

DEP & DCNR

BUDGET HEARING WRAP

Thursday, February 27, 2025



General Overview:

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Acting Secretary Jessica Shirley and Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Secretary Cindy Dunn and senior staff from both departments testified before the House Appropriations Committee this morning. House Republicans expressed disappointment that DEP and DCNR were consolidated into one hearing, given their significant impact on our economy and energy industry. When asked if this hearing arrangement indicates they could be consolidated with one agency to achieve efficiencies, both secretaries shared that their agencies are very different and better serve taxpayers separately.

Key Takeaways (DEP):

- Committee members expressed frustration with the governor's insistence on pushing an energy tax that has already resulted in the loss of a power plant in Pennsylvania while threatening future growth. The governor has refused to withdraw his lawsuit seeking to implement the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). Furthermore, the governor has proposed a Pennsylvania-based carbon tax, the Pennsylvania Climate Emissions Reduction Act (PACER), which would implement RGGI-like policies under a different name.
 - The DEP acting secretary said the governor supports an energy policy that creates jobs, lowers emissions, and reduces consumer prices. House Republicans' agenda to unleash Pennsylvania's energy sector would accomplish all three goals. Unfortunately, the administration continues to insist on enactment of RGGI and energy tax proposals like PACER and PRESS, which will lead to higher prices for consumers, fewer jobs for Pennsylvanians, and will disincentivize the deployment of cleaner new power generation in the Commonwealth.
- Day care centers in Pennsylvania are subject to increased DEP drinking water inspections and regulations once their facility serves at least 25 individuals, including children and staff. Many of these facilities arise out of need, and are small businesses located in homes. The regulations effectively prohibit many well water connections, and require installation of a new well or a public water line connection. In rural Pennsylvania, many areas do not have public water connections, and the cost of a new well can be prohibitive. The DEP committed to finding a commonsense solution for these centers rather than immediately shutting them down.
- Committee members asked for an update on DEP's permitting process and the improvements the agency is making to issue permits faster. While progress has been made, more must be done to change DEP's culture in a manner that promotes business growth and competitiveness in the Commonwealth.
- Many areas of Pennsylvania have been working to mitigate the presence of PFAS chemicals in drinking water. Members asked what steps are being taken to increase testing and improve mitigation efforts.

Key Takeaways (DCNR):

- DCNR was recently audited by the Auditor General, who found that the Community Conservation Partnerships Program (C2P2) is open to “outside pressure and influence in awarding state grants.”
 - When pressed on their reactions, DCNR did not express any plans to change their process or admit to any concerns about their grant awards.
- The number of state parks continues to increase, as do the costs of maintenance, upgrades, and potential uses for each park.
 - Members discussed DCNR’s stated \$1 billion backlog in infrastructure and their recommendations for sustainable funding.
 - DCNR also has a concerning trend of making decisions impacting private property in the vicinity of state lands without engaging the local community, such as in Big Elk Creek Park and the Spruce Creek area in Huntingdon County.

Notable Q&A:



Rep. Marla Brown questions DEP on how the permitting process can be improved.

Rep. Jeff Olsommer receives a commitment from DEP to use common sense in regulating rural day care centers with well water.



Rep. Charity Krupa presses DCNR on the need to implement changes to the Community Conservation Partnership Program recommended by the Auditor General.

Rep. Ann Flood asks how the DEP is working to address PFAS in drinking water.



Rep. Torren Ecker discusses the fiscal health of DCNR and how the agency intends to fund its ever-growing portfolio.

Noting dissatisfaction with combining DEP and DCNR into one hearing, Rep. Ryan Warner asked if it makes sense to combine the two agencies. Both secretaries noted their agencies are very different.

