

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy Oil Gas and Minerals Policy Statement

Approved by the Board of Directors February 26, 2015

Amended February 26, 2026

Background:

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) protects and restores exceptional places to provide our region with clean waters and healthy forests, wildlife and natural areas for the benefit of present and future generations. To advance our mission, WPC collaborates with private landowners, state and federal agencies, local governments, conservation partners and a variety of grassroots organizations. WPC has played a leadership role in identifying the most ecologically significant locations throughout the Commonwealth, and has protected more than 235,000 acres of natural lands in Pennsylvania through acquisitions of properties or conservation easements. These areas include large tracts of unbroken forest, lands in high quality watersheds, and rare habitats harboring a diverse variety of native plants and animals. WPC seeks to protect these exceptional places through collaboration with our partners, working together to advance mutual conservation goals.

Over its history, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy has conveyed hundreds of thousands of acres to the Commonwealth for inclusion in state parks, the state forest system, and state game lands. In addition, WPC has conveyed tens of thousands of acres in the Allegheny National Forest. WPC often retains ownership of certain high value conservation lands. These holdings represent special natural areas or conservation lands important to WPC, such as the Bear Run Nature Reserve in Fayette County. Our investment in conserving land in Pennsylvania has been significant.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy supports safeguarding significant ecological places as oil, gas and minerals are developed. It is essential that development of these resources be done in a manner that protects all of our lands and waters, particularly our high value ecological places. Accordingly, WPC supports avoiding or greatly minimizing impacts from the development of oil, gas and minerals and pipeline development in all areas of Pennsylvania, with greatest consideration for ecologically sensitive, high value conservation areas. These areas, identified through the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program, county natural heritage inventories and other local and regional planning initiatives, play a vital role in supporting the full array of native species and habitats in Pennsylvania.

Western Pennsylvania Conservancy Policies:

In keeping with its conservation mission, WPC will adhere to the following policies:

- The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy will not enter into any development of oil, gas and minerals connected to the conservation lands it owns. Further, WPC will not approve pipeline development on lands it owns. When the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy sells conservation properties to private buyers, it will permanently restrict development of subsurface rights and pipeline development.

- The Conservancy recognizes that many properties that it may wish to permanently protect already have gas rights leased or severed, just as other mineral and property interests may have been severed. Also, some property owners may be unwilling to convey those rights to WPC. As opportunities arise to protect properties, WPC will evaluate the potential and actual impacts on each property from all oil, gas and mineral rights and pipeline development to determine whether and how the property's conservation values can be protected. When possible, gas and other rights will be acquired by WPC or limited by agreement with the property owners or the owners of the gas and other rights.
- The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy transfers some of the exceptional ecological lands it acquires to state and federal land management agencies. WPC will protect properties it conveys to the agencies by reserving oil, gas and mineral rights or other methods when appropriate, particularly when WPC contributes its own funds to properties. Because every property and transaction is unique, WPC will work closely with the agencies to negotiate protections for each property.
- The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy opposes oil, gas and mineral development on the conservation lands it has historically conveyed to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the US Forest Service, Allegheny National Forest.
- Given the extent of leasing for natural gas development in the State Forest system to date, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is opposed to additional leasing of State Forest or State Park land for shale gas development.
- The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy opposes the development of oil, gas and minerals and pipeline development on highly sensitive ecological areas, as identified in the County Natural Heritage Inventories, the Pennsylvania Forest Conservation Analysis and other studies, in the state forests, parks and game lands.
- WPC opposes, in the development of oil, gas, and minerals, fragmentation of core forestland, wetlands, and unique ecological habitats that result in the reduction of connectivity, wildlife passage, and climate-related adaptive pathways.
- WPC supports the establishment of adequate, scientifically-based setbacks of oil, gas and mineral development sites, including unconventional shale gas development sites and pipelines, from waterways and wetlands, in order to protect natural resources.

Implementation of Best Management Practices:

As oil, gas and minerals and pipelines are developed in the Commonwealth, the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy supports the development, implementation and adherence to "best management practices" (BMPs) for the siting and development of infrastructure on all private and public lands to avoid and minimize adverse impacts to our forests, waterways, wetlands. To safeguard our natural resources, BMPs should include the following:

- Scientific assessment and use of data from the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program and a comprehensive conservation pre-planning process to guide siting, development, and restoration, in which all sensitive ecological areas are identified and mapped to enable avoidance or minimization of long-term impacts.
- Monitoring of sensitive species in pre- and post-construction phases to understand potential negative impacts to ecologically sensitive, high value conservation areas from habitat fragmentation, changes to water quality and quantity, and to prescribe restoration measures.
- Restoration of areas that were needed for development but are not needed during the operational life of the development activity. For example, early development activity for shale gas extraction, including well pad development and associated infrastructure including pipelines, often results in greater soil and canopy disturbance than is needed for long-term operation.
- Implementation of restoration measures including use of native vegetation to screen long-term infrastructure, establish a multi-tiered forest, as well as soil grading, control of non-native invasive species, and other measures that return the natural character to the site.

Individual Projects:

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy is often asked to support or oppose specific development projects. WPC typically does not endorse or oppose individual projects. Rather, WPC advances its conservation mission through on-going scientific inquiry and collaboration with our partners. WPC directs its resources to areas where we can be most effective in achieving our mission.

Conclusion:

The development of oil, gas and minerals and pipelines in Pennsylvania must be done in a manner that avoids degradation of all of Pennsylvania's lands and waters, particularly our high value ecological places.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy strongly supports careful scientific assessment to determine the cumulative impacts from oil, gas and mineral extraction, including related infrastructure, to forests, other significant habitats, rare species, water quality and quantity, and to gauge the threat of invasive species. This information will inform the development of the most effective best management practices and help guide the formulation of resource management plans.

The challenge to effectively balance energy needs with the sustainable protection of our ecologically significant land, water and wildlife habitats presents an opportunity for collaboration among government entities, conservation organizations, and the general public. The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy regularly collaborates with these stakeholders to provide scientific data and information to advance comprehensive understanding of the Commonwealth's high value biological and ecological resources.