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# Visit SOUTHWEST PA!

photo-Linda Stager

by Linda Stager

**B**irthplace of the environmental conservation movement, the 10-county southwest region of Pennsylvania is known for its picturesque rolling hills and rugged landscapes. Pittsburgh is at the heart of this region, which offers a unique blend of urban and rural experiences that the whole family can enjoy.

Pittsburgh is home to world-class museums and renowned universities, making it an excellent destination for those exploring culture and education. Beyond the city limits, the stunning scenery of the Laurel Highlands, with its waterfalls and overlooks, is an ideal adventure for those seeking natural beauty. For history enthusiasts, the region's steelmaking past provides a fascinating glimpse into its industrial heritage, while foodies will find the unique local flavors of the area appealing.

Pennsylvania's 2024 River of the Year, the Allegheny River, is here and offers many opportunities for water activities. The river, along with three other major rivers, six water trails, and an abundance of lakes and reservoirs, caters to beginner and experienced anglers and boaters.

Create your family's next adventure here—fish, boat, hike and bike.

## Treasured trail

**Great Allegheny Passage (GAP):** This trail is a 150-mile-long hiking and biking trail that follows the route of several former railroads and offers stunning views of rivers, forests and mountains. But, it also follows several important water trails and is a dream destination for anglers and kayakers.

A favorite adventure on the trail is the 75-mile section from Point State Park in Pittsburgh to the confluence.

Although known as the GAP, the trail comprises several shorter trails, starting with the Three Rivers Heritage Trail,





*Pittsburgh Riverfront, Allegheny County*



*Ohiopyle State Park, Fayette County*

*photo-PFBC archives*

Pittsburgh. Walk the trail or paddle downtown Pittsburgh's serene but urban waters to view the city's riverfront from a unique perspective.

From downtown Pittsburgh, the GAP follows the Monongahela River for 16 miles to the Youghiogheny River. From there, the GAP follows alongside the Youghiogheny River Trail.

It's all fishable waters and beautiful countryside. Fish the river and its tributaries for Muskellunge, Walleye, bass and catfish.

Numerous campgrounds and cabins are close to the trail and offer convenient accommodations. The trail is close to

some fantastic state parks including Ohiopyle State Park, Fayette County, considered one of the jewels of the state park system, and Laurel Hill State Park, Somerset County, offering stunning views of Laurel Ridge.

## Popular waterways

**Three Rivers:** The Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers are the major rivers that meet in Pittsburgh, but another important waterway in this region is the **Youghiogheny River**, including Ohiopyle State Park, renowned for its whitewater rafting and outdoor adventure opportunities. It is also part of the GAP. The "Yough," as it's locally known, carves a dramatic

*photo-Linda Stieger*



*Waterfalls near Laurel Ridge State Park, Cambria, Fayette and Somerset counties*



*Casselman River, Somerset County*

*photo-Bob Fritz*



*Yellow Creek State Park, Indiana County*

*photo-Donna Mohney*

14-mile gorge within Ohiopyle State Park, and it's a magnet for whitewater enthusiasts,

Beyond the rapids, though, calmer stretches offer tranquil paddling opportunities. Hike along the scenic trails, and visit Cucumber Falls and Ohiopyle Falls.

Bring your fishing license along and throw in your line. The stocked waters are an adventure-in-waiting.

**Prince Gallitzin State Park:** Located in Cambria County, about an hour and a half east of Pittsburgh, the sprawling park surrounds 1,635-acre Glendale Lake with 26 miles of shoreline. Bring the whole family. Many of the park areas are accessible to visitors with disabilities including paved trails, fishing piers, an Americans with Disabilities Act kayak/canoe launch, accessible campsites and ramp access to the swimming area.



**Laurel Highlands Trout Trail:** it isn't a continuous trail but a scenic route connecting 10 trout streams across a 70-mile radius, starting in Ligonier in the north and going southwards to the West Virginia border.

Each stream offers a variety of trout species including Brook Trout, Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout. You'll find stocked trout in some places, while other spots offer wild trout populations.

**Stonycreek River:** Its 46 miles of near-wilderness trout waters empty into what is said to be the longest continuous set of rapids in the eastern United States. Scheduled water releases throughout the summer just about guarantee whitewater.

Near Johnstown is also the Stonycreek Whitewater Park, the first artificial set of rapids built in Pennsylvania. Learn whitewater skills or enjoy gentler tubing activities.



