

PA Environment Digest

An Update On Environmental Issues In PA

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PEC: More Unprecedented Cuts To Environmental Program Funding Proposed

The [Pennsylvania Environmental Council](#) released this statement on Gov. Corbett's proposed FY 2012-13 state budget this week--

It's budget time again in Harrisburg. But before we look at the details of the Governor's current proposal, let's remember one key contextual number: over the past nine years, approximately \$1.8 billion has been diverted or cut from environmental programs to help balance the budget or to fund other programs.

Time and time again, funding dedicated to environmental programs has disproportionately been a target in budget dealings. And the hits keep coming.

In the budget laid out by Gov. Corbett last month, some of the additional cuts proposed include:

- For the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), a combined series of cuts or diversions totaling more than \$25 million.
- For the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), a combined series of cuts or diversions totaling more than \$40 million. Included in this total is the intended permanent diversion of funding from the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund (\$36.1 million in the current budget proposal).

It has been asserted that new impact fee revenues, coupled with recent increases in permit fees, will do well enough to offset any losses. But in context the numbers don't measure up.

The passage of Act 13 promises new impact fee revenues to DEP and other resource management agencies. However these potential revenues – which are dependent on individual counties adopting an impact fee on unconventional natural gas operations – are dwarfed by proposed agency budget cuts for the forthcoming year alone.

And recent increases in permitting fees won't make up the difference. Currently, DEP's staff complement is 2,759, down from 3,211 in FY 2002-2003. While its true that DEP has added

staff in Oil & Gas Management over the past several years, this doesn't hold true for other bureaus within the Department. Even those bureaus directly involved in shale gas work, like Water and Air, have seen a marked decrease in staffing and budget support.

At a time when demands on DEP are only increasing, not to mention all other ongoing responsibilities and commitments of the Department, this proposed budget is clearly headed in the wrong direction. New agency rulemaking and policy resulting from Act 13 alone will add significant responsibilities for the Department over the next year and beyond. DEP will put on a brave face and give their utmost effort, as they always have, but funding cutbacks have real consequence. This consequence will be compounded by expected decreases in federal funding, which recently have been used to supplement state efforts.

No one argues that we remain in lean economic times. However, there is a difference between being sensible and failing to meet critical programmatic and agency needs.

The citizens of the Commonwealth have repeatedly affirmed their desire to see environmental program funding protected – evidenced by established dedicated funds like the Keystone Fund that is now on the budgetary chopping block. Investing in environmental quality is an investment that brings proven returns in the form of jobs, enhanced property values, and recreational business and tourism.

It is time for the Governor and General Assembly to step up and stop the budgeting shell games. It is time for them to honor their commitment and responsibility – required by Pennsylvania's Constitution – to fully protect our natural and built environment.