



For Immediate Release
March 17, 2017

KANE, Pa -- PA Route 6 Alliance and the PA Wilds Center for Entrepreneurship (PA Wilds Center) are excited to announce they will be launching a regional façade grant program for communities along Route 6 in the Pennsylvania Wilds.

The program is made possible thanks to an \$183,000 Keystone Communities grant from the PA Dept. of Community and Economic Development (DCED), and project support funding from the PA Dept. of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR).

State partners and the two regional nonprofits announced the program Thursday at The Laughing Owl Press Company, a growing small business in downtown Kane that partners said is a good example of the types of applicants they are looking for.

“We are thrilled that our state partners have decided to invest in this project with us,” said PA Route 6 Alliance Executive Director Terri Dennison, whose organization will implement the bulk of the award. “It is going to create a lot of opportunities for communities and businesses in the region. We are still working out the details of the program, but anticipate it will be a matching grant program that will fund about 32 façade projects at \$5000 each, as well as make smaller matching signage grants available to 50 retail and host site establishments involved in The Wilds Cooperative of PA, a visitor experience the PA Wilds Center is working to curate and grow.”

The regional façade grant program concept was developed by the PA Wilds Planning Team, a group of regional stakeholders that are part of the PA Wilds Center. It builds on many previous investments at the local, state and federal level in nature and heritage tourism in the region and helps advance principles laid out in the *PA Wilds Design Guide for Community Character Stewardship*, an award-winning voluntary planning document that launches its 2nd Edition next month.

Partners decided to focus the pilot along Route 6 as doing so would leverage recent and upcoming DCNR and DCED state investments in the area as well as a bicycle and pedestrian plan being undertaken by PennDOT for Route 6, also designated as state bicycle route Y.

“Initiatives that encourage revitalization and business development, like the project led by the PA Route 6 Alliance, contribute greatly to the strength and vitality of Pennsylvania’s communities,” said DCED Secretary Dennis Davin. “The Keystone Communities funding that the Alliance received will benefit efforts all along Route 6 in McKean, Potter, Tioga, and Warren counties – restoring façades and improving signage – to help bolster the economic well-being of the region’s businesses, communities, and residents.”

“DCNR is delighted to participate in this shared investment strategy by the state agencies as it truly exemplifies Governor Wolf’s “government that works” philosophy,” said DCNR Secretary Cindy Adam Dunn.

Some best-known tourism assets are shared by the Pennsylvania Wilds and the PA Route 6 Heritage Corridor – the National Wild & Scenic Allegheny River, Kinzua Skywalk and State Park visitor center, PA Lumber Museum, the Dark Skies at Cherry Springs State Park, and PA Grand Canyon. PA Route 6 itself is a popular driving destination with its many charming downtowns. Also critical, many communities along Route 6 have continued to work with the Alliance on their individual Heritage Community Plans and were in a state of readiness for the regional façade grant program.

The hope is that if the pilot goes well, the program can be offered in future years in different areas around the region and along the Heritage Corridor.

“A lot of our region’s downtowns don’t have the capacity to run a full blown Main Street program or similar program where façade grants might be made available,” said Clearfield County Planning Director Jodi Brennan, who spearheaded development of the regional program as Chair of the PA Wilds Planning Team’s Design Guide Committee. “Taking a regional approach can help bridge that gap.”

“We’ve seen a lot of nature and heritage tourism investment in the Pennsylvania Wilds in recent years, and it is creating real opportunities for communities to draw visitors in to fuel business and job growth and improve quality of life,” said PA Wilds Center Executive Director Ta Enos. “To attract visitors – and most other kinds of investment -- communities need to appear welcoming. This program helps communities achieve that.”

As part of the application, the county governments of Tioga, Potter, McKean and Warren signed a cooperative agreement to assist with in-kind support such as meeting space and assistance by their county planners.

“Any time you ask the state for funding, one of their first questions is: is there local buy-in, local leadership?” Enos said. “They want to see it at a lot of levels – business, nonprofits, local government. We appreciate the commissioners in Tioga, Potter, McKean and Warren counties stepping up to help us put forth a competitive application. It is one of the beauties of the regional work we’re all involved in, that we have built this network of partners with shared

goals who understand each other's capabilities and how we can put that to work for the betterment of our communities."

Joe Lanich, who owns Laughing Owl Press with his wife, Andrea, started their letterpress business in their garage in 2010 but quickly grew it into a storefront operation. Last year, they purchased a building in downtown Kane that needed a lot of work inside and out. They spent many months running the business by day and sanding floors and painting by night. Joe dug up pictures of the building's historic storefront for inspiration, and is hoping to get to the exterior soon.

"These old buildings in rural PA are a lot for a small operator like us to take on," he said. "We are really excited about the matching grant program as it would help make exterior improvements possible." He said Laughing Owl Press hopes to apply if the program fits its timeline.

Dennison said the program is expected to leverage at minimum \$183,000 in private-sector investment through match. An exact timeline and details of the program will be released in coming months.

"We are thrilled that PA Route 6 Alliance is able to bring organizational capacity, expertise and leadership to the table to help accomplish the shared vision for this pilot program," Enos said. "The Alliance is a longtime partner around the Wilds table and is respected for the work they have done over many years to enhance and promote the Route 6 Heritage Area. We are excited to work with them."

For more information about the PA Wilds Center or PA Route 6 Alliance visit www.pawildscenter.org and www.paroute6.com.

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