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Pennsylvania Takes Stock of Biodiversity

HARRISBURG, Pennsylvania, December 10, 2002 (ENS) - A new report that details biodiversity in Pennsylvania represents the first step toward protecting the state's animal and plant resources. The Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership (PBP) introduced itself today with the release of the comprehensive report, "Biodiversity in Pennsylvania: Snapshot 2002."

"The Pennsylvania Biodiversity Partnership is an unprecedented collaboration of people who understand the need to conserve Pennsylvania's natural diversity in order to maintain the state's economic vitality and quality of life for all citizens," said state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary John Oliver.

"Biodiversity in Pennsylvania: Snapshot 2002" summarizes a year long effort to survey the status of Pennsylvania's biodiversity as it is now known. The report finds that Pennsylvania is home to more than 25,000 species of known organisms, and perhaps many thousands more yet to be identified.

The report notes that more than 150 species of plants and animals have been lost from Pennsylvania and 130 species are considered to be globally endangered, threatened or rare. Animals, plants and their unique habitats are being lost every year in Pennsylvania due to natural forces, human activities, neglect and a lack of coordinated protection efforts.

Scientists agree that Pennsylvania's biodiversity is in peril for a variety of reasons, the report notes, including habitat loss and fragmentation, and pollution. The report found that the state is making progress towards addressing some of these threats, such as point source water pollution, but others, such as urban sprawl and invasive species, present increasing problems.

The report "reveals that despite extensive knowledge about natural resource conservation in Pennsylvania and many activities focused on conserving wildlife and habitats, there is much we don't know about biodiversity in the state," the authors conclude. "Many gaps need to be filled."

In addition, "despite the importance of biodiversity and the continuing threats to biological communities, Pennsylvania lacks a statewide strategy for biodiversity conservation," the report notes. "Critical habitats, plants, and animals are being lost every year in the Commonwealth due to development, neglect, and lack of coordination among interested parties."

The next phase of the state's biodiversity protection effort will further pinpoint gaps in scientific knowledge, identify methods and initiate processes to fill those gaps, and provide a blueprint for how to achieve better protection. A completed Pennsylvania Biodiversity Conservation Plan is expected sometime in 2005.

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