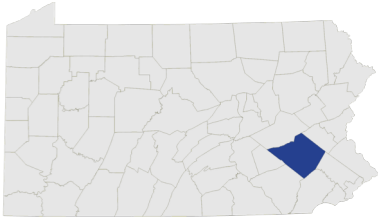


My Story



Two Miles Closer

Big Woods Trail at French Creek S.P.

By Sarah Presogna, Nature Educator

"As an educator, this enables me to bring more people out into the field for interpretive walks and lessons, which thrills me."



French Creek State Park began its life as a glimmer of hope. As part of Roosevelt's New Deal, land was purchased from struggling families and – through the work of the CCC – transformed into recreational areas and green spaces free for public use. Through the years this legacy of land conservation and public access has continued; the park has grown steadily through parcels of land purchased by the state, donated, and placed in trust in partnerships with land conservation organizations. Every acquisition brought recreational benefits as well: new trails, new cabins, new habitats to explore.

The newest section of the Big Woods Trail exemplifies this legacy. The two-mile trail is situated on newly acquired and preserved farmland which has been brought into the French Creek Park system. The trailhead, located off Center Road near Birdsboro, boasts a



Total Public/Private Investment: \$1.3 million
Keystone Fund Investment: \$903,500

large parking lot and the trail winds through grassy meadows that abut successional forests, eventually connecting to the Schuylkill River Trail at the Thun Trail section. Trail users are treated to breathtaking views of the mountain ridges along the Schuylkill River as

well as numerous species of birds that thrive in both meadow and forested habitats, native wildflowers, and the occasional deer sighting.

Those attributes alone make this trail special. But the true wonder of the new Big Woods Trail is its accessibility. Designed to expand recreational activities to more people, this trail is hard-paved at a 5% slope. Unlike the rocky and muddy trails throughout the area, this trail is wheel-friendly and opens up hikes to wheelchairs, strollers, and other tools of limited

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The long-term plan for the Big Woods Trail is thirteen miles of ADA accessible trail that winds through different townships, counties, private, and public lands. It might not seem like such a significant goal; after all, there are many trails that cross through boundaries in these woods already. But the need and desire for a more inclusive trail is great. Last year, when the lower portion of the trail was opened, an article written about the project was unfortunately worded in a way that led readers to believe the whole thirteen miles had already been completed. Groups came, excited to take on the trail. There were wheelchair users, motorized scooters, and families with wagons in tow.

As this project develops so will French Creek. It is one of the things I love about this place: its rich history is embedded in every detail of the park and as it grows it helps further its mission of environmental stewardship and outdoor recreation and education for everyone.