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Keystone Elk Country Alliance receives Grant from West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund

Benazette, PA. The West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund (WPPSEF) provided a grant for \$120,000 to the Keystone Elk Country Alliance (KECA) in support of the construction of KECA's new outdoor classroom on the Elk Country Visitor Center campus. Construction is underway to build and fully enclose the outdoor classroom with highly energy efficient folding glass doors and a solar photovoltaic energy system.

Construction of the 40 x 80 ft. outdoor classroom that will also serve as an event center, began last fall and is scheduled to be completed by September 2023. KECA contracted construction of the \$850,000 project with Dagher Construction, Inc. 554 Rock Street, St. Marys, PA. The facility will be opened in time for the busy fall season and upcoming school year. The WPPSEF previously contributed \$125,000 in 2014 and 2015 towards the construction of the existing and highly popular Elk Country Classroom Outdoors classroom building. Since opening, the popularity of KECA's conservation education programs have grown, making it necessary to create additional classroom space.

"Last year, more than 400,000 guests visited the Elk Country Visitor Center and over 31,000 students participated in one of our conservation education programs." Stated Rawley Cogan, CEO of the Keystone Elk Country Alliance (KECA). KECA is a Pennsylvania based 501 © (3) wildlife conservation organization that operates the Elk Country Visitor Center in partnership with Pennsylvania's Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)."

"The WPPSEF provided funding for the new facility's energy savings components such as the energy efficient folding glass doors and 26.6 kw solar photovoltaic system. The highly energy efficient folding glass doors will provide the heat retention necessary during cold weather, as well as, allow guests to enjoy the outdoors and spectacular panoramic views of Pennsylvania's elk country" stated Joel Morrison, Director of the WPPSEF. The solar photovoltaic system will produce clean energy in the form of electricity 365 days per year and will provide electrical power for the building. During periods of peak electricity production, excess power will be fed back into the electrical grid, providing a reduction in energy costs. The building will also include a rainwater capture system to provide water for restroom toilets, an electric heat pump HVAC system, and Energy Star rated equipment.

In addition, the WPPSEF is helping to underwrite the cost of a collaborative clean energy outreach plan which will include clean energy conservation education programs that are structured around the various clean energy and conservation initiatives across the Elk Center campus and this new classroom. "As a demonstration and education site, the outdoor classroom will expose the benefits of these clean energy initiatives to hundreds of thousands of West Penn Power ratepayers each year," says Morrison. These programs will be available through field trips, organized lessons and weekend programs at the Elk Country Visitor Center. The clean energy outreach plan will also include a comprehensive marketing campaign designed to reach the region's educators.

The classroom was designed by Moshier Studio, Architect, from Pittsburgh, PA. Moshier Studio was also involved in the Elk Center design back in 2008 and 2009 and the Elk Country Classroom Outdoors in 2014 and 2015. “My firm was contracted to oversee the LEED aspect of the Elk Center and ECCO building during the design and build stages,” said Gary Moshier partner in Moshier Studio. The Elk Center achieved a LEED Gold certification and the ECCO building achieved a LEED Silver certification, so the bar was set high and we needed to design the new classroom to continue the same look and quality of those buildings said Moshier. Moshier stated the new classroom may reach the silver certification once completed.

Additional funding for the construction of the new outdoor classroom facility was also received from the Commonwealth Financing Authority’s (CFA) Greenways, Trails and Recreation Program, the Richard King Mellon Foundation, The Stackpole Hall Foundation and the George A. and Margaret Mee Charitable Foundation.

DCNR Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn added “We at DCNR are excited to see this innovative project come to fruition. DCNR is grateful to our many partners on this worthy investment in Pennsylvania’s Elk Country and the Pennsylvania Wilds. As we expand outdoor recreation opportunities and grow Pennsylvania’s economy through this sector, it is critical we continue to create opportunities for new initiatives to help boost nature tourism and business development strategies in this region and across the Commonwealth.”

The Keystone Elk Country Alliance manages, operates and funds the facility’s daily operation.

“Since opening the Elk Center in September 2010, attendance has increased more than anyone predicted and we’ve needed to expand our Elk Country Campus to better accommodate the large school groups, group tours and the general public. The influx of more than 4.5 million guests that have visited the Elk Country Visitor Center has spurred multiple new business openings or expansions in the immediate vicinity,” stated Cogan. “The Alliance is very appreciative to Joel and the WPPSEF for their financial and educational support of this project” said Cogan. Dagher Construction is the general contractor, Allied being the plumbing and HVAC contractor, Precision Installations being the electrical contractor along with RJ Vollmer Excavating doing the site work.

The **West Penn Power Sustainable Energy Fund (WPPSEF)** is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that invests in the deployment of sustainable energy technologies that benefit West Penn Power ratepayers in Pennsylvania. WPPSEF investments are focused in three broad categories:

- ✓ Deployment of sustainable and clean energy technologies;
- ✓ Deployment of energy efficiency and conservation technologies; and
- ✓ Facilitating economic development, environmental betterment, and public education as they relate to sustainable energy deployment in the WPP service region.

Visit <http://www.wppsef.org> for further information. [YouTube](#) – Listen to what our project partners have to say about us.

The Keystone Elk Country Alliance which operates the Elk Country Visitor Center is a Pennsylvania based 501 (c) (3) wildlife conservation organization. KECA’s mission is to conserve and enhance Pennsylvania’s Elk Country for future generations. For more information, visit ExperienceElkCountry.com.