



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF PENNSYLVANIA**

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**League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania
Comment to the
Citizens Advisory Council of the
Department of Environmental Protection
July 15, 2014**

I am Bonita Hoke, Executive Director of the League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania. The League is indeed grateful for the opportunity to comment on the significant issues on today's agenda.

First, there is the topic of Pennsylvania's Natural Diversity Inventory Environmental Review Tool as presented. The credibility and accuracy of this instrument is critical to identifying threatened and endangered species as needed to conserve and protect their environments. The League believes that wise decision-making requires special consideration for the protection of areas of critical environmental concern, natural hazards, historical importance and aesthetic value.¹ As individuals, we have also learned that remote technologies are no replacement for first-hand knowledge gained from those with boots on the ground. Data output is a function of data input. Given the continuing evolution of the environmental factors, habitats and their inhabitants require on-going monitoring and re-assessment. A high quality stream today may be an exceptional value one tomorrow. A bog turtle that was gone yesterday may be here today. We believe that the PNDI provides a helpful way for the public to search for potential impacts in given locations. However, we trust that DEP will act in ways to insure that all environmental reviews will be comprehensive and completed using best practice, reliable, up-to-date assessments, and an understanding of the seasonal patterns.

Secondly, based on Article I, Section 27 of Pennsylvania's Constitution, the League is strongly opposed to any additional leasing of our state forest and park lands for oil and gas development. These are public lands and it is our right to have them preserved for generations yet to come. The Department is a trustee of these resources. Natural gas operations in adjacent lands will devalue and degrade our lands by altering the hydrogeology, impacting air quality, and generating unwanted noise. Many find the language of the executive order prohibiting any additional surface disturbance to be of comfort. However, this is misleading. The most recent DCNR fact sheet² states that the prohibition for "no **long term** surface disturbance" is defined as

¹ Resource Management Position of the League of Women Voters found at <http://www.lwv.org/content/resource-management>

² *Nonsurface Disturbance Leasing on DCNR Lands* found at http://dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_20029317.pdf

only affecting the conversion of the forest to a non-forest use. This does not preclude short-term use that might include temporary pipelines, test wells, and/or activities involved with “surveys” and “resource evaluation.” We encourage members of this Council to intervene to clarify, delay, or stop the implementation of this order. This action is particularly important given the recent questions being raised by DEP to determine if a relationship exists between the fracking process and earthquakes.³ The League supports this inquiry regarding seismic hazards.

Finally, the analysis of *Robinson, et al. v Commonwealth* by Chief Counsel Whitaker is a topic of great interest to the League and others. We are optimistic that this review will clarify the ruling in a manner consistent with the rights of all Pennsylvanians and the significant role of the Department in conserving and protecting our natural resources and public health.

In conclusion, many of you are aware, that the EPA is holding hearings in Pittsburgh later this month on carbon pollution. The League supports efforts at the federal and state levels to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. Coal-burning power plants have been a critical and consistent target of this initiative. As noted in the Climate Change Action Plan Update, Pennsylvania is a key player relative to greenhouse gases emitted in the country.⁴ As the fourth largest coal producing state, 75% of our 68 million tons of bituminous mined last year is being used to generate half of the nation’s electricity. More than 56% of the energy in our state comes from coal.⁵ While we recognize that cleaning up coal emissions has greatly improved air quality, further regulation and technological advances must be implemented. However, beyond these efforts, we believe the DEP must take the lead in regulating methane emissions. Why? According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, methane, as a greenhouse gas, is more than eighty (80) times as potent as carbon dioxide over a twenty-year timeframe.⁶ Wellheads, pipes, valves, compressors, and even abandoned wells⁷ are releasing increasing volumes of methane into our atmosphere. Although the rates vary, their cumulative impact is significant. In fact, some project that methane may be worse than coal as a climate changer.⁸ The League strongly encourages the Department to revise regulations, adopt on-going monitoring, and enforce violations with meaningful consequences. Climate change is a disrupter not only of our weather but also of our economy and public health. Clean-up costs from recent rain, wind, ice, and snow are only the prelude to future challenges. The Department’s efforts in the prevention of methane emissions will be truly be worth a pound of cure for generations yet to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

³ <http://powersource.post-gazette.com/powersource/policy-powersource/2014/07/08/DEP-considers-rules-on-tremors-and-fracking/stories/201407080021>

⁴ See Executive Summary of the Climate Change Action Plan found at http://www.dcnr.state.pa.us/cs/groups/public/documents/document/dcnr_001957.pdf

⁵ <http://www.pacoalalliance.com/industry-profile/>

⁶ <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2013/10/02/2708911/fracking-ipcc-methane/>

⁷ <http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2014/06/20/3451380/abandoned-pennsylvania-wells-spew-methane/>

⁸ <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/fracking-methane-emissions-catastrophe-17439>