

## It began over 25 years ago...

The Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC), located within the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DEWA), is a special place for students, teachers, families, Scouts, birders, botanists, photographers, hikers, and everyone else interested in learning about the natural world in a beautiful and informal setting.

The study of nature and natural systems is our focus at PEEC, our proximity to a quarter of a million acres of public lands, including the National Recreation Area and numerous state parks, forests, and game lands offers a world of opportunities to explore: shady hemlock gorges, the wild and scenic Delaware River, diverse lowland and upland forests, fields blooming with wildflowers, rushing waterfalls and streams, unique flora and fauna of boreal bogs, fossils as old as 400 million years, ponds teeming with insect and amphibian life.

Thirty-five years ago, there was no PEEC (1972), no DWGNRA (Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area) (1968). Then came the Tocks Island Dam project. This dam across the Delaware River, just five miles North of Stroudsburg, PA, would have created a thirty-seven mile long, 12,500 acre reservoir supplying the area with flood control, water, recreation, and hydro-electric power. In order to create this vast reservoir, property was needed. Among the properties acquired by the United States Army Corps of Engineers was Honeymoon Haven, a resort facility above the proposed high-water line, thus placed under the control of the National Park Service (NPS).

This proposed dam created increased controversy, and public reaction frequently opposed the project. The dam construction project was abandoned and NPS management and development plan for this area was placed on hold. In 1972, Keystone Junior College (KJC) and NPS formed a special-use partnership for the property formerly known as Honeymoon Haven. The news appeared in the Sunday, 10 September 1972 edition of *The Scrantonian*:

*National Park Service, Keystone Junior College Plan Education Center. Keystone Junior College and the National Park Service (NPS) have become partners in the operation of a facility to be known as the Pocono Environmental Education Center. The Center will be a part of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area - and is expected to provide, among other things, environment education and cultural programs for Park visitors.*

The first year was a challenge, but the staff was expanded and programs were created and PEEC survived through its first winter. During the first year, renovations were begun immediately, transforming the former honeymoon resort into a residential center for environment education. During this first year, 1,800 park visitors participated in programs at PEEC. (*Average visitation 2001-2007 was 24,000 visitors*)

The first half of PEEC's existence was with KJC. Through partnership with NPS and Keystone's special use permit to create the center, PEEC operated for many years, (the first two under the direction of Jerry Howard, Former Dean of Students at Keystone), expanding programs, renovating facilities, and creating a steady client base. Improvement continued, and in the mid 1980's came the creation of the Friends of PEEC organization.

In 1986, KJC divested its interest in PEEC. Independent of KJC, PEEC became incorporated as a private, non-profit organization. Since becoming a non-profit corporation, PEEC experienced substantial growth and changes. The Board of Trustees expanded from seven to twenty-two members. Staff increased from four in 1972, to twenty-four persons in 1984. And participation increased dramatically, now serving approximately 24,000 visitors annually (up from 1,800 the first year).

Since 1986, there have been other notable stages in the evolution of PEEC. In 1990, an endowment fund was created to provide scholarships for educators, so that those with economic constraints may still attend PEEC professional development programs. In 1991, PEEC hosted the Commonwealth Elementary Science Teaching Alliance Summer Leadership Institute, a program designed to develop teams for multiple school districts to design and implement a science education action plan.

One of the more notable accomplishments during recent years is the creation of PEEC's "Russian Program." In 1992, PEEC initiated the National Parks as International Classrooms program, including an international exchange with students, teachers, and park personnel from Karelia, Russia. PEEC hosted groups of Russian students, educators, and park officials to experience PEEC and its educational partnerships and practices.

Recent developments in 1996 included the founding of the Paul F-Brandwein Institute, an education program focused on the environment for teachers and students with gifts and talents. In 1997 the American Nature Study Society, the most venerable environment education organization in the United States, has its home and is managed at PEEC. 1999 marked the beginning of a new annual publication at PEEC, EcoTones. With the new century, (2000), PEEC-a-Boo!, a halloween trail program, a Summer Day Camp and public Nature Trek program was created along with the revival of Yule Log.

To better accommodate people who study and recreate at PEEC, the Dining Hall was replaced and a new wastewater treatment facility installed – the Visitor Activity Center (VAC) - to meet visitor needs. The VAC and two new group duplex lodges opened in 2006, four new family duplex cabins, a gazebo, pavilion and YURT village opened in 2007.

Looking ahead, PEEC continues to utilize the vast cultural, historical, and natural resources of the National Park Service to create a program for environment education. PEEC and NPS created the first of its kind partnership in 1972. This unique partnership enables PEEC to serve as a model for other similar centers and programs within the National Park System. It is the goal of everyone at PEEC to remain an international leader in environment education.

History information from:

"It Began 25 years ago..." PEEC Seasons, Vernal Equinox, 1997 by Dr. Harry K. Miller.

PEEC Staff Manual and Training Guide, 1997

## Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area

PEEC's partnership with the United States Department of Interior, National Park Service has endured transition and time. PEEC advances environmental awareness, knowledge and skills through education using a one-of-a-kind, quarter of a million acre classroom, a National Park and proximal public land on which the complexities of earth systems are available to study and enjoy.

The location of the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area (DWGNRA) in the Northeastern corner of Pennsylvania in the tri-state junction of NY, NJ and PA affords easy accessibility to one-half the nation's population. More than 24,000 people a year participate in PEEC's programs that embrace a wide variety of subject matter.

In 1965, by an act of the United States Congress, land along the Delaware River and Delaware Water Gap was designated as a National Recreation Area to provide recreational opportunities for American citizens. To further promote environmental appreciation and nurture greater understanding of National Parks as resources for education, the National Park Service partnered with Keystone Junior College to establish an education center on 38 acres of federal property.

The Pocono Environmental Education Center (PEEC) was established by a Memorandum of Understanding and Special Use Permit with the National Park Service and was operated by Keystone Junior College. In 1986, PEEC incorporated as a Pennsylvania not for profit entity, received 501(c)(3) designation from the Internal Revenue Service and Tax Exempt status from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

PEEC has the distinction of being one of the nation's seven residential environmental education centers located with the boundaries of and in partnership with a unit of the National Park Service. This august group includes:

1. North Cascades Institute, North Cascades National Park Service Complex, WA
2. Great Smoky Mountains Institute, Great Smoky Mountains National Park, NC, TN
3. Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center, Cuyahoga Valley National Park, OH
4. Pocono Environmental Education Center, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, PA
5. Dunes Environmental Learning Center, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, IN
6. Teton Science Schools, Grand Teton National Park, WY
7. Yosemite National Institutes, Yosemite and Olympic NPs, Golden Gate National Recreation Area, CA, WA