

**Legislative Budget and Finance Committee**

**PA Game Commission Compliance  
With Its Strategic Plan**

**Report Presentation by Philip Durgin,  
Executive Director, at June 17, 2015, Meeting**

Good morning. Act 166 of 1998 calls on the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to conduct a performance audit every three years of the Game Commission's compliance with its Strategic Plan. This is our sixth such report on this topic.

Like our last report, this report provides an assessment of the Commission's "compliance" with each of the 41 objectives contained in the Strategic Plan. We believe the objectives in the PGC's Strategic Plan, which covers the years 2009 through 2014, are sufficiently defined, and adequate data exists, for us to independently assess—at least in broad terms—the PGC's success in achieving the plan's goals and objectives. The assessment, however, requires a substantial degree of subjective judgment because very few of the plan's objectives are specific, quantifiable, or time-limited. As a consequence, we used broad categories to "grade" the extent to which an objective has been achieved.

In all, we rated 11 of the 41 objectives as "Fully or Largely Achieved," 27 as "Partially Achieved," 3 as "Not Achieved or Largely Not Achieved." I won't go through our ratings for all the objectives, but I will mention a few.

We rated the PGC's deer management objective as Fully or Largely Achieved. The Commission's deer plan calls for stable populations in 20 of the Commonwealth's 23 Wildlife Management Units, a decrease in deer in 2 WMUs, and an increase in 1 WMU. Actual population trends match the PGC's objective in all but 7 WMUs, so we considered this objective to have been at least largely achieved.

We rated the goal to "conserve, protect and restore" as Not Achieved or Largely Not Achieved for two game species, Bobwhite quail and black ducks. We gave this rating because Bobwhite quail populations have declined by 97 percent from historic levels, and black ducks, once abundant, are now down to fewer than 500 pairs in Pennsylvania.

The only other objective I'll mention is the objective to "Increase hunter and trapper recruitment," which we rated as Partially Achieved. General hunting license sales increased marginally from FY 2008-09 to FY 2013-14 (less than 1 percent), but then declined in FY 2014-15. On a more positive note, the number of new hunters increased by 37 percent, from 30,213 in 2009 to 41,462 in 2014, and the sales of junior hunting licenses also showed gains of about 5 percent.

We also found the PGC's efforts to improve forest health through its deer management plan does not appear to have been effective, at least as yet, because there has been little or no increase over the past eight years in the number of

WMUs with improved forest health. In 2014, one Wildlife Management met the PGC's criteria to be rated as Good (70 percent or more surveyed plots with adequate regeneration), 15 WMUs as Fair (50-70 percent of forested plots have adequate regeneration), and 4 WMUs as Poor (fewer than 50 percent of forested plots have adequate regeneration). These figures match the eight-year average for the period 2007-2014, so it is difficult to see that there has been any significant improvement over the period.

The report contains three recommendations. The first is that the PGC consider streamlining its Strategic Plan. The 2009-2014 Strategic Plan contains 41 strategic objectives, 150 operational objectives, and over 500 outcome and output measures, many of which we found to be redundant or of only marginal value in assessing the plan. Streamlining the plan to a more manageable number of objectives and measures should make it easier for both the PGC and the public to understand the plan, focus on critical objectives and measures, and assess results.

Secondly, we recommend the PGC strive to develop objectives that are time-limited and quantifiable. We recognize this is easier said than done, but we encourage the PGC to work toward developing time-limited, quantifiable objectives wherever possible.

Finally, as a management tool, we recommend the PGC attempt to make its own assessment of the extent to which the Strategic Plan is being achieved. This perhaps could be made available to the public as part of its Annual Report.

We would like to thank Executive Director Matt Hough and his staff for the excellent cooperation we received during this project. Thank you.