

THE BURG

Earth Day Birthday: on this golden anniversary, there are many ways to celebrate, contribute locally

31 March 2020



Earth Day began on April 22, 1970, when 20 million Americans filled streets and public places in a unified protest of environmental ignorance and inaction. The day is widely recognized as the birth of the environmental movement.

Fifty years later, the tradition endures, with a more salient need for environmental protection than ever before. On the anniversary this month, millions will gather and act on behalf of our planet and natural resources for Earth Day 50. The Earth Day Network proclaimed “Climate Action” as this year’s theme, the most pressing challenge to the future of humanity and the systems that support life.

To bring this home, Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) released a new website that provides a calendar of activities, events and volunteer opportunities across the state for the month of April. There will be Earth Day celebrations at Black Moshannon State Park and Prince Gallitzin State Park, cleanups at Harrisburg’s Riverfront Park and Nockamixon State Park and a tree planting at Colonel Denning State Park and Pine Grove Furnace State Park, to name a few.*

PPFF has dubbed 2020 “The Year of the Tree,” a call for stewardship and investment in the natural infrastructure of our shared green spaces, areas that bring in over 40 million visitors and \$1 billion in tourism revenue annually. The organization’s area of focus

encompasses PA's 121 state parks and 2.2 million acres of forested land across 20 forest districts.

"We recognize 2020 as 'The Year of the Tree' because trees are the panacea for much of what ails us," says Marci Mowery, president of PPF.

Trees remove carbon from the air, provide oxygen for us to breathe, reduce flooding and control runoff and soil erosion, while also cleaning water. Trees provide shade and block wind, which reduces energy costs and mitigates heat from paved surfaces.

"One of the simplest things that we can all do to reverse the impact of climate change is to preserve the trees that we have and plant additional trees," Mowery said.

PA's forests have undergone massive change since the mid-19th century—from clearcutting in the late 1800s to tree planting by the Civilian Conservation Corps following World War I to the more recent and gradual regrowth of the canopy. But storm damage, drought, human traffic and expansion and climate change are challenging old growth forests and their regrowth.

PPF is working to improve this by planting trees that can withstand invasive insects, increasing temperatures and other climate-related hardships. Alongside its 41 state park and forest chapters, called "Friend Groups," PPF is recruiting a volunteer "tree army" to help plant tree seedlings.

Gratifying

PPF is a Camp Hill-based, statewide nonprofit advocating for support and stewardship of the state's parks and forestland through educational opportunities, recreation and volunteerism. Its Friend Groups are built on volunteers lending their time and support to bring people closer to PA's natural places through environmental stewardship and engagement.

Mary Soderberg is a longtime volunteer with PPF and a member of the board of the PPF chapter, Friends of Pine Grove Furnace. She and her husband have a cabin in the park. This Friend Group hosts a volunteer event every year to observe Earth Day, which, in the most recent years, has been tree planting.

"We want there to be pine trees in Pine Grove Furnace State Park for future generations to enjoy," she said. "I always find it very gratifying when families come help out on Earth Day. Hopefully, those experiences help to guide those young people in their future decisions."

Soderberg still remembers the spring of 1970, when, at the University of Wisconsin, she witnessed thousands of fellow students turn out for activism on the first Earth Day in downtown Madison. Earth Day still means a lot for her.

"[Earth Day] reminds me of how thrilling it was to see a hawk in 1970," she said. "It was so exciting we would pull the car over so we could watch the hawk."

She went on to explain how her Peace Corps experience solidified how important and impactful environmental activism is. At that time, she witnessed DDT being used by local farmers with no protection. DDT, an insecticide, was banned in the United States in 1972, an environmental action stemming from the first Earth Day two years earlier.

If inspiration strikes, there are plenty of ways to get involved on Earth Day 50 beyond strikes and rallies—and all of them are good for personal health.

“On a human level, trees reduce stress, which causes illnesses, while also speeding up healing time,” Mowery said.

If you want to get outside, volunteer for a cleanup, attend an environmental reading, plant trees or contribute to citizen science research. Or learn more about climate change and personal actions to mitigate your carbon footprint.

Source: <https://theburgnews.com/in-the-burg/earth-day-birthday-on-this-golden-anniversary-there-are-many-ways-to-celebrate-contribute-locally>