



## **Governor Rendell -- Support Buffers, Reject Weakening PA Law**

January 12, 2009

Governor Ed Rendell  
225 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg PA 17120

Sent via fax: (717)772-8284

Dear Governor Rendell,

Over the past year, the Delaware Riverkeeper Network has been working with the Pennsylvania Clean Water Campaign and other state environmental organizations to protect Pennsylvania's waterways by supporting a proposal to require minimum 100 foot buffers on rivers and streams with additional protections for streams in particular need. Remarkably, we have received overwhelming support in this endeavor from our nearly 8,000 members, other organizations, and a large number of Pennsylvania legislators. People recognize that protecting forested buffers along our streams is an effective and cost efficient way to protect our drinking water supplies, to reduce flood damages and protect our communities from the ravages of growing flooding, for protecting our public and private lands and infrastructure from erosion, and for protect the quality of our environment in order to support the quality of life, recreational, and ecotourism and economic opportunities this beautiful Commonwealth provides.

It is disappointing that despite the tremendous benefits forested buffers provides our communities, and the overwhelming support this concept has inspired, Secretary John Hanger is not only abandoning previous DEP efforts to enact progressive regulatory buffer requirements but is in contrast actually trying to undermine the initiative altogether.

When our natural waterways are forested:

- flooding and flood damages are minimized
- drought is reduced
- pollution is prevented and filtered out protecting drinking water as well as recreation and associated ecotourism
- our public and private lands are protected from erosion
- we save taxpayers money by reducing flood damages and the cost of flood response -- keeping new houses away from stream edges reduces flooding and flood damage, and negates the need for costly cleanups and repair

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When we allow the removal of the native vegetation that should buffer our streams for development and lawns the opposite happens:

- flooding and flood damages are increased
- drought is exacerbated
- our streams and drinking water supplies become increasingly polluted
- people can no longer comfortably, or sometimes even safely, fish, boat, swim in our waterways and businesses are harmed
- our public and private lands become eroded
- our communities have to invest in public services, emergency services and clean up plans to try to undo the damage done

Clearly, what we have been doing to date to protect streams and buffers is not working. We need regulations at state level to protect our communities from harms that denuding and developing our stream banks and streamside lands causes.

A 100 foot forested buffer along streams and waterways is not a radical or extreme proposal, but a modest and scientifically regarded minimum for water quality protection and a regulation already in existence by several other states. A voluntary approach will not provide our residents the protection they deserve or communities the clean water and healthy rivers that they need.

Most importantly today, buffers are the most effective, natural, and free devices we have for protecting communities against flooding which has become an expensive and critical issue in Pennsylvania. You yourself have funded millions throughout the state to assist flood victims, help rebuild homes and structures, and continuously rebuild roads, sewer systems, and infrastructure within the floodplain due to damages from flooding. While Secretary Hanger may propose minimal cost savings in this voluntary approach to buffers protection, the cost of state assistance given to victims of flooding due to inadequate forested buffer distances is much higher.

Recognizing the value of forested buffers, Pennsylvania grants are funding millions in the restoration and enhancement of damaged streams and buffers throughout the Commonwealth. The cost of restoration versus prevention of damaging streams and buffers is astronomical. It is a wise decision to move forward with the Buffers 100 proposal to protect Pennsylvania's streams and rivers.

I ask that you deny Secretary John Hanger's request for a voluntary buffer approach and instead keep the safety of Pennsylvania residents at the forefront of your decision-making by urging him to put in place a regulatory requirement for minimum 100 foot buffers on all streams with additional protections for high quality and already damaged streams to ensure they too are benefited and protected.

Respectfully Submitted,

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the Delaware Riverkeeper