



Stronger Economies, Stronger Communities:

The Benefits of Growing Greener Funding for Pennsylvania

May 2005



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Executive Summary

Increasing funding for Pennsylvania's cornerstone conservation programs would provide a broad range of environmental and economic benefits across the state. This report illustrates those benefits by highlighting past successes in protecting Pennsylvania's environmental resources and historic places, and the future potential for further benefits through increased funding to the state's environmental programs.

Specifically, increased conservation funding has the potential to:

- Clean up waterways polluted by acid mine drainage, as was accomplished in **Pine Creek in Tioga County** and as has begun in the **Lehigh River**. This will help protect the state's drinking water supplies and create healthier fish populations.
- Improve buildings, water and sewer systems, roads, bridges, and trails in state parks. Better facilities can provide a better experience for hikers and campers, such as those who visit **Moraine State Park** and **Kettle Creek State Park**, and may attract new visitors. These visitors help support the local economy of towns near parks.
- Help protect family farms and croplands that are threatened by urban development, as **Lebanon County** has begun to do, and maintain a vital sector of Pennsylvania's economy.
- Encourage revitalization of older towns by providing resources for infrastructure projects and helping to leverage other investment. **Ridgway Borough** used state conservation and recreation funds to construct a path beside the Clarion River and Little Toby Creek, improvements that sparked the rejuvenation of the town's economic center.
- Promote physical activity and community involvement by supporting playing fields, swimming pools, playgrounds, and other areas for recreation, as the **Lewisburg Area Recreation Authority** has.

To fund these and other projects, state legislators worked with Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell to put forth a proposal to increase funding for the Commonwealth's major conservation and preservation programs by \$625 million. On May 17, 2005 voters approved this proposal by a broad margin of 61 percent to 39 percent. This injection of financial support will go a long way toward protecting more family farms, preserving more open spaces and restoring more waterways. It will also help to stimulate local economies and improve the quality of life for all of Pennsylvania's residents.

The infusion of state fiscal support from the initiative also has the potential to leverage new and different types of financial support. For example, conservation experts estimate that an investment of \$625 million could lead to nearly \$1.4 billion in additional funding to protect our environment and boost local economies.¹

Pennsylvania's leading conservation experts agree that these recommendations are essential in the effort to preserve Pennsylvania's family farms, protect threatened open spaces, and restore contaminated rivers, lakes and streams.

Following on the broad-based and bipartisan support to increase Growing Greener's funds by \$625 million, Pennsylvania's decision makers should utilize this mandate to further increase funding for other environmental programs in the state that not only protect our open spaces and restore waterways, but that also improve recycling, clean up hazardous waste sites and promote downtown revitalization. Elected officials should also promote policies that give local citizens and municipal officials more legal tools to promote open space protection in their communities and improve Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning Code to promote common sense "smart growth" policies in the Commonwealth.

Introduction

Pennsylvanians have a deep connection with their environment. Generations of Pennsylvania residents have been raised to value long hikes in our vast forests, take advantage of the state's rich soils to put food onto our tables, fish in our cold-water streams for elusive trout, or simply to appreciate nature while boating, biking or camping.

Yet Pennsylvania's environmental resources offer more than just enjoyment for the state's residents. The Commonwealth's environment plays an integral role in the economy statewide, as well as at the municipal, county and regional levels. This is not surprising given that agriculture is the largest economic sector in Pennsylvania, with tourism and recreation ranking second.

Unfortunately, the story of Pennsylvania's environment includes threats that endanger the Commonwealth's natural resources or have already scarred the state's landscape. From Western Pennsylvania, where abandoned mines continue to leach acid and metals into local streams, to the Philadelphia area, where rampant sprawl threatens to swallow up rich farmland and irreplaceable natural treasures, Pennsylvania faces the challenge of restoring a healthy

environment following generations of pollution and constant new threats.

In many ways, that challenge has begun to be met. Through state programs such as the Growing Greener program, hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent to restore degraded waterways, protect key tracts of agricultural and natural land, confront the legacy of mine pollution, and enhance Pennsylvanians' access to the state's natural treasures. Meanwhile, many Pennsylvanians—whether they are farmers, anglers or just ordinary citizens—have taken up the mantle of environmental stewardship, committing themselves to restoring their own little piece of the Keystone State.

Despite this progress, challenges remain. While the state's open space protection programs have helped to preserve more than 35,000 acres of threatened areas across the state, Pennsylvania continues to lose more than 125,000 acres of open spaces each year.² Nearly 1,900 family farms in the Commonwealth remain on waiting lists for protection from encroaching development.³ Thousands of miles of streams remain severely polluted from runoff and acid mine damage.⁴

Fortunately, Pennsylvania's elected officials have worked in a bipartisan effort to propose increasing funding for the state's conservation by \$625 million, an idea that voters approved by a broad margin. This injection of funds will help protect more open spaces, preserve more family farms, restore more polluted waterways, and revitalize towns and cities.

This report highlights 10 places that help define the natural and recreational resources

of Pennsylvania. They are important not just because of their environmental qualities, but because of the value they add to Pennsylvania's economy and to the quality of life for the state's residents. Each individual case study highlights the environmental and economic impacts on local communities, the threats that these areas face and the role that state programs such as Growing Greener have played and may further play in their restoration.