*photo-PEBC archives*

*Prince Gallitzin State Park, Cambria County*



Fallingwater, Fayette County

photo-Jesse Kendall

## Points of interest

- Packsaddle Bridge (a.k.a. Doc Miller Bridge), Brush Creek, Fairhope, Somerset County (only Pennsylvania covered bridge that spans a waterfall)
- Cedar Creek Gorge Trail, Cedar Creek/ Youghiogheny River/Great Allegheny Passage Bike Trail, Westmoreland County, features small waterfalls, river views and a pair of swinging bridges
- Hyde Park Walking Bridge, Kiskiminetas River, Westmoreland and Armstrong counties (the longest swinging bridge in Pennsylvania)
- Mount Davis, Somerset County (the highest point in Pennsylvania)
- Staple Bend Tunnel/Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, Cambria County (first railroad tunnel built in the United States)
- Mount Assisi Gardens, Loretto, Cambria County (3.5 acres of fountains, statues and landscaping, some of which dates back more than 100 years)

## Best-loved adventures

“Must see” favorites are:

- **Pittsburgh:** This vibrant city is fun for the entire family. Kennywood (amusement park), the Carnegie Museum of Art and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History offer something for everyone. Take a boat ride with the Gateway Clipper Fleet on the Three Rivers. And, don't forget to check out the Carnegie Science Center, Pittsburgh Zoo & Aquarium and the National Aviary, too.



- A ride on the Duquesne or Monongahela inclines is a unique experience and offers stunning city skyline views. Time your visit to see the Three Rivers Arts Festival for a celebration of creativity along the waterfront. And, sample a Primanti Bros. sandwich while you're in town.
- Fallingwater, Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural masterpiece in Fayette County, is a must visit. The cantilevered living room extends over a waterfall, and the house is considered one of Wright's most important works. Guided tours are available.
- Somerset County's Flight 93 National Memorial stands as a powerful tribute to the passengers and crew of United Airlines Flight 93 that thwarted the plane's hijackers on September 11, 2001. It is a place of reflection and respect; visiting this site is a powerful lesson about courage and resiliency.

photo-Linda Stager



Duquesne Incline, Allegheny County

photo-Linda Stager



Flight 93 National Memorial, Somerset County

- Johnstown, the largest city in Cambria County, is a fun heritage city. Experience the history, geography, culture and ecology of Johnstown at the Heritage Discovery Center. It is home to America's oldest record store and the Steve Ditko Spider-Man Mural.

The southwest region of Pennsylvania has so much to experience. You can fish, boat and enjoy outdoor fun for everyone, from urban environments to the rugged mountainous state parks of the Laurel Highlands.

Enjoy the historical significance of the area and explore its heritage. Discover the pristine wilderness, but be sure to appreciate the conservation efforts of many who have made this area a top-tier destination.

The national environmental protection movement started in this region with the research of biologist and writer Rachel Carson. Today, Pennsylvania's ongoing conservation efforts reflect the theories that were formed from her life's work.

Visit Southwest PA today! ☐



## Channeling Rachel Carson

We owe much of the conservation movement in Pennsylvania to Rachel Carson, a native of the Pittsburgh area. She called us to recognize the importance of our environment and to take actions to protect it.

Some of our most fragile waterway species are amphibians, reptiles and fish. Knowing the threats faced by these critters is the responsibility of everyone who enjoys the outdoors.

Recognizing the roles they play in the ecosystem is a start. Did you know that amphibians are vital insect predators, that reptiles can help control rodent populations and that fish are a crucial part of the aquatic food chain?

Here are some ways to help:

- Support conservation organizations that work to protect these animals and their habitats.
- Minimize human impact on their environments by using eco-friendly cleaning products to avoid water pollution.
- Don't disturb spawning grounds.
- Respect and protect rattlesnakes and other reptiles and amphibians.
- Take the threat of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) seriously. AIS can be spread by fishing equipment, waders, clothing, shoes, boots and boats. Don't transport live fish, bait, plants or water from one body of water to another. Disinfect equipment and use best practices.
- Never release unwanted pet fish, amphibians or reptiles into the wild. They can disrupt the local ecosystem.
- Spread awareness about the importance of these critters and the threats they face.

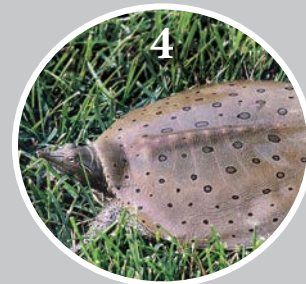
Being conservation-minded means being mindful of our actions and making choices that benefit the long-term health of vital and fragile components of our ecosystem. Let's all channel Rachel.

