

# The great outdoors can be great for business

By WENDY STIVER  
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**LOCK HAVEN** – The best places in Pennsylvania aren't necessarily the big cities.

When heading out for a get-away, many don't seek urban streets. Rather, they look for a landscape where nature is the big draw.

To make a name for itself in the wider world, a place can boast of its natural assets and the recreational opportunities those assets offer. This particular tool in the tourism box is referred to as "nature-based placemaking." Whatever you choose to call it, it's something our region can employ.

"There is a synergy between a place, natural resources, and economic development," said Meredith Hill, the Department of Conservation of Natural Resources's PA Wilds director.

Consider this one lone statistic: In 2013, resident snowmobilers in Pennsylvania spent \$57 million on equipment and \$96 million on trips to enjoy the sport.

Hill and other speakers addressed the Susquehanna Greenway Partnership Board of Directors and guests during the board's annual meeting held July 28 at the Lock Haven University Durrwachter Alumni Conference Center.

Start with outdoor recreation opportunities – a park, a trail, dark skies for stargazing, scenic views – and add in the community's culture such as a historical riverfront, Hill said. Then ask if the place is ready for visitors. Are there hotels, restaurants, boat rentals, bike racks, good directional signs?

"The image of a community is fundamentally important to its economic well-being," Hill said, quoting Ed McMahon of the Urban Land Institute.

She pointed to South Renovo's welcome sign that describes it as "nestled along the West Branch of the Susquehanna."

Once an image is identified, it can be boosted with special events like Susquehanna Sojourn and Hyner View Trail Challenge, with draws like art exhibits and classes at Station Gallery, she said.

More information about Nature-Based Placemaking can be found through the Pennsylvania Downtown Center's website at [www.padowntown.org](http://www.padowntown.org).

DCNR has launched a project with the downtown center to look at existing efforts and find out how they have achieved success, then develop strategies that can work for many Pennsylvania communities, Hill said.

The Pine Creek Rail Trail is an asset that can spell economic success for the communities it passes through. It is among nine long-distance trails in Pennsylvania, and together, they generate \$60 million annually for their communities, she reported.

And, according to Hill, for every \$1 invested in state parks, \$12 is returned to the economy in Pennsylvania.

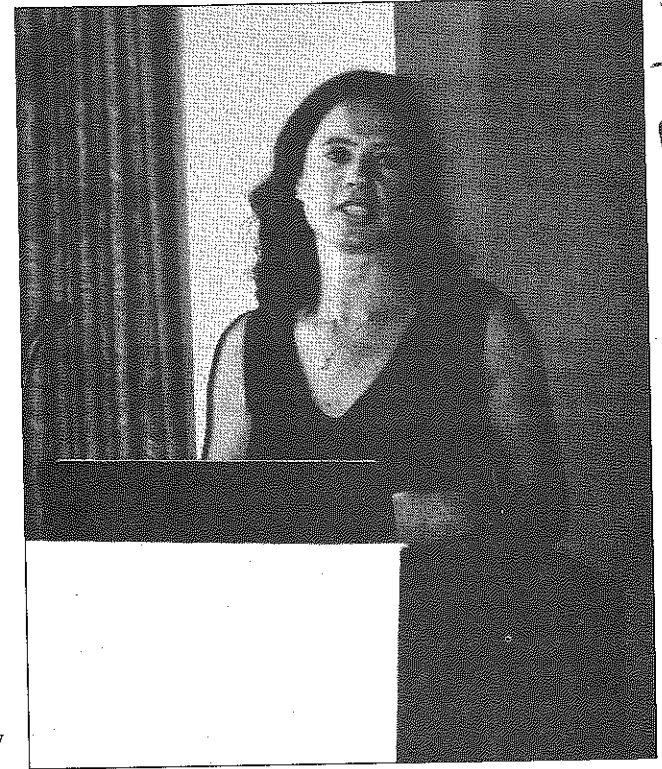
The Pennsylvania Wilds region, which includes Clinton, Lycoming and part of Centre counties, encompasses 29 state parks.

The PA Wilds effort can help businesses linked to recreation, said Ta Enos, PA Wilds small business ombudsman. It offers a brand book and a design guide, and it markets the region to visitors. Everyone can benefit, from big investments like the Elk Country Visitor Center in Benezette to individuals like her family members who have an outfitting business.

Visitor spending totals \$1.7 billion in the 12.5-county region, she said.

It's a great thing to see a community grow around a growing business, she said.

The PA Wilds also markets the region in a series of trails for different interests. Its Artisan Trail includes Station Gallery in Lock Haven.



WENDY STIVER/THE EXPRESS

**Ta Enos speaks at a Susquehanna Greenway Partnership board meeting earlier this week.**

The Artisan Trail has grown 300 percent from its beginning, Enos reported, from 15 to 60 sites, "and we're just at the beginning... I really hope to double that number in the next couple of years again."

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