding.
Snowmobiling: Fries Road Trail by Tuttle Point and the abandoned railroad grade by the spillway provide five miles of trails for snowmobiles. In the Jamestown area, there are additional trails and open fields.
Ice Fishing: Walleye, perch and crappie are the fish most often caught through the ice of the 17,088-acre Pymatuning Reservoir.
Iceboating: Iceboating permitted on lake.

804 E Jamestown Road ~ Jamestown, PA
Phone: (724) 932-3142

Website for the PA XCC Ski Assn: *paccsa.org*

Moraine State Park ~ Butler County

Each year, over one million boaters, hikers, bikers & swimmers visit the 16,725-acre park. Park info, launch permits, cabin info and assistance can be obtained at the park office (entrance to South Shore) ~ open weekdays year-round, plus weekends during summer.
Cross-country Skiing: Pleasant Valley and Sunken Garden trails groomed when conditions permit. Trails blazed with yellow and pink, suitable for all skill levels.
Sledding: Pleasant View Picnic Area
Snowmobiling: 26 miles of trails in park's north and west portions. Must be at least six inches of snow on the paved bike trail. Studded track snowmobiles are prohibited on the paved bike trail. Please refer to bulletin boards for additional rules and regulations for snowmobiling.
Ice Fishing: Game Prop. Area ~ Jan. 1 - Mar. 15
Ice Skating: Pleasant Valley Day Use Area
Iceboating: Must display state park permit.

225 Pleasant Valley Road ~ Portersville, PA
Phone: (724) 368-8811

Chapman State Park ~ Warren County

805-acre park includes Chapman Lake.
Cross-country Skiing: 4.4 miles of groomed ski trails connect with numerous trails in the adjoining national forest and state game lands.
Snowmobiling: Chapman is a trailhead to over 300 miles of trails in the ANF. Many of these trails are groomed. Open late Dec. to Mar. 31.
Sledding: 7-acre groomed slope on the western side of the park lighted until 10 pm daily.
Ice Fishing: The 68-acre Chapman Lake is popular for ice fishing.
Ice Skating: Ice rink near park office, behind Environmental Learning Ctr. This 120' x 80' rink is lighted nightly until 9 pm.
Ice skating is permitted on the natural ice of Chapman Lake, as conditions permit.

4790 Chapman Dam Road ~ Clarendon, PA
Phone: (814) 723-0250

Oil Creek State Park ~ Venango County

The Oil Creek Valley is the site of the world's first commercial oil well, and the park tells the story of the early petroleum industry.
Cross-country Skiing: There are 11.5 miles of groomed ski trails, with ski passes required for use of this network, at park office. No cost to ski on bike trail. Cross-country ski equipment available for rental. Warming hut beside parking lot for the ski trail loops.

305 State Park Road ~ Oil City, PA
Phone: (814) 676-5915

Cook Forest State Park ~ Clarion, Forest & Jefferson Counties

The 8,500-acre park is famous for its stands of old growth forest, which contributed to its designation as a National Natural Landmark. Clarion River connects Clear Creek State Park to Cook Forest, popular for canoeing & rafting.
Cross-country Skiing: Three designated ski trails with an equipment rental facility.
Sledding: 3 acres of slopes by River Cabins.
Ice Skating: Lighted pond along River Road.
Nearby Clear Creek State Forest is also a heavy snow area, with four miles of trails.

113 River Road ~ Cooksburg, PA
Phone: (814) 744-8407

Maurice K. Goddard State Park ~ Mercer Co.
The 2,856-acre park features the 1,680-acre Lake Wilhelm, which is very popular with anglers and boaters. The large lake, abundant wetlands, old fields and mature forests provide a diversity of habitats for wildlife, especially waterfowl, eagles and ospreys. State Game Lands 270 is adjacent to the park.
Cross-country Skiing: There are about six miles of trails marked for beginner to expert skiers.
Sledding: There is a one-acre hill for sledding at the dam.
Snowmobiling: Six miles of trail are open for snowmobiling. The trail can be accessed at Boat Launch 4 and the parking lot below the office.
Ice Fishing: Ice fishing accounts for many of the larger fish caught in Lake Wilhelm.
Ice Skating: Launch 3 has an unmaintained ice skating area.
Iceboating: Iceboats must display a current state park launch permit.

