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May 8, 2009

Secretary John Hanger
Department of Environmental Protection
Rachael Carson State Office Building, 16th Floor
P. O. Box 2063
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2063

Re: DEP Initiatives Affecting Conservation District Responsibilities

Dear Secretary Hanger:

Pike County Conservation District Board of Directors would like to add our voice to those who have expressed concern with DEP's recent actions to transfer all Chapter 102 and Chapter 105 responsibilities related to oil and gas activities from districts to DEP Regional Oil and Gas Program offices. We question how Williamsport Regional Oil and Gas Program staff will be able to consistently deliver the same level of service and natural resource protection that the Conservation District provides within Pike County.

Pike County Conservation District twice in the last year entered into revised delegation agreements with DEP to assume additional responsibilities for services that DEP was struggling to provide. The first revision related to District assumption of enforcement responsibilities in the Chapter 102 and NPDES Permit programs necessitated by a long-standing scarcity of DEP Regional Office compliance assistance resources. The second revision provided for District review of post construction stormwater plans for land development projects requiring NPDES Permits. This involved a commitment to hire and train a professional engineer in an effort to help expedite permit reviews in the face of staff shortages in the DEP Regional Office. Pike County Conservation District also provides DEP delegated Chapter 105 services in Pike County with no state cost share funding because we believe the resources and the residents of Pike County benefit from our involvement. District staff are experienced, trained, knowledgeable of local conditions and respected by local officials and landowners.

Noting the Department's regular communications and working relationships with industry groups and other conservation organizations, we are left wondering why DEP is not more actively engaging its Conservation District partners in formulating and implementing new policies and regulatory changes for programs that we jointly administer. Pike County Conservation District would like to be part of a broader conversation about how communication between DEP and Conservation Districts can be improved. We echo the PA Association of

Conservation Districts' request for a meeting between you and representatives from delegated conservation districts to discuss this issue.

Please feel free to contact me at 570-241-1188 or Executive Director Susan Beecher at 570-226-8220 if you would like to discuss this further.

On Behalf of the Board of Directors,

Sincerely,

Scott F. Savini, District Chairman

Cc: Governor Edward Rendell
Senator Lisa Baker
Representative Mike Peifer
Representative John Siptroth
Pike County Commissioners
PA Association of Conservation Districts
Susan Beecher, Executive Director