

June 23, 2010

A Tax on Natural Gas Extraction Must Include Significant Funding for Growing Greener Projects

Harrisburg, PA – A coalition of 22 of the state’s leading conservation, recreation and environmental organizations, strongly supports a tax on natural gas extraction that includes a significant portion of the revenues being allocated to the Environmental Stewardship Fund for future Growing Greener projects.

Andrew Heath, Executive Director of the Renew Growing Greener Coalition, said he is cautiously optimistic that the Environmental Stewardship Fund, the primary funding source for the state’s Growing Greener initiatives, will receive a significant portion of any future Severance Tax legislation. “We are encouraged by the responses we have received during our meetings with Senators. There appears to be a strong, bipartisan understanding that Growing Greener is an effective tool in protecting and restoring the Commonwealth’s most treasured places,” Heath said.

Heath noted that, in a recent Capitolwire article, Senate President Pro Tempore Joseph Scarnati (R-Jefferson) specifically cited Growing Greener as a possible beneficiary of any future Severance Tax. “This is a clear indication that there is concern in the Senate about our communities’ ability to protect their land, air, water and ways of life,” Heath said.

Growing Greener began in 1999, when Governor Tom Ridge and the General Assembly committed \$645 million over five years to empower communities to protect working farms and special places, clean up rivers and streams, create and improve parks and trails, and revitalize cities and towns. Growing Greener remains the largest single investment in conservation, recreation and environmental projects ever made by the Commonwealth.

In 2002, Governor Mark Schweiker and the General Assembly identified a dedicated source of revenue for Growing Greener through increasing the state’s “tipping fee,” a fee charged for dumping trash in Pennsylvania landfills. The Environmental Stewardship Fund was created to receive those “tipping fee” revenues and Growing Greener grew from \$645 million to \$1.3 billion.

Recognizing the need to accelerate the work of Growing Greener, Governor Rendell and the General Assembly put a \$625 million bond referendum question to the voters for the maintenance and protection of the environment, open space and farmland preservation, watershed protection, abandoned mine reclamation, acid mine drainage remediation and other environmental initiatives. In the primary of 2005, the referendum passed with 60% approval and Growing Greener II was established.

Since its inception, Growing Greener has transformed Pennsylvania by empowering local communities to protect, restore and maintain their natural treasures, revitalize their downtowns and neighborhoods, and improve their economic vitality.

According to the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee Report issued in March 2010, virtually all of the Growing Greener II funds have already been spent or committed. Total funds available for Growing Greener projects will soon decrease to about \$15 million a year, from previous levels of \$200 million.

For more information on the Renew Growing Greener Coalition, contact Andrew Heath, Executive Director, or visit www.renewgrowinggreener.org.