



Testimony before the PA Senate Environmental Resources & Energy and Labor & Industry Committees
Importance of Pennsylvania Waterways to Energy and Economic Development
County Executive Rich Fitzgerald, Allegheny County

Good morning. My name is Rich Fitzgerald, and I am the County Executive here in Allegheny County. On behalf of the county, we welcome the Senate Environmental Resources and Energy and Senate Labor and Industry Committees here to our Courthouse. Chairs Yaw and Bartolotta and Minority Chairs Comitta and Tartaglione, thank you for coming here and inviting me to speak about this important issue for our community.

Throughout the past 11 years of my administration, we have focused heavily on the opportunities that exist in this county for economic development and energy around our waterways.

Just last month, we awarded \$21.8 million in grants from our Trail Development Fund to advance trail and active transportation projects. Eighteen projects received funding through the program which was open to nonprofits, municipalities, for-profit businesses and councils of government. Since 2012, we have also distributed \$1.2 million in Active Allegheny grants and an additional \$9.8 million county and grant dollars for county projects, all around bike and pedestrian infrastructure. We've invested about a million dollars a year in these important projects.

These efforts have not just been county focused, but also look to build on long distance systems such as the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail, the Westmoreland Heritage Trail and the Great Allegheny Passage (or the GAP). We have partnered with our surrounding counties and even states to continue to build a trail system that highlights this wonderful resource in our community.

The Three Rivers Water Trail in Allegheny County is a system along the Ohio, Monongahela, Allegheny and Youghiogheny rivers with 30+ access points along the rivers with non-motorized board launches. The trail was created and stewarded by Friends of the Riverfront and has direct spending impacts on communities and strengthens connections to other trails throughout the region.

We know that trails, in general, generated significant economic development dollars. These systems follow the rivers and are critical for our overall economy too. You don't have to wait long once the weather warms up to begin seeing boats out, kayaks on the river, and people exploring the trails and rivers. A recent economic impact study by the GAP showed that the GAP has a total impact of \$121.2 million in economic impact, including \$75 million in direct spending. generated \$19 million in tax revenue annually, with approximately \$9 million coming back to state, county and local governments.

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There are also an estimated 1,400 jobs directly tied to trails. Self-reported, an overnight user of the trails reported spending \$496 per day while a day user spent \$90 per day on average. And while a significant number of users (67%) are from within the five-county GAP region, 33% live outside of it, creating GAP tourists that come to our region to use the trail, including some that fly into the Pittsburgh International Airport specifically for that experience.

In 2016, I had the opportunity to see first-hand the completion of the 335-mile GAP trail that stretches from Pittsburgh to DC. It gave me an up-close look at the trail economy and a better understanding of what the GAP, and the entire trail system in our community, means for economic development and tourism. I've had the opportunity to repeat that trip, and portions of it, several other times going both from Pittsburgh to DC, and DC to Pittsburgh. And along the way, I brought along another 50+ people for all or a portion of the ride, including DCNR Secretary Cindy Dunn and others.

It's no secret that in the 1980s, the steel industry experienced a significant downturn and plants and other supporting manufacturing and industrial operations that were located along the rivers either shut down or reduced their production. The need to move materials along our rivers decreased, as did the use of rail for those same purposes. Our energy needs changed. And it provided a rare opportunity for us to reclaim those properties and develop trail systems from those localities.

It also provided an opportunity for development of new energy uses. In November 2018, the University of Pittsburgh announced that it had signed a letter of intent to purchase 100 percent of the power from a low-impact hydroelectric plan to be built on the Allegheny River at the existing Allegheny Lock and Dam No. 2, just below the Highland Park Bridge. And in January 2021, we announced similar plans, entering into a power purchase agreement for 7.4 MW of electricity from a new, low-impact, run-of-river hydroelectric facility to be located on the Ohio River. The 35-year agreement and financial investment makes possible the development and financing of new renewable energy capacity right in the county. Both agreements were signed with Rye Development, who you are also hearing from this morning.

Hydropower or hydroelectric power is one of the oldest and largest sources of renewable energy. With such an important resource in our region with our three rivers, it only makes sense that we harness that energy in a way that protects that natural resource and ensures continued recreational use. We are excited about the opportunities that exist here in our region around our rivers. They're not just important to the animals that live in them, or the people that boat on them. We are all connected to our rivers – and that's probably truer here, in the city where the three rivers meet – than anywhere else.

Thank you for your interest in talking with us about our vast water resources and we have embraced the opportunities here that they provide. I welcome your questions and am happy to provide any additional detail you may need.