



PA Environment Digest

An Update On Environmental Issues In PA

Edited By: David E. Hess, Crisci Associates

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Growing Greener Coalition To Legislature: Make Marcellus Shale Bill #1 Priority

[Renew Growing Greener Coalition](#) Tuesday welcomed legislators back into session and called upon them to restore Growing Greener funding by making the passage of meaningful Marcellus Shale legislation their top legislative priority.

“Now is the time to get down to business,” said Andrew Heath, executive director of the Renew Growing Greener Coalition. “Our state and our environment can ill afford any further delays in the passage of a Marcellus Shale package that restores funding to help local communities across the state protect water quality, preserve open space and farmland, and enhance parks, trails and other recreational opportunities.”

“The Coalition is firmly united in its support for the passage of a provision that allocates 25 percent of the revenues from leases for oil and gas drilling on state forests to the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund,” Heath continued. “Any final Marcellus Shale measure must contain this provision, which is consistent with the original intent of the Oil and Gas Lease Fund Act.”

The Oil and Gas Lease Fund was established in 1955 by legislation to reinvest revenues from the extraction of nonrenewable oil and gas resources from state lands back into conservation and recreation programs benefiting all Pennsylvanians. The Oil and Gas Lease Fund Act states that the “Fund shall be exclusively used for conservation, recreation, dams, or flood control or to match any federal grants which may be used for any of the aforementioned purposes.”

Money from the fund comes from the rents and royalties from oil and gas leasing and drilling on state parks and forest lands.

“Natural gas drilling in state forests and parks is already putting at risk our scenic and recreational resources and impacting wildlife habitat,” Heath stated. “Add to that the risks to water and air quality and it becomes clear why a substantial portion of the revenue from drilling leases on state lands should be directed to the Environmental Stewardship Fund.”

At present, The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is the primary benefactor and administrator of the fund. As such, funds have been used – up until 2009 – primarily to help DCNR acquire additional state parks and forestlands and to address the infrastructure needs in these areas. More recently, the fund has also been used to supplement DCNR’s operating expenses and to help defray cuts to their operating budgets for state parks and forests.

“Revenue projections indicate that there is ample funding to support both the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund and DCNR,” Heath said. “It is not a choice of either/or. We can do both with the revenue from existing leases. The Coalition does not support the leasing of any additional state parks and forest lands.”

In addition, Heath noted that to satisfy short-term needs, the Coalition supports allocating a significant portion of an impact fee to Growing Greener and encourages the Commonwealth to restore Growing Greener tipping fees to their original purpose of funding Growing Greener projects instead of paying bond debt expenses.

Growing Greener is a bipartisan program established in 1999 under Gov. Tom Ridge and later expanded by Governors Schweiker and Rendell. Since its establishment, Growing Greener has created a legacy of success, preserving more than 107,000 acres of Pennsylvania’s family farmland, conserving more than 42,300 acres of threatened open space, adding 26,000 acres to state parks and forests, and restoring over 16,000 acres of abandoned mine lands.

Moreover, Growing Greener has contributed and leveraged billions of dollars to the Pennsylvania economy by helping to boost tourism, create jobs and generate revenue. Yet despite the program’s accomplishments, funding for Growing Greener projects and grants fell from an average of approximately \$150 million per year for the last six years to \$27.3 million in the current state budget, over an 80 percent reduction.

The Renew Growing Greener Coalition is the largest coalition of conservation, recreation and environmental organizations in the Commonwealth, consisting of nearly 350 organizations and government entities from across the state.

More than 140 government entities, including 33 counties, representing more than seven million Pennsylvanians, have passed resolutions calling for a dedicated source of funding for the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund.

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