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# State grants boost Greene County recreation projects

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WAYNESBURG – A little more than three years ago, Cindy Adams Dunn visited Greene County to deliver bad news about the future of Duke Lake at Ryerson Station State Park.

The state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources secretary announced in July 2015 that the lake could never be restored, a decade after cracks were found in the concrete dam, which at the time forced state officials to drain the water.

But she offered a caveat of hope that money from a \$36 million settlement reached with Consol Energy would help to remake the park so it would be an attraction for people across the region. During a meeting two years ago to discuss ideas for Ryerson, Greene County Commissioner Blair Zimmerman told Dunn about a different recreational undertaking at Wisecarver Reservoir near Waynesburg that county officials hoped could one day be an alternative fishing option to replace Duke Lake.

"Blair kept talking about Wisecarver," Dunn recalled.

As they were driving back from that Ryerson meeting, Dunn decided they should take a quick detour to the water company's 18-acre reservoir near Water Dam Road in Franklin Township so she could see it for herself. Dunn, who proclaimed herself an avid "paddler and angler," immediately saw the potential of Wisecarver.

"I'd like to drop my kayak in and go fishing," Dunn said she thought at the time.

Dunn returned to Waynesburg again Thursday morning, this time with better news, announcing \$603,000 in state Keystone grants for two projects in Greene County. One-

third of that money will help convert Wisecarver Reservoir into a county park with the other \$403,000 going to fund the extension of the Greene River Trail another 2.2 miles toward Crucible.

County officials have been focusing on both projects over the past two years.

The commissioners entered into an agreement with Southwestern Pennsylvania Water Authority in June 2016 to lease 360-acre Wisecarver property for 99 years in order to develop it into a park with ball fields, hiking trails and places to fish along the former reservoir.

"We all know what happened to Ryerson. It was a great park and it will be a great park again. But we know what happened to the fishing," state Rep. Snyder, D-Jefferson, said during the announcement with various state and county dignitaries on the steps of the Greene County Courthouse. "(Wisecarver) will allow fisherman to sit on the banks and fish once again."

Dunn also touted the importance of biking and walking trails in the state, pointing to their economic and recreational benefits. She added that the DCNR has the lofty goal of one day having a trail within 15 minutes of every resident in Pennsylvania.

"This fits into our train mission at DCNR," Dunn said. "There is no better asset that can do more than trails."

That is true of the 5.1-mile Greene River Trail, and the commissioners took control two years ago of a former railroad right-of-way at the southern terminus of the trail with plans to extend it. Once completed, the trail will be nearly eight miles long as it snakes beside the Monongahela River from the Greene Cove Yacht Club to the Jessop Boat Club property near Crucible.

"Our trail is as beautiful as any trail in the state. Let's take advantage of it," Zimmerman said. "This is just the beginning."

But even with these other recreational options, people are still wondering about what the future of Ryerson holds.

Work began earlier this summer to improve the campgrounds, with construction of a shower house, three new camping cottages and better access to the site, among other upgrades.

John Norbeck, the deputy secretary for parks and forestry, said Thursday they are meeting with state Department of General Services next week to request more funds be released for Ryerson. He expects a new swimming pool and splash zone to open in 2020, and streams through the park will be restored to include fishing holes.

"We're as restless as they are," Norbeck said of the long timeline. "We're working really hard on the design right now."

Dunn said the DCNR still sees potential with the upgrades to the state park in Richhill Township near the West Virginia panhandle.

"Ryerson was like a local park," Dunn said before the loss of Duke Lake. "We want it to be a destination park."

Dunn's visit to Waynesburg was the middle of her three-day swing through Western Pennsylvania that began Wednesday at the Ohiopyle State Park's new environmentally friendly visitor center to discuss sustainable energy initiatives. Later Thursday, she traveled to Moraine State Park in Butler County to dedicate a new solar power installation that was expected to save about \$25,000 per year in energy costs to operate a sewage treatment plant there. She planned to finish the tour Friday at Prince Gallitzin State Park in Cambria County to highlight a new electric charging station installed for park visitors.

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