

PIKE COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

PIKE COUNTY ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

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COUNTY SOLICITOR

April 6, 2009

Acting 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:

The Pike County Commissioners are very concerned with what appears to be a trend on the part of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection towards reducing Conservation District oversight in crucial natural resource protection programs. We are also troubled by the precedent set by DEP in implementing key policy changes without meaningful input from the Conservation Districts that administer the programs at the local level.

From the proposed Permit by Rule, which would remove Conservation District technical review of certain land development plans, to the recent transfer of erosion and sediment control and waterways encroachment permitting responsibilities for gas drilling activities to DEP's Regional Office Oil and Gas Program staff, we believe such actions to be shortsighted given the local perspective that Conservation Districts bring to balancing environmental protection with growth and the history of responsible and efficient delivery of state environmental programs at the county level.

Pike County is the fastest growing county in the Commonwealth. Pike County Commissioners have made a long-term commitment to a variety of planning and conservation initiatives aimed at protecting the County's land and water resources, preserving quality of life and providing for smart growth. Pike County Conservation District plays a strategic role in these efforts with a well-trained, experienced and respected staff and an engaged board of directors that represents a cross section of local interests. It makes no sense whatsoever for DEP to curtail District review of land development plans or to assign new responsibilities to already shorthanded regional offices when County Conservation Districts across the state are already performing these delegated duties under the Chapter 102 and 105 programs. We question how staff from the Williamsport Regional Office, with no knowledge of local landscapes and responsibility for multiple counties can "maximize the effective delivery of these programs" in Pike or other counties in the region.

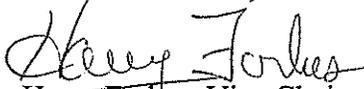
We encourage DEP to reconsider any efforts to reduce local input and oversight in the environmental programs capably administered by County Conservation Districts and make a renewed commitment to fully engage Districts in proposed program changes to assure that local resource issues and community objectives are considered.

Sincerely,

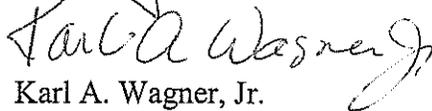
Pike County Commissioners



Richard A. Caridi, Chairman



Harry Forbes, Vice Chairman



Karl A. Wagner, Jr.

Cc: Governor Edward Rendell
Senator Lisa Baker
Representative Mike Peifer
Representative John Siptroth
County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania
Scott Savini, Pike County Conservation District Chairman