

**TESTIMONY
ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES & ENERGY COMMITTEE**

APRIL 27, 1995

PRESENTED BY WILLIAM C. FORREY, FORMER DIRECTOR OF STATE PARKS

Good afternoon.

I am William C. Forrey, former Director of State Parks in the Department of Environmental Resources. I retired from DER in 1992 and I am now Assistant to the President of The RBA Group, an Engineering, Architectural and Planning consulting company.

I would like to thank the Committee for inviting me to discuss the restructuring of the Department of Environmental Resources.

First, I want to say that I endorse , wholeheartedly, House Bill 1400.

Also, I am representing the views of the PA Recreation and Park Society on the restructuring of the Department of Environmental Resources. The Society is a statewide, non-profit membership association with 1470 members who are municipal recreation and park directors, state park managers, state and federal officials, members of local recreation and park boards, therapeutic recreation specialists, activity coordinators, and college students.

The primary focus of the Society (PRPS) is on education, training, and support services for local and state park and recreation agencies. We feel that park and recreation agencies are vitally important to the Commonwealth because of the many benefits that are provided by recreation and park agencies through their programs, facilities, and park areas.

A Branch of this organization is the Pennsylvania State Park Society. The Pennsylvania State Park Society has among its membership state park managers, park maintenance managers, administrative assistants, environmental education specialists, engineers, and planners. This Society and the parent Society support the restructuring of the Department of Environmental Resources into a natural resource department and a regulatory department.

Personally speaking, I worked for 32 years for the Bureau of State Parks from 1960 to 1992, which included both the Departments of Forests and Waters and Environmental Resources. I served in the two Departments during the terms of Secretaries Goddard, Jones, Duncan, DeBenedictis and Davis.

Having had the experience of serving in two vastly different size Departments, I can say without hesitation that the smaller Department of Forests and Waters was a much better way to manage and protect our natural resources. DER became so large that the Secretary did not have time to devote his attention to some of the units of the Department. Because the environmental issues became so sensitive, most of his time was consumed with them. As a result, state parks and forestry were not given the attention that they needed. I want to emphasize, however, that I am not criticizing the former Secretaries. All of them had tremendous interest in state parks and forestry, but the environmental issues were so overwhelming that they could not devote sufficient time to the natural resource Bureaus.

The new Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

will bring together many related programs which focus on conservation, recreation, parks and forestry. This will enhance cooperation, coordination, and communications so as to better utilize existing resources.

I firmly believe that the incorporation of the Bureau of Conservation and Recreation from the Department of Community Affairs into the new Department is a logical move. It will bring the major units of State Government involved in recreation, parks and forestry under one roof. Other states have such an arrangement and it has proven to be a wise decision.

I want to commend you for including in House Bill 1400 a number of important changes which will make the management of the state park and forest land more efficient. For example, providing for police power for both park and forest rangers on park and forest lands will be advantageous for the security of the state parks and forest districts.

The inclusion of DCA's Bureau of Conservation and Recreation will bring together the grant programs for local government and the recently authorized trail grants in DER. This consolidation of grant programs will improve the delivery system of support to local governments throughout the Commonwealth.

In terms of the cost of having two departments rather than one, it is my understanding that new positions will not be created in the process of implementing this change. It is important to note, however, that regardless of the

location of the state park and forest Bureaus, the number of staff positions in the field units are understaffed in many areas. Any future requests for additional positions in the Forest Districts and State Parks should not be related to the restructuring.

I have several suggestions relative to some programs that will enhance the natural resource protection within the new Department. For example, the Pennsylvania Conservation Corps program was moved from DER to the Department of Labor and Industry several years ago. If that program is to be continued, I believe it should be returned to the new Department for administration. Also, a statewide greenways program should be initiated as soon as possible. I am pleased that Governor Ridge has pledged to hold a Governor's Conference on Greenways next year. This is a program that Pennsylvania should get involved with quickly. In fact, in terms of rail-to-trail conversions, Pennsylvania ranks second in the nation. It is important, however, that the Commonwealth help to guide the program with its grants and statewide planning efforts.

In the overall organization of government at the State level, I endorse the concepts which are included in House Bill 1400 and I commend the Committee for its foresight in moving to implement the creation of the Departments of Conservation and Natural Resources and Environmental Protection.