



Fraternal Order of Police
CONSERVATION POLICE OFFICERS' LODGE # 114
Pennsylvania's Fish & Game Officers
PAFOP114.org

10/21/2009

MEMORANDUM

To: Pennsylvania General Assembly
Fr: PA Conservation Police Officers Association
Re: PGC, PFBC staffing levels

The PCPOA appreciates your support and leadership through the years. We want to provide you with a copy of an opinion/editorial piece we are currently circulating around the state concerning the dangerous staffing levels in place at the Pennsylvania Game Commission and Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission – despite surpluses held by both agencies. You can help these officers with recruitment and retention with these bills [HB 1398](#) & [HB 1513](#).

Here is an excerpt:

But these dedicated men and women need help in the form of more full-time officers. For example, just one waterways conservation police officer is responsible for protecting an average of 575 square miles. In Somerset County, one wildlife conservation police officer is responsible for protecting 713 square miles. It is not uncommon for one conservation police officer to have an entire county as a primary patrol district.

We also want to inform you that our officers perform a variety of important and dangerous tasks that aren't often known by the public.

Waterways officers played a pivotal law enforcement role in the recent G20 meetings in Pittsburgh when they were tasked by the United States Coast Guard to secure the port of Pittsburgh. Our Waterways Officers serve as the in-state arm for the coast guard.

Waterways officers also have enforcement duties in the Marcellus Shale exploration. Officers inspect as well as respond to complaints of environmental degradation and fish kills to hold corporations accountable.

Please see our op-ed below. If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me at: 717-372-4891.

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By Ed Zindell

It was April 4, 2008, and Pennsylvania Wildlife Conservation Police Officer Clint Deniker made a choice that heroes make, even though he would tell you he was only doing his job. He came upon a car crash where the driver was trapped in an overturned and burning vehicle. He didn't worry that the car might explode. Officer Deniker charged in, cut the seat belt and carried the driver 50 yards to safety.

Officer Deniker's deed is just one example of the brave work done each day by Pennsylvania's Wildlife Conservation Police Officers and Waterways Conservation Police Officers. Most Pennsylvanians believe these officers spend their time checking licenses and patrolling state game lands and waterways, but their work is no different than any other police department.

Our conservation police officers are charged with an enormous responsibility. As one of the most populated states in the nation, Pennsylvania's forests and waterways need these officers because these areas provide plenty of cover for criminals. That means Pennsylvania's conservation police officers play a frontline role as drug and weapons agents, DUI enforcement officers, environmental investigators, detectives, and beat cops—all wrapped into one.

But these dedicated men and women need help in the form of more full-time officers. For example, just one waterways conservation police officer is responsible for protecting an average of 575 square miles. In Somerset County, one wildlife conservation police officer is responsible for protecting 713 square miles. It is not uncommon for one conservation police officer to have an entire county as a primary patrol district.

Despite millions in surplus funding available, the Pennsylvania Game Commission and its counterpart, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, have failed to fill their respective complements and continue to ask these officers to do more with less. Keep in mind – the money that is generated by these agencies is through user fees, not tax dollars.

There simply isn't any excuse for piling up surpluses and asking a conservation police officer to be solely responsible for hundreds of miles of state game lands, waterways and our natural resources. In fact, the PGC has not had a class of cadets enter the academy since the spring of 2007, and PF&BC is still far below its allowed complement. Anticipated retirements and promotions will further deplete ranks.

The dangerous work these conservation police officers do has led to their involvement in several high-profile cases, including:

- Conservation police officers were first to identify a group of terrorists known as the Fort Dix Six, who trained on Pennsylvania game lands and would later be arrested for plotting a massacre at the Fort Dix Army base in New Jersey.
- An conservation police officer played a key role in helping the FBI and Pennsylvania State Police find the hidden weapon caches of Carl Gugasian, also known as the "Friday

Night Bank Robber,” who was responsible for 50 or more bank robberies along the East Coast over three decades.

- Recently, a routine investigation in the Yellow Breeches Creek in Cumberland County led a waterways conservation police officer to the discovery and eventual destruction of a marijuana farm.
- Waterways conservation police officers were actively involved in flood response in the eastern portion of the state in the early morning hours of June 28, 2006. Officers were credited with 19 rescues.

Funding certainly shouldn't be an issue for staffing needs, and we don't need to raise taxes since all revenue is generated from fees. According to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, there was a \$46-million surplus in revenue in 2008. The Fish and Boat Commission boasted an \$8.3-million surplus in 2008. We cannot afford to ignore such an obvious need to improve the service to and protection of millions of people who enjoy Pennsylvania's outdoors.

Salaries are a problem since both agencies fail to compete with conservation agencies in neighboring states, as well as other agencies in Pennsylvania. According to the Game Commission's 2007 annual report, the officer ranks suffered numerous defections to the Pennsylvania State Police academy and other agencies "that have a superior salary and retirement structure."

It is time for the PGC and PF&BC to put more full-time officