

## Report Highlights

### Transferring Enforcement of Fish, Boat, and Game Laws to a Single Executive Branch Agency

**Background:** House Resolution 222 of 2003 directed the LB&FC to study the feasibility of transferring the enforcement of fish, boat, game, and wildlife laws as currently performed by the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) to a new Bureau of Conservation Law Enforcement in the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), or another state agency.

#### Study Conclusions:

**1. Pennsylvania's Current Conservation Law Enforcement Structure.** As of early 2004, Pennsylvania had a force of 284 full-time staff involved in conservation law enforcement. This number included 135 PGC Wildlife Conservation Officers, 80 PFBC Waterways Conservation Officers, and 69 DCNR Rangers. These full-time officers are supplemented by 206 seasonal wage Rangers in DCNR and a combined volunteer deputy force of 765 within the PGC and PFBC. In FY 2002-03, combined agency expenditures for conservation law enforcement purposes was approximately \$28 million.

**2. Consideration of State Agencies.** While we considered the possible placement of these functions in the Pennsylvania State Police or the Department of Environmental Protection, DCNR is the agency in which conservation law enforcement duties would most appropriately be placed if such a change were to occur. The assumption of fish, boat, game, and wildlife law responsibilities would be consistent with DCNR's mission as the state's lead conservation and outdoor recreation agency.

**3. Placement of Conservation Law Enforcement Functions in Other States.** Conservation law enforcement functions are carried out by a DCNR-type agency in 27 states along with the fish and game management functions. In 22 other states, fish and wildlife functions are carried out within an independent department or commission. In all but two of these states, conservation law enforcement is conducted within the fish and wildlife department or commission. In these two states, Alaska and Oregon, conservation law enforcement is the responsibility of the state police.

**4. A Consolidated Bureau of Conservation Law Enforcement for Pennsylvania.** Consolidating the conservation law enforcement personnel and functions currently performed by the PGC, the PFBC,

and DCNR into a single conservation law enforcement unit is feasible. Such a consolidation would require the creation of a new bureau and regional office structure in DCNR along with a new "conservation officer" (CO) job classification. While not providing for a reduction in the number of full-time officers, a consolidation could enhance field coverage through improved officer deployment.

**5. Size and Cost of the New Bureau.** The proposed consolidated bureau would have a complement of 437 full-time and 100 seasonal Conservation Officers. The first year costs to operate the Bureau are estimated at \$33.8 million, about \$5.8 million more than under the existing structure, primarily because we did not consider it feasible to continue the Commissions' deputy programs in a new DCNR bureau.

**6. Funding and Budgetary Impacts.** The report presents several funding options. Under one of these, the full cost of operating the new bureau would be paid through the DCNR's General Fund appropriations. Absorbing the law enforcement functions of the PGC and the PFBC into the General Fund would reduce the PGC's costs by about \$10.1 million annually and lower PFBC costs by about \$7.3 million annually. Other options discussed in the report provide for a sharing of costs among funds.

**7. Potential Alternative Funding Sources.** The report suggests that fines and penalties derived from conservation law enforcement be earmarked for the new bureau and discusses the possible use of a special additional sales tax on hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching equipment to help defray the costs of conservation law enforcement.

**8. Other Matters to Be Addressed.** Although the report contains no recommendations, it does discuss the various statutory, regulatory, and administrative actions that would be necessary if a consolidation were to occur.