Conservation Success Stories

Fishing and Boating: Pine Creek, Tioga County

Pennsylvanians have a deep bond with the natural outdoors, with more than 5.5 million people engaging in outdoor activities in the state.⁵ Fishing and boating are particularly popular activities in the Commonwealth, with anglers and boaters spending more than 25 million days on Pennsylvania's waters annually.⁶

With this in mind, it is not surprising that recreational tourism is the second largest economic sector in Pennsylvania, with fishing and boating alone generating over \$2 billion annually.⁷ The fishing and boating opportunities draw travelers from outside of Pennsylvania as well, with non-resident anglers spending nearly \$96 million on fishing trips in the Commonwealth in 2001.⁸

Unfortunately, the potential of fishing and boating in the state's economy is not fully met because thousands of miles of rivers, lakes and streams in the Commonwealth are threatened by acid mine drainage, agricultural pollution and sewer overflows. The largest source of pollution is acid mine drainage.⁹

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat



Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

An aerial view of Pine Creek Gorge near Blackwell.

Commission estimates pollution of fishing streams from acid mine drainage deprives the state of \$60 million in lost fishing and boating revenue.¹⁰ Fortunately, public conservation funding can provide the resources to clean up damaged waterways, streams and rivers and restore healthy, aquatic habitats that will attract fishers and boaters.

The Pine Creek Gorge, also known as Pennsylvania's Grand Canyon, is located in the middle of almost 100 miles of natural forested land that sweeps across north-central Pennsylvania. Pine Creek—categorized as a Pennsylvania Exceptional Value Stream—runs through the center of the



Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection

The passive treatment system on the Rattler Mine near Morris

spectacularly scenic Grand Canyon, and has been rated as the most popular trout fishing creek in Pennsylvania.¹¹ Local business owners report that 70%-80% of their business comes from the three spring months when fly-fishing is at its peak.¹²

Although Pine Creek is one of the finest trout fisheries in the northeast U.S., it is threatened by acid mine drainage pollution from Babb Creek, which enters Pine Creek at Blackwell Township, and supplies Pine Creek with one-third of its flow. Babb Creek is the victim of abandoned coal mines, and has been mostly devoid of aquatic life for 150 years.¹³ The problem was greatly exacerbated in the 1970s and 1980s when the abandoned mines were “daylighted,” or mined again, which increased the amount of acid mine drainage contamination, turning Babb Creek’s water more acidic than vinegar.¹⁴

Trout anglers and longtime residents noted a decrease in the diversity and quantity of aquatic insects (an important ecological indicator and food source to sustain fish populations) in Pine Creek downstream from the township of Blackwell, and reported that some species completely vanished. This resulted in more than 5 miles of Pine Creek being designated as an “Impaired Waterway” by the Commonwealth.¹⁵

Slate Run Tackle Shop owner Tom Finkbiner reports that before the mines on Babb Creek were “daylighted,” anglers traveled to Pine Creek from all 50 states and multiple foreign countries to fish. But “business died off right along with the aquatic insects,” said Finkbiner, referring to the stream’s deterioration from acidic mine pollution. Other local business, including restaurants and hotels, suffered as well. A study by Trout Unlimited found that acid mine drainage in Babb and Pine Creeks resulted in an annual economic loss of tens of thousands of dollars.

Finally, in 1989, concerned citizens and anglers organized and took action to control the acid mine pollution and its detrimental effects on the economy and local environment.

After successfully litigating against Antrim Mining Co. for increasing pollution in Babb Creek, local activists created the Babb Creek Reclamation Task Force. Over the next 15 years, 16 restoration projects took place through partnerships between the Babb Creek Reclamation Task Force, foundations, and 26 municipal, county, state and federal agencies.¹⁶

State conservation funding through Growing Greener grants played a critical role—Growing Greener grants allowed several new acid mine treatment systems to be installed in 2000, 2001 and 2002. These systems treated the last significant sources of acid mine drainage in the watershed.¹⁷ By 1999, the once-impaired section of Pine Creek was similar to sections upstream from Babb Creek and Pine Creek was removed from the Impaired Waters list. With the installation of the final treatment systems, aquatic insects returned to Pine Creek, and business related to fishing has been steadily returning to the region.

Not only has Pine Creek been successfully restored, but Babb Creek has recovered in ways that the local community never expected. Babb Creek now supports trout, as well as almost 20 other fish species.¹⁸

“Growing Greener is the program that

makes miracles like the restoration of Pine and Babb creeks possible,” noted Jim Barr of the Babb Creek Reclamation Task Force. “We had all the people power here—all ready to work hard to save our polluted backyards and livelihoods—and Growing Greener gives people the resources they need to make it a reality.”

Despite the progress at Pine and Babb creeks, the need for remediation funding remains. Pine Creek’s water treatment system must continue to operate to prevent the stream from again becoming acidic. And across the state, 13,000 miles of streams remain contaminated by mining.¹⁹

State Parks: Moraine State Park

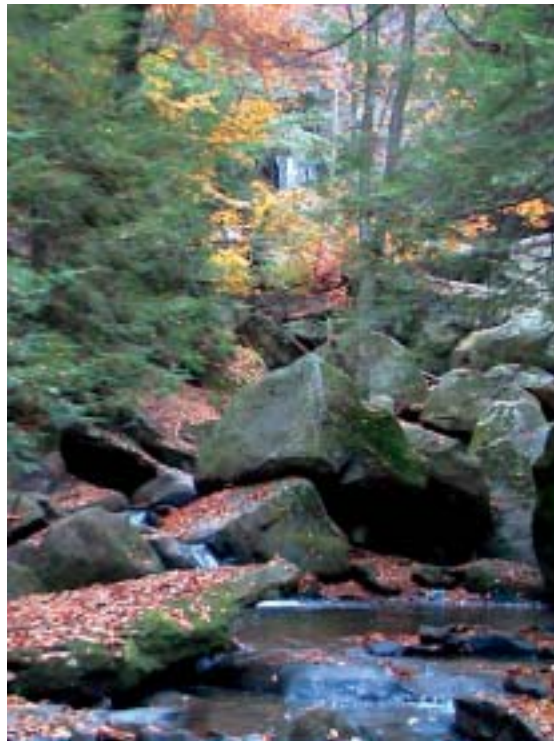
Pennsylvania’s state parks improve the quality of life for the state’s residents by providing recreational opportunities and access to nature. With 116 state parks spread across Pennsylvania, all communities reap benefits from these protected areas.²⁰

Moraine State Park, located in northern Butler County, is representative of the attractions and benefits of state parks. Moraine State Park offers its visitors both natural beauty and a variety of activities, including boating, swimming, fishing, hiking, picnicking, hunting, bicycling and horseback riding. These recreational opportunities enhance life for Pennsylvania residents who visit the park and increase economic activity in the area.

Moraine State Park’s primary attraction is Lake Arthur, a 3,225-acre lake with over 40 miles of shoreline. Not only is the lake a popular swimming, boating and fishing destination, but it is also habitat for important wildlife species, such as great blue herons, belted kingfishers and ospreys.²¹ The lake is also the site of Butler County’s premier recreational event, an annual regatta that attracts 50,000 visitors and is one of the largest weekend events in the region.²²

Moraine State Park maintains a large array of facilities in order to maximize the quality of the experience for its visitors. Besides the basic infrastructure of roads, water and sewage treatment, picnic tables and bathrooms, the park offers two marinas, seven large pavilions, 10 boat launches, a 7-mile paved biking trail, 11 modern rental cabins, a disc golf course, and six hiking trails totaling nearly 30 miles in combined length. During the winter months, the park provides cross country skiing trails, 20 miles of snowmobile trails, and an ice skating area.²³ As a result of the park’s extensive facilities and activities, it is visited by more than 1.1 million visitors annually.²⁴

In recent years, with support from the Growing Greener program, the park has repaired and upgraded many of its 30-year-old facilities. This includes an investment of \$2.4 million to pave the park’s roads and over \$1 million to improve Moraine’s water and sewage treatment plants, important



Moraine State Park

for protecting water quality.²⁵ These infrastructure repairs were essential to keeping the park in basic working order, and without them the quality of visitors' experience would have been diminished.

There remains, however, an enormous need for additional investments in Moraine State Park if it is going to continue to offer a quality experience to its visitors. For example, acid mine drainage threatens water quality in the park. The park is located in the middle of Pennsylvania's mining region, which is highly contaminated and seeps chemicals into Lake Arthur's tributaries. Water pollution remediation in the park is estimated to cost \$2.4 million.²⁶

In addition, restoration of many of Moraine's most heavily used areas is critical to maintaining the park as a regional attraction. The park's 30-year-old infrastructure cannot support growing visitor demand without upgrades and expansions. For example, while the park's two marinas can hold about 900 boats, there is almost always a waiting list for people who would like to rent a slip.²⁷ Even simple items are in need of replacement, such as the park's 1,200 picnic tables.²⁸

Renewed state funding to support Pennsylvania's parks and recreation areas will ensure that the state's residents have access to enjoyable outdoor spaces.

"We just don't have the funding to do the things that we need."

**Charles McQuaid,
Assistant Complex Manager,
Moraine State Park**

Wildlife- and Bird-Watching: Hawk Mountain

When it comes to recreational popularity and economic value, bird and wildlife watching may be the most under-appreciated tourist activity in the Commonwealth.

