



February 28, 2019

Dear Senators and Representatives:

On behalf of the undersigned groups representing thousands of Pennsylvania sportsmen and women, we are writing today with major concerns about future funding for the Environmental Stewardship Fund (ESF) and the Keystone Recreation, Park and Conservation Fund. We value the projects funded by these programs that restore fish and wildlife habitat, improve sportsmen's access to streams and forests, and enhance the conservation efforts of the Commonwealth's independent fish and game agencies.

We are dismayed that the Governor's budget proposal would redirect much-needed resources from the ESF and the Keystone Fund in order to pay for state government operations in the coming fiscal year.

We appreciate the need for the Commonwealth to properly fund the Departments of Environmental Protection (DEP) and Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR). The work of those agencies is critical to ensuring healthy fish and wildlife habitat and plentiful outdoor recreational opportunities. However, these resources should come from the General Fund—not from dedicated sources established to support local, on-the-ground projects that conserve and restore our waters, set aside natural lands, and support state parks and recreation.

In particular, the sportsmen and women represented by our organizations want to see more resources—not less—for the ESF, which funds the highly successful Growing Greener program. In 2018, a statewide poll conducted for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership found that 80 percent of hunters and anglers support funding the Growing Greener program at \$200 million annually. Under the Governor’s budget, expenditures for this critical work would be cut to \$65 million in the coming year.

These ESF has provided critical seed money to conserve more than 80,000 acres of open space, restore more than 1,600 acres of abandoned mine lands, and fund 400 projects to reduce flooding and improve water quality. The Keystone Fund has leveraged \$1 billion to complete more than 5,000 projects. Every dollar from the ESF is matched by at least another dollar in additional investment; usually, the multiple is higher: Trout Unlimited, for example, raises another two dollars for every dollar invested by Growing Greener into its abandoned mine drainage (AMD) cleanup projects. Since 1993, every dollar spent from the Keystone Fund has leveraged three additional dollars.

These investments in our natural resources pay dividends. Healthy waterways are a critical component of Pennsylvania’s \$28 billion outdoor recreational economy, which supports 390,000 jobs. Hunters and anglers alone contribute \$1.3 billion to the Commonwealth’s bottom line.

The work funded by the Environmental Stewardship Fund and the Keystone Fund are a boon to sportsmen and women in Pennsylvania:

- Sportsmen’s access and headwaters protection: The Keystone Fund helped the Wildlands Conservancy and its partners acquire the 500-acre Klondike property, which was turned over to the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) to expand State Game Lands 312. Local chapters of Trout Unlimited, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the Ruffed Grouse Society, and the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists contributed to the purchase. This acquisition did not just provide public access to land where hunters can pursue deer, turkey, and grouse, but it also protected the headwaters of the Lehigh River, a popular destination for anglers and a source of drinking water for thousands of Pennsylvanians.

The ESF and the Keystone Fund also helped to preserve a 1,600-acre stretch of Blue Mountain that is open to seasonal hunting, and the headwaters of the Letort Spring Run, a spring creek in Cumberland County with Class A wild trout status and international renown.

- AMD cleanup: Since 1999, Trout Unlimited has been at work in the Kettle Creek watershed in Clinton, Potter, and Tioga counties, where coldwater streams were severely degraded by 19th century coal mining and clearcutting. Two decades of abandoned mine drainage (AMD) cleanup, habitat restoration, and streambank stabilization projects have improved water quality and heralded a rebound in the watershed’s native brook trout population. TU is also providing technical assistance to dozens of groups working in their own watersheds at hundreds of sites to clean up some of Pennsylvania’s 5,600 miles of AMD-impaired streams.

In Centre County, Growing Greener helped the PGC and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation reclaim 40 acres of abandoned mine lands on State Game Lands 100, providing grasslands for elk, deer, turkey, and other species, and treating AMD pollution on Contrary Run.

- Agricultural conservation: On Warrior's Mark Run, a wild trout water in Huntingdon County, the conservation district used ESF funding to help two local farmers protect the stream from grazing cows and their nutrient-rich manure. The project, which included streambank restoration and installation of 10,000 feet of fencing and cattle crossings, provided multiple benefits: It ensured both a healthy fish population and improved water quality for downstream drinking water supplies.
- Stream restoration: In Lancaster County, the ESF provided portions of the funding for an ambitious restoration of Lititz Run that featured streamside buffer plantings, wetlands reconstruction, cattle fencing, streambank stabilization, in-stream restoration, and stormwater management improvements. The projects completed over the course of a decade led to improved water quality, lower stream temperatures, and a rebounding trout population. In Tioga County, the ESF helped finance restoration on Mill Run, eliminating downstream sediment buildup and enhancing the trout population. Construction of a fishing path provided better access for anglers, including those with disabilities.

Much has been accomplished by projects funded by the Environmental Stewardship Fund and the Keystone Fund, but much remains to be done. Pennsylvania has 19,000 miles of impaired streams and rivers, more than 180,000 acres of abandoned mines. Thousands of acres of fish and wildlife habitat that sportsmen and women cherish are in need of conservation. We urge you to work with your colleagues to craft a budget plan that leaves the ESF and the Keystone Fund intact, and going forward, to identify new sources to support the important and necessary work for which these funds were created.

Signed,

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Ducks Unlimited

National Wild Turkey Federation

Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited

Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists

Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever

Quality Deer Management Association

Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Trout Unlimited

United Bowhunters of Pennsylvania