



Senate Environmental Resources and Energy Committee

Senator Mary Jo White
Chairman

Patrick Henderson, Executive Director

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June 23, 2009

Andy Loza
Pennsylvania Land Trust Association
105 Locust Street, Suite 300
Harrisburg, PA 17101

Dear Mr. Loza:

Thank you for your recent letter on behalf of several conservation groups expressing your opposition to Senate Bill 962 and Senate Bill 963.

As you know, I am the prime sponsor of these bills. I fully support these proposals, and believe the concerns expressed in your letter originate from a misunderstanding as to the intent and actual effect of these particular bills.

Senate Bill 962 and Senate Bill 963 do not require the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) to allocate any money for state park operations. Rather, they provide the Secretary of DCNR with the discretion – if a need should arise – to augment state park operations from the Environmental Stewardship Fund and the Keystone Fund.

The concern that this legislation creates a lose-lose situation is misplaced. These bills merely expand the menu of permissible uses of this money. Indeed, both the Growing Greener and Keystone statutes already have multiple uses of these funds, in addition to the grants that they provide to your members. For example, the Keystone Fund can be used for state park and forest infrastructure upgrades, rails-to-trails projects and the purchase of in-holdings to expand the state park and state forest systems. It is inconsistent for the conservation community to accept these uses, yet argue that SB 962 and SB 963 would fundamentally undermine both the Environmental Stewardship Fund and the Keystone Fund, because the General Assembly saw fit to provide DCNR with additional funding flexibility.

At its core, I believe the opposition generated by some groups to this legislation underscores the fallacy of dedicated funding. The trash tipping fee and the realty transfer taxes which provide the revenue to these funds belong to the taxpayers of Pennsylvania – not to any one interest group. Dedicated funding insulates beneficiaries from the reality facing every other recipient of taxpayer money: the need to compete for limited resources and to justify its place on the budget priority list. It suggests that its recipients are more important than education, health care, assistance to the poor or any other number of worthwhile investments. The reaction of some groups within the conservation community last session to efforts to use surplus Keystone

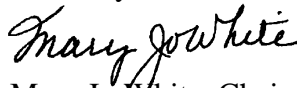
Funds for the Hazardous Sites Cleanup Fund – perhaps the most fundamental environmental obligation of the state – further illustrates this point.

To be clear, I continue to believe that funding for state park operations is best handled in the General Fund budget. However, should the need arise in the future – be it insufficient appropriations for state parks, or the need to freeze funding mid-year – these bills would provide a hedge to ensure that our state parks remain accessible. I am also willing to limit the use of these funds for a period of five years. However, I respectfully suggest that, as important as the grant projects funded by Growing Greener and the Keystone Fund are, it should be a higher priority of DCNR to keep our state parks open, accessible and properly maintained. This is particularly true during this economic hardship as we consider the numerous communities and their businesses which rely on state park visitors.

Budgeting is about priorities. Numerous programs across the state face elimination or deep funding cuts, and no expenditure should be immune from this scrutiny. We must also keep in mind that, as one Cabinet official recently said, the environmental and conservation community has done extraordinarily well over the past six years. Record investments from Growing Greener and the Keystone Fund, the \$625 million Growing Greener Bond Fund and the \$650 million Alternative Energy Investment Fund continue to make Pennsylvania a leader in environmental, conservation and alternative energy policy and funding.

Thousands of people from across the Commonwealth have expressed their strong support for ensuring state park services are maintained in this year's budget. SB 962 and SB 963 are two important measures aimed at doing just that.

Sincerely,



Mary Jo White, Chairman
Senate Environmental Resources
& Energy Committee

cc: Pennfuture
Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds
Greenspace Alliance
Heritage Conservancy
Lancaster Farmland Trust
Montgomery County Lands Trust
Natural Lands Trust
PA Recreation & Park Society
PennEnvironment
Pennsylvania Environmental Council
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
Philadelphia Parks Alliance
Sierra Club, PA Chapter
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy, Pennsylvania Chapter
The Trust for Public Land
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy