



# PROTECTING THE LEGACY OF THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS IN PENNSYLVANIA

*photo-Sam Fordick*

*by Jessica Aiello*

**A**s a retired environmental education specialist from Greenwood Furnace State Park, Huntingdon County, Paul Fagley has vast knowledge of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the first nationwide conservation program created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Fagley also knows that many people don't realize the significant role former Pennsylvania Governor Gifford Pinchot had on the CCC.

"Roosevelt planned to have the CCC boys work solely on federally owned lands. But, even before the CCC was a nationwide program, Pinchot created similar camps to fix roads and plant trees. Being friends with Roosevelt, Pinchot's efforts rubbed off, and the CCC—on federal- and state-owned lands—was born," said Fagley.

Rather than focusing solely on federal lands, as Roosevelt originally intended, CCC camps sprung up in state parks and forestlands across Pennsylvania. During the 8 years of the CCC program, more than 150 camps were working across Pennsylvania, making Pennsylvania second only to California in the number of CCC camps. Pennsylvania also led the way in the number of African American camps, having 30 of the 250 camps nationwide. In a Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) newsletter article from Spring 2021, Fagley wrote that Pennsylvania's total Black CCC enrollment was slightly higher

than the state's percentage of the black population at the time, and exceeded 9 percent before the 1935 restrictions (that limited African American camp members to working only in their home state and stopped any new enrollments).

## **How did the CCC enhance outdoor recreation?**

Unlike many other states at the time, Pennsylvania already had a well-established state park and forest system. CCC boys helped grow the system while also working on other lands like the Allegheny National Forest, Soil Conservation Service Camps, Army lands, and local parks and forests. Camp members improved the number and variety of recreational amenities on those lands. They built roadways, bridges, tree plantations and trails. They also built dams to create lakes for fishing, boating and swimming, like the first concrete and stone dam ever built by the CCC, located in what is now R.B. Winter State Park, Union County. In many places, they also built instream fish habitat structures. While CCC architecture is quite different throughout the country, a unifying theme is the use of local and native materials, making structures that blend with their environment.

"When they built on the land, they didn't want their structures to intrude on the landscape. They stone faced the dams with native rock from the area to make them look like

they grew out of the land. There was a natural design philosophy. They didn't want it to just look like a concrete wall," said Fagley.

## Where can you see the CCC legacy?

"Laurel Hill State Park is home to the largest collection of CCC-era architecture in the Commonwealth," said Mike Mumau, the park's manager. "We also believe it may be one of the largest intact collections of CCC-era architecture in the nation. These buildings and structures are a direct link to the cultural history of our area. It provides a tremendous sense of place. The structures have become living symbols of the hard work and commitment of our CCC boys," said Mumau.

On July 28, 2024, Poe Valley State Park, Centre County, will celebrate CCC Legacy Day. Visitors can learn about the CCC, see the dam built by program participants and have a lunch of what they would have eaten in the camps. Other great places to see the long-lasting impacts of the CCC include Whipple Dam State Park, Huntingdon County; French Creek State Park, Berks and Chester counties; Penn-Roosevelt State Park, Centre County; and Pymatuning State Park, Crawford County; as well as the CCC museums at Laurel Hill State Park, Somerset County; Promised Land State Park, Pike County; and Parker Dam State Park, Clearfield County.

Forty-five Pennsylvania state parks have CCC features, and many features remain in state forests. Find a full list on the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources's website.

### More information:



[dcr.pa.gov/StateParks/History/CCCYears/Pages/default.aspx](https://dcr.pa.gov/StateParks/History/CCCYears/Pages/default.aspx)

## What is being done to protect the CCC legacy?

The PPF has partnered in the efforts to preserve these historical resources. PPF has leveraged grants and funding opportunities to support existing preservation work of park staff. For example, PPF helped organize a volunteer vacation for the HistoriCorps, where HistoriCorps staff, PPF volunteers, Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps members and Laurel Hill State Park staff worked cooperatively to restore the mess hall in Camp Tree Army. PPF also received grants and private donations to restore one of the few remaining CCC camp living quarters still in existence, located at French Creek State Park. It will be used for environmental education and events.

"It is impossible to overstate the importance of the CCC boys to the conservation of Pennsylvania's natural resources and the long-lasting legacy of their work," said Marci Mowery, PPF President. "The rich history of the wonderful efforts of the CCC is worth preserving and sharing, so future generations feel inspired to get involved in protecting our natural world."

Individual state parks are striving to protect their CCC resources, too. Laurel Hill State Park is actively working to develop a Cultural Resource Management Plan that will guide the use and maintenance of the CCC structures within the park's historic district for generations to come. Mumau notes that balancing the need for historic preservation with current recreational demands can be challenging, but his staff and partners are prepared.

"All of our CCC boys have since passed away. It is our job as park professionals to ensure their legacy is preserved and protected," said Mumau.


If you want to help ensure that the work of the CCC lives on, learn more about their efforts and volunteer for upcoming events and conservation projects at [paparksandforests.org/our-work/volunteerism](https://paparksandforests.org/our-work/volunteerism). 

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Construction of the Jones Mill Run Dam at Laurel Hill State Park, Somerset County.

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Members of a CCC crew work on the foundation of the dam that created Laurel Hill Lake at Laurel Hill State Park.

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Roosevelt's Tree Army had a lasting impact on Pennsylvania including the improvement of water quality through the planting of trees.