684 Lake Wilhelm Road ~ Sandy Lake, PA
Phone: (724) 253-4833

Presque Isle State Park ~ Erie County
3,200 acre sandy peninsula arching into Lake Erie in Erie, PA.
Cross-country Skiing: The trails of the park can be skiied, conditions permitting.
Winter Concession: Cross-country skis and snowshoes for rent in Shelter #1 near the Waterworks Ponds. Open 10 am - 5 pm weekends from mid-November to March.
Ice Fishing: Presque Isle Bay & Misery Bay are popular for ice fishing; bring safety equipment.

301 Peninsula Drive, Suite 1 ~ Erie, PA
Phone: (814) 833-7424

If you are interested in nominating a park for the 2015 Green Park Award, complete the Nomination Form at the website below ~ deadline is Jan. 24. The award recognizes excellence in the public park community for those that demonstrate the integration of green and sustainable park practices.
www.dcnr.state.pa.us/brc/grants/greening/casestudies/greenparksaward/index.htm
For more info: Erin Wiley Moyers (814) 226-2329

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
water, land, life.

In December 2014, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy announced that the organization has permanently protected sixty six acres in Rockdale Township, Crawford County. Located downstream from another WPC-protected property, the newly-acquired property has approximately 1,600 feet of creek frontage along French Creek, one of the most ecologically significant waterways in the northeastern United States. *"The conservation of this land will help to protect French Creek, its water quality and aquatic life, and forestland along the creek,"* said Thomas Saunders, WPC president and chief executive officer.

The property includes a wetland and a forested, riparian buffer along the creek. These corridors help to regulate the temperature of streams, creating conditions that contribute to improved water and habitat quality. This is especially beneficial for federally endangered and threatened freshwater mussels, plus numerous fish species of special conservation concern that live in the French Creek Watershed.

The WPC purchased the land from the *Niknar Sportsmen's Club*, which has owned the property since the 1950s. The property will be managed as a natural area, and will be open to the public for low-impact recreation, such as hunting, hiking and wildlife viewing.

"The mission of the Niknar Sportsmen's Club was to promote, foster and protect wildlife and natural resources, and encourage participation in recreational activities and sports," said George Varzaly, president of Niknar Sportsmen's Club. *"Thanks to the Conservancy, we are able to uphold the original charter of the organization and keep the land natural forever."*

The acquisition was made possible through one family's generous financial contribution in memory of Brad Barnes, whose family has conserved several ecologically significant properties in northwestern Pennsylvania in his memory via the WPC. Their philanthropy is dedicated to the conservation of endangered plants and wildlife. Funds from the estate of Helen B. Katz also contributed to this acquisition.

About the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy:
The WPC enhances the region's quality of life by protecting and restoring exceptional places. Founded in 1932, this private non-profit conservation organization has helped to establish ten state parks, conserved nearly a quarter million acres of natural lands, and protected or restored more than 1,500 miles of rivers and streams. The Conservancy owns and operates Fallingwater, which symbolizes people living in harmony with nature. In addition, WPC enriches our region's cities and towns through 130 community gardens and other green spaces, which are planted with the help of about 12,500 volunteers. The work of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is accomplished through the support of nearly 10,000 members.

WPC website: WaterLandLife.org

Jennings Environmental Education Center
Owl Prowl - Saturday, January 3 at 7:00 pm

Owls are superb, highly-specialized predators. Discover why owls' nocturnal habits, silent flight and ghostly appearances have fascinated people for centuries. Following a brief indoor presentation, prowl among owls and other winter nightlife on a guided walk along Jennings' darkened forest trails.

Jennings is open from 8:00 am to 4:00 pm weekdays and on weekends as scheduled. The trails are open daily from sunrise to sunset for hiking and other environmentally-related activities.

Contact: Miranda Crotsley, Program Coordinator
2951 Prospect Road, Slippery Rock, Butler County
(724) 794-6011 email: jenningssp@pa.gov

"Come Grow With Us: Digging Deep!"

January 10, 2015 ~ 9:00 am - 3:30 pm

This seminar will show you, in a fun way, the basics of color and design. Plus, explain how to turn your landscape into a wildlife habitat.

Penn State Extension Mercer County
463 N. Perry Highway
Mercer, PA ~ Mercer County

Call (724) 662-3141 to register or for questions.

Register by Monday, Jan. 5 ~ Seating is limited!

This event is sponsored by the Penn State Master Gardeners of Mercer County.

Hoot and Holler Night

Pymatuning State Park

Saturday, January 10 ~ 6 - 8 pm

Jamestown Camp Grounds
2660 Williamsfield Road
Jamestown, PA - Crawford Co.