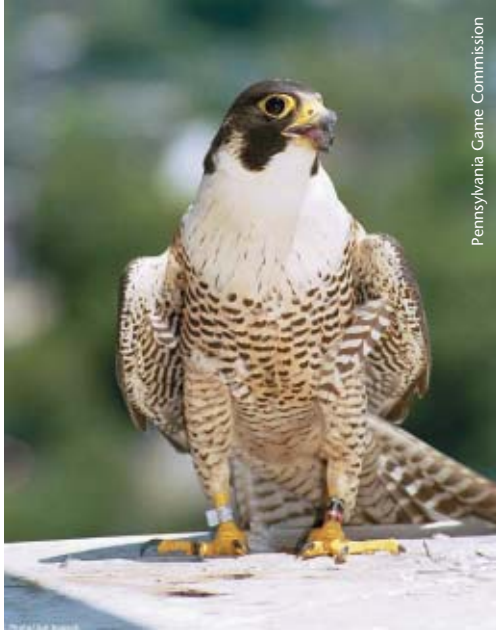
More Pennsylvanians partake in wildlife watching in the Commonwealth than hunting and fishing combined, with more than 3.8 million Pennsylvanians participating in 2001.²⁹ Pennsylvania currently has the third highest number of in-state residents participating in wildlife watching activities in the country, after California and New York.³⁰ Combine this with the fact that another 910,000 out-of-state residents travel to Pennsylvania to partake in bird and wildlife watching, and these popular activities account for expenditures just under \$1 billion annually in Pennsylvania.³¹ In 2001, the wildlife- and bird-watching industries in Pennsylvania generated \$70 million in state sales and income taxes.³²

Bird watching accounts for the bulk of this tourist activity. A 2001 study by the Fish and Wildlife Service found that more than 2.7 million people partook in bird watching activities in Pennsylvania in 2001.³³

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in southern Schuylkill and northern Berks counties exemplifies the potential economic and recreational benefits of wildlife watching in Pennsylvania. As a world-class observation site for birds of prey and a national natural landmark, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary draws tens of thousands of visitors annually.

A 1999 economic survey of the benefits of Hawk Mountain showed that the sanctuary received 83,000 visitors that year alone, with nearly 30% of visitors coming from other states or nations. These visitors spent money at local restaurants, nearby lodging establishments, and local gas stations, and had a \$1.5 million direct economic impact on the region.³⁴ Total annual economic impact is estimated between \$5-10 million.³⁵

The Hawk Mountain forest is an important migration corridor for approximately



Peregrine falcon

20,000 hawks, eagles and falcons annually, and with surrounding public lands, represents one of the largest, contiguous tract of forest in southeastern Pennsylvania.³⁶

Hawk Mountain Sanctuary has been the recipient of \$750,000 in state conservation funds and leveraged an equal amount of private donations to help protect the scenic value of its lands and preserve their ecological functioning. These funds helped support the first complete biological inventory of the site and the first formal land management plan to ensure its future viability. They also made it possible for the Sanctuary to add 190 acres.³⁷

One purchase occurred in 2003, when Hawk Mountain received \$240,000 in Growing Greener funds from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to fund the purchase of a 30-acre tract on the northwest slope of Hawk Mountain, as well as a second parcel. The 30-acre site adds to the amount of protected land for migratory raptors and other birds and provides a buffer for the sanctuary's existing holdings.³⁸

The panoramic views, natural beauty, and ecological value of Hawk Mountain's 2,600 acres are linked to the protection of private rural farmlands and more than 13,000 acres of public lands adjacent to the Kittatinny Ridge, of which the sanctuary is part.³⁹

Currently, private lands that surround Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and Kittatinny Ridge are at risk. Though the higher elevations of the ridge are publicly owned, the lower slopes, which provide the best habitat for nesting forest-interior birds, are being encroached upon by development. Suburbanization threatens the "wildness" of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and the Appalachian Trail that follows the Kittatinny Ridge, a greenway used by Pennsylvanians for birding-watching and hiking, and a repository for wildlife.⁴⁰

New state conservation funding could allow the Hawk Mountain Sanctuary and others to purchase additional land now while it is still available and affordable.

Farming: Lebanon County

Farming is an important part of Pennsylvania's economy, and farmland provides valuable open space. The state's 7.7 million acres of farmland and 59,000 family farms add \$4 billion to the state's economy annually.⁴¹ Yet development threatens agriculture by consuming cropland: from 1982 to 1997, 1.17 million acres of farmland and pastureland were developed for other uses.⁴² State funding for open space and farmland protection can help maintain the state's agricultural base.

In Lebanon County, farming is an essential component of quality of life and the economy. Lebanon County ranks in the top five counties statewide for total agricultural production, milk production, number of chickens, and number of cattle and hogs.⁴³ The county's cropland is the basis for a

“It’s like we have a target on our back—the pressure from developers to pave over our farmlands is incredible and, unfortunately, hard to resist for many of our county’s farmers.”

Charles Wertz, District Manager
Lebanon County Conservation District

thriving agricultural industry that contributes over \$220 million to the local economy.⁴⁴ Lebanon County’s farmland also gives the county a quiet, natural character and provides beautiful scenery—contributing untold quality of life benefits to residents and visitors alike.

Unfortunately, rapidly growing pressure from development, combined with the slowing down of state farmland preservation dollars, is threatening the future of Lebanon County’s farmland. New residents are drawn to the county’s rural beauty and by the easy commute to urban jobs. With Harrisburg to the west, Lancaster to the south and even Philadelphia much further to the east, Lebanon County’s proximity to these growing urban areas combined with its relatively low land costs and pleasing

aesthetics has made it a prime target for developers.

