



Common Themes of Conservation, Fishing and Boating Groups

A simple truth about conservation and environmental efforts is that no single agency, organization or individual can accomplish substantial efforts on his own. No entity by itself has the funding, expertise or personnel to deal with the truly major issues facing the state. Fortunately, as a result of many people understanding this paradigm, Pennsylvania has developed a broad network of environmental and conservation organizations.

Consider the beginnings long ago of such venerable organizations as the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, which started in 1932 as a group to fight for clean water to improve fisheries. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy also began in 1932, and it is a major player in land preservation, including its role in the recently announced Erie Bluffs State Park, to be managed by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Dozens of other organizations now play critical roles in shaping Pennsylvania's future. In just the past three months, I have had the pleasure of meeting the leaders of many of these groups, such as the Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Pennsylvania Trout, Southern Allegheny Conservancy, Pennsylvania B.A.S.S. Federation, Unified Sportsmen of Pennsylvania and many other conservation, fishing and

boating groups. I've also had an opportunity to discuss natural resource activities and agendas with staff of these organizations. Some common themes seem to be clearly forming as a result of all these discussions.

First, we have much more in common than we have as differences. As in any family, there are divergent views on some topics. But when it comes to basic values, we are generally on the same page. We all want clean streams, we all want to stop rampant conversion of land, we want to preserve open space, and we seek to improve the quality of life for Pennsylvanians, just to cite a few examples.

When we focus on these issues, we are a potent force for change, and we can accomplish great goals. A wonderful example of this cooperation was the water-trail workshop, hosted May 26 by the Fish & Boat Commission at its Harrisburg headquarters. The workshop was sponsored by the Pennsylvania Recreation and Park Society in partnership with the Fish & Boat Commission, the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council. Participants came from these organizations and dozens of other groups. Our common goal was to create systems of water trails that can be used for a wide variety of purposes including paddling, motorboats, fishing and nature-watching. Different uses, common goal. *See page 60 of this issue for a more complete review of this workshop.*

Next, we should all realize that the opportunities to perform our work are virtually limitless. All too often we view the world, and the funding base for our work, as a pie of limited dimensions. When one diner wants a larger piece, someone else gets less. This perception is not always the case. It is well-known that our citizens strongly support a clean Pennsylvania: There are federal dollars to obtain, foundations with funding available, and innovative mechanisms to be implemented for making the pie larger. Furthermore, by working together in increasingly better ways to complement our resources, we can become even more effective.

A simple example is the watershed approach used throughout the state and nation. Many local partners come to-



Dr. Douglas Austen addresses the June 15 rally at the Capitol.

gether to identify the problems and find funding sources. As often happens, the resulting solutions are far more creative than anyone would have anticipated going into the effort. Such are our challenges; innovative partnerships spawn creative solutions.

Finally, there is no such thing as separate and conflicting "environmental" and "conservation" communities or agendas. Certainly there exists a spectrum of opinions, but don't let those opposed to our general philosophy of improving the natural resources of Pennsylvania try to force a wedge among us by creating artificial divides.

Since 1866, the Fish & Boat Commission has been an active part of the Commonwealth's conservation and environmental movement. Initially designated to restore shad runs in the rivers, the Commission has pursued an agenda that has obviously included fishing and boating, but also dam removal, clean water, endangered species and much more. In my tenure as executive director of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, I hope to build upon this energy and forge new coalitions with the many other entities that share the same common purpose, as well as to work collegially with those who don't. We can do much together to make Pennsylvania a better home for all of us, and we all have a place at the table.

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