

Introduction to Group Activities

The mission of DCNR is to “conserve and sustain Pennsylvania’s natural resources for present and future generations’ use and enjoyment.” With about 2.2 million acres of Bureau of Forestry managed land, State Forests present a unique opportunity for dispersed, low-density outdoor recreation that small forest areas or private ownership cannot offer. The Bureau of Forestry is compelled to discover and afford those forms of dispersed forest recreation that other land uses or ownerships do not provide, and that are compatible with the forest ecosystem.

State Forests are finite, however, and cannot provide everything to everyone. Likewise, recreational amenities cannot facilitate over-use for an extended time. Increasing recreational use results in a greater impact on other resources and the forest ecosystems. Pine Creek Valley is extraordinarily beautiful, and should be kept that way. Transportation and environmental infrastructure is minimal along Pine Creek, and, while this may be challenging when planning a group activity, it adds to the charm of the valley, helping to make Pine Creek what it is today.

With the influx of more individuals and groups in pursuit of their recreational activities, it becomes increasingly important for the Bureau of Forestry to develop management strategies to provide a quality outdoor experience, minimize conflicts and maintain ecological processes. One such strategy is implementing activity agreements and authorizations for group activities on State Forest land, especially on the Pine Creek Rail Trail. The unique nature of the Pine Creek Rail Trail requires special attention to the details and plans for a group activity; therefore, all activities must adhere to the following Guidelines and have an approved Activity Plan.

Guidelines for Organized and Group Activities on the Pine Creek Rail Trail

- **Definitions:**

- **ACTIVITY:** An ACTIVITY requires a **Commercial Activities Agreement**, a **Special Activities Agreement**, or a **Letter of Authorization**. These documents are necessary to protect environmental resources and facilities and to minimize conflicts with traditional forest users.
- **Group Activity:** Participating in a group that engages in any of the following types of ACTIVITY:
 - An ACTIVITY that the DEPARTMENT determines requires a large land area or unique land formation.
 - An ACTIVITY that the DEPARTMENT determines may impact or conflict with normal or traditional visitor uses or experiences on state forest land.
 - An ACTIVITY that the DEPARTMENT determines may have a greater than normal impact on natural resources or the environment.
- **DEPARTMENT:** References to DEPARTMENT include the Bureau of Forestry, Bureau of State Parks, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.
- **SPONSOR:** References to SPONSOR include any Group, Organization, Club, or Individual that desires to engage in an ACTIVITY on State Forest land.
- **VENDOR:** References to VENDOR include any Corporation, Sole Proprietorship, or Partnership that desires to engage in a commercial activity on State Forest land.
- **Letter of Authorization:** A Letter of Authorization will be issued for any ACTIVITY that is organized as a Group Activity, does not require a Special Activities Agreement, is not perceived as dangerous or adversely impact or conflict with normal or traditional users experiences, nor sponsored/co-sponsored by the Forest District.
- **Special Activities Agreement:** A Special Activities Agreement will be issued for any ACTIVITY that is organized as a Group Activity, potentially dangerous, large or otherwise which may adversely impact or conflict with normal or traditional users experiences or have a potential environmental impact. Non-profit organizations may charge an administration fee to cover operational costs, which may include prizes. The Bureau may collect a fee from the SPONSOR based on services rendered* for ACTIVITY administration and post-event trail inspections.
- **Commercial Activities Agreement:** A Commercial Activities Agreement will be issued for any ACTIVITY in which the VENDOR conducts commercial activities that are for-profit on State Forest lands. Annual fee of \$250. The Bureau may collect a fee from the VENDOR based on services rendered* for ACTIVITY administration and post-event trail inspections.
- ***Services Rendered:**
 - DEPARTMENT shall use person-hours and equipment-hours beyond routine duties necessary to accommodate the ACTIVITY to calculate estimated, incurred expenses directly related to the ACTIVITY.
 - Time records will be kept.
 - VENDOR or SPONSOR shall be invoiced after the ACTIVITY.
 - VENDOR or SPONSOR shall pay the invoice within thirty (30) days after the invoice date.
 - The final invoice will not exceed the estimate by 10 percent.
 - Checks shall be made payable to the **Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**.
 - **Only** the State Forester may waive any costs associated with Commercial or Special Activities Agreements.

