

## DRAFT DOCUMENT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

### THE PENNSYLVANIA BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION PLAN

#### FUNDING BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION

Funding Task Force, Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership

**Definition:** Funding for biodiversity focuses on statewide strategies and activities that generate financial support for biodiversity conservation in Pennsylvania.

**Background:** Although there is a diversity of funding sources for biodiversity research and conservation in Pennsylvania, the amount of money available does not come close to meeting the projected needs. The Pennsylvania Biological Survey estimated in 1992 that at least \$13 million per year was needed for basic research and inventory, education, and habitat acquisition. In particular, funding to gather information on basic questions such as what plants and animals live in the state, where they live, and their ability to reproduce and thrive is limited. Lack of such fundamental knowledge about biodiversity in the state can hamper efforts at conservation.

Funding for biodiversity conservation is available from a variety of sources in Pennsylvania. The Commonwealth has two major sources of funding for conservation land acquisitions – tipping fees paid by waste haulers to dump trash in Pennsylvania landfills and the real estate transfer tax. The *Keystone Recreation, Park, and Conservation Fund Act* (Key 93), passed in 1993, provides funding for acquisition of natural areas and open space. *Growing Greener*, enacted in December 1999, is the other significant source for conservation funds. The original Growing Greener provisions were slated to provide \$645.9 million over five years. New funding, earmarked in 2002, provides an average of \$100 million/year for the next 10 years.

Growing Greener II was passed by voters in the May 2005 primary election. On 13 April 2005, Pennsylvania Governor Edward Rendell signed into law House Bill 2, authorizing a question on the primary ballot that asked residents to consider the \$625 million bond issue. Nearly two-thirds of Pennsylvania voters gave their support to the initiative. The Governor and General Assembly acted with haste to craft a plan that nearly doubles the size of the original Growing Greener program. It provides significant new funding for biodiversity related conservation and restoration. The plan is financed by permanently extending the \$4.25 already paid in Growing Greener I tipping fees on each ton of waste deposited in Pennsylvania landfills. An additional \$2 tipping fee to finance recycling programs remains in place through 2008.

The \$625 million will be spread out over six years for the following initiatives:

- \$230 million to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to clean up rivers and streams; take on serious environmental problems at abandoned mines and contaminated industrial sites; and finance the development and deployment of advanced energy projects.
  - Nearly 20 percent of our rivers and streams are polluted. If lined up, all of the polluted waterways would stretch from Atlantic City to Las Vegas. Each mile of polluted streams and lakes costs the state more than \$30,000 in lost revenue from our fishing and tourism sectors.
  - There are 12,000 vacant and contaminated industrial sites, or brownfields, located throughout the Commonwealth – totaling 100,000 to 120,000 acres of derelict land that could be used to attract businesses.
- \$217.5 million to the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) to preserve natural areas and open spaces; improve state parks; and enhance local recreational needs.
  - Nationally, Pennsylvania ranks second in land consumption per person and fifth in land area converted to development, despite being the second from the bottom of all states in population growth. Each year in Pennsylvania, nearly 120,000 acres of open space are converted to development.

- \$80 million to the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) to protect working farms.
  - Today, we average 41 acres of farmland in development each day, which will add up to 75,000 additional acres of farmland converted during the next five years. At present, more than 1,850 farms are on the waiting list for help to keep them as farmland.
- \$50 million to the Department of Community and Economic Development (DCED) to revitalize communities through investments in housing and mixed-use redevelopment projects.
- \$27.5 million to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) to repair fish hatcheries and aging dams.
- \$20 million to the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) for habitat-related facility upgrades and repairs.

A provision in the new law sets up an Environmental Block Grant Program that allows counties to address local priorities. Counties can designate up to \$90 million over the life of the bond program by picking from approved projects within the DEP, DCNR, PDA and DCED appropriations to target specific needs. Each county is guaranteed a minimum level of funding, with the funding distributed among the state's 67 counties according to their class.

Growing Greener II also restores funding in the short term for the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Act (HSCA) Fund, the state's most important tool to respond immediately and eliminate any threat to public health and safety when toxic chemicals or hazardous substances are spilled or leaked, or otherwise found in the environment. Prior to Growing Greener II, HSCA was heading toward fiscal ruin and DEP had stopped new public protection projects and triaged ongoing cleanups. Growing Greener II provides \$50 million over the next two fiscal years to continue this program.

