

**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Testimony on the Rockview SCI Land Transfer  
before the House State Government Committee  
October 25, 2007**

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Good morning Madam Chair, members of the Committee and honored guests. Thank you for the opportunity to address this Committee.

The legislation that seeks to transfer ownership and control of Commonwealth property, currently administered by the Department of Corrections in Centre County, is of significant importance to the Fish and Boat Commission. Our interests in the subject properties and their future management can be placed into three distinct categories: Fish and Boat Commission operations, recreational opportunities and resource protection.

First, I would like to talk about the impacts as they pertain to our operations. From a practical standpoint, it is vital to preserve the Commission's investment in several facilities we operate within the Spring Creek corridor. These include; Benner Spring State Fish Hatchery, the Upper Spring Creek State Fish Hatchery, the Bellefonte State Fish Hatchery and the H.R. Stackhouse School of Fishery Conservation and Watercraft Safety.

For more than 50 years, the Commission has operated the Benner Spring State Fish Hatchery through a cooperative working relationship with the Rockview State Correctional Institution. For many years, memoranda of understanding (MOU) have formalized the relationship between the Department of Corrections and the Commission. We sincerely thank the administration at Rockview for the past support and look forward to continuing this long-standing relationship. As currently proposed in House Bill 1657, the real property interests to be conveyed to the Commission will help ensure the long-term viability of the Benner Spring facility. The 59-acre parcel proposed to be transferred to the Commission will allow us to continue the important fish culture and research work that has been the hallmark of this facility. This is exemplified by the fish production in Fiscal Year 2006-2007 when Benner Spring State Fish Hatchery produced 572,000 adult trout and 321,000 fingerling trout.

Likewise, it is important that the 4.38 acres of land immediately upstream of the Upper Spring Creek State Fish Hatchery be included in this transfer. This parcel contains a diversion dam and pipeline that supplies water from the creek to this facility.

The 25.75 acres of land located between the existing Bellefonte State Fish Hatchery and the Upper Spring Creek State Fish Hatchery will allow for uninterrupted access to the Upper Spring Creek State Fish Hatchery. The Bellefonte facility is also important for the production of adult and fingerling trout. In Fiscal Year 2006-2007 this hatchery produced 574,000 adult trout and about 10,000 fingerlings.

These trout are raised and stocked to meet the expectations anglers and supplement fish populations were natural reproduction alone would not support an adequate recreational fishery. Fishing activity, in turn,

provides a significant economic value to the Commonwealth, contributing in excess of \$1.6 billion to the state's economy annually.

The transfer of these parcels to the Commission, along with appropriate MOU's outlining water rights, easements, and rights-of-way, will help ensure long-term operation of these hatcheries. We are actively engaged in developing these documents with the Department of Corrections and Department of General Services. Each agency has pledged to resolve these matters in a timely and acceptable manner.

Next, I would like to talk about the recreational opportunities which are currently available and provided by the Commission. Public parking and other amenities available at the H.R. Stackhouse School have long benefited the local community. Many anglers travel to this area for the purpose of enjoying one of the nation's premier trout fisheries. This stream also offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities such as hiking and bird watching. The path along Spring Creek, a coldwater stream, affords a scenic and tranquil outdoor experience.

The Commission has always been willing to accommodate compatible recreational use of the stream and stream corridor. We have demonstrated this by keeping the area open on a daily basis, except when public use conflicts with Commission sponsored training activities such as use of the firing range located immediately upstream of the Stackhouse School. The PFBC has always made every effort to minimize these restricted periods. However, the expected increased recreational use of this trail will create new demands that should be recognized and planned for accordingly. For example: to prevent competing user demands, it would be highly desirable to relocate the firing range. Further, we expect substantial burdens on available parking that will need to be addressed. We believe these associated infrastructure costs should not be the responsibility of the Commission alone.

The last point on the topic of recreation is to note that the Commission has already entered into a memorandum of agreement with Benner Township. This agreement outlines a plan for joint management of the Spring Creek Canyon. This document also covers subjects such as recreational use and preserving the ecological integrity of the canyon. A copy of this memorandum of agreement has been attached to this testimony.

Lastly, I would like to talk about resource protection. The Commission considers it to be absolutely essential to protect the sensitive natural resources of the stream, canyon, and the lands adjacent to the canyon that directly affect the ecological health of this system. As the properties are transferred, the Commission will work to ensure that the natural resources of this area are protected and enhanced for future generations. For this to occur, it is vital that the appropriate environmental and conservation provisions are included in any transfer document. The Commission is committed to working with the proposed partners - Penn State, Benner Township, Clearwater Conservancy, Department of Corrections and the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources- to develop a conservation easement and management plan that will provide this protection.

The Commission again extends its appreciation for this opportunity to address the State Government Committee and highlight our interests in the land transfer process. I would now be willing to entertain questions from the Committee.