



Pennsylvania TU Supports HB 2443

Honorable Chairmen Levdansky, Rohrer and members of the House Finance Committee and guests.

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Deb Simko and I am Vice President of the Chestnut Ridge Chapter of Trout Unlimited. It is a local chapter of 367 members serving Greene, Washington, Fayette and southern Somerset counties. I am here today to speak on behalf of our PA Council of TU which is comprised of 12,000 members and the 52 chapters across Pennsylvania as well as my individual Chapter located here.

Our members cross political boundaries, being Republicans, Democrats, Independents and are from all walks of life; such as miners, loggers, school teachers, college professors, biologists, housewives, engineers, township supervisors, ski resorts, water suppliers, steel workers, farmers, gas well drillers, you name it. We belong to this organization because we believe in TU's mission of conserving, protecting and restoring North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds. My individual chapter's mission is reclaiming the past, protecting the present and preparing for the future. We are not just a bunch of fishermen – uh, anglers.

We have spent some of the best days of our lives hiking and fishing Pennsylvania's outstanding trout streams. And we have also spent some of the best days of our lives volunteering countless hours working to improve and protect our precious cold water streams in projects ranging from planting trees along stream banks to making streams more accessible to the public to improving the habitat for fish and other aquatic life and to restore the thousands of miles of streams from the ravages of the coal industry. My chapter alone has received over 2 million dollars in funds in order to restore several streams that were dead due to coal mine drainage. Today one of these streams once again sustains a thriving brook trout community that residents could only remember their great-grandparents telling stories of catching "those little brookies."

We educate the children on the importance of clean water, for example, my Chapter has just finished talking to 700 sixth grade students in Fayette County yesterday about why we need good clean water, for their health as well as the health of an ecosystem. For the past 2 years at our display we have a contest to name the 5 trout in Pennsylvania waters. For the past 2 years, girls

have won the fishing rod. (In case you don't know what the five trout are in PA, they are: Brook, Brown, Golden, Lake and Rainbow)

Our Trout in the Classroom program for schools has become so popular that my chapter alone is assisting 7 school districts in bringing the wonder of raising a trout from an egg, to a fry to when the school students can release them in a local stream. The squeal of delight and one of sadness is heard as students say goodbye and release the fish, each fish has been given a name, each fish has been given a hope of maybe it will survive in our local waterways.

All of this work not only in our Chapter but in all of our Chapters across Pennsylvania is done to protect and improve our waters that we love and this work has been funded by grants from the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Department of Environmental Protection and the Environmental Stewardship Fund of Growing Greener, as well as other environmental funding programs. We have formed partnerships with our local township supervisors who donate their services and equipment because they too recognize the economic development dollars that a recreational fishery brings to their community. The county conservation districts partner with our chapters and provide needed expertise in areas that the chapter may lack, such as stream bank fencing, completing permit applications and water monitoring.

People from all over the world come into Pennsylvania to learn about our history; the French & Indian War, the Revolutionary War, the Civil War. They visit Amish country, the farms and scenic by-ways crisscrossing the Commonwealth. One local river, next door to us in Fayette County on the Youghiogheny, provides white water rafting to almost 2 million visitors. Two million visitors coming to our hotels, our shops, our resorts, to our streams. The economic vitality of tourism in the Laurel Highlands area near the city of Pittsburgh brings in \$12M – in my own backyard, and is probably duplicated throughout Pennsylvania, in the PA Wilds, the Poconos, in Allentown, in Scranton, in Philadelphia and in Erie. But the work I and my fellow anglers have done to improve stream health and help to keep one of Pennsylvania's premier economic assets, our recreational trout fishery, in good enough shape is not completed and we still have so much more to do.

And now we are facing an unprecedented threat to the quality of our trout streams and the economy that depends on them. As the natural gas industry taps into the rich and productive gas deposit that lies deep underneath most of Pennsylvania, we lose millions of gallons of water that never makes its way back into the water cycle. The need to treat large amounts of highly contaminated production water puts strain not only on the communities who accept it but also our streams and rivers. Who will help the people along the Monongahela River every time the PA DEP announces an advisory that the citizens should drink bottled water? Who will buy those people who are on fixed incomes bottled water? Who will replace their hot water tanks and dishwashers? Who will compensate the steel or power industry for lost production because they could not use the water for their processes? And who will compensate the fish and aquatic

species when they are dead in the streams of Washington County, Greene County or any county? Who will pay for this? Well pads, roads and pipeline construction causes sediment to enter our streams and affect the biodiversity within it. All this causes damage which right now taxpayers will ultimately pay to repair.