Increasing development pressure in the early 1990s quickly outpaced the region’s farmland preservation efforts. Between 1990 and 1995, Lebanon County lost 1,000 to 1,600 acres of farmland to development annually, while on average only about 230 acres were preserved and kept in farm production. Overall, nearly 18,000 of 127,000 acres, or 14 percent, of prime farmland were lost in Lebanon County from 1990 to 2005.⁴⁵

Fortunately, an influx of farmland preservation dollars that began in 1999 as part of the original Growing Greener program helped to close the gap between development demands and farmland preservation. Preservation funding allows farmers to sell their development rights while retaining ownership of the land so they can continue farming. In 2003, 1,112 acres of farmland were preserved compared to 1,030 acres developed.⁴⁶ While preservation programs are stemming the tide of overdevelopment in the region, Lebanon County clearly has a long way to go to ensure the protection of the county’s farmland.

But as the original Growing Greener dollars are running out, farmland preservation money in Lebanon County is getting increasingly scarce. In recent years, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture matched the county’s investment in farmland preservation dollar-for-dollar. More recently, however, for every dollar the county spent on preservation, the agriculture department was able to contribute only 57 cents.⁴⁷



Lebanon County Conservation District

Preserved farmland in Lebanon County

The shortage of preservation funds hurt people such as Lebanon County farmers Jim and Cheryl Dice, who have been waiting since 1991 for state farmland preservation money to help save their farm, which has been in their family for over 134 years. There are currently 18 other family farms in Lebanon County on Pennsylvania's waiting list.⁴⁸ Statewide, the backlog of farmers seeking state preservation funding has grown to nearly 1,900.⁴⁹

These farmers could easily have sold their land to developers but instead have chosen to preserve their property as productive farmland and continue the legacy of family farming in Lebanon County. Renewed state funding will help farmers like the Dices receive the preservation assistance that they need to protect the state's rich tradition of family farming and this vital economic sector.

Hunting: Moosic Mountain Barrens

Pennsylvanians are avid hunters. The state's residents spend more time hunting than the residents of any other state.⁵⁰ In addition to the 850,000 Pennsylvanians who hunted in 2001, approximately 150,000 came from other states to hunt in Pennsylvania.⁵¹ In that year, the economic activity associated with hunting in Pennsylvania totaled more than \$2.2 billion, for food, lodging, transportation, equipment, permits, and other expenses.⁵²

The Pennsylvania Game Commission, an independent state agency, is responsible for managing habitat on 1.4 million acres of State Game Lands, establishing hunting seasons, and enforcing hunting and trapping laws. Although the Pennsylvania Game Commission has not been able to



Harold Maide

Moosic Mountain Barrens

apply directly for Growing Greener funds, other groups have received funds to improve habitat and protect wildlife on State Game Lands. Equally important, land purchased to prevent development has been opened to hunters.

At 6,500 acres, Moosic Mountain Barrens in Lackawanna County is the largest ridge-top heath barrens in Pennsylvania. The fire-tolerant scrub oaks and pitch pines and smaller plants such as huckleberries and blueberries are home to a rare moth species and many butterflies, and provide crucial habitat for migratory songbirds such as the prairie warbler and golden winged warbler.⁵³

In the late 1990s, both the Greater Scranton Area Chamber of Commerce and the federal government developed plans to build on a portion of the land and disrupt this large wild area. The Chamber of Commerce, through its land development subsidiary, had planned an industrial park and the federal government wanted to construct a penitentiary.⁵⁴ Using matching funds from the Department of Conservation and

At 6,500 acres, Moosic Mountain Barrens in Lackawanna County is the largest ridge-top heath barrens in Pennsylvania.



White tailed deer buck

Natural Resources, Lackawanna County hired the Nature Conservancy to conduct an inventory of the barrens and discovered that it is one of the most important, unfragmented natural habitat areas of its kind in the state.

The Chamber of Commerce agreed to sell its proposed 1,200-acre business park to the Nature Conservancy, which received a \$1.1 million grant through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Land Trust program to fund part of the purchase. The Department worked with the Chamber to find another location for the business park, and the business park now is being constructed on a reclaimed brownfield.⁵⁵

Today, the Nature Conservancy has opened its 1,200 acres to the public and welcomes hunters. The newly preserved site is contiguous with State Game Land 300, a popular hunting area. Through a cooperative agreement with the state Game Commission, the Nature Conservancy allows public hunting on its land and has granted the Commission the right to enforce hunting laws on the property.⁵⁶

Across the state, increased conservation funding could benefit hunters by enabling further land acquisition and supporting hunting-related infrastructure improvements. Much of the Game Commission's extensive infrastructure is in need of repair. For example, many of the state's 41 rifle ranges are in dire need of upgrading. Due

to safety problems and a lack of funding to fix the problems, the Game Commission recently closed four rifle ranges in Somerset, Luzerne, York, and Bucks counties.⁵⁷ Rifle ranges are popular with hunters and others who practice shooting: a single rifle range in Allegheny County had at least 17,000 visitors in 2004, 7,000 of whom were non-hunters.⁵⁸

Expansion of the state's current Growing Greener program will help the Game Commission to maintain its facilities and properties, and could enable other lands to be opened to hunters.

