



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

Assess Implementation of
the 2006 PA Wilds Recreation Plan and
Identify On-going Needs, Strategies and Other Recommendations for
DCNR's Investment in the PA Wilds Conservation Landscape

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Introduction

This Request for Proposal is being solicited by the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship (the Center) in partnership with the PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). As part of DCNR's Conservation Landscape Program, the Center is the agency's lead external partner organization for implementing the program in the region. The Center is a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit whose mission is to integrate conservation and economic development in a way that strengthens and inspires communities in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

Background

Since its inception more than 15 years ago, the PA Wilds initiative has matured as a successful and nationally recognized model to grow a region's nature, outdoor recreation and heritage tourism industry under a trademarked and regional brand. It involves many federal, state, regional and local partners with the PA Wilds Center serving as the coordinating entity among them.

The Pennsylvania Wilds is one of the state's 11 official tourism regions. It is also one of DCNR's 8 designated Conservation Landscapes because of its outstanding natural assets, conservation legacy and place-based collaborative approach. This large rural area covers about a quarter of the Commonwealth but is home to only 4 percent of the state's population.

The initiative grew out of an elk nature tourism strategy and plan developed in the early 2000s to address impacts by visitors to the state's elk range, now the heart of the 12½ county Pennsylvania Wilds region. In 2003, DCNR and the Rendell Administration expanded the elk strategy to a more comprehensive approach that included a broader array of outdoor recreation experiences and one that could potentially lay the foundation for additional community revitalization and economic development opportunities for the region.

With 2.4 million acres of public land – as much as Yellowstone National Park, the region is home to some of the best opportunities for outdoor recreation and wilderness adventure in the eastern US, but is still relatively unknown, even among Pennsylvanians. An original and on-going objective of the effort is to brand the Pennsylvania Wilds region as a distinct entity and world class destination.

In 2006, "A Recreation Plan for the State Parks and State Forests in the Pennsylvania Wilds," completed for DCNR by Fermata, Inc., set a course for agency infrastructure investments based on current recreation trends and needed to establish the area as a regional destination. The plan included large and small projects: from signage, restrooms, trailheads/trail improvements to several flagship destination facilities such as the Elk Country Visitor Center, Nature Inn at Bald Eagle, Wildlife Watching Center at Sinnemahoning, and Kinzua Bridge State Park Sky Walk and Visitor Center. The "Fermata" plan also proposed a staff deployment structure to address plan implementation at an operational level.

For information on the region and its assets/attractions go to <http://www.pawilds.com> . The Fermata plan and other studies and reports on the PA Wilds work can be found here: <http://www.pawildscenter.org/studies-reports/> .

A majority of the recommendations in the Fermata plan have been addressed but there has not been a formal assessment of plan implementation nor determination of what a new strategy might look like. Such a strategy is needed to guide DCNR and the agency's partnership with the Center and others in terms of new priorities, needs and staff roles going forward in the context of past work, outdoor recreation interests and visitation patterns today, current partner capacity and long-term sustainability. Developing such a strategy is the goal of this request.

Scope of Work

- Conduct assessment of the 2006 Fermata PA Wilds Recreation Plan. Identify implementation accomplishments and any outstanding items that still warrant attention. Get input from DCNR including past Rec Team and Unit data and from the Center. A list for interviews and data sources will be provided by DCNR. Where appropriate, input from other agencies and non-government partners can be sought as well.
- Evaluate current use and biggest gaps in visitor infrastructure and provide recommendations for how to address with emphasis on maintaining/mitigating existing vs. building/bringing new offerings on line. As part of this, review current planning projects and other planned infrastructure investments currently underway or on the docket at parks and forest districts. Conduct this review and segment by designated sub-landscapes using the Rec Unit boundaries.
- Review current recreational offerings across the region, including those from other land management agencies like PA Game Commission, the PA Fish and Boat Commission, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Allegheny National Forest. Use this date to confirm existing and/or provide new recommendations on signature and model site designations to address gaps and any changing recreation trends, target resources and avoid excessive duplication. As part of this, compile visitation numbers at key sites (2010 to present) and identify resource and infrastructure needs associated with filling gaps. State Parks and State Forestry visitor use information will be provided for analysis.
- Review current Forest Management Plans and State Park Management Plans for parks and forests in the region and offer recommendations for incorporating actions and priorities that fill identified gaps. Offer suggestions to integrate recreational resources across internal PA DCNR administrative boundaries accordingly or those of other agencies as appropriate.
- Identify priority initiatives and projects between DCNR and the Center related to the Center's role as DCNR's External Lead for the PA Wilds Conservation Landscape. This should specifically include projects and activities that demonstrate clear mission alignment between DCNR and the Center and that support DCNR's implementation of regional recreation plans and priorities, activities

