

Are Growing Greener Grants Available for You

Growing Greener legislation, House Bill 868, was signed by Gov. Ridge into law on December 15, 1999. Nearly \$650 million in new money and redirected funds will be made available in this five-year funding program. Four agencies have been allocated Growing Greener funding:

- Department of Environmental Protection (DEP),
- Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR),
- PA Department of Agriculture (PDA), and
- PENNVEST Program.

The distribution of the funding is listed in the following table. "Year 1" is actually from the beginning of year 2000 to the end of the state fiscal year, June 30, 2000. "Year 2" began July 1, 2000.

Allocations (in millions)	Year 1	Years 2-5	Total
DEP	\$37.5	\$50.5	\$239.5
DCNR	\$24.4	\$32.5	\$154.4
PDA	\$20.0	\$20.0	\$100.0
PENNVEST	\$24.0	\$32.0	\$152.0
Total	\$105.9	\$135.0	\$645.9

For 100 days - from the Farm Show in January to the celebration of Earth Day in April - Gov. Ridge and Lt. Gov. Schweiker announced at least one new initiative every week. During that time, nearly \$26 million in grants were awarded to more than 200 municipalities and organizations across the state.

The grants ranged in size from \$800 for Butler County Sewage Association (to develop a database of permitted on-lot sewage systems to notify owners of pumping schedules) to \$787,800 for Cherryhill and Blacklick Creek Watershed Association. This grant will fund construction of a passive acid mine drainage treatment system which will be more economical to operate than the

existing active system established by a now-bankrupt coal company. Most grants were awarded to municipalities who partnered with conservation districts, conservancies, watershed associations, and other conservation groups. For more information: www.dep.state.pa.us/grants/growgreen

The remainder of this newsletter is devoted to providing information on the availability of Growing Greener grants and experiences of the four agencies.

DEP

We interviewed most of the DEP Watershed Coordinators who are charged with administering the Department's Growing Greener initiative. According to information from them as well as that found at <http://www.dep.state.pa.us/growgreen/defaultDEP.htm>, DEP has designated five categories of watershed projects that can be funded through Growing Greener:

- Organization of a watershed group
- Watershed assessments
- Development of a watershed restoration or protection plan
- Implementation of a watershed restoration or protection plan
- Demonstration, education and outreach projects

Experience of the Coordinators during the early phases of the program is that interest is very high. Most of the six regional offices each received more than 100 applications in February. It seems that the availability of funds has rejuvenated the creative juices of those who are concerned about watershed protection. In some cases, old plans were "dusted off", revisited and can now become a reality.

It was reported that applications were evaluated by a panel of local and statewide personnel. High points were awarded to projects fitting into one of the five categories listed above, plus those that demonstrated the involvement of public and private partnerships, including work with environmental

groups and local contributions of resources and funds. Projects that addressed an entire watershed rather than a specific project within a watershed also received high points.

Where necessary, site visits and personal communications by the Watershed Coordinators were conducted to gauge the practicality, permitability and implementability of each proposal. Successful applicants had previously communicated their ideas to DEP and modified their proposals to conform with the goals of Growing Greener.

To handle the implementation stage of a project, DEP has assigned a Project Manager to each project. These people will be charged with ensuring that permits are obtained, designs comply with applicable standards and funds are properly distributed.

Broad Top Township of Bedford County was successful in obtaining two grants, one for an acid mine assessment and the other for a stream location around a coal spoil pile. Ernest Fuller, Township Supervisor, found that talking to DEP at the regional level was very important to help them understand just what their applications were all about. "We have been involved in seeking solutions to our watershed problems for the past 20 years, but now, instead of just scraping along because of limited local funds, these new resources give us a much better chance of success".

The Township found that the application process was simple. But, they also believe that future applications will be more competitive once everyone has a better understanding of the sources of funds and possible limitations on their use, and develops more detailed scopes of service with supporting back-up information. In short, future competition for these funds will require more time and effort in the application stage.

DEP is accepting applications for "Year 2". Application deadline is August 11, 2000.

DEP will host a Growing Greener conference on October 13-14, at the PennStater Conference Center in State College, focusing on specific aspects of non-point water pollution and ways to solve those problems.

DCNR

DCNR has been faced with a perpetually increasing backlog of state parks and state forests maintenance projects. These projects include repairs to roads, bridges, drinking water and wastewater treatment systems, campsites, cabins and buildings, trails, marinas, and dams in the 116 state parks and 20 forest districts. Growing Greener funds will enable the department to address these issues and eliminate the backlog. DCNR has dedicated \$125 million of the \$154.4 million for these maintenance projects.

