



Pennsylvania
Department of Conservation
and Natural Resources

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MEDIA CONTACT:

Wesley Robinson, werobinson@pa.gov, 717-877-6315

**In Lancaster County, Secretary Dunn Recognizes Conestoga River,
Named as Pennsylvania's 2026 River of the Year**

The Conestoga flows for more than 61 miles, from its headwaters in Berks County down to the Susquehanna River below the Safe Harbor Dam — threading past historic covered bridges, working farms, and small towns.

The scenic waterway is a popular recreation destination, including activities such as canoeing, kayaking, tubing, and fishing.

DCNR manages the Commonwealth's 2.2 million acres of state forestlands and 125 state parks, which are free and open to the public every day.



Lancaster, PA – Today, **Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn** visited Lancaster County to recognize the [Conestoga River](#) in southeastern Pennsylvania as Pennsylvania’s 2026 River of the Year.

“The Conestoga River is a great example of what can happen when we prioritize clean, healthy waterways — making its selection as Pennsylvania’s 2026 River of the Year a very well-deserved honor,” said **Secretary Dunn**. “The Conestoga River Club and its volunteers have done amazing work to steward this river, and the river has become a hub for outdoor recreation. Thank you to the staff and volunteers for the conservation work on the Conestoga, which has provided an economic boost to the region and helped demonstrate that rivers build thriving communities.”

The Conestoga flows for more than 61 miles, from its headwaters in Berks County down to the Susquehanna River below the Safe Harbor Dam. It threads past historic covered bridges, working farms, and small towns — a living landscape of culture, recreation, and history that belongs to all of us.

The public selected the Conestoga as [River of the Year](#), which beat out the Lower Schuylkill River and the Chillisquaque Creek. The Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers (POWR), managed by the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, oversees administration of the vote and works in collaboration with DCNR.

“The River of the Year program continues to engage communities across Pennsylvania by highlighting the unique stories and value of our waterways,” said **Tom Gilbert, President of the Pennsylvania Environmental Council**. “We are happy to celebrate the Conestoga River today for its rich history, its importance to local communities, and the ongoing efforts to restore and protect this vital resource for future generations.”

The Conestoga River Club nominated the Conestoga River and received a \$15,000 Leadership Grant to help fund a slate of year-long 2026 River of the Year activities. DCNR and POWR will work with them to create a free, commemorative poster celebrating the Conestoga River as the 2026 Pennsylvania River of the Year.

“We are fortunate to have this year’s River of the Year event take place during the 10th annual Lancaster Water Week to help elevate the value water brings to the county,” said **Conestoga River Club Executive Director Malinda Harnish Clatterbuck**. “Having the Conestoga River selected as the 2026 River of the year is an honor that celebrates a history woven into the fabric of life in Lancaster County. As a club, we are committed to stewarding the Conestoga and keeping it clean and clear for all. Deepest thanks to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers for making this opportunity possible.”

One of Lancaster County's most scenic waterways, the Conestoga is a popular spot for canoeing, kayaking, tubing, and fishing. The Conestoga River Watershed covers hundreds of square miles and drains a mix of agricultural lands, towns, and growing suburbs — which means both rich heritage and real restoration challenges the Conestoga River Club actively manages.

“The Conestoga River is vital to the health of Lancaster City — from providing drinking water to recreation opportunities, we are fortunate to have this indispensable resource in our backyard,” said **Lancaster City Mayor Jaime Arroyo**. “We thank the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Organization for Watersheds and Rivers for highlighting the value of this important waterway.”

The Conestoga River Club is dedicating the 2026 River of the Year victory and celebration to those who will benefit from the future health of our watershed, and to the memory of Ad Crable, a revered local journalist and environmentalist, who championed the careful stewardship of the Conestoga.

“The Conestoga River is vital to Pennsylvania communities—providing water for families, farms, and businesses and supporting recreation across the region,” said **EPA Mid-Atlantic Regional Administrator Amy Van Blarcom-Lackey**. “Each improvement in the Conestoga watershed strengthens local streams, restores habitat, reduces sediment and flood impacts, and delivers benefits people can see close to home and downstream in the Chesapeake Bay. This progress is possible because of strong partnerships with the Commonwealth and local advocates like the Conestoga River Club.”

The **Shapiro Administration** remains committed to protecting the Commonwealth's natural resources, including clean water. Administered by DCNR, [Pennsylvania's Rivers Conservation Program](#) helps support initiatives that benefit all types of waterways and significant water resources including:

- Grants for projects to restore and protect rivers and watersheds
- Scenic Rivers
- Rivers Registry
- River of the Year and sojourns
- Water trails

The Conestoga River is one of [29 water trails in Pennsylvania](#), which provided safe access to waterways and connections to local history, ecology, geology, heritage, and wildlife.

As [more people discover Pennsylvania's waterways](#), it is important to remember that safety is the foundation of every trip. A [few simple habits](#) can make all the difference. Everybody should wear a life jacket, no matter their age or experience level. It is also important to know your skills and choose water that matches them. Beginners should stick to calm, flat water and stay close to shore. Finally, always check the conditions

before heading out, since even normally gentle rivers can rise or change quickly after rain.

Shapiro Administration's Record on Outdoor Recreation

Under **Governor Josh Shapiro's** leadership, Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation economy has grown to **\$20.4 billion**, supporting approximately **177,000 jobs** and generates **\$9.5 billion in wages**, according to the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis. Since taking office, the Governor and his Administration has helped grow the industry by **\$3.5 billion** and approximately **12,000 jobs**. The Governor has made outdoor recreation and tourism a central part of his economic development strategy, positioning Pennsylvania as a leader in outdoor recreation:

- Unveiled the Great American Getaway, to encourage more people to visit the Commonwealth
- Secured **\$422,000** to launch the Office of Outdoor Recreation, helping connect Pennsylvania's public lands, businesses, and workers
- Completed **\$228 million in infrastructure improvements** across Pennsylvania's public lands since taking office in 2023

Visit DCNR's website for more information on the River of the Year competition and check out DCNR's Calendar of Events for events on public lands.

Photos and video from the event are available on the PAcast website.

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