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Coalition launches campaign to tax drilling for natural gas; New statewide poll shows 87% want dedicated portion of tax used to protect land, water, and wildlife

Harrisburg, PA (March 16, 2009) - A coalition of environmental, conservation, and sporting groups; municipal officials and state legislators today launched a campaign in support of a severance tax on natural gas drilling. The groups advocate that a portion of tax revenues should be dedicated to conservation, local governments dealing with environmental damage, and the Fish and Boat Commission and the Game Commission. As part of the campaign, the group unveiled a recent statewide poll which showed that the majority of Pennsylvanians support taxing natural gas drilling, and nearly 9 out of 10 want a portion of the tax revenue used to protect Pennsylvania's land, water, and wildlife.

"The breadth of support for conservation funding is astounding," said Andy Loza, of the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association. "Support for the idea of dedicating severance tax revenues to conservation cuts across every region of the state and every demographic group. And that support also extends to dedicating a portion of gas lease revenues on public land to protecting our environment."

"The Marcellus Shale offers us a tremendous opportunity to expand our supply of domestic fuel and, through the proposed severance tax, bring revenue into the state, at a time when our budget forecasts are so dire," said Jan Jarrett, president and CEO of Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future (PennFuture). "But it also offers a tremendous risk to the land, water, and wildlife that makes Pennsylvania so special. These drilling operations use millions of gallons of water and scar our land, at least temporarily. This poll shows that our citizens recognize that it is only fair that a portion of the severance tax goes to protect the environment."

Douglas Hill, Executive Director of the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania agreed, saying, "Local governments are under increasing strain, and the Marcellus Shale drilling is exacerbating the problem." Stressing that counties see this as more than a revenue issue, he continued, "Dedicating a small portion of the new severance taxes to help local governments dealing with the drilling operations and other environmental problems just makes good sense."

"Our Game Commission and Fish and Boat Commission are in difficult financial straits, constantly underfunded as they carry out their duty to protect our land and water," said State Representative David Levdansky (D-Allegheny, Washington). "It is vital to remember that the commissions are charged under state law to protect and manage all species in the interests of all Pennsylvanians. Therefore it is appropriate and worthy to use a portion of the severance tax to invest in the work of the commissions to improve habitat and public access to our land and water, and to grow our burgeoning wildlife recreation industry."

The statewide poll was conducted from February 28 - March 3, 2009 by the bipartisan polling team of Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R). The pollsters' memo on the results is available at http://www.pennfuture.org/UserFiles09/220-2696PublicSummaryMemoFinal.pdf.

In addition to municipal officials and state legislators, the members of the coalition include 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania, American Farmland Trust, Appalachian Mountain Club, Audubon Pennsylvania, Berks County Conservancy, Central Pennsylvania Conservancy, Centre County Farmland Trust, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Citizens for Pennsylvania's Future (PennFuture), City Parks Association, ClearWater Conservancy, Countryside Conservancy, Delaware River Greenway Partnership, Delaware Valley Earth Force, E.L. Rose Conservancy of Susquehanna County, Eastern Pennsylvania Coalition for Abandoned Mine Reclamation, Eden Hill Conservancy, Foundation for Pennsylvania Watersheds, GreenSpace Alliance, Heritage Conservancy, Independence Conservancy, Kennett Township Land Trust, Keystone Trails Association, Lake Erie Region Conservancy, Lancaster Farmland Trust, Land Conservancy of Adams County, Lebanon Valley Conservancy, Montgomery County Lands Trust, Natural Lands Trust, Open Land Conservancy of Chester County, Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited, Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, Pennsylvania Wildlife Federation, PennEnvironment, Pennsbury Land Trust, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Pennsylvania Land Trust Association, Pennsylvania Recreation & Park Society, Philadelphia Water Department, Preservation Pennsylvania, Radnor Conservancy, Shermans Creek Conservation Association, Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter, Somerset County Conservancy, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, The Conservancy of Montgomery County, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Wildlands Conservancy, Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, Crossroad Gift & Thrift, Fjordstone Inc., J. W. Crouse Inc., Hometown Green, Montgomery Rehab Associates, Schmid & Company Inc., This Leaky House, and Veterinary Medical Specialists of Pittsburgh.