

Big Bend Bird-Viewing Platform January Project Status

In July of 2006, the Allegheny Outdoor Club (AOC) committed to assist the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in building a bird-viewing platform in the Big Bend Recreation Area downstream from the Kinzua Dam.

After site clearing by the AOC and after three years of fund-raising, in September 2009 a 16' X 24' bird-viewing platform was completed, overlooking the Allegheny River upstream from Dixon Island where bald eagles tend to congregate and where bird life and water fowl life is evident. (The platform is referred to as a bird-viewing platform, so as not to raise visitors' expectations about seeing eagles.)

For the project to date, \$75,000 has been raised and spent on platform design and construction, plus construction of a 300-yard handicap accessible Watchable Wildlife trail, leading from the Big Bend Visitor Center parking area to the platform. Platform material is Western Red Cedar; however, the deck and railings are constructed from Trex, a man-made composite material, to reduce maintenance and extend platform life.

The final phase of the project, yet to funded, is the placement of a three-sided kiosk near the Big Bend Visitor Center parking area and several interpretive panels throughout the project, including two or more on the platform itself. On the kiosk are planned three 48" high X 36" wide panels, while the remaining panels will be 24" high x 36" wide. Two will be on the platform (eagles/ospreys and river ducks/birds), three will be at river level (sporting fish, water/watershed, and non-point source pollution) and the balance along the 300-yard trail (songbirds and habitat/plant life).

While panel fabricating, framing and mounting costs vary, the project steering committee has determined that for a \$250 donation, a person, company or organization can have its name on a 24" x 36" panel as the panel sponsor; for a 48" X 36" panel, the amount would be \$1,000. Of course, donations of any amount will be accepted. Donations will be used for interpretive panels and benches, trees, birdhouses, etc., along the Watchable Wildlife Trail.

Donations are payable to Penn Soil Resource Conservation & Development Council (Penn Soil RC & D), a project partner and a recognized 501 (c) (3) entity. Penn Soil RC & D collects and disperses all project funds.

Financial contributors to the project to date are:

Pennsylvania Lumber Heritage Region	\$25,000 grant
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	\$18,683
FirstEnergy Corporation	\$10,000 donation
FirstEnergy Foundation	\$10,000 award
Community Foundation of Warren County	\$7,500 award
Northern Allegheny Conservation Association	\$2,000 award
Betts Foundation	\$1,000 award
Individual donations	\$490
Water Resources Education Network	\$300 grant