

Pennsylvania Game Commission Compliance with Its Strategic Plan

A 1998 amendment to the Game and Wildlife Code requires the LBFC to conduct a performance audit every three years of the Pennsylvania Game Commission's (PGC's) compliance with its strategic plan for agency operations. This is the eighth report issued under this mandate. The report also includes information on PGC revenues, expenditures, and the Game Fund financial condition.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- ❖ **We found:**
 - The PGC appeared to be in compliance with the *Pennsylvania Game Commission Strategic Plan 2015-2020* and their mission to "manage Pennsylvania's wild birds, wild mammals, and their habitats for current and future generations."
 - The Commission has not achieved its goal of implementing a marketing program and outreach effort that achieves a no-net loss of general hunting license sales.
 - The PGC heavily relies on the sale of natural resources to fund its operations.
- ❖ **The PGC 2015-2020 Strategic Plan is streamlined compared to the previous plan.** The current strategic plan has five core goals and 34 strategic objectives compared to seven goals and 41 objectives in the 2009-2014 plan. For the most part, the goals, and objectives in the 2015-2020 plan are sufficiently defined and stated in a manner (i.e., specific, time-limited, and quantifiable) to allow for an independent assessment of their achievement. Our ratings of the PGC's achievement of its goals and objectives are based on information primarily provided by the PGC and the Commission's internal self-assessment ratings, not direct observation, or file reviews by LBFC staff. Unless stated otherwise, we agreed with the assessment of the PGC as to their progress.
- ❖ **All five of the PGC's broad goals were rated as Partially Achieved.** In addition to the five broad goals, the Strategic Plan contains 34 Strategic Objectives. Of these, 21 are rated as Fully or Largely Achieved, 9 as Partially Achieved, 2 as Not Achieved, and 2 as Unknown/Not Able to Assess. Each rating has a brief explanation.
- ❖ **Twenty-one of the PGC's Strategic Objectives were rated as Fully or Largely Achieved – an increase of 13 from our 2018 report.** Strategic Objective 1.1.1 – recovering the population of peregrine falcons and ospreys – was upgraded from Partially Achieved to Fully or Largely Achieved. The osprey was delisted as a threatened species by the PGC. The status of the peregrine falcon was upgraded from endangered to threatened. Both mark a significant achievement for the PGC.
- ❖ **One of the Not Achieved or Largely Not Achieved objectives was on hold due to budgetary constraints.** The PGC had hoped to initiate construction of a Game Commission Wildlife Research and Education Center in State College to house specific PGC staff. However, PGC determined that funding needed for this objective was nonexistent.
- ❖ **Two strategic objectives were rated as Unknown/Not Able to Assess.** These strategic objectives, 3.2 – repositioning certain field staff from home offices to headquarters and 3.3 – reducing in person staff meetings and replacing them with webinar technology, were unable to be assessed, according to the PGC, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ❖ **The PGC was unable to achieve a no-net-loss of general hunting licenses sales between 2015 and 2020 as stated in Strategic Objective 5.7.** The PGC reported this strategic objective as Fully or Largely Achieved. However, we disagree with their assessment. The number of general hunting licenses sold dropped from 930,000 in FY 2015-16 to 860,000 in FY 2019-20.
- ❖ **Revenues from the sale of natural resources increased significantly.** From FY 2010-11 to FY 2019-20, revenues from the sale of natural resources increased from \$11.5 million to \$61 million in constant dollars. Put another way, the sale of natural resources accounted for 14 percent of PGC revenues in FY 2010-11 and increased to 45 percent of revenues by FY 2019-20.
- ❖ **PGC Expenditures as they relate to benefits and retirement costs continue to be a significant concern.** Pension costs are largely outside the Commission's control. We note with concern the rising costs related to State Employees Retirement System benefits. If pension costs continue to increase, the result will be a significant strain on the financial health of the PGC.
- ❖ **We recommend:**
 - The PGC's next strategic plan reduce the number of core goals allowing the Commission to focus more intently on the following:
 1. Recruiting significantly more new hunters and bringing lapsed hunters back to the sport, and
 2. Diversifying the Commission's revenues to rely less on the sale of natural resources given the instability of that source of revenue.

For a full copy of the report, email us at lbfcinfo@palbfc.us or download a copy at <http://lbfc.legis.state.pa.us/>.