Written by Linda Stager



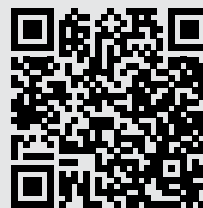
## Southwest PA! Critter Corner

- 1 Seal Salamander, *Desmognathus monticola*
- 2 Eastern Red-backed Salamander, *Plethodon cinereus*
- 3 Eastern American Toad, *Anaxyrus americanus americanus*
- 4 Eastern Spiny Softshell, *Apalone spinifera spinifera*
- 5 Eastern Milksnake, *Lampropeltis triangulum*
- 6 Dekay's Brownsnake, *Storeria dekayi*



photos-PFBC archives

Protect, Conserve and Enhance:



[explorepawaters.com/resources/fishing-conservation/](https://explorepawaters.com/resources/fishing-conservation/)

## Popular waterways

### Southwest Region:

- Allegheny River
- Buffalo Creek
- Chest Creek
- Crooked Creek Lake
- Glendale Lake
- Laurel Hill Creek
- Meadow Run
- Monongahela River
- Ohio River
- Youghioghene River Lake



## Pennsylvania state parks

### Southwest Region:

- **Allegheny Islands State Park**, Allegheny Co. (fishing and boating)
- **Hillman State Park**, Washington Co. (fishing)
- **Keystone State Park**, Westmoreland Co. (fishing and boating)
- **Kooser State Park**, Somerset Co. (fishing)
- **Laurel Hill State Park**, Somerset Co. (fishing and boating)
- **Laurel Mountain State Park**, Somerset and Westmoreland counties
- **Laurel Ridge State Park**, Cambria, Fayette, Somerset and Westmoreland counties
- **Laurel Summit State Park**, Westmoreland Co.
- **Linn Run State Park**, Westmoreland Co. (fishing)
- **Ohiopyle State Park**, Fayette Co. (fishing and whitewater)
- **Point State Park**, Allegheny Co. (fishing and boating)
- **Prince Gallitzin State Park**, Cambria Co. (fishing and boating)
- **Raccoon Creek State Park**, Beaver Co. (fishing and boating)
- **Ryersen Station State Park**, Greene Co. (fishing)
- **Yellow Creek State Park**, Indiana Co. (fishing and boating)

### Key:

fishing=fishing, no boating of any type

fishing and boating=fishing and powered and unpowered boating

paddling=unpowered boating

whitewater=whitewater paddling



Point State Park, Allegheny County

Regional designations are based on Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Law Enforcement regions.

artwork-Michael Kensinger

## Popular State Game Lands

- **State Game Lands 51**, Fayette County: With nearly 17,000 acres of mixed hardwoods and some herbaceous openings, there is excellent access for hunters, birdwatchers, photographers and hikers. Mixed succession conditions that favor habitat requirements are maintained for game species such as deer, bears and turkeys, as well as brown thrashers, golden-winged warblers and ruffed grouse. A non-game mammal species of interest is the state-threatened Allegheny woodrat. There is also extensive bat work being done.
- **State Game Lands 203**, Allegheny County: Coming in at 1,280 acres, mainly forested, outdoor recreation opportunities include birdwatching, hiking, horseback riding, hunting and mountain biking. However, the shooting range is its claim to fame. One of the largest and most heavily used firearm ranges on the East Coast, close to 20,000 people a year visit this 50-position rifle and pistol range with 10, 25, 50 and 100 yard stations. A new archery range offers shooting opportunities from 10, 20, 30, 40 and 50 yards.
- **State Game Lands 232**, Washington County: Covering just over 5,000 acres, hiking, hunting and birdwatching are popular. Listed as an Important Bird Area due to its exceptional bird habitat and high biological diversity, it is home to many Species of Greatest Conservation Need. More common species found here include deer, beavers, coyotes, foxes, raccoons and turkeys. Stocking of ring-necked pheasants also occurs.



Raccoon

- **State Game Lands 108**, Cambria and Blair (Southcentral Region) counties: Encompassing roughly 22,750 acres, birdwatching, hiking and hunting are popular. Horseback riding and mountain biking are also enjoyed here. Bordering Prince Gallitzin State Park, additional recreational opportunities include waterfowl hunting as well as bear, deer and turkey hunting. It is also the site of the annual SGL driving tour, where participants learn about law enforcement, forestry, prescribed fire, wildlife biology and habitat management.