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Contacts:

Agriculture: Shannon Powers, shpowers@pa.gov, 717.603.2056

Conservation and Natural Resources: Wesley Robinson, werobinson@pa.gov, 717.877.6315

Fish and Boat Commission: Mike Parker, michparker@pa.gov, 717.705.7806

Game Commission: Travis Lau, trlau@pa.gov, 717.705.6541

Pennsylvania Governor's Invasive Species Council Celebrates Third Annual PA Native Species Day at Big Elk Creek State Park

Franklin Township, PA - The **Pennsylvania Governor's Invasive Species Council** highlighted the importance of protecting native plants, insects, and animals during the third annual Pennsylvania Native Species Day at Big Elk Creek State Park in Chester County.

The Department of Agriculture-led advisory council brings state agencies, local governments, and environmental organizations together to make recommendations and spearhead strategies to tackle invasive species threats to our economy and environment and promote benefits of nurturing native plant and animals.

"Protecting our environment starts with each of us," said **Department of Agriculture Deputy Secretary Fred Strathmeyer**. "By planting native species in our gardens and yards, we create vital food and shelter for native wildlife and pollinators critical to our food supply. This simple act strengthens biodiversity and creates a healthier ecosystem. Let's work together, on Native Species Day and year-round, to support the organizations and business that promote native plants and ensure a thriving environment for generations to come."

Healthy native ecosystems provide numerous benefits, including clean water, diverse recreation opportunities, and a thriving economy. Invasive species, lacking natural predators, disrupt these ecosystems and harm native wildlife.

“Increased global trade and travel have escalated the threat of invasive species on the commonwealth’s 2.2 million acres of state forests, millions of acres of state park and game lands, and millions of acres of private forestlands,” said **Jason Hall, a Regional Forester with Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)**. “DCNR combats invasives through training, outreach, and collaboration with other agencies. Protecting native plants and forests ensures beautiful and productive landscapes for future generations.”

“Conserving and protecting native aquatic species happens when we recognize their value and actively help to minimize threats against them,” said **Tim Schaeffer, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission**. “With boaters already taking to the water to enjoy the warmer weather and action-packed spring fishing, they can do their part by taking the plugs out of their boats when leaving a waterway, draining any water that may harbor invasive species, and cleaning vegetation from motors and other parts of the boat’s exterior. In fact, those proactive steps are now required as a result of new regulations that went into effect for this boating season.”

"Pennsylvania has 480 native bird and mammal species reliant on healthy ecosystems," said **Scott Bearer, Chief Land Manager, Pennsylvania Game Commission**. "Invasive plants and insects disrupt these ecosystems. Controlling them is complex and expensive, but we work with partners to ensure healthy habitats for wildlife now and for the future."

Deputy Secretary Strathmeyer also invited proposals to the Department of Agriculture to manage the new **PA Center for Plant Excellence**, which was funded in the 2023-24 first **Shapiro Administration** Budget. The center’s goal will be to expand growth opportunities for nursery crops, indoor agriculture, fruit, vegetable, nuts, hardwoods, honey, and other specialty crop producers. Detailed proposal guidelines are available in the [Saturday, May 11, 2024 edition of the PA Bulletin](#). Proposals must be submitted by 5 p.m. on Friday, June 14, 2024 through the [PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development’s Electronic Single Application](#).

DCNR Park Manager Rob Campion led speakers and attendees through several stations to learn to identify native and invasive species, explained how native meadows in the park will aid native bird and insect populations, a discussion on recently planted buffers to mitigate nutrient runoff into Big Elk Creek, and the opportunity for attendees to install blue bird boxes to encourage more native species to call the park home.

Video and photos of today’s event will be available later today at PACast.com.

State parks and organizations are joining the council’s effort by offering public education and volunteer activities across Pennsylvania. For more information, visit NativeSpeciesDay.pa.gov.

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