



PA Environment Digest

An Update On Environmental Issues In PA

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Berks County Joins 350 Groups Supporting Renewal Of Growing Greener Program

The [Renew Growing Greener Coalition](#) Thursday announced 35 counties – more than half the state – have passed resolutions calling for the renewal of the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund, Pennsylvania’s primary source of funding to help local communities protect water quality, preserve open space and farmland, and enhance parks, trails and other recreational opportunities.

Now more than 150 government entities, including 109 municipalities, representing more than seven million Pennsylvanians, have passed resolutions calling for a dedicated source of funding for the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund.

This week Berks County adopted a resolution in support of the Growing Greener initiative, marking a significant milestone in the efforts to save the critical program. In addition, Bedford County adopted a resolution this week.

“The Growing Greener program has made a tremendous impact in counties throughout the Commonwealth,” said Chairman of the Berks County Board of Commissioners Christian Leinbach. “In Berks County, the program has helped us enhance our heritage areas, conserve our open space and protect our water quality. We could not achieve this without Growing Greener.”

In Bedford County, Growing Greener has contributed to improvements at the Saxton Borough and East Providence wastewater treatment plants and helped mitigate acid mine drainage in Broad Top Township.

“Bedford County has effectively leveraged Growing Greener funds to achieve tangible, lasting results for our residents,” said Kirt Morris, Chairman of the Bedford County Board of Commissioners. “We cannot let this program die.”

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, capping more than 2,100 abandoned wells 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, more than an 80 percent reduction.

"With more than half the counties in Pennsylvania calling for the renewal of Growing Greener, it is increasingly obvious that the legislature and Governor must take action," said Andrew Heath, executive director of the Renew Growing Greener Coalition. "The pending Marcellus Shale legislation provides an opportunity to create a long-term, sustainable source of revenue for the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund. We cannot let this opportunity slip away."

Specifically, the legislature is considering a provision that allocates 25 percent of the revenues from existing leases for oil and gas drilling on state forests to the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund.

"The Renew Growing Greener Coalition stands firm in its support for the allocation of 25 percent of the existing revenues from the Oil and Gas Lease Fund to Growing Greener," Heath said. "This is a smart solution that is consistent with the original intent of the Oil and Gas Lease Fund Act."

The Coalition also 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.

In addition to Berks and Bedford, the following counties have adopted resolutions in support of Growing Greener: Adams, Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Blair, Butler, Cambria, Centre, Chester, Clearfield, Dauphin, Elk, Erie, Fayette, Greene, Huntington, Indiana, Lackawanna, Lawrence, Lehigh, Luzerne, Lycoming, Monroe, Philadelphia, Pike, Somerset, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Washington, Westmoreland, Wyoming and York.

To date, more than 140 government entities, including 109 municipalities, representing more than seven million Pennsylvanians, have passed resolutions calling for a dedicated source of funding for the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund.

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.

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