- **Definitions, continued:**
 - **Forest District:** The State Forest within which a District Forester has jurisdiction. For the purposes of an ACTIVITY on the Pine Creek Rail Trail, Tiadaghton State Forest covers Lycoming County, and Tioga State Forest covers Tioga County.
- **All Group Activities require an Activity Plan as described on page 4.**
- ACTIVITY requests must be written, either paper or electronic, and the request date will be the date on which the Forest District receives the written request, not a verbal request.
- Requests must be received by the following deadlines, to allow sufficient processing time:
 - Letter of Authorization requests must be received at least four to six weeks before the activity.
 - Commercial and Special Activities Agreement requests must be received at least twelve weeks prior to the ACTIVITY. A minimum of eight weeks is required to process the request through appropriate channels in DEPARTMENT's Central Office and Office of Attorney General, *after* the District Forester approves the ACTIVITY and the Agreement is written.
- No ACTIVITY may take place on a state recognized holiday or holiday weekend, including, but not limited to, Easter Sunday, Memorial Day, Independence Day, Labor Day and Thanksgiving Day. The opening weekend of trout season shall also be included. Weekends include Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.
 - Maximum participation in a Pine Creek Rail Trail ACTIVITY is 250 participants.
 - **Between March 15 – May 1 and between September 21 – November 1:** Maximum participation in a weekend ACTIVITY is 100 participants.
 - Only one Pine Creek Rail Trail ACTIVITY may take place within a Forest District on the same weekend. Only one ACTIVITY will be permitted at any location on consecutive weekends. Dates will be booked on a "first come – first served" basis.
 - The Forest District may request the SPONSOR or VENDOR to hold their ACTIVITY at a location other than that requested, in order to disperse events.
 - Competitive events are prohibited on the Pine Creek Rail Trail.
- Commercial and Special Activities may require the SPONSOR / VENDOR to provide transportation to and from the ACTIVITY.
- An ACTIVITY may require additional comfort facilities located where meals/refreshments will be available.
- Failure to observe any guidelines, rules and regulations, permit conditions or agreements may result in immediate cancellation of the ACTIVITY, and/or prohibition of any future ACTIVITY for the organization.

Activity Plan for the Pine Creek Rail Trail

Your organization must provide the district with a very detailed, very thorough Activity Plan.

- Activity Plan should include times when participants are expected to arrive, return, etc. Address the “W” questions: Who, What, When, Where, Why, hoW. Include all related events your group plans to hold in conjunction with the ACTIVITY, e.g. tent with refreshments, etc. A map of the route and locations where events are planned is required.
- Include an accurate number of participants, or a maximum. All subsequent plans must be made to accommodate the maximum number of participants.
- Provisions must be made for trash collection. In addition, a designated trail sweeper must follow the group to ensure litter is properly disposed of. Participants are expected to be environmentally conscious.
- Trained medical personnel *should* accompany your group, preferably at least one certified Emergency Medical Technician.
- County Emergency Services must be notified, after the ACTIVITY is approved, for every county in which the ACTIVITY occurs. You should provide them with a copy of the plans.
- Rain dates or inclement weather plans must be included, unless you plan to simply cancel the ACTIVITY.
- The trail will not be closed to the public during your organization’s ACTIVITY. Address steps that will be taken to ensure participant usage does not conflict with the general public.
- Commercial and Special Activities Agreements only:** Since your organization’s activity is expected to draw a large group of users, you must provide a plan for transportation of the participants. Jersey Shore is the only location that was designed to accommodate a bus. Whitetail Access Area can accommodate some transportation, depending on the type and size. Other locations suitable for a bus to turn around include Ross Run, Clark Farm/Utceter Station, Tomb Flats, Slate Run, and Ansonia. Any agreement with a bus/transportation company must be submitted in writing, as well as any agreements with local businesses.
- For qualifying activities:** Provisions must be made for extra restroom facilities. Those provided by the Bureau of Forestry are intended for normal usage, and cannot handle the additional usage from large gatherings. The regional Sewage Enforcement Officer *may* require notification of your intent to place portable toilets in their jurisdiction. Participants must follow appropriate trailside etiquette.

The District Forester and/or Assistant District Forester will review your Activity Plan upon receipt. You will then be made aware of any issues that require further clarification. If the Activity Plan is deemed acceptable, permission will be granted. You will then be required to complete a Risk Management Plan that will be included in the Letter of Authorization, Special Activities Agreement or Commercial Activities Agreement. The Risk Management Plan will be relatively simple, because most of the information will have already been addressed in your Activity Plan. Upon receipt of the Risk Management Plan, the Bureau will issue a Letter of Authorization, Special Activities Agreement or Commercial Activities Agreement, whichever is appropriate.

A few words to consider: the smaller and less complex your ACTIVITY, the more likely it will be approved. The Bureau needs a solid Activity Plan.