



PENNSYLVANIA ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS, INC.

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Celebrating 50 Years of Conservation Districts in Pennsylvania

The Honorable Robert D. Reber, Jr.
149, Main Capitol
Harrisburg, PA

Dear Representative Reber:

My name is Bernard Hoffnar and I serve as President of the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts.

Our association would like to take this opportunity to provide you with our thoughts and concerns about the proposed splitting of the Department of Environmental Resources.

ROLE OF CONSERVATION DISTRICTS

Our primary concern is the location of the PA State Conservation Commission (SCC). We strongly support the provision in House Bill 1400 which locates the SCC in the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

As proposed in this legislation, the Bureau of Land and Water Conservation, and the Bureau of Dams, Waterways and Wetlands will be situated in the Department of Environmental Protection. Conservation districts have historically worked closely with these two Bureaus and we fully expect to maintain these relationships for the benefit of our local constituents and the Commonwealth.

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The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) supports the location of the SCC within the DEP for the following reasons:

- All programs presently administered by the Commonwealth's conservation districts are related to efforts in the maintenance or improvement of Pennsylvania's water quality.

- Because of strong farmer director presence on the State Conservation Commission, locating the SCC within the DEP provides a greatly-needed administrative voice to implement regulatory programs that impact the agricultural community. This "inside" voice could be lost if the SCC were to be moved. An example of the importance of this relationship was illustrated by recent conservation district actions to work with the DER to simplify and clarify the permitting procedure for waterways and wetland encroachments so that the average citizen is not discouraged from applying for a permit, while still providing a level of water quality protection.

- At the local level, all district boards have a majority agricultural director component which assists in the user-friendly approach in administering present mandatory DER programs, and future DEP programs. Districts have always held local governance as one of their fundamental assets in administering programs to their local communities. With the belief that many of the local natural resource problems can be solved locally through voluntary cooperation, districts across the state have taken on delegation of programs such as the Erosion and Sedimentation Pollution Control Program, the Dam

Safety and Encroachment Program dealing with streams and wetlands, the Agricultural Utilization of Sewage Sludge Program, the Landowner Reclamation of Abandoned Mines Program, and the Chesapeake Bay Cost-Share Program. Each of these programs has been successful because local people have had the ability to input, set priorities, and in many aspects control a traditional DER regulatory program. And all of these programs have a direct impact on Pennsylvania's water quality.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we support locating the SCC in the DEP. Pennsylvania's conservation districts look forward to working with both the DEP and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to insure that the citizens of the Commonwealth have clean water to drink, rich land to grow crops on, and a future for our families to enjoy in Pennsylvania.

Submitted by the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts.