Pennsylvania
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Pennsylvania
Department of Environmental Protection

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Thursday, November 19, 2026

MEDIA CONTACTS:
DCNR: Wesley Robinson, werobinson@pa.gov, 717-877-6315
DEP Newsroom: ra-epnews@pa.gov

Shapiro Administration Invests $4.5 Million to Restore Floodplain, Improve Little Conestoga Creek Along Blue Green Connector in Lancaster County

Investments from Pennsylvania's Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and Environmental Protection (DEP) in the Blue Green Connector supported restoration of 25 acres of floodplain and wetland along the Little Conestoga Creek, removal of legacy sediment, the planting of native vegetation and habitat creation for wildlife, and recreational trails for visitors.

DCNR invested $1.2 million to support restoration of Little Conestoga Creek and two segments of more than a mile of trail connecting East Hempfield Township and Noel Dorwart Park to Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health.

DEP provided more than $3 million in Growing Greener grants, which helped secure matching federal funds, as well as a $440,000 Countywide Action Plan (CAP) Block Grant. DEP also provided technical assistance and permitting support to advance the project.




BLUE GREEN
CONNECTOR
Penn Medicine LGH Trailhead Kiosk
We All Need Water





East Hempfield Township, PA — Yesterday, **Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn** visited Lancaster County to discuss a total $4.5 million investment in the Blue Green Connector project, which will restore 25 acres of floodplain and wetlands along Little Conestoga Creek, improve water quality, and expand outdoor recreation opportunities for local residents.

The investment supports work to remove legacy sediment, plant native vegetation, create wildlife habitat, and build recreational trails. These improvements will help reduce flooding, improve water quality, and connect more residents to outdoor spaces.

DCNR invested **$1.2 million** to support restoration of Little Conestoga Creek and two segments of more than a mile of trail connecting East Hempfield Township and Noel Dorwart Park to Penn Medicine Lancaster General Health.

“This project is the result of strategic public and private investments in environmental and recreational work — resulting in critical steps towards improving wildlife habitat, restoring the Conestoga Creek Watershed, and supporting the mental and physical health of local residents,” said **Secretary Dunn.** “We all win when we can prioritize

environmental stewardship and the many benefits that come from responsible use of our natural spaces."

DEP provided more than **$3 million in Growing Greener grants**, which helped secure matching federal funds, as well as a **$440,000 Countywide Action Plan (CAP) Block Grant**. DEP also provided technical assistance and permitting support to advance the project.

"The Blue Green Connector is a great example of the partnership between state agencies, environmental groups, local leaders, and the private sector to improve our environment," said **DEP Secretary Shirley.** "This trail serves as a green space, a restored watershed, and demonstrates flood plain restoration in an urbanized area. The Little Conestoga Creek is becoming cleaner thanks to efforts from many partners who all aim to protect Pennsylvania's air, land, and water."

When completed in 2029, the Blue Green Connector will include 3.5 miles of accessible, multi-use trail, connecting with the 15-mile Greater Lancaster Heritage Pathway and five miles of existing trails. The network will serve approximately 225,000 residents in the Lancaster metropolitan area. Plans also include a trailside environmental learning lab with interpretive stations, demonstration areas, outdoor learning spaces, and public art.

Little Conestoga Creek is a priority watershed under Lancaster County's CAP. The ongoing Blue Green Connector Project includes the restoration of 25 acres of floodplain and wetland along 1.3 stream miles; the removal of 112,000 cubic yards of legacy sediment, which are soils that eroded from upstream areas; the planting of native vegetation and habitat creation for wildlife; and the annual reduction of 4 million pounds of sediment, 1,541 pounds of phosphorus, and 7,752 pounds of nitrogen from the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

"What makes the Blue Green Connector so meaningful is that it reflects what we've always believed about investing in Lancaster County: lasting progress happens when people and organizations come together around a shared vision," said **Shane Zimmerman, CEO of The Steinman Foundation**. "What began as an idea to restore a section of the Little Conestoga Creek has grown into something far greater than any one organization could have accomplished alone. Through the commitment of our partners, we're not simply restoring a waterway or building a trail. We're creating a lasting community resource that will connect people, strengthen our environment, and benefit Lancaster County for generations to come."

The multi-million-dollar initiative designed to restore the watershed and enhance flood resilience plan builds on DCNR's recently released Climate Action Plan to make public lands more sustainable and resilient for future generations. The 182-page plan outlines steps DCNR will take to prepare its lands and facilities for climate impacts, protect visitors, and help communities address climate-related risks. Drawing on findings from DEP's **Climate Change Impact Assessment**, the plan identifies how changing weather patterns and more extreme conditions could affect DCNR's lands, operations, and mission.

Restoring Lancaster County's Waterways

DCNR named the Conestoga River, which is part of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed, Pennsylvania's 2026 River of the Year. The river flows for more than 61 miles, from its headwaters in Berks County down to the Susquehanna River mostly through Lancaster County and below the Safe Harbor Dam. 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.

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.

Investing in Communities Through Statewide Recreation and Conservation Grants

DCNR's **Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2)** provides funding for local governments and nonprofit organizations to support recreation and conservation projects. Grants help communities develop and rehabilitate parks, plan and build trails, protect land and water resources, conduct conservation planning, and strengthen regional partnerships.

Under the Shapiro Administration, DCNR's C2P2 has **invested a total of approximately $315 million in more than 1,100 park and recreation projects across Pennsylvania**. Funding for this round of C2P2 grants comes from the Keystone Fund, Environmental Stewardship Fund, and additional sources.

Since 1995, DCNR has invested more than **$1.5 billion into more than 10,000 outdoor-related projects** in Pennsylvania. In 2026, the Shapiro Administration announced an **$81 million investment in new state funding** to support **more than 295 recreation and conservation projects across Pennsylvania**. These investments align with DCNR's 2025-29 **Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP):** *Outdoor Places, Shared Spaces*, which outlines a roadmap to improve outdoor access, equity, and sustainability throughout the Commonwealth and meet the outdoor recreation needs of Pennsylvanians.

If a nonprofit organization or local government is interested in applying for a C2P2 grant, DCNR staff are available to assist with questions, site visits, and guidance on preparing competitive applications. Applicants are encouraged to **contact their regional advisor** before starting a proposal. For more information visit **DCNR's Community Conservation Partnerships Program webpage**.

Photos and video of the event are available at PAcast.com.

# # #