Bring your own snowshoes and dress for the weather. We'll be calling for owls in the campground as well as hollering at the moon. Please bring a flashlight or headlamp. If no snow, we'll still walk. A limited number of snowshoes are available, so please reserve in advance via the park office (724) 932-3142.

Warren County Outdoor Show

Warren Mall - 1666 Market St., Warren, PA
January 10 & 11
10:00 am - 5:00 pm

The Warren County Outdoor Show features lots of vendors with outdoor themes like hunting, taxidermy and recreation. Food booths are also available. Admission is free to the public.

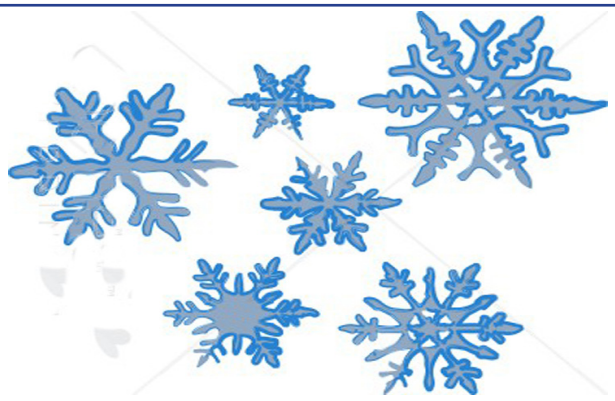
For more info, call John Papalia - (814) 723-3050

Winter Trails Day Snowshoeing

** Saturday, January 10, 2015 **
10 am - 12 pm or *1 - 3 pm*

Jennings Environmental Education Center
2951 Prospect Road, Slippery Rock, PA

Celebrate Winter Trails Day, a fun-filled day of snowshoeing for beginners, at Jennings Environmental Education Center. This program, for ages 8 and up, will include the history of snowshoes, a complete introduction to the sport of snowshoeing and a winter activity hike on snowshoes. Equipment will be provided, although personal equipment is welcomed. *Please register for this session by calling the center at (724) 794-6011 no later than Jan. 5.*



Presque Isle Winter Trails Day

Saturday, January 10 ~ 11 am to 7:30 pm

Presque Isle State Park
301 Peninsula Drive - Erie, PA

Join the Park Naturalist for a day of hikes on *Winter Trails Day*. Four hikes will be held throughout the day.

Sidewalk Trail Hike - *meet at 9 am at the Lighthouse Parking Lot for an approx. 2.5 mile hike down Sidewalk Trail & Old Ridge Trail until 11 am.*

Deadpond Trail Hike - *meet at Noon at Thompson Circle for an approximately 2 mile hike on Deadpond Trail & Pine Tree Trail until 2 pm.*

Gas Well Trail Hike - *meet at 3 pm at the Rotary Pavilion for a 2 mile hike on Gas Well Trail & other interior trails until 5 pm.*

Graveyard Pond Trail Hike - *meet at 6 pm at the Perry Monument Parking Lot for a 1.5 mile night hike on Graveyard until 7:30 pm.*

No fee or registration, dress appropriately for the the weather. Program is subject to modification or cancellation at the discretion of park staff.

Call (814) 833-7424 for more details.

Warren County Winterfest

January 16, 17 & 18
Fri., Sat. & Sun.
9:00 am - 4:00 pm
Chapman State Park

32-mile Sled Dog Race, Canine Weight Pull, Polar Bear Plunge, Geomeet, Food and Crafts, Ski-joring, Canine Weight Pull, Ice Fishing, Ice Skating and Sled Riding. Event is open to the public.

4790 Chapman Dam Road - Clarendon, PA

For more information, call: (814) 723-0250 or visit: warrencountywinterfest.com

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The Friends of Oil Creek and Titusville Leisure Services bring WINTERFEST to Oil Creek on Saturday, January 17.

Cross-country ski equipment rentals will be available, along with ski lessons. *Now's the time to try out this great winter activity.* Download a registration form at: *friendsocsp.org* or call Titusville Leisure Services ~ (814) 827-3741.

Registration deadline is January13.
Cost: $20 - adults, $15 - 18 yrs. & under, or $10 w/ own equipment. **Fee includes:** rentals, lesson, and trail fee for groomed trails. There are three sessions of lessons: 10:30-11:30 am, 12:30-1:30 pm, and 2:30-3:30 pm.

Food will be available, including Suzie Q's Homemade Ice Cream.

In case of poor conditions, the snow date is January 24.