We had an incident in Somerset County a month ago where water haulers who were supplying water for fracking were blocking the access point to a river for canoers and kayakers. The trucks cracked the boat ramp and also blocked access to the Great Allegheny Passage, the 300 mile hike/bike trail connecting Pittsburgh to Washington DC. What do you tell the tourists when this happens – to come back??? Water trucks and tourists don't mix.

Unlike almost every state with substantial natural gas resources, Pennsylvania imposes no severance taxes to compensate taxpayers for the depletion of the resource and to repair damage caused by drilling activities.

The 12,000 members of Pennsylvania Trout Unlimited strongly support the need for a severance tax. And we strongly support HB 2443. A severance tax will not “stunt the growth of this industry significantly”. The gas is here and the industry will extract the gas regardless of having to pay the tax. The multi-national companies operating here should pay a severance tax like everywhere else they do business. In the end, they will pass this tax onto the millions of citizens on the eastern seaboard who buy gas. By the time this tax is spread through several million people, it is miniscule. With Japan and Europe entering the arena to get Pennsylvania gas, any tax that Pennsylvania imposes will now be spread out over billions of people. Again, this will not even be noticed by the consumer. As the coal industry pays a fee per ton of coal they take and the money is sent back to the coal producing states, of which Pennsylvania is one, and used for reclamation purposes and drinking water supplies so too should the gas industry pay. Why should the gas industry be treated so special?

We need the revenue from a severance tax to keep our environmental programs going. The money we've been using to protect and improve our trout streams is drying up. The Growing Greener bond money is gone; DCNR grant programs are being slashed to the bone under the current budget cuts; the money in the Environmental Stewardship Fund is being diverted to pay the bond debt and our county conservation districts have to let people go.

We need a severance tax on natural gas drilling to protect taxpayers, keep our restoration and improvement projects going and ensure that gas drilling will not leave the scars the coal mining industry did.

The responsible way to move Pennsylvania forward is to institute a severance tax on natural gas. We support the need for a dedicated fund to deal with the environmental damage that will occur due to the extraction process but also to put money back into Pennsylvania. HB 2443 provides the right mix of distribution, including 22% to the Environmental Stewardship Fund, 4% to the PA Fish and Boat Commission, 3% to the County Conservation Districts and 20% to local

government. Our restoration projects put Pennsylvanians to work. We hire local consultants to develop our assessments, we hire local laboratories to analyze our water samples, we hire local contractors to build our projects, we use stone from the local quarries, and we buy native plants from local nurseries. By approving HB 2443, this will enable us to keep local people working, keep the conservation districts open, provide the township supervisors with the needed funds to repair the roads and bridges, provide the funds for the fire departments and EMS to buy new equipment and train their volunteers. By approving this bill we will keep Pennsylvanians working. And when the gas industry hires all of the people they say they will hire – well look out, maybe we won't have unemployment in Pennsylvania.

This gas play in Pennsylvania is not about getting the U.S. off of foreign dependence. It is about the bottom line of profits for the gas industry. Please don't fall hook, line and sinker for industry's whine that they are a fledgling industry or that they will pack up and leave, or that this tax will hurt them. They want this gas; they will be here for a long, long time. In Western Pennsylvania alone, our TU Chapters and other conservation groups have brought back the Clarion River (it is now a Wild and Scenic River) the Monongahela River started to heal but now has a set back, the Youghiogheny River, the Kiski-Conemaugh, the Stoneycreek. All restoration projects that gave Pennsylvanian's jobs, improved the quality of life for those residents living in these areas. The people in the gas fields of Pennsylvania are crying out loud and clear. Please give the money back to these communities, why? Because it is the right thing to do.

So in conclusion, a long time ago at the beginning of my long winded testimony, I told you the mission of Trout Unlimited and that of my local Chapter. We strongly support HB 2443 because we feel that this bill will ultimately help us fulfill our Missions – whether it is protecting or conserving or restoring our coldwater fisheries and their watersheds – we MUST prepare for the future.

Thank You.

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