

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Conservation and Natural Resources

Climate Change Strategy

January 25, 2017

Position Statement

Climate change is real and is impacting the Commonwealth's ecological and recreational resources. As the state's leading conservation agency, DCNR will use the best available science to develop and implement climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies within each of its bureaus to minimize these impacts and serve as a role model for the citizens of Pennsylvania.

Background

The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is charged with maintaining and preserving 121 state parks, 2.2 million acres of state forest land, conservation of native wild plants, and providing information about the state's ecological and geologic resources. The department also provides information, technical advice to private forest landowners and establishes community conservation partnerships through grants and technical assistance to benefit rivers, trails, greenways, local parks and recreation, heritage regions, open space, and natural areas.

Climate change has already begun to manifest itself in the Commonwealth in the form of higher temperatures, increased annual precipitation, significantly higher numbers of large storm events, changes in peak stream flows, decreased snow cover, changes in recreational use patterns, and the movement of some species to the north and to higher elevations. In addition to these direct impacts, climate change is a threat-multiplier, magnifying the impacts of other environmental stressors such as invasive species, habitat fragmentation, and deer overpopulation. Climate change impacts the state's communities, lands, waters, plants, fish, air, visitors, and wildlife. It also affects DCNR's ability to manage these resources for the long-term benefit of the public. Consequently, the need to take action on climate change is now.

Approach

DCNR is in a unique position to help the Commonwealth reduce risk and adapt to climate change. This will require a new conservation paradigm that focuses on managing for change, preserving ecosystem services, and recognizing the need to reevaluate conservation goals and policies in response to climate change. The department's land management practices can also directly mitigate atmospheric carbon as well as ensure that our public lands remain resilient and can adapt to a changing climate.

The department will take the following steps to implement this strategy:

- Appoint a Climate Action Steering Team (CAST) comprised of Bureau Directors to provide resources, monitor progress, and ensure that climate change mitigation and adaptation are integrated into the department's operations and mission.
- Refine and adapt strategies identified in *DCNR and Climate Change – Planning for the Future*, as well as other relevant sources, to create and implement a climate change adaptation and mitigation plan.
- Evaluate the department's carbon footprint and mitigate greenhouse gases by reducing energy consumption and increasing forest carbon sequestration.
- Develop a climate change communications plan to engage and educate the public and DCNR staff.
- Work cooperatively with state and federal agencies NGO's, and universities to conduct research, share tools and resources, and coordinate our response to climate change.

Legal Citations

- *Article I, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution* guarantees the Commonwealth's citizens the "right to clean air, pure water and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and aesthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people." PA. CONST. art.I, § 27.
- *Conservation and Natural Resources Act (Act 18 of June 28, 1995, P.L. 89, 71 P.S. §§ 1340.101-1340.1143).*
- *Wild Resource Conservation Act of June 23, 1982, P.L. 597, No. 170*