FRIENDS OF OIL CREEK STATE PARK
305 State Park Road
Oil City, PA ~ Venango County

Park Office: (814) 676-5915
website: *friendsocsp.org*

5th Annual Winterfest at Moraine State Park

Saturday, January 17 ~ 12:00 - 5:00 pm

Enjoy ice skating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, hiking, ice sculpture and dog sledding demos, crafts and hot food.

Reserve your place in the Fifth Annual Chili Cook-off now! For details, call (724) 368-9185.

225 Pleasant Valley Road ~ Portersville, PA

14th Annual Prairie Improvement Day

Saturday, January 17, 9:00 am ~ 1:00 pm
Jennings Environmental Education Center
2951 Prospect Road ~ Slippery Rock, PA

Shake off those mid-winter blues by pitching in at Jennings Environmental Education Center. Help by spending a Saturday morning outdoors managing the unique prairie ecosystem.

For lunch, local restaurants will provide warm, hearty soup. Each participant will receive a commemorative soup mug as a special thank you.

Participants must be age 12 or older and should dress for the weather. Register by calling the Center at (724) 794-6011 before January 9.

Annual Eagle Watch
February 1, 2015
8 am ~ 2 pm

Wildlife observation in the Allegheny National Forest and an audio-visual program presented by Dave Donachy of the PA Game Commission. Geomeet "Caching with Eagles" organized by Kinzua Cachers.

Kinzua Dam Visitor Center
1205 Kinzua Road ~ Warren, PA
(814) 726-0661

Two Mile Run County Park

471 Beach Road, Franklin - Venango County

Skiing equipment rentals *(if six+ inches of snow)* at the Nature Lodge Office on weekdays 11 am - 3 pm; weekends 10 am - 2 pm. Both men's & women's available. Rental cost is $5 for 2 hours and $8 for all day. Snowshoes are also available to rent at a cost of $3. For more info, call Park Office at: (814) 676-6116 or visit: *twomilerun.net*

Snowmobile Season: Dec. 14 - March 31

PA's state forests and parks provide access to almost 3,000 miles of marked joint-use state forest roads, closed roads and trails. There are also 170 miles of winter ATV trails in seven state forest districts. The DCNR provides condition updates: (877) 766-6253. Plus, maps and more available at the DCNR's website: *dcnr.state.pa.us*

Snowmobiles & ATVs require registration with the DCNR's snowmobile/ATV Unit. For info: (866) 545-2476; or DCNR's website.

NW PAssages Photo Contest

Congratulations to the winners of NW PAssages' first annual photo contest! Our readers voted for their favorite images in three categories, with hundreds of votes cast. Thanks to all the incredible photographers who entered the competition, and to our readers for deciding upon the three winners and honorable mentions.

Winner ~ Recreation

Fishing along the Allegheny River in Tionesta

Photographer ~ Tina Eaton

As summer turns to autumn, fishermen cast their lines into the Allegheny River in Tionesta, Forest County ~ "Western Gateway to the Allegheny National Forest." In 1992, this area was part of a pair of sections of the Allegheny totaling 86.6 miles that received the "Recreational River" designation in the *National Wild & Scenic River system*, spanning the counties of Forest, Warren and Venango.

The Tionesta Bridge is a girder bridge constructed in 1961, which carries US Route 62 and PA Route 36 over the Allegheny, connecting to Tionesta Borough on the east side.

Tina Eaton lives in Tionesta, Forest County, where she was born and raised. Her photography hobby started fifteen years ago, with her main focus on landscapes and birds. She's an outdoorswoman, with a love for tubing the Allegheny, swimming, fishing, hiking and camping. Tina is an animal lover, and has several rescued cats and two dogs.

Honorable Mention ~ Recreation
Snowy Ski Trail in Oil Creek State Park
Photographer ~ Joe Lowrey

The first snowfall of 2014 created ideal conditions on the cross country ski trail near Hemlock Run in Oil Creek State Park in northern Venango County, PA. The park offers many miles of bike/hike trails that become excellent cross country ski trails when the winter snows blanket the region.

Oil Creek State Park tells the story of the early petroleum industry by interpreting oil boomtowns, oil wells and early transportation. Scenic Oil Creek carves a valley of deep hollows, steep hillsides and wetlands. The wooded hills of Oil Creek Gorge look almost as they did before the boom. Pumpjacks still operate in OCSP, extracting petroleum and natural gas from the earth where nature provided the twin energies long ago. Important oil well sites are in contrast with clean trout streams and forested hillsides seen today throughout the park.