Clean Drinking Water: Lehigh River

Clean drinking water is critical to the well-being of Pennsylvania. Yet, in 2004, 16 percent of the waterways sampled by state officials did not meet standards for supporting fish and insect life, and 70 percent of sampled waterways failed to meet human health standards. Urban and agricultural runoff, combined sewage overflows and acid mine drainage caused most of the impairment.⁵⁹

Fortunately, with adequate funding, these are solvable problems. And investments in protecting drinking water quality make economic sense. Cleaning polluted water to make it suitable for drinking is more expensive than preventing that pollution in the first place.⁶⁰

The Lehigh River is a case in point. The Lehigh River serves as the backup water supply for Allentown and a primary supply for Northampton, Hazleton and Lehigh. It also is a tributary of the Delaware River, a major water source for millions of people in the Philadelphia metropolitan area in both Pennsylvania and New Jersey.⁶¹

Abandoned mines in the Lehigh River watershed have leaked contaminants into the Lehigh River for decades, making it

harder to use the river as a drinking water source. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) lists the Lehigh River as impaired, primarily because of high metal content due to drainage from old mines.⁶²

Seeking to solve this problem, the Wildlands Conservancy, a Pennsylvania non-profit environmental organization, applied for funding from a variety of federal and state grant programs, including Growing Greener.

The Conservancy honed in on the largest source of abandoned mine discharge in the watershed, the Lausanne Tunnel. Before remediation, the tunnel discharged 4,000 gallons of mine drainage per minute, sending more than 16,000 pounds of sulfates, 80 pounds of aluminum, 120 pounds of manganese and 200 pounds of iron per day into the Nesquehoning Creek and eventually the Lehigh River.⁶³



An artificial wetland reduces pollution to the Lehigh River

The Conservancy raised over \$524,000 in funding, built a team of over 20 organizations and government agencies, and designed a man-made wetland to filter the contaminants flowing out of the Lausanne Tunnel. The team completed the 1.5-acre complex of wetlands at the end of June 2004. Planners expect the project to reduce iron and aluminum discharge from the tunnel by over 40 percent.⁶⁴

The Pennsylvania DEP estimates that addressing all of the impacts of acid mine drainage in the Commonwealth would cost roughly \$16 billion.⁶⁵ Without effective watershed protection, the costs of cleaning water polluted by increased runoff due to poorly planned development could also rise into the billions. Programs like Growing Greener are critical to prevent unnecessary water treatment costs in the future, as well as to reduce the impact of past mining or development activity on Pennsylvania's drinking water supplies.

Recreation: Lewisburg Area Recreational Authority

Local recreational parks across Pennsylvania provide basic, day-to-day outdoor enjoyment. These are the places where we walk our dogs, where our children play on playgrounds and swim in community pools, and where neighborhood recreational sports teams compete on summer evenings. Adequate state funding for maintaining existing parks and creating new ones will protect the state's quality of life.

The Lewisburg Area Recreational Authority provides a perfect example of how a minimal investment from the state in local recreation can create results for the local economy and quality of life. Prior to 1999, the recreational areas in the Lewisburg region in central Pennsylvania were created and managed by a loose assemblage of municipalities and regional

recreational organizations. While these groups provided quality recreational opportunities to residents, it was clear that far more could be accomplished if these recreational organizations combined their efforts. With financial help from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources peer-to-peer grant program, the Lewisburg Area Recreation Authority (LARA) was created in 1999 as the new hub for regional recreational planning, implementation and management. By the spring of 2000, LARA had applied for and received funding for a full-time executive director from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

This assistance from the Commonwealth gave LARA the financial jumpstart that it needed. In just a few short years, LARA has improved services and developed recreational programs, attracting 5,000 new participants. With more recreational programming available to residents and with the increased quality of recreational services attracting more local attention, LARA was soon funding 60% of its operations from fees paid by participants, as opposed to 20% just a few years before.⁶⁶

LARA also began undertaking longer term, more ambitious projects such as the rehabilitation of the Lewisburg Community Pool. Constructed in 1960, the facility had deteriorated over time. Crumbling walls, weak foundations and other problems threatened to make the pool unsafe for its 13,000 annual visitors.⁶⁷ Once again, state funding played a key role. The total improvements to the pool were estimated to

“We could not have accomplished what we did here without state funding. Grants from the state provided us with the leg up necessary to attract more investment to our recreational areas, improving our area’s quality of life and invigorating our local economy.”

Greg Weitzel, Executive Director,
Lewisburg Area Recreational
Authority

cost \$1 million. Beginning in October 2000 with a \$175,000 grant from Department of Conservation and Natural Resources through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, LARA pursued matching donations from municipalities, individuals and service clubs to raise almost \$500,000 in three years. Now, with the goal of a fully renovated pool within reach, LARA continues to seek individual donations to provide the remaining necessary funds.

This flurry of recreational development in the region attracted the attention of Playworld—an international playground equipment manufacturer based in Lewisburg. Playworld approached LARA with an exciting offer to help fund an ambitious demonstration park in the Saint Mary Street Recreation Area in west Lewisburg to both demonstrate its products and improve the quality of life in the local area. The company pledged an investment of \$500,000 in the project, and LARA



Activities supported by LARA

is looking into ways to fund the remaining costs.

