

# Get Outdoors PA

## Centre Region Parks & Recreation highlights successful regional recreation efforts



By Molly A. Hetrick and Ronald J. Woodhead

**T**he Centre Region is a great place to get outdoors in Pennsylvania and is nestled among rolling hills, beautiful farmlands and rich forests, all in the shadow of Mount Nittany. The Centre Region Parks & Recreation Department (CRPR) is an agency of the Centre Region Council of Governments and is a cooperative effort among five municipalities surrounding State College Borough. First-time visits are often related to Penn State University, but the exciting offerings in the area keep people coming back over the years to visit or for some, to put down roots.

One of the many attributes of living in the Centre Region are the community parks across the region, a regional nature center, two newly-renovated swimming pools, a softball complex, and a great menu of recreation activities for all ages. CRPR has been cooperating for municipal services since 1970 and now operates 52 recreation sites across the region. CRPR is guided by a parks and recreation board and regional recreation authority, which includes one member from each of the five participating municipalities plus one from State College Area School District.

Neighborhood and regional parks throughout the region are common destinations for families and groups to gather for recreation, socializing and sports. If you visit Tudek Park, you will see families enjoying the playground, young people throwing a football in the grassy field, people walking the trails, horses grazing nearby and families riding bicycles. Tudek Park also features a butterfly garden with natural plants maintained by the local Master Gardeners. It's common to see visitors enjoying this area with cameras, binoculars or sketch pads.

Another popular park in the area is Spring Creek Park which offers playgrounds, tennis courts, ballfields, picnic pavilions and walking paths. The draw for this park is the beautiful Spring Creek which winds through the park, under a covered bridge, and continues through fields and fertile farms. For fisherman, this creek is very healthy and an excellent place for fly-fishing, while families and children enjoy wading and swimming in the shallow water. Many evenings you will see cars and families gathered to cheer for softball games or gathered at the pavilions for a cookout. These parks are important destinations in the community and are used frequently.

Another great destination in the Centre Region is the Millbrook Marsh Nature Center. This beautiful 62-acre wetland offers recreation opportunities and environmental education programs that introduce visitors to exploring an ecosystem by using their senses. This type of experiential learning is very important to the visiting school children who attend field trip programs at the center. Children who come with their families or with group programs have the opportunity to experience the marsh by smelling the skunk cabbage, observing the habits of a blue heron, watching the muskrats swim and play, learning the call of the red-winged blackbird, holding aquatic snails in their hands, and occasionally seeing a white-tailed deer standing in the meadow. A big part of the excitement at Millbrook Marsh Nature Center is the wild quality of the area, despite being nestled so close to campus. Some of the most exciting spotting at the nature center include seeing the large snapping turtles, the baby painted turtles, large bullfrogs sitting on the banks, a Great Blue Heron flying over, or the American Bittern fishing along the banks in the spring.

This wetlands nature center

includes a restored 1850s bank barn, a newly constructed LEED Silver certified classroom building, picnic pavilion, sun shelters, boardwalk trails, wildlife viewing areas, and a connection to the municipal bikepath network. The nature center annually hosts about 12,000 visitors to organized programs, not including recreational day users who come to explore the marsh, walk their dog or to watch the wildlife.

Another important outdoor component at CRPR is the Summer Day Camps. Youth day camps are held each summer at two different sites and offer eight weeks of full-day camps for children with outdoor activities, sports, crafts, games, field trips and swimming at the regional pools. Attending these fun summer camps is an important part of being a child in the Centre Region – a great place to meet new friends and spend the summer being a kid. The motto for summer camp is “Where Kids Can Be Kids” and the staff encourage children to participate in planning their own activities during camp. The highlight of the week is when the campers assemble and walk to one of the nearby swimming pools to spend the afternoon swimming and riding the waterslides. Anyone walking by the pools on these days will agree that it’s fun to be at summer camp!

The Centre Region also offers two community swimming pools that were recently renovated. The Welch and Park Forest Community Pools now offer new facilities with spray features, splash pads, water slides, a current channel, fitness swimming, a diving well and more. If you drive by these pools, seeing the children and adults playing, jumping, laughing and enjoying the water features, you want to get in on the fun.

The pools have become a very popular feature in the community both as a family destination and as a



**FOR ALL AGES** With the diverse set of recreation opportunities in the region, CRPR has something for everyone

hub for outdoor activities, including the “Welch Pool Water Walkers.” This low-impact program encourages participants to walk against the current in the lazy river for fitness; it is ideal for those recovering from injuries or who need a more gentle approach to exercise. The pools also offer swimming lessons, two swim teams, lap swim times and fun pool events such as the “Dive-In Movie” and special events such as “Pool-o-ween.”