Federal government funding programs that impact biodiversity conservation include the State Wildlife Grants; various Farm Bill programs (Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, etc.); Transportation Enhancement Act; Forest Stewardship Program; and Environmental Protection Agency funding as well as other land management and research programs. At the local government level, bonds and property taxes can be used by municipalities for acquiring open space if approved by voters. Other programs, such as Act 515 and the Farmland and Forest Assessment Act, can play a role in funding activities that support biodiversity conservation.

In addition to government funding, conservation organizations and land trusts raise their own funds from donors and foundations. Research on Pennsylvania biodiversity is conducted by many private non-profit organizations and individual researchers at academic institutions, utilizing a variety of funding sources, including those previously listed as well as monies internal to the organizations and federal sources such as the National Science Foundation. Pennsylvania is fortunate in having many foundations that focus at least part of their substantial assets on environmental issues within the state.

Public surveys reveal that Pennsylvanians consistently place a high value on protecting plants, animals, and their habitats. In a 2002 poll, 82 percent of Pennsylvania voters placed priority on habitat preservation and 78 percent supported guaranteed state funding to be used exclusively to protect and improve Pennsylvania's environment.

**Vision:** Establish sustainable long-term funding sources for biodiversity research and conservation in Pennsylvania that:

- Address all needs, including baseline surveys; basic research on biological and ecological aspects of biodiversity; applied research on methods for management, control, and protection; dependable and persistent monitoring of species, populations, and habitats; methods for accurately assessing management outcomes; protection of critical habitats; and education on the importance of biodiversity.
- Make efficient and effective use of grantees' personnel and time.
- Utilize "best granting practices."

### Issues to be Addressed to Achieve Vision

1. **Funding sources are not consistent.** Planning, implementation, and stability of established programs are compromised by inconsistent funding sources. Often established programs are ended due to lack of funding, only to be re-created at a later date when funding again becomes available.
2. **Funding can be subject to political dynamics.**
3. **Funding levels are insufficient to meet present needs, let alone future needs.**
4. **Funders unknowingly can create duplication in efforts.**
5. **Application processes and accounting requirements are often confusing or overly cumbersome.**
6. **State management agencies do not have sufficient and reliable funding for their legislatively-mandated conservation responsibilities.**
  - A. Explore feasibility of earmarking tax dollars for legislatively-mandated biodiversity work by state agencies.
  - B. Explore leveraging federal and private dollars for this work.
7. **Prioritization criteria used by funders are variable, sometimes difficult to consistently apply, and often not transparent to those seeking funding.** Funders typically set funding levels and priorities. Much of the biodiversity funding pot is awarded through a competitive process, with funders typically utilizing a series of criteria in order to rank proposals. The issue of private funders utilizing prioritization as a guideline for grant-making is not highly understood.
8. **There is no sustainable long-term source of funding in Pennsylvania for biodiversity conservation.**

### Recommendations

1. Raise awareness of the need for stable long-term funding.
  - A. Develop and utilize consistent and fact-based economic justifications for biodiversity conservation that are specific to Pennsylvania.
2. Find allies in the public and private sectors who can help influence funding levels.
  - A. Approach Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation with case materials on Pennsylvania resources of national significance (e.g., freshwater mussels, northern hardwood forests).
3. Increase funding at all levels.
  - A. Expand federal conservation funding in Pennsylvania, including increasing the Land and Water Fund, Forest Legacy Fund, and other sources.
  - B. Pursue a higher standard of mitigation funding from transportation and development entities.
  - C. Pursue direct compensation and dollars for habitat banking.
  - D. Explore feasibility of earmarking tax dollars for legislatively-mandated biodiversity work by state agencies.
  - E. Explore leveraging federal and private dollars for state agency work.
4. Direct Growing Greener II funding to highest priority biodiversity conservation and restoration sites and activities to the greatest extent possible.
5. In conjunction with funders, develop guidelines and "best granting practices" as well as statewide priorities for conserving biodiversity.
6. Avoid adverse impacts to biodiversity and pursue biodiversity conservation in the present in order to lessen future need to invest higher levels of dollars into restoration and recovery, which is always more costly.