



Open Letter to Members of the General Assembly
and Governor Wolf
November 16, 2020

Contrary to some assertions in the Pennsylvania House, money cannot be taken from the **Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund** (Keystone) and the **Environmental Stewardship Fund** (ESF) without jeopardizing existing projects and impeding much-needed investments in new projects in communities across Pennsylvania.

The ill-considered notion misses fundamental issues:

- Keystone and ESF projects **support small businesses and create jobs**. They are proven programs for **stimulating local economies** across the state at a time we need stimulus more than ever.
- Keystone and ESF are **starving for funds**. Demands for project investments and the needs driving the demands already far outstrip available funding.
- The pandemic has caused larger numbers of Pennsylvanians than ever before to take to the outdoors. Investments in maintaining our public lands, protecting wildlife habitat, protecting water quality, and supporting other green infrastructure are needed more than ever as **visitors at parks, trails, and preserves double, triple, quadruple, and more**.
- The Keystone and ESF **monies in state accounts are committed to projects**. Capital projects by their nature can take a couple years to complete. If the General Assembly were to redirect any of these committed monies elsewhere, the state would in fact be decommitting from the projects. Under future budgets, the General Assembly *could* recommit funds to those projects, but, in the meantime, communities would be placed in the impossible position of making major expenditures *with no guarantees* that the state will come through with money in the end. (And if the state cannot keep to its present commitments today, why should anyone have confidence that it will do so at a later date?)
- Keystone and ESF were established to **fund projects that make lasting improvements**; repurposing their funds would seriously damage the ability of these workhorses for achieving community and environmental improvements across the Commonwealth.

Helping Communities Help Themselves; Leveraging Private and Local Resources

The Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund and Environmental Stewardship Fund owe their success and longevity to their **direct support of community-driven projects**. The dedicated funds empower local people and the private sector to address problems at their source, not from afar in Harrisburg. Every dollar in state grants typically leverages \$1 or more in additional investments and usually the multiplier is much larger. The Keystone Fund alone has leveraged more than \$1 billion in public/private partnerships to complete 5,000 projects.

Unmet Demand

Keystone and ESF come nowhere near to meeting present demand. **Half of all project investment proposals must be turned away**. These rejections only represent a portion of unmet demand, because grant applicants greatly self-limit their submissions knowing that competition for scarce dollars is fierce. Even when projects are funded, DCNR is only able to fund 85% on average of each request (which are already limited to 50% of total project costs).

The Need

The Keystone Fund delivers \$7 in flood control and prevention, water treatment, and other natural services for every dollar invested. (See *Pennsylvania's Return on Investment in the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund* and other studies in the [Economic Benefits](https://conservationtools.org) section of <https://conservationtools.org>.) Now is the time to strengthen Pennsylvania's dedicated environmental funds, so that they can deliver more, not less, in project investments.

Pennsylvania's environmental funding needs are huge. Pressing water issues—from water quality investments needed in all of Pennsylvania's water basins to municipal stormwater management and flood reduction measures—**hundreds of millions if not billions of dollars are needed** in the coming years. A budget diversion would worsen the needs as it would effectively take money away from communities as they work to address stormwater, flooding, water treatment, and other environmental issues.

Looking beyond water issues, our parks, trails, and other outdoor recreational spaces all have pressing needs. There is a billion dollars in deferred maintenance in our state parks and forests. (See <https://paparksandforests.org/initiatives/infrastructurestudy/>.)

Workhorses for Lasting Improvements

The Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund and Environmental Stewardship Fund are the state's workhorses for investing in **projects that bring lasting benefits** to communities across the Commonwealth. They have

effectively and efficiently improved water quality, conserved lands important to local communities, and created outdoor recreation opportunities for visitors and tourists alike. Their exemplary track records and the needs they address are described at length at <https://KeystoneFund.org> and <https://GrowingGreener.info>.

Conclusion

A portion of the realty transfer tax was dedicated to the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund in 1993 and landfill tipping fees were enacted to fund the Environmental Stewardship Fund in 1999 (and expanded in 2002) in order to reinvest in our communities, redress the environmental damage of the past, and conserve wildlife, parks, and preserves for generations yet to come. Both funds were established with extraordinary bipartisan support in the General Assembly as well as in public referenda.

The decades-long bipartisan consensus on the need to maintain the dedication of the Keystone Fund and ESF—so that they may consistently invest in projects that deliver today and will continue delivering for future generations—should continue to stand.

The Growing Greener Coalition asks the members of the General Assembly and the Governor to reject any proposal that would undermine Keystone or ESF.

For more information, please don't hesitate to reach out to the people and organizations of the Coalition including:

...

Chesapeake Bay Foundation

Harry Campbell, PA Executive Director
hcampbell@cbf.org

Conservation Voters of PA

Joshua McNeil, Executive Director
joshua.mcneil@conservationpa.org

Ducks Unlimited

Nikki Ghorpade, Government Affairs Representative
nghorpade@ducks.org

Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds

R. John Dawes, Executive Director
rjdawes1@pennsylvaniawatersheds.org

Lancaster Farmland Trust

Jeffrey Swinehart, Chief Operating Officer
jswinehart@lancasterfarmlandtrust.org

Natural Lands

Oliver P. Bass, President
oliver.bass@natland.org

PennFuture (Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future)

Jacquelyn Bonomo, President & CEO
bonomo@pennfuture.org

Pennsylvania Environmental Council

John Walliser, Senior Vice President
jwalliser@pecpa.org

Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society

Tim Herd, CEO
herd@prps.org

Sierra Club PA Chapter

Jen Quinn, Legislative and Political Director
jen.quinn@sierraclub.org

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

Tom Sexton, Northeast Regional Director
tom@railstotrails.org

The Conservation Fund

Kyle D. Shenk, Pennsylvania State Director
kshenk@conservationfund.org

The Nature Conservancy, PA Chapter

Ronald L. Ramsey, Senior Policy Advisor
rramsey@tnc.org

The Trust for Public Land

Owen Franklin, Pennsylvania State Director
owen.franklin@tpl.org

Trout Unlimited

Jennifer Orr-Greene, Eastern Policy Director
jen.orrgrreene@tu.org

WeConservePA

Andrew M. Loza, Executive Director

aloza@weconservepa.org

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

Cynthia Carrow, Vice President

ccarrow@paconserve.org