Nearly \$30 million, however, will be available for matching grants to protect open space and critical habitat, conserve river resources, create greenways, community parks, and playgrounds, etc. Unlike DEP, there are no separate DCNR Growing Greener Grants. The funds will be available under the department's existing Community Conservation Partnership grant programs which include:

- Community Grant Program
- Rivers Conservation Program
- Land Trust Grant Program
- Rails-to-Trails Grant Program
- PA Heritage Parks Program

Depending on the Grant Program, applicants can be municipalities, counties, municipal or intermunicipal authorities, non-profit land trusts, conservancies, and public-private partnerships.

Growing Greener money was used earlier this year to augment the Community Conservation Partnership grant program. The next grant period will begin in early August and the application deadline is November 3, 2000. You can request additional information from one of six DCNR regional offices, the Central Office Grants Center: 717-783-2656, or www.dcnr.state.pa.us/growinggreener/gg-grants.htm.

PDA

The Pennsylvania Agriculture Conservation Easement Purchase Program under PDA purchased its first easement in December 1989. As of February of this

year, 152,205 acres - 125 farms - have been approved for easement purchase and therefore preserved. The Growing Greener legislation has made an additional \$100 million available in the next five years through the existing PDA program. With "100 Days of Growing Greener", 101 farms were preserved this year - an additional 124,000 acres.

There are State Minimum Criteria for applications, such as the farmland must have contiguous acreage of at least 50 acres, contain the greater of 50% or 10 acres of harvested cropland, pasture or grazing land, etc. If your community is interested in farmland preservation, the first contact for information about requirements, applications, and deadlines is with one of the County Agricultural Land Preservation Boards. (PDA: 717-787-4737 or www.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Agriculture/G2/)

PENNVEST

The availability of Growing Greener funds for grants in the PENNVEST program will have a significant impact. According to Brion Johnson, Deputy Executive Director for Project Management, the grant funds are giving life to needed projects that were on hold because of affordability.

Normally, PENNVEST grants will not exceed \$1,000,000 or 50 percent of the project costs, whichever is less. Even that is flexible, however, according to Johnson. If there is an environmental need in an impoverished area, PENNVEST appears willing to consider higher grants to allow the project to proceed. For example, a grant of \$2,642,900 was awarded to Berwick Township, Adams County, at the July 12, 2000 PENNVEST Board meeting.

Sixteen (16) PENNVEST Growing Greener grants, ranging in amounts from \$124,128 to \$1,000,000 and totaling \$12,449,975, were approved at the PENNVEST Board meeting of March 22, 2000. Several of the grant recipients, not expecting to qualify for a grant, were pleasantly surprised when grants were applied to their projects. At the July 12, 2000 meeting, an additional \$7,937,005 in grants were awarded ranging from \$302,839 to the \$2,642,900 for Berwick Township. For more information about the grants that were awarded: http://www.pennvest.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/

Pennvest/growinggrants.htm

According to Brion Johnson, the amount of revolving funds available for PENNVEST loans is not affected by the Growing Greener funds. Having the additional funds available for grants, however, is allowing PENNVEST to bring projects into the program that were not affordable with only loan funds, even at the low interest rates provided by PENNVEST.

While these additional funds are available, don't look for user rate targets set by PENNVEST to be necessarily reduced. PENNVEST still looks at user rates based on a percentage of median household income and other factors to establish a target affordable user rate. This target rate serves as the basis for determining the amount of grant and loan interest rate.

There is one possible change being considered by PENNVEST, however. This has to do with projects that serve areas that may have median household income substantially different than the median from census data. For example, suppose 500 homes in a low income area of a township need a wastewater system, but because the median income of the entire Township or census tract is so high that user fees would not be affordable. Up to this time, PENNVEST has not considered anything other than census tract data. Now, according to Johnson, PENNVEST is considering allowing income surveys of project areas to be used in determining target user rates. A decision is expected within the next six (6) to nine (9) months. In fact, a decision may be made sooner if specific proposals on the use of income surveys are made to PENNVEST.

With the amount of grant money available to PENNVEST over the next several years for water supply and wastewater infrastructure, the time is now to schedule a planning consultation to discuss your project. This is especially true if economic feasibility has been a hindrance.

PENNVEST Board Meeting Schedule

<u>Application Deadline</u>	<u>Board Meeting</u>
August 9, 2000	October 4, 2000
September 6, 2000	November 15, 2000
January 17, 2001	March 21, 2001

For more information:
PENNVEST: (717)783-8138 or
http://www.pennvest.state.pa.us/PA_Exec/Pennvest/growinggreenernotification.htm

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