The Lewisburg Area Recreational Authority is a prime example of how state funding can lead to increased investment from other sources, stimulating the local economy and improving the region's quality of life. The returns on these efforts are more than just quality of life benefits—they make these regions of Pennsylvania more attractive to businesses and tourists, revitalizing and energizing the local economy.

Lewisburg's successes could be replicated across Pennsylvania if state funding were available to jumpstart these important projects. Current funding levels allow the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to satisfy only 40 percent of requests for local recreation projects.⁶⁸ One program that is prepared to follow LARA's example, if funding were available, is the Stroud Region Open Space and Recreation Commission—a recreation authority in the Poconos that recently consolidated three municipal recreational efforts into one, much like LARA. They are working to repair the area's aging local park infrastructure and to develop a regional greenway, but tight budgets have required that tax dollars be directed away from these local parks in order to maintain essential services like fire and police operations.⁶⁹ With further state funding, local communities will not have to choose between municipal services and community projects that enhance the region's economy and quality of life.

Hiking and Camping: Kettle Creek State Park

Pennsylvania's network of hiking trails and state parks with campsites offer residents easy access to outdoor vacations. The state ranks fourth in the nation for the number of campgrounds and RV parks, and visitors to the state request information about camping, whether in a tent or a recreational vehicle, more often than anything else.



Kettle Creek, Clinton County

Camping and related activities prompt \$75 million in spending annually.⁷⁰

Kettle Creek State Park is a 1,793-acre park along Kettle Creek in Clinton County, north central Pennsylvania. Situated in a valley of the 278,000-acre Sproul State Forest, the park is surrounded by mountainous wilderness. The park is probably best known for its hiking and fishing opportunities.

The popular Donut Hole Trail, a 90-mile hiking trail following the west branch of the Susquehanna River through Sproul forest, runs through the park, and Kettle Creek Reservoir is a noted trout and bass fishing area. Hikers traveling through the Sproul forest may see white tail deer, black bear, wild turkey, grouse, timber rattlesnake, warblers and birds of prey.⁷¹

Hikers can begin their trip at Kettle Creek State Park or can hike in from other trailheads. In addition to 70 camping sites, the park offers a 5-mile mountain bike trail, a 250 foot beach, 22 miles of equestrian trails, and 200 picnic tables.⁷² Approximately 116,000 people, many of them return visitors, come to the park each year.⁷³ Though data is not available on how much these visitors spent in nearby towns, park visitors do shop in local grocery stores and shops, eat in restaurants, and purchase fuel at gas stations.



Hyner View, Clinton County

Though the park is well-liked by visitors, many facilities need improvements and park officials are struggling to maintain the quality of existing facilities. A \$900,000 grant through the Growing Greener program allowed officials to repair and improve the dilapidated visitor center and maintenance facility in 2002.⁷⁴ The park still lacks flush toilets and showers, amenities that potential visitors are increasingly searching for and that hikers on multi-day trips especially appreciate.⁷⁵

New state funding would provide money to maintain and increase the quality of services at the park. New support would enable infrastructure improvements, such as building wastewater treatment facilities to provide flush toilets and showers for campers. Additional funding would also allow restoration of the park's natural resources. For example, decades of visitors have heavily compacted the day use areas, making them more prone to heavy flooding. Landscaping and revegetating these areas would help to prevent such flooding.

Increased conservation funding would permit infrastructure upgrades and restoration of natural areas that could improve the experience of the thousands of people who hike and camp in Pennsylvania each year.

Downtown Revitalization: Ridgway

Deteriorating and abandoned buildings in town centers lead to further disinvestment, loss of jobs, and a deteriorating sense of community, while simultaneously forcing development elsewhere, leading to the destruction of open spaces and traffic congestion in surrounding areas. Many downtown areas across Pennsylvania—from small boroughs to big cities—are affected by blight.

Fortunately, publicly funded conservation and restoration programs can reinvigorate downtowns, transforming them from areas of economic and structural decay to thriving centers of commerce and community. One of the urban revitalization success stories of state conservation programs is Ridgway Borough, located in Elk County.

Until recent years, Ridgway was a typical down-and-out town located in north-central Pennsylvania at the base of the Alleghenies. In better days, Ridgway had a bustling downtown center and thriving local lumber industry. But shifting economic forces caused an exodus of jobs and people. Ridgway's population reached its peak in 1910 at slightly over 6,700, but has now declined to under 4,800 residents.⁷⁶ The town's remaining residents were left with a decaying downtown of empty storefronts and decrepit buildings, and a weak local economy.

To address downtown blight, a partnership of community volunteers, businesses and the borough formed the Ridgway Heritage Council to restore the town's economic vitality. The Council spent its first years patching together local funding to build the nearby Clarion-Little Toby trail for hiking and biking. Local community leaders were confident that this scenic trail could attract recreational tourism dollars.

The Ridgway Heritage Council's efforts accelerated with critical matching grants from the Commonwealth totaling \$120,000 from the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund and other programs.⁷⁷ This investment by the state finalized the

conversion of the nearby abandoned train tracks into an 18-mile trail, starting in downtown Ridgway and running along the area's wild, trout-rich streams. Since that initial financial spark, Ridgway has undergone a rapid downtown revitalization based on recreational tourism and the rehabilitation of the downtown's historic facades. Ridgway is now a travel destination for outdoors people, and offers an improved quality of life for residents.