related to visitor services like programming and marketing strategies and conservation stewardship messaging. As appropriate, identify other partners that might play a role in priority initiatives and projects through public private partnerships or other mechanisms that are cost effective and extend DCNR's reach in implementing the agency's mission.

- Include a stakeholder input component to the project to inform regional stakeholders of the project and receive any comment at the draft document stage. This may include 1-3 meetings in the region or other suggested approaches.

Deliverables

A strategy and plan that addresses the following items and includes:

- Clear and concise analysis of the Fermata plan in terms of what was implemented, what wasn't, highlighting the top successes and challenges.
- Major gaps that currently exist in delivering regional recreational experiences as informed by a decade of visitor use patterns, new trends, and any other factors. Include inventory of key recreational experiences in terms of current conditions/attractiveness to prospective visitors. Include who is best to provide these services to deliver the recreational experiences.
- Actions to improve efficiencies in DCNR staff deployment and program delivery among park and forest units in the region. As appropriate, identify ways to fill gaps or make efficiency improvements by DCNR working with other government, non-government agencies, private sector businesses or other organizations that could play a role in delivering visitor or recreation services in the conservation landscape.
- Areas of strategic collaboration with the Center to implement the goals of the PA Wilds Conservation Landscape and recommendations related to regional recreation issues and visitor services.
- Any new opportunities that could expand DCNR capacity or the overall capacity of other resource-limited agencies and organizations through public private partnerships and other collaborative initiatives.
- Estimated costs associated with any proposed recommendations.
- A stakeholder input component and a summary of the results of this.

Proposal Format

Submit the following items in this order:

- A letter of transmittal that demonstrates an understanding of the project goals; confirms that the company meets the qualifications; and lists the primary contact person, email, and phone number.
- Proposer Information:
 - Statement of experience in conducting work similar to that of RFP.
 - Location of project manager's office, as well as that of any team members, if different.

- Resumes of individuals who will do the work, relevant experience and his/her role in project.
- Project examples of similar work. May be included as hot links.
- Scope, Methods and Procedures: Include a detailed description of the methods and procedures you intend to employ for this scope of work. Expand on scope as necessary.
- Work schedule with target dates for key tasks. Detail is encouraged. Assume kick-off meeting around May 1, 2019.
- Budget: A detailed budget of work to be performed including staff hourly rate and hours to be worked; travel, and all expenses both personnel and project costs. Describe method of billing.

Selection Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on the quality of the proposal and consultant's expressed ability to complete the Scope of Work in a timely and cost-effective manner. Specific criteria include but are not limited to the following:

- General Qualifications:
 - Experience and expertise of consulting team related to similar projects.
 - Demonstrated understanding of large landscape initiatives, partnerships and structures.
 - Demonstrated ability to work with various audiences including committees, public and private sectors, community leaders and elected officials, individuals and private land owners.
 - Clarity of proposal and understanding of project goals.
 - Track-record in project management and the ability to deliver high quality work on-time and within established budget.
 - Sound methodology that is well defined to support project goals.
 - Demonstrated aptitude for creative and strategic problem-solving.
 - Knowledge of geographic area of study.
 - Ability to be physically present in region to engage with people in-person, not just by phone.

- B. Budget:
 - Detailed budget that clearly identifies expenditures.
 - Costs are realistic and are allocated to achieve high quality final products. Budget not to exceed \$50,000.

Project Timeline & Submission

RFP Issued: March 15, 2019

Responses Due: April 15, 2019 (COB)

Pre-submission Questions Taken: Between March 15 and April 1.

Project Completion Target: April 2020.

Please submit proposals electronically to Abbi Peters, Managing Director, PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship at apeters@pawildscenter.org . Pre-submission questions can also be directed to Abbi by email or phone: 800-895-1376 ext. 402 during the timeframe noted above.