

## **House Appropriations Budget Hearing**

**Testimony by Cindy Dunn**  
*Interim Acting Secretary*  
**Department of Conservation and Natural Resources**

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Chairman Adolph, committee members, thank you for this opportunity to address the budget priorities of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Pennsylvanians love their nationally-acclaimed state parks that offer outdoor activities and close to home vacations that create family memories. Our forests define the way we think about our state, and make us worthy of the name "Penn's Woods."

Studies show that the visitors to state parks help local communities prosper, returning more than \$9 for every one dollar of state money invested in them; generating more than \$928 million in local expenditures each year. Our certified well-managed forest system supports the state's multi-billion timber and energy industries as well as provides clean water and air, hiking and other outdoor activities, scenic beauty and habitat.

Governor Corbett has proposed a 2011-12 budget that demonstrates a commitment to taking ownership of our financial burdens and not passing them on to the next generation.

I am pleased to say as a revenue-producing agency, DCNR's proposed budget is about equal to this fiscal year, which will allow us to operate as we currently do, continuing this unique balance of conservation practices and economic development.

The budget proposal uses \$65 million in revenues from the Oil and Gas Lease Fund generated from gas leases on state forest lands to offset the operating costs of the department. The budget numbers are not based on additional leasing of state forestland.

This will free up dollars normally appropriated to run DCNR for other General Fund uses to help address revenue shortfalls in other areas.

When created by the hand of conservation giant Maurice Goddard in 1955, the Oil and Gas Lease Fund was intended to support conservation and recreation efforts in the state. Because DCNR's mission is to conserve and sustain Pennsylvania's natural resources for the present and future, using the fund to support the work of the agency is consistent with this purpose.

This action will help the Commonwealth to weather some of the most challenging economic times in decades, and preserve DCNR's ability to manage state parks and forests, promote land conservation and sustainable communities, and provide outdoor connections for citizens and visitors.

It reflects DCNR's value in the lives of Pennsylvanians, our inspired work, and the fact that we operate a lean and efficient organization. The last few budgets have been challenging to DCNR. We have lost people and money, so this budget will still require us to operate frugally, dig for operational efficiencies and stretch ourselves. We have proven we can do that and do it well.

As a result, all of your state parks **will remain open** to our citizens for affordable getaways, and to attract the visitors who spend money in our Commonwealth. State parks and forests are woven in to the fabric of our rural communities, integral to their economies, and are accessible to all Pennsylvanians. Keeping them open is critical for our economic vitality and our quality of life.

With direct oversight of one-sixth of all of our forested areas, the Bureau of Forestry is the state's largest land manager. As we see increased activity related to gas drilling on the leased

areas of state forests, it was also a priority to maintain the current level of staff who work to plan and monitor these drilling activities, protecting the important balance of uses of the forest and making sure it is healthy for future generations. Twenty-seven positions were added to the Bureau of Forestry in this fiscal year for monitoring and field work, and this budget supports their continued operations.

And, because economic activity is expected to build, we are cautiously optimistic that our grant dollars -- the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund and the Environmental Stewardship Fund -- will remain intact, allowing us to continue our community grant and infrastructure work that invests in helping communities capitalize on their natural assets. Every \$1 of DCNR grants is matched by \$3 from other sources.

DCNR's community work is built around a landscape-scale approach to conservation, using partnerships at a regional and local level to make communities and economies sustainable by capitalizing on resources including parks, forests, trails and rivers as a local economic development tool.

As just one example, in the Pennsylvania Wilds region in northcentral Pennsylvania increases in tourism related employment earnings and tax revenues are exceeding statewide averages. Studies also are showing strong economic returns in trail towns and other communities that are connecting revitalization efforts to their natural landscapes.

Strengthening and institutionalizing these and other initiatives this year and next, and working to connect deeply to communities and partners will be our focus.

DCNR has transitioned itself from a land management model to that of an engaged government, one that not only protects and enhances the state's irreplaceable natural treasures, but also improves the health and quality of life of our citizens and supports communities,

economies and industries. We are helping to build a brighter future for Pennsylvania. We look forward to your help in these efforts.