

Q:

Is there an active multi-agency advisory board for the PNDI system that advises DCNR on policy matters such as the listing process and management of the database?

A:

The daily management of the PNDI tool and its data is performed by DCNR's Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) staff and Bureau of Information Services staff. Policy matters concerning the tool and management of the database are addressed by the PNHP steering committee composed of senior staff from the PNHP partner agencies (DCNR, PA Game Commission and PA Fish and Boat Commission) as well as representatives from DEP and the USFWS. Each year, there are several feedback sessions with industry representatives where DCNR receives comments and suggestions on the current tools and processes, as well as proposed changes.

Listing decisions are the responsibility of the respective jurisdictional agencies (See Appendix D of the DEP PNDI Policy for agency area of responsibility), each of which has its own listing procedures, which include opportunities for comment by other agencies and the public at-large. Each agency coordinates with technical groups from the PA Biological Society—receiving feedback from experts in their respective jurisdictional taxa (i.e. vascular plants, mammals, birds etc).

Q:

Explain the processes on how rare and significant ecological features are determined or approved for inclusion into the PNDI system. Which agencies make the final decision?

A:

DCNR is responsible for the survey, inventory and elucidation of significant natural features as directed by section 305 (A)(10) of Act 18 of 1995. This would include rare and significant ecological features. In general, the decision to include these features in the PNDI process is based on the rarity of the ecological features and its ecological significance, e.g., the presence of unique or unusual environmental conditions and/or, unique or rare associated flora and fauna. An example of this would be the Serpentine barrens in Southeast PA, which contain a high density of rare, threatened and endangered plants, butterflies and moths, and other fauna. The decision to include these features in the PNDI tool is made by the DCNR Bureau of Forestry, Division of Conservation Science and Ecological Resources based on statewide data collected and maintained by the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program.

Recommendations for inclusion may also come from the Pennsylvania Biological Survey – Plant Community Classification Standing Committee, composed of botanists and ecologists with demonstrated expertise regarding Pennsylvania's plant communities and ecological features. DCNR may accept or reject these recommendations.