



# Stroud Region Open Space & Recreation

15 Day Street, East Stroudsburg, PA 18301  
570-426-1512 info@srosrc.org  
[www.stroudgreenway.org](http://www.stroudgreenway.org)  
[www.srosrc.org](http://www.srosrc.org)

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*One in a series of educational essays on the essential community services of parks and recreation systems.*

### **Save the Keystone Fund for difference-making investments in the life and health of our communities**

by Tim Herd

One of the best examples of stable, public funding of key quality of life projects has been hauled onto the state budget chopping block, and awaits its fate at the hands of state legislators.

The Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund was created in 1993 through the efforts of a strong bipartisan partnership of legislators, governmental agencies, nonprofit organizations and related businesses. Automatically receiving fifteen percent of the State's realty transfer tax, this revenue source has created permanent and lasting assets for the citizens of the Commonwealth, improving the livability of our communities and providing irreplaceable recreation and educational opportunities for everyone.

Over the past nineteen years, the Keystone Fund, administered by the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), has helped local municipalities to forever protect new parkland, natural areas and other green spaces, and supported thousands of municipal and county parks in the construction and renovation of playgrounds, athletic fields, picnic pavilions and pools. The Fund has also improved recreational facilities in our state parks and state forests, renovated and expanded libraries, preserved historical landmarks and structures, and built hundreds of miles of trails.

Governor Corbett's proposed 2012-2013 budget calls for the elimination of the DCNR portion of the Keystone Fund, resulting in the loss of mandatory annual allocations for local recreation and parks, land trusts, and state park and forest maintenance: approximately \$80 million in lost project expenses—as well as the economic benefits to the many companies that support these projects.

Each dollar of Keystone Fund community grants typically leverages more than two dollars in direct private and local investments in our parks, trails, and greenways. These investments in turn generate

hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity, ranging from recreational purchases and wages to increased property values.

Stroud Region residents and businesses have benefitted from DCNR grant funds of \$371,568 over the past eight years, which has leveraged an additional \$449,672 in local matching funds, for a total of \$821,240 directly invested in the economic, environmental, and social welfare of all who live and work in the Stroud Region.

These local projects have enabled the master plan for the Levee Loop Trail and its formation—a multi-municipal trail system that links seven public parks, two playgrounds, two skate parks, a dozen ball fields, two public swimming pools, two fishing ponds, one disc golf course, a regular golf course, eight schools, a university, a Community Center, and the historic downtown districts of Stroudsburg and East Stroudsburg, as well as many other community resources and linkages to further destinations.

Keystone Fund grants have enabled the construction of the Dansbury Trailhead in our most popularly-used park. They have partially funded a master site development plan for two regional parks and a trail feasibility study. They have enabled critical renovations to the region's two public poolhouses. These are all vital investments in the viability and vitality of the life and health of the community.

The state's 2009-2013 Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, *Pennsylvania Outdoors – The Keystone for Healthy Living*, identified four major goals and provided many significant recommendations for improving the health of Pennsylvanians. Statewide implementation of the recommendations will be severely hampered without the Keystone Fund.

For more information on the Keystone Fund, the PA State budget, farmland preservation, the oil and gas lease fund, and other related issues, see <http://conservationadvocate.org>

Contact both your District Representative and your State Senator. Tell them that the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, as the source of these many difference-making projects, must remain fully funded and functionally separate from the state's General Fund, and remain a dedicated fiscal resource for the personal and corporate welfare of all Pennsylvanians.

*Tim Herd is the Executive Director of the Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission and serves on the Board of Directors of the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society.*

*The Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission provides essential public services of regional economic stimulation, environmental stewardship, and social stability through healthful recreational and cultural programming and responsible stewardship of parks and open space.*

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