Joe Lowrey has lived in Tippery, Venango County, his entire life. His photography hobby began six years ago, and he is self-taught, other than the occasional tip from fellow photographers. He has a great love for hiking through our region's vast wilderness, and enjoys playing and watching sports. Joe never goes anywhere without his tripod. His favorite subjects are waterfalls, and he often captures his images during the nighttime.

Winner ~ Heritage

1933 Nebraska Bridge in Forest County

Photographer ~ Tina Eaton

Constructed in 1933, this 187 foot-long metal truss bridge over Tionesta Creek is a favorite fishing hole for young and old alike. Adjacent to the bridge is a popular boat launch which allows access through the back channel to Tionesta Lake. Restored in 1999, the Nebraska Bridge will soon be the only truss bridge in all of Forest Co.

Known as the submersible bridge, the Nebraska is noted for annually being flooded well above the deck during the spring thaw, making this a "seasonal" crossing to say the least. As such, the flood waters are fairly calm and simply drown the bridge, causing minimal damage. Water levels have risen high enough to submerge the entire structure under water. It is closed only when flooded out.

Information courtesy of: www.HistoricBridges.org

Heritage ~ Honorable Mention

Historic Emlenton along the Allegheny

Photographer ~ Dennis Keyes

Emlenton is a borough located mostly in Venango County, in the southeastern corner of the county, with a small portion located in Clarion County. The population was 625 at the 2010 census. Of this, 617 were in Venango County, and only 8 were in Clarion County. The borough is also home to the I-80 Emlenton Bridge, which spans the Allegheny River.

Emlenton is named for Emlen, the wife of Joseph M. Fox, one of its founders. The Emlenton Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1997.

Emlenton is a recreational and sportsman destination, with the Allegheny Avenue public boat launch providing access to the Allegheny River. The Allegheny River Trail extends northward from Emlenton; this bike/hike trail was constructed by the Allegheny Valley Trails Association along former railroad lines.

This photo was taken from the I-80 Bridge, 270 feet above the river, at some risk since there's no sidewalk there. The bridge is unusual in that it's located in three PA counties ~ Venango, Clarion and Butler.

Dr. Dennis Keyes has operated a dental practice in Butler, PA since 1984, and resides in Karns City, Butler County. He began photographing in Vietnam in 1969, switching to digital photography in 2000. His subject matter includes landscapes, portraits, fashion and architecture, with his images being featured in numerous publications and art shows. Dr. Keyes has also produced several travel and event video slideshows, which he shares during live presentations.

Winner ~ Nature

Leesburg Falls in Mercer County

Photographer ~ Elisha Boyd

Springfield Falls ***(aka Leesburg Falls)*** along Wolf Creek is located on PA Gamelands #284 in southern Mercer County, just a few miles from the towns of Mercer and Grove City. Here's a great description of the waterfall from trails.com: A 50-yard walk to such a wide and impressive falls is hard to beat. From the parking area, cross Falls Road and look for an old concrete stair and path leading through the trees lining the road. It may feel like you're intruding into the backyard of the house seen to the right, but you're not; the path and falls are public. The base of the falls is reached by a short scramble down a steep, muddy slope, avoiding a set of old railroad tie stairs in the process. Only 13 feet tall, but more than 60 feet wide, it's surprising how narrow Wolf Creek can fan out to fill the cascade's entire width with such a consistent veil of water.

Information courtesy of: www.Trails.com

Elisha M. Boyd was born and raised in Grove City, Lawrence County, and now resides in Slippery Rock, Butler County. Her interest in photography came early in life, but greatly expanded five years ago when she became a landscaper for Landscape Design in Grove City. This work helped her develop a unique way of viewing landscapes, trees, flowers, shapes and lines. Recently, Elisha has branched out into portrait photography, specializing in family portraiture.

Honorable Mention ~ Nature
Red Fox Kit at Presque Isle

Photographer ~ Larry Slomski

Red foxes are among the wide range of flora and fauna abounding at Presque Isle State Park in Erie, PA. The 3,200-acre sandy peninsula arches into Lake Erie, creating the wonderful harbor of Presque Isle Bay. Designated a *National Natural Landmark*, the state park offers an array of unique habitats, providing protection for a greater number of PA's endangered, threatened and rare species than any other area of comparable size in the state.

Erie native Larry Slomski has lived in NW PA most of his life, and now calls Saegertown, Crawford County, home. His interest in photography began in the 1980s, and his images are mainly of Nature, though he also has been filming and photographing Lake Erie shipwrecks for several years. Larry actively volunteers his photography and other skills to Tamarack Lake Wildlife Rehabilitation & Education Center in Saegertown.