

Citizens Advisory Council

to the Department of Environmental Protection

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October 3, 2002

The Honorable John N. Wozniak
Senate of Pennsylvania
Senate Post Office Box 203035
Harrisburg, PA 17120-3035

Dear Senator Wozniak:

While water is one of Pennsylvania's most abundant and valuable resources, we do little to manage the use of it. The Commonwealth continues to battle ongoing drought conditions, yet has no comprehensive water management system. We do not know how much water is available, how much is needed to support human and aquatic health, or the amount and location available for future uses. Pennsylvania is not in a position to effectively manage future development of water resources. As a result, growth and development in the state are and will continue to occur with little regard for water resource availability or impacts.

To address this shortcoming, the Citizens Advisory Council¹ to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection again urges you to adopt a comprehensive and integrated system of water resource management. Planning must be followed by management, and where appropriate, conservation, to minimize the effects of overuse of water and recurring periods of drought. Without an integrated, comprehensive approach, severe shortages and over-use may render water resources incapable of meeting essential needs, cause conflicts among users, disrupt or damage economic activities, destroy aquatic organisms and contribute to environmental degradation, pollution and unsanitary conditions. All of these are detrimental to the health, safety and welfare of Pennsylvanians and to Pennsylvania's economy.

The Council's position, which is summarized in the enclosure, builds on the recommendations made by the Governor's 21st Century Environment Commission. Council cautions against provisions that allow entire categories of users to be exempt from reporting their usage patterns, as complete data is needed to quantify how much water is needed and where. We also caution against provisions that further limit municipal authority in land use planning, as local land use is key to protecting water supplies. We encourage you to give consideration to this unique opportunity to make water conservation a priority in the state water plan and policies, rather than an afterthought. Finally, we

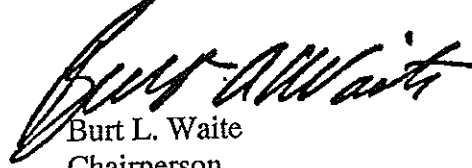
¹The Council is a legislatively created advisory committee charged with reviewing all environmental issues, legislation, regulations, policies and programs relating to Pennsylvania. Council members are appointed volunteers who serve staggered 3-year terms. Council provides its advice to the Department, the General Assembly, the Governor and the Commonwealth's citizens.



encourage you to include water well construction standards, as such standards will help to protect ground water quality from contamination from surface activities.

The Council asks that you pass water resources management legislation **but only legislation that provides for a comprehensive and integrated system of water management as outlined above.** Piecemeal action only defers and may preclude important decisions to a time when there may be insufficient political will to adequately address these critical needs. Please call Sue Wilson, Council's Executive Director at 717-787-4527 if you have questions of if we can provide further assistance.

Sincerely,



Burt L. Waite
Chairperson

Enclosure

Summary of Citizens Advisory Council Position Statement on Water Resource Management

Pennsylvania cannot afford to continue to take its water supply for granted any longer.

Shortcomings of the existing water resource management system:

- Lack of a comprehensive and consistent approach to water resource management at the state level
- Piecemeal coordination between agencies in managing water resources
- Incomplete database of how much water is available; no unified reporting system on availability and usage; little data on water consumption, groundwater availability, and quantity needed to support aquatic communities
- Inadequate planning authority – coordination needed between political and watershed boundaries

Data needs to be collected to comprehensively manage the state's water resources, including the following:

- Inventory of surface waters to develop a water balance in all sub-basins including minimum stream flows to protect aquatic ecosystems, natural diversity, provide for other water uses
- Inventory of groundwater systems including recharge locations, recharge amounts, discharge amounts, withdrawals, overlying land uses, and resulting recharge impacts
- Inventory of water usage, ground and surface, by whom, for what, consumptive uses, diversions, and amount returned to source
- Water consumption from poor infrastructure i.e. damaged or outdated delivery / drainage systems
- Prioritize sub-basins that have or will experience water shortages

The Commonwealth should consider the following actions:

- Pursue authorization and funding for comprehensive water resources planning and establish planning criteria for water basins in full cooperation with all stakeholders and interested parties
- Ensure that water use does not exceed the sustainable yield of ground and surface water supply
- Protect high quality, unpolluted ground and surface waters, diverse aquatic ecosystems and restore degraded systems
- Make water resource databases and basin plans available to local governments, developers, regional planners and natural resource managers
- Begin an aggressive educational program with local / regional interests ensuring local watershed plans are consistent with major basin resource plans
- Implement portions of basin plans that can be carried out under existing authority, develop legislation and / or administrative proposals where additional authority to implement is needed
- Encourage innovation in areas such as treatment and reuse of wastewater
- Implement water well construction standards for wells not intended for public use; substandard construction and overuse may pose threats to properly constructed wells and aquifers
- Integrate and monitor better protection of surface and groundwater quality and quantity. Polluted water cannot continue to degrade water that ultimately will have to be consumed

Council Recommendations for Legislative and Administrative Initiatives

- Ensure that regulatory authorities of river basin commissions are consistent with statewide authority
- Allow interbasin transfers only if the applicant has
 1. Implemented all possible conservation measures
 2. Taken all reasonable steps to improve operational efficiency of present system
 3. Assured that no other alternative supply exists within immediate area
- Encourage public water supply agencies and their customers to implement water conservation strategies
- Protect aquatic resources and water supplies through water quality protections, ensure adequate stream flows that are necessary for preserving aquatic health

During the time that the scope and magnitude of a comprehensive water resource management plan are being discussed, DEP should begin the data collection process discussed earlier and begin using existing data to address the clear need to further manage the state's water resources.