

Conservation District Week May 5-11, 2019

Thank you for supporting the Commonwealth's 66 Conservation Districts!

2019-2020 Budget

Conservation districts thank members of the PA House and Senate, as well as the Governor, for supporting the districts by providing the funds necessary to preserve and protect our Commonwealth's natural resources through the state budgetary process. Governor Tom Wolf's proposed budget recommends continued funding for conservation districts in both the PA Department of Agriculture (PDA) and PA Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) budgets.

Conservation districts often enter into contracts and accept authority delegated by state agencies. Over the last several years, agencies have struggled with decreased funding resulting in fewer employees. Consequently, conservation districts have taken on additional responsibilities without additional compensation.

To ensure that conservation districts can accommodate agency and community needs, the Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts (PACD) is respectfully requesting that the General Assembly 2019-2020 budget include a 10 percent increase to the "Transfer to the Conservation District Fund" lines in both the PDA and DEP to maintain current programs and services for local communities. These lines have not been increased since the 2004-2005 fiscal year.

Conservation districts have enjoyed partnering with state agencies in the past and are looking forward to working with them efficiently and cost-effectively in the future. By increasing the "Transfer to the Conservation District" lines in the PDA and DEP budget, districts will be able to continue providing the Commonwealth with the services Pennsylvania citizens have enjoyed and grown accustomed to receiving.

The Governor's proposed budget takes money from Environmental Stewardship Fund (ESF) to pay for DEP administrative costs, which were previously taken out of the DEP annual budget.



PACD continues to support utilizing the ESF to fund the growing greener program and its success in assisting local communities with natural resource projects, but philosophically opposes using funding from the ESF to pay for state agency administrative costs.

Additionally, the Governor recommends a transfer of the conservation district fund line from the DEP general budget to the ESF.

PACD also supports keeping conservation district funding in the DEP general fund, continuing with the existing funding structure, rather than moving our funding source to the ESF.

Pennsylvania's Dirt and Gravel / Low Volume Road Program

The purpose of Pennsylvania's Dirt, Gravel, and Low Volume Road Program is to create a better public road system with a reduced environmental impact, utilizing site-specific, long-term solutions to prevent erosion and pollution. The Program focuses on "Environmentally Sensitive Road Maintenance Practices" that reduce the impact of road runoff and sediment to local streams, while reducing road maintenance costs. In 2013, Act 89 was enacted, effectively increasing the funding for the Program from \$5 million to \$35 million annually. The Act dedicates \$28 million to dirt and gravel road improvements and also mandates that \$8 million be used for the maintenance of low-volume paved roads with less than 500 vehicles per day.

Pennsylvania's 20,000 miles of publicly owned unpaved roads are a prime example of non-point source pollution. Unpaved roads not only generate sediment, but also act as collectors for runoff and sediment from adjacent land uses. The Act 89 funding allows conservation districts to assist local municipalities and more effectively reduce water pollution.

Thank you for your support of the program to improve Pennsylvania's roads and water quality.

Third Party Reviewer Legislation

HB 509 has recently been introduced which includes language allowing for third party permit reviews. Conservation districts are concerned that allowing for these private reviews will hinder the permit review process and result in permit approval delays with the potential for approved permits not meeting state standards. This legislation could also mean the same private firms who develop the permit application would be the reviewer of those permits.

For these reasons, PACD opposes HB 509.

