



June 13, 2014

Dear Representative/Senator XXXXX:

We, the undersigned organizations, strongly urge you to protect funding in the 2014-2015 FY budget for conservation, recreation, and preservation programs critical to the protection of our land, water and heritage.

We recognize the budget challenges currently facing the Commonwealth and ask for your leadership in addressing these challenges without sacrificing core programs that contribute so much to the economic health and overall well-being of Pennsylvania communities.

We firmly oppose cuts to the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, the Growing Greener Environmental Stewardship Fund, farmland preservation, Heritage Areas Program, and historic preservation. Now more than ever, Pennsylvania needs to *strengthen* its investment in local efforts to protect our open space, preserve our family farms, support parks and recreation, and preserve our historic sites.

Pennsylvania communities have had to endure significant cuts to several programs in the past. It is disappointing to learn that, having proven time and again their effectiveness and value to Commonwealth residents, these important programs—and the local projects they support—are once again in jeopardy. If we hope to make real progress in tackling the many environmental challenges facing Pennsylvania, now is the time to step up our commitment to programs that protect land and water.

Consider that:

- The Commonwealth has 19,000 miles of rivers and streams that do not meet basic water quality standards.
- More than 2,000 family farms remain on the statewide list for preservation.
- Pennsylvania continues to lose more forest, wildlife habitat, farmland and other open spaces to development than we are able to preserve.
- Abandoned mines still scar almost 220,000 acres across the Commonwealth and are the cause of more than 5,000 miles of dead streams.

Investments in conservation, recreation, and preservation also bolster the economy. A Trust for Public Land study on the Keystone Fund found that for every \$1 invested in land and water conservation, \$7 in natural goods and services is returned to the state of Pennsylvania.

Moreover, investments in parks and open space add billions of dollars to property values and help support Pennsylvania's tourism and recreation industry. A report by the Outdoor Industry



Association indicates that outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania generates \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenue and supports 219,000 direct Pennsylvania jobs.

Lastly, polls show strong, consistent public support for programs that improve our quality of life, boost the economy and protect the environment throughout Pennsylvania. The Growing Greener Environment Stewardship Fund, which celebrates its 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, and the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund, which just passed its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, have enjoyed strong, bipartisan support from voters, legislators and governors since the beginning.

A survey released June 3<sup>rd</sup> by Penn State found that more than **97.4 percent of Pennsylvanians surveyed think that state funds dedicated to protecting rivers and streams; conserving open space, forests, natural areas and wildlife habitats; providing parks and trails, and preserving farmland should continue to be used for these purposes.** This figure represented strong bi-partisan support, and is up by five percentage points since 2012.

The survey also found that more than three-quarters of respondents – **82.6 percent – would support increasing state funds to address these issues, even if it would cost the average household \$10 more annually.** This figure is up from 77.7 percent in 2012.

The people of Pennsylvania clearly feel that these programs hold value and must not be diminished.

We also have grave concerns about the elimination of funding for the Heritage Areas Program, which has successfully conserved and enhanced the state's scenic, recreational, cultural and historical resources while promoting tourism development for nearly 25 years.

The General Assembly rightly rescued this important program last year, and we are disappointed that it is slated for the chopping block again this year. We urge you to restore \$3 million in funding for the Heritage Areas Program, which creates jobs and brings business to the region, generating hundreds of millions of dollars in state revenues.

We recognize the challenges ahead and look forward to working with you to ensure that funding for programs that protect our open space, preserve our family farms, support our parks and trails, and safeguard our historic treasures remains intact.

Thank you.



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