Another exciting feature that attracts visitors and residents both is the newly-renovated John Hess Softball Complex. Located in rolling farmland in Harris Township along Route 45 between Boalsburg and Pine Grove Mills, this is one of the “Best Kept Secrets in Central PA” for softball enthusiasts. The John Hess Softball Field Complex was first created in 1963 by a group of softball players. Today, after a renovation with safety and ADA improvements and the municipal support of

the Centre Region Council of Governments, the complex continues as home to thousands of hours of fun and competition for both youth and adults. Currently there are 9 tournaments scheduled for summer 2012 on the four playing fields and over 1,000 softball games are played there each year.

In downtown State College is another attractive feature for residents – Centre Region Senior Center, which is a hub of recreation and activity for seniors. Visitors enjoy company, activities, exercises, noontime meals, music, crafts, dancing and more. Dropping by the Senior Center is always a treat; there is always something fun going on. The Senior Center also strives to promote outdoor programming by offering a summer games series called “Senior Games.” This year, the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Centre County Senior Games offers competitive activities such as golf, 1-mile walk, bowling, water volleyball, football throw and  
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their permit. Additionally, County Planning Departments are offering assistance in preparing educational materials and hosting seminars or workshops that can be tied into the public education and involvement requirements of MCM Nos. 1 and 2. Utilizing the abilities and resources of these local groups can only help MS4 permittees in completing their permit requirements.

**Continued EPA oversight.**

Pennsylvania's MS4 program has come under closer surveillance over the past several years with increased

EPA involvement. In 2010, EPA issued orders to 83 municipalities in southcentral Pennsylvania which cited deficiencies with their MS4 programs. Additionally, EPA conducted site inspections of several MS4 municipalities and conducted an extensive onsite review of all records pertaining to the MS4 program implementation. Recently, EPA, through a review of Pennsylvania's Phase II Watershed Implementation Plan as required under the Chesapeake Bay Tributary Strategy, has announced that

they will maintain "enhanced oversight" of the MS4 program until Pennsylvania can demonstrate that they will achieve the required 40 to 50 percent reduction in nutrient and sediment pollution from urban stormwater runoff. For those who were hoping the MS4 program would fall to the backburner or simply "go away," it appears that the MS4 program will remain under the regulatory radar for the foreseeable future. **(B)**



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"We want to key in on what you need to look for at your sites, and some of the things you can do to slow the insect's spread, including taking down the trees," Wagoner told her fellow park managers and Bureau of Forestry employees. "If nothing else, this pooling of people and expertise from the two bureaus enables us to put faces behind names. We now know who to contact in planning for the future." Since the emerald ash borer first was detected in June 2007 in Cranberry Township, Butler County, the parks and forestry bureaus have worked cooperatively with the state

Department of Agriculture to track and contain its spread.

Ash species compose less than four percent of Pennsylvania's forests, or about 308 million trees, and most are located in the state's northern tier counties. It especially is valued in the manufacture of baseball bats.

Native to Asia, the emerald ash borer first was detected in the U.S. in Michigan in 2002. Beetle larvae bore through ash trees, feeding on the inner bark and phloem, disrupting flow of water and nutrients through the tree, and causing their eventual death.

Tree owners fearing infestation should be alert for the May and early June emergence of adult insects through D-shaped exit holes in the bark. Other signs include dieback, woodpecker damage, and frequent, irregular branching from the main trunk.

Details on West Chester's Tree City Award U.S.A. can be found at [www.west-chester.com/tree.php](http://www.west-chester.com/tree.php).

Information on the emerald ash borer and other Pennsylvania forest pests can be found at [www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/insectsdisease/index.htm](http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/forestry/insectsdisease/index.htm). **(B)**



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more. Participants over the age of 50 can compete in these categories. The Senior Center also promotes "Active Walking" through several walking and hiking groups who visit local parks and outdoor areas for fitness walking.

Over the past decade as CRPR has developed programs and facilities, including acquiring new regional parks, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources has been instrumental in assisting this progress through land

acquisition projects, master plan developments, and the development of new park sites.

A regional parks initiative is currently underway that will add three new parks to the current properties managed by CRPR, that are focused on expanding opportunities for active, outdoor recreation. Since 2001, the elected officials of the five participating municipalities have been working together to provide new, larger regional parks for the future. Those

efforts have opened a new chapter in the long history of regional cooperation for municipal parks and recreation that involves shared funding of the acquisition, planning and development of those new park areas. CRPR is also fortunate that this level of cooperation has engaged funding assistance from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to help make the new regional parks a reality.

For more information is available at [www.crpr.org](http://www.crpr.org). **(B)**