

THE PENNSYLVANIA FORESTRY ASSOCIATION

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BACKGROUND:

The Department of Environmental Resources (DER) created by legislative action in 1970 by combining several departments and bureaus into a single "super agency" responsible for all environmental protection in the Commonwealth. This was in response to a new environmental awareness sweeping the country at the time and was appropriate as environmental regulation was fragmented and ineffective. However, the inclusion of the non-regulatory resources management for Bureaus of Forestry and State Parks was ill-advised and has proven to be a major mistake.

Economic studies by The Pennsylvania State University show that the annual economic impact of state parks exceeds \$500 million. Thirty-seven million visitors utilize state parks annually. With 114 parks, the Bureau of State Parks is the third largest state park system in the country.

The two million acre state forest system is one of the largest, most productive in the United States, containing some of the most desirable hardwoods in the world. These forests provide many forms of recreation, protect valuable watersheds, cleanse the air, and provide a sustained yield of forest products. The economic impact of state forest recreational use has never been quantified but considering size, location, and accessibility of the state forests, it must be in the hundreds of millions of dollars annually. Pennsylvania is 59% forested, with 17 million acres of forests. The forest products industry is the state's fourth largest and is expanding. The Bureau of Forestry is the linchpin in forestry matters statewide as it is responsible for providing technical assistance to the private sector in wise-use stewardship and effective utilization that is essential to sustaining the forest resources.

The Bureaus of Forestry and State Parks have tremendous economic and environmental importance to the Commonwealth.

STATUS:

Since its inception, funding and personnel for environmental protection elements of DER have escalated dramatically. Simultaneously, funding for resource management has failed to support even the basic programs. Since 1980, the Bureau of Forestry's budget has declined from about ten percent of DER's total budget to seven percent. Likewise, State Parks' budget has decreased from 14 percent to 10 percent. The authorized salaried personnel in DER has grown from 3,647 in 1980 to 4,120 in 1992. Meanwhile, the salaried personnel complement in the Bureau of Forestry has declined from 519 to 437 positions, and State Parks from 751 to 615, salaried positions.

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STATUS CONTINUED:

During the past three years, forestry has been able to harvest only 27 percent of the annual allowable timber cut, while the demand for timber is dramatically increasing. Both traditional recreation use and new user groups utilizing state forest lands are growing by leaps and bounds. Increased public use has resulted in increased vandalism and other illegal activities. Current staff is woefully inadequate to provide off-hour informational contact and public safety. The primary concern of using the public continues to be the lack of law enforcement on state forest lands, and they believe that enforcement should be made a top priority.

State Parks requires \$100 million to modernize antiquated physical plants. It is estimated that an additional \$7.5 million per year is required to prevent the major maintenance backlog from increasing. The majority of state park overnight facilities do not meet minimum security requirements for public safety and facility protection. Security staffing is well-below adequate state park staffing standards.

The concept of a Department of Resource Management is not new. In some states, Resource Management is a separate department, while in others, it is combined with Environmental Protection. A recent study at the University of Minnesota shows that Resource Management invariably suffers financially when combined with Environmental Protection.

SUMMARY:

1. Public service is diminished through curtailed goods and services, and natural resources suffer when resource management functions are only a minor part of a large regulatory oversight department.
 - a. The programs of environmental protection and resource management are distinctly different.
 - b. In competition between human health concerns and resource management, it is inevitable that resource management is secondary.
2. The current DER organization has not functioned as intended, particularly in regard to Forestry and State Parks.
 - a. Environmental Protection has dramatically expanded while Forestry and State Parks has substantially declined.
 - b. The possibility of achieving needed funding increases for resource management is precluded as long as their functions remain in a department whose major focus is higher profile public health and environmental protection.

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SUMMARY CONTINUED:

3. State Parks and Forestry have a great economic and environmental impact on the entire Commonwealth, and programs of this magnitude deserve cabinet-level department status.

Two separate departments would rebuild, improve, and enhance Pennsylvania's natural resource activities, while strengthening vital environmental programs.

Adopted by the PFA Board of Directors—September 29, 1993.