"None of this would be happening if not for the initial, minimal investment by the Commonwealth," says Dale Lauricella, a local bed-and-breakfast owner, and co-founder and president of the Ridgway Heritage Council. She estimates that from the initial \$120,000 invested by the Commonwealth, an additional \$5 million has been generated in Ridgway through non-state public investments, business investments and residential investments.

Downtown Ridgway boasts more than 20 new businesses. Fewer than four vacant buildings remain, while more than 30 restored Victorian homes attract visitors for the Annual Historic Tour of Homes, as well as increasing numbers of out-of-town buyers.

The town has also taken advantage of its location as the "Gateway to the Alleghenies." With the state's elk herds just 30 miles



Bull elk

outside of the borough, elk watching draws over 75,000 visitors annually.⁷⁸ Over 70% of the non-local visitors to the Allegheny National Forest identify elk watching as the primary purpose of the trip, and 40% stay overnight.⁷⁹ Investments by multiple state and private entities have also helped improve infrastructure and marketing for elk watching, including the creation of an "Elk Scenic Drive." Since the investments in the elk watching industry, Ridgway lodgings that cater to recreational tourists bring in 200 to 500 percent more dollars.⁸⁰

Renewed state funding for conservation programs will provide funding for other communities like Ridgway that seek to rebuild their economy and community.



Train tracks converted to a trail near Ridgway

Urban Parks: Fairmount Park

Parks provide serene oases in the middle of busy cities, offering places for family picnics, playgrounds for children, open areas for fairs and public events, and paths and benches that facilitate community interaction. Thanks to Pennsylvania's numerous city parks, residents of small towns and big cities have access to open space on a daily basis.

Even people who do not regularly use parks benefit from them. Respondents to a poll cited access to greenery and to undeveloped land as major factors in determining quality of life.⁸¹ Further, parks provide an economic boost. According to a review of studies that estimate the effect of open space and parks on property values, properties adjoining a park or open space are in the range of 20 percent more valuable than similar properties without open space.⁸²

Philadelphia's 9,100-acre Fairmount Park offers the city's residents and visitors a range of landscapes and activities. Planted areas include an arboretum from the 1876 Centennial Exhibition, an azalea garden, and tree-lined walks. Over half of the park's land, however, is uncultivated meadows,

woods, wetlands, and streams.⁸³ The park's facilities include playgrounds, a swimming pool, picnic pavilions, an indoor recreation center, the Philadelphia Zoo, more than 50 playing fields, basketball courts, boat-houses, bicycle paths, a driving range, and a disc golf course.⁸⁴ The park also includes hundreds of sculptures, historic homes, and an outdoor amphitheater.

Due to the wear and tear imposed by tens of thousands of visitors annually, pressure from pollution and stormwater runoff, and the effects of time, Fairmount Park's natural areas and facilities have required significant upgrades and restoration.

The Fairmount Park Commission received \$636,000 from the Growing Greener program to restore Meadow Lake.⁸⁵ In addition to state funding, the Fairmount Park Commission spent \$100,000 and volunteers worked for 1,300 hours. A swimming pool, constructed in 1958 and separated from the lake by a concrete berm, had deteriorated and been closed in 1996. After removing the concrete, asphalt and fill material of the berm and pool, the Fairmount Park Commission added topsoil, allowed water to return to the site, and planted 10,000 wetland grasses, trees and shrubs. A nearby mowed area was returned to its natural state to increase habitat area and provide a buffer for the wetlands.

The restored lake is larger and has greater biodiversity, and provides food and nesting habitat for birds. A path winding through the area allows park visitors close contact with the wetland, a type of habitat that often is inaccessible. Additional Growing Greener grants have enabled the restoration of other natural areas in the park.

Separately, the Philadelphia Water Department received nearly \$1 million in funding through Growing Greener in 2001 to build a new interpretive center in Fairmount Park.⁸⁶ The educational facility provides students and other visitors information about water and the urban environment through an urban watershed exhibit, watershed technologies display, and water lab.



Meadow Lake, before and after

Recommendations

The 10 important projects highlighted in this report represent just a few of the hundreds—if not thousands—of environmental and recreational resources across the Commonwealth that could help stimulate local economies and improve Pennsylvanians' quality of life with further financial support.

Pennsylvania must make long-term fiscal commitments to programs that will benefit our environment, grow our economy and improve the well being of the state's residents.

Voters recently showed their broad support for funding environmental initiatives when they supported the Growing Greener ballot initiative on May 17, 2005 by a margin

of 61 percent to 39 percent. Building on this broad-based and bipartisan support, Pennsylvania's decision makers should utilize this mandate to further increase funding for environmental programs in the state that not only protect our open spaces and restore waterways, but that also improve recycling, clean up hazardous waste sites and promote downtown revitalization. Elected officials should also promote policies that give local citizens and municipal officials more legal tools to promote open space protection in their communities and improve the Pennsylvania's Municipalities Planning Code to promote common sense "smart growth" policies in the Commonwealth.

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