

## PENNSYLVANIA BIODIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

### **SUMMARY REPORT STAKEHOLDER AND PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS Stakeholder Focus Groups Public Comment Forms September 2005**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership (PBP) conducted a broad stakeholder and public input process to assist in developing the State Comprehensive Wildlife Strategy as well as the statewide Pennsylvania Biodiversity Conservation Plan. As one part of this process, PBP hosted a series of facilitated focus groups designed to gather critical information and input from a broad range of stakeholders about important biodiversity issues in Pennsylvania. The focus groups were facilitated by The Drager Group. In addition, a pencil-and-paper survey was made available for the public to complete at conferences and meetings attended by PBP staff as well as on the PBP website.

The overall results of the process are:

- Fifteen stakeholder focus groups were conducted.
- Approximately 240 individuals participated in focus groups across the state.
- Approximately 11,000 individual responses were received for group topics.
- 680 public comment forms were completed.
- Every county in the state was represented by at least one public comment form.

The objectives of the overall input process are:

- To engage a broad range of individuals in the planning process by gathering their perceptions about a range of topics concerning biodiversity.
- To engage stakeholder groups in the planning process by gathering their perceptions about a range of topics concerning biodiversity.
- To document and summarize their input for use by PBP task forces and the Biodiversity Conservation Plan Team in developing the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Conservation Plan.
- As a secondary objective, increase awareness on the part of stakeholders of PBP, its activities, and the development a statewide plan for conservation of biodiversity in Pennsylvania.

This Summary Report is intended to provide information and analysis to the PBP task forces and the Biodiversity Conservation Plan Team to assist them in developing the Pennsylvania Biodiversity Conservation Plan (BCP). Results of each focus group and public comment form are also available to assist in development of the BCP.

#### **STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUPS**

**Purpose and Process:** The primary purpose of the stakeholder focus group process was to gather primary (first-hand) information from specific stakeholders. A secondary purpose was to increase awareness on the part of stakeholders of PBP and its efforts to develop a comprehensive statewide plan for the conservation of biodiversity in Pennsylvania.

The facilitation process was designed to provide a high level of objectivity and to mitigate or reduce as much as possible any participant bias and response contamination. Each topic (see below) was presented individually and participants were allowed a few minutes to record their responses on index cards. The

responses were collected and read to participants without comment. Discussion as a group prior to the recording responses was not allowed. A brief time period was available at the end of all focus groups for any additional questions and comments. The topics presented to each focus group were:

- What are the five most important issues relative to biodiversity in Pennsylvania?
- What are the five least important issues relative to biodiversity in Pennsylvania?
- What role should [participant's organization/type of organization] play in biodiversity conservation in Pennsylvania?
- Relative to accomplishing the specific mission of the organization(s) participants represent, what should be in the biodiversity conservation plan?
- Relative to accomplishing the specific mission of the organization(s) participants represent, what should **not** be in the biodiversity conservation plan?
- What is the participant's vision of the best achievable condition of biodiversity in Pennsylvania in ten years?
- What format(s) should the plan be in? Should the plan include maps? If yes, what types? If no, why not?
- Other suggestions and comments.

**Participants:** The following groups participated in the stakeholder focus group process:

- Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Harrisburg
- Forest products industry representatives, Kane
- Governor's Advisory Council on Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation, Erie
- Oil and gas industry representatives, Warren
- Pennsylvania Academy of Science, Monroeville
- Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Educators, Altoona
- Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals, Eastern Section, Blue Bell
- Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals, Western Section, Pittsburgh
- Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership Board, Warren
- Pennsylvania Biological Survey Steering Committee, Kempton
- Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Harrisburg
- Pennsylvania Forest Products Association, State College
- Pennsylvania Game Commission, Harrisburg
- Southeastern Pennsylvania land trusts, Doylestown
- Southwestern Pennsylvania land trusts, Sewickley

#### **Stakeholder Focus Group Results:**

The information gathered from the stakeholder focus groups is opinion and perception-based and therefore qualitative rather than statistically-based. To the degree possible, the results in this report quantify and summarize these opinions and perceptions.

#### **What are the five most important issues relative to biodiversity in Pennsylvania?**

- This question was "easy" for respondents, as most participants could define what was important to them.
- Responses were fairly consistent among stakeholder groups.
- The responses may indicate the areas of common agreement that the partnership seeks.
- The most frequently recorded responses were habitat (loss, fragmentation, preservation), education, invasive species, need for comprehensive statewide planning, and deer management.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic are:

- Habitat loss, fragmentation or preservation – 102
- Education (needed) – 60
- Invasive species – 48
- Sprawl – 38
- Funding – 35
- Pollution – 25
- Deer (management, overpopulation, damage due to deer) – 23
- Need for statewide planning – 20

- Research/information (needed) – 4

**What are the five least important issues relative to biodiversity in Pennsylvania?**

- Participants had significantly more difficulty in identifying issues that were “least” important.
- The most frequently mentioned response was focusing on individual species or habitats.
- Some participants were mildly frustrated at the difficulty of the question.
- Responses were consistently “fragmented” among the focus groups and there was little overall agreement between groups or even among participants within a group.
- Private industry groups (forest products industry, oil and gas) are concerned about adding additional public lands due to potential restrictions for economic uses.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic are:

- Laws, regulations – 21
- Focus on individual species or habitats – 20
- Structure of government agencies (“turf”) – 20
- Acid rain – 15
- Lack of overall focus (being all things to all people, etc) – 13
- Game species (management or reintroduction) – 12
- Private land (regulations, controls) – 11
- Public “green” spaces – 10
- Population and genetics (control) – 9
- Climate – 8
- Cost – 6
- Invasive species – 6
- Conflicts (between organizations, political organizations, constituencies) – 4

**What role should [participant’s organization/type of organization] play in biodiversity conservation in Pennsylvania?**

- State agencies responded that they should play a lead role in biodiversity conservation with strong regulatory, legislative, and enforcement roles.
- Secondly, they reported a supportive role with other organizations, primarily non-governmental organizations (NGOs).
- Least, they reported a land and habitat acquisition role.
- NGOs see their roles as primarily advisory, supportive, and research.
- NGOs potentially see a stronger role in land and habitat acquisition than state agency participants.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic (separated by state agency focus groups versus other focus groups) are:

**State Agency Focus Groups (PFBC, PGC, DCNR)**

- A leading role – 37
- Regulatory, legislative, and enforcement roles – 34
- Education – 24
- Research and information – 19
- Funding role – 22
- Supportive role (support, partner, coordinate) – 17
- Implementation role – 7
- Advisory role – 6
- Land and habitat acquisition/protection – 3

**Non-Governmental Focus Groups**

- Education – 60
- Research and information – 38
- Advisory/advocacy role – 36
- Supportive role (support, partner, coordinate) – 30
- Communication and information sharing role – 22

- Land and habitat acquisition/protection – 19
- Regulatory, legislative, and enforcement roles – 14
- Implementation role – 12
- Funding role – 7
- A leading role – 2

**Relative to accomplishing the specific mission of the organization(s) participants represent, what should be in the biodiversity conservation plan?**

- Overwhelmingly, participants identified the need for clear and well-defined strategies as part of the biodiversity conservation plan.
- Secondly, participants defined a need for specific species and habitat plans as well as education and information.
- Funding for research, projects, and activities was also identified as an important issue.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic are:

- Strategies and plans (solutions, plans, practices, recommendations) – 117
- Education and information (outreach) – 55
- Species and habitat plans (reintroduction, protection) – 51
- Funding (concepts, goals, outcomes, sources) – 50
- Research (research needs, data, opportunities, funding) – 41
- Identification of critical species, habitats, locations – 29
- Goals – 18
- Accountabilities (organizational and individual roles, responsibilities) – 16
- Legislative (priorities, needs, laws) – 14
- Mandates (guidelines) – 9
- Threats (to biodiversity, species, organizations) – 6
- Balanced focus (cold-blooded species vs. warm, plants vs. animals, sportsmen vs. non-sportsmen) – 6

**Relative to accomplishing the specific mission of the organization(s) participants represent, what should NOT be in the biodiversity conservation plan?**

- Participants had significantly more difficulty identifying items that should not be in the biodiversity plan.
- The most frequently mentioned item was that the plan should not focus on an individual species or habitat.
- Secondly, a significant number responded that the plan should avoid making specific recommendations on regulations or laws, and restrictions on the rights of individual landowners and developers.
- Others mentioned a need for the plan to avoid recommendations about agency structure or taking “pot shots” at individuals or organizations.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic are:

- Emphasis or isolated focus on specific species and habitats – 70
- Legislative (priorities, needs, specific regulations, laws) – 48
- Restrictions (limits, farming, private property) – 44
- Governmental agency recommendations (structure, practices) – 43
- Compromises, vague, weak statements, goals, objectives – 14
- Politically motivated items – 12
- Locations of rare and threatened species – 11
- Criticism (of specific agencies, individuals, finger-pointing, nit-picking, potshots) – 9
- “Feel good” recommendations (recycling, junk science) – 6

**What is the participant’s vision of the best achievable condition of biodiversity in Pennsylvania in ten years from today?** (Note: this question was introduced later in the focus group process and was not presented to PFBC.)

- A wide range of personal responses were received, indicating that participants may not have already-formulated visions.

- The most frequent responses concerned no loss of species in the state, followed by improved biodiversity planning, funding, and a change in public perception and greater awareness of biodiversity.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic are:

- No loss of species in Pennsylvania (conserve present species, protection) – 65
- Changed public understanding and perception – 47
- Increase in amount of protected lands – 40
- Deer control – 32
- Limited human growth and development (sprawl) – 31
- Improved planning – 28
- Improved funding (revenue, new sources, stable) – 26
- Sustainable Pennsylvania biodiversity – 18
- Decreased pollution (abandoned mine drainage, pollution) – 15
- Reduced invasive species – 15
- Better coordination (statewide plan, network of efforts, agencies organizations, multi-municipal) – 15
- Balance (e.g. biodiversity and economy) – 14
- Local planning guidelines – 14
- Biodiversity in the educational system (curriculum) – 10
- Greater research and improved scientific understanding – 8
- Restoration (rebound, stable populations) – 8
- Inventory of Pennsylvania species in place (index, inventory) – 6
- Equal emphasis (of biodiversity to other factors) – 5
- Legislation that recognizes biodiversity – 5
- Politics (removed from the issue or supportive of the issue) – 3
- Leadership in the state – 3
- Private landowner incentives – 3

#### **What format(s) should the plan be in?**

- Participants generally were in agreement that the plan should be published in three primary formats:
  - Electronic (CD, DVD, other)
  - Web-based
  - Hardcopy
- In addition, many participants noted a need for an executive summary.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic are:

- Electronic/CD/DVD – 75
- Web-based (Web and PDF) – 67
- Hardcopy – 39
- Executive summary – 18
- Pictures (many) – 12
- Short- and long-term goals (objectives, actions, plans) – 12
- Prioritize (bioregions, habitats, and landscapes) – 9
- Easy to read (bullets) – 8
- Working version (notebook, loose leaf) – 8
- Video – 7
- GIS series of volumes (baseline, administrative summary, appendices, etc.) – 4
- Brief – 4
- Sub-plans for specific agencies – 3
- Plan documentary – 2

#### **Should the plan include maps? If yes, what types of maps?**

Participants were asked for their perception regarding the use and inclusion of maps in the biodiversity conservation plan. While the majority of participants were in favor of the use of maps, there were a number of reservations, some voiced strongly, even among those in favor of the use of maps.

- Eighty-six respondents said “yes” to the use of maps, at least in general, while 69 said “no.” This overall trend however, varied significantly among focus groups.
- The majority of reservations about maps surrounded the issue of making information available to the public that could be used to harm threatened and endangered species.

The most frequently recorded categories of phrases, statements, or words for this topic are:

- Yes – 86
- No – 69
- GIS/GPS – 26
- Bioregions (forest, farmland, wetland) – 26
- Selected information only (no threatened and endangered species, sensitive species) – 16
- Layers, scales – 9

## **PUBLIC COMMENT FORMS**

The public comment form was designed as a simple method of gathering input from diverse individuals through a short pencil-and-paper format. Two versions of the form were used, depending on the audience, however the questions were the same. One format was open-ended and was used with more knowledgeable audiences; the other form contained check-off boxes as well as space for open-ended responses. These forms were administered by PBP staff at conferences, meetings, lectures, and focus groups as well as available on the PBP website. A total of 680 forms were completed at locations throughout the state. Every county in the state is represented by one or more completed comment forms.

The forms were collected at locations around the state, including:

3rd Statewide Summit for Volunteer Watershed Monitors, State College  
 4th Annual Pennsylvania Watershed Conference, Grantville  
 Ag Progress Days, Rock Springs  
 Allegheny Society of American Forestry Summer Meeting, State College  
 BioForay 2003, Powdermill Nature Reserve, Rector  
 Community College of Allegheny County Life Sciences Students, Pittsburgh  
 County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia  
 Earth Day Fair, Beechwood Farms, Pittsburgh  
 Earth Day Fair, Renfrew Institute, Waynesboro  
 Environmental Issues Forum, Shippensburg  
 Heritage Conservancy, Doylestown  
 Invasive Plant Conference, Morris Arboretum, Philadelphia  
 Native Plant Conference, Phipps Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Pittsburgh  
 Ned Smith Festival, Millersburg  
 Pennsylvania Academy of Science Annual Meeting, Grantville  
 Pennsylvania Academy of Science Annual Meeting, Monroeville  
 Pennsylvania Alliance for Environmental Education Annual Meeting, Altoona  
 Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts Fall Meeting, State College  
 Pennsylvania Association of Council of Governments 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, Champion  
 Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals Annual Conference, Harrisburg  
 Pennsylvania Association of Environmental Professionals Annual Conference, Champion  
 Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership K-12 Work Group Meeting, Harrisburg  
 Pennsylvania Biological Survey Steering Committee Meeting, Kempton  
 Pennsylvania Invertebrate Biodiversity Project Annual Meeting, State College  
 Pennsylvania Land Conservation Conference, Bethlehem  
 Pennsylvania Recreation and Parks Society Annual Conference, State College  
 Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs Annual Conference, Philadelphia  
 Pennsylvania State University Conservation Leadership School, Stone Valley  
 Rachel Carson Day, Rachel Carson Homestead Association, Springdale  
 Rare Plant Forum, PA Biological Survey Vascular Plant Technical Committee, Bellefonte  
 Smart Growth Conference, Sustainable Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh  
 Smart Growth Summit, Smart Growth Partnership of Westmoreland County, Greensburg  
 Society of American Forestry / Wildlife Society Joint Meeting, State College  
 Sustainable Systems Seminar, Slippery Rock University, Slippery Rock  
 Venture Outdoors, Western Pennsylvania Field Institute, Pittsburgh

The survey questions and a summary of the responses in descending order (from highest number of responses to lower number of responses) are given below.

**In your opinion, what are the greatest threats to native species and their habitats in Pennsylvania?**

The top five responses were:

1. Development/sprawl
2. Habitat loss
3. Invasive species
4. Pollution
5. Land planning (poor land planning, or lack of regulations)

**Do you think that biodiversity conservation should be a priority for the state of Pennsylvania? Why or why not?**

Yes – 572                      No – 0                      Did not respond – 108

**If you were constructing a plan to conserve biodiversity in Pennsylvania, what are the issues you would include?**

The top five responses were:

1. Research and education
2. Development of a statewide and community-based effort and plan
3. Wetland preservation
4. Preservation of land and open space
5. Development of county and local guidelines

**Please list any specific geographic areas or habitats in Pennsylvania that you consider most important to conserve.**

The top six responses were:

1. Variety of specific local and regional sites ( in aggregate, these specific areas were the most frequent response)
2. All of Pennsylvania
3. Wetlands
4. Water resources and watersheds
5. Appalachian Mountains
6. Old growth forests

**What does the word “biodiversity” mean to you? [Question added in 2004 - total 83 responses]**

The top responses were:

1. Variety of species
2. Conserving living things and their habitats
3. All living things
4. Not sure

**Is biodiversity important to you? [Question added in 2004]**

The responses were:

1. Yes – 173
2. No – 0
3. Did not answer – 2