

**COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
CITIZENS ADVISORY COUNCIL TO THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION**

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HARRISBURG (March 27)—“When the well’s dry, we know the worth of water,” said Benjamin Franklin, one of our most famous Pennsylvanians. While water is one of Pennsylvania’s most abundant and valuable resources, we do little to manage our use of it. To redress this shortcoming, the Citizens Advisory Council to the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has issued a statement calling for Pennsylvania to adopt a comprehensive and integrated system of water resource management.

“Pennsylvania currently has no comprehensive water management system. We do not even have a solid understanding of the amount of water available, the amount needed to support human and aquatic health, or the amount and location of water available for future land uses. As we enter the new millennium, Pennsylvania is not in a position to effectively manage either future development of water resources,” CAC Chair Jolene E. Chinchilli said.

The entire Commonwealth remains in a ‘drought watch,’ never having fully recovered from the drought conditions of the last 2 years. In addition, “La Nina” weather patterns are causing a drought across the southern United States and much of the mid-west, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), predicted to affect states as close as Ohio.

Pennsylvania participates in several interstate river basin commissions, only two of which have comprehensive water management functions within their jurisdictions. The Commonwealth has a number of laws and programs affecting water quality, but only a single, narrow, antiquated water quantity law: the 1939 Water Rights Law. This law only authorizes DEP to regulate surface water withdrawals for public water supplies, an estimated 10% of the total surface water withdrawals in the Commonwealth.

As a result, growth and development in the state are occurring with little regard for water resource availability or impacts. Additionally, while the Commonwealth has completed a number of water plans over the years, there is no mechanism to implement the resulting findings or recommendations.

Planning must be followed by management, and where appropriate conservation, to minimize the effects of overuse of water and recurring periods of drought. All must be integrated to provide a comprehensive approach to water resource management.

Under our current structure, disputes are usually resolved through litigation, which does not guarantee or protect water rights, does not deal with use conflicts during droughts, does not address conservation of water during non-drought conditions, and does not adequately provide for increasing demand. Proper legal and institutional systems would define water rights and resolve quality and quantity conflicts among water uses, protecting current and future users, aquatic systems and public health and safety.

Without an integrated approach, severe shortages and over use may render water resources incapable of meeting essential needs, cause conflicts among users, disrupt or damage economic activities, destroy aquatic organisms and contribute to environmental degradation, pollution and unsanitary conditions. All of these are detrimental to the health, safety and welfare of Pennsylvanians and to Pennsylvania's economy.

Council's water committee has been studying this issue for nearly a year, meeting with various interest groups, affected parties, and experts. The Council reviewed relevant materials from other jurisdictions and organizations before reaching its conclusions. The Council's position builds on the recommendations made by the Governor's 21st Century Environment Commission.

The Council is a legislatively created advisory committee charged with reviewing all environmental issues, legislation, regulations, policies and programs relating to Pennsylvania. Council members are appointed volunteers who serve staggered 3-year terms. Council provides its advice to the Department, the General Assembly, the Governor and the Commonwealth's citizens.

For a copy of the Council's water position statement, or for more information about the Citizens Advisory Council, visit our web site at www.cacdep.state.pa.us or call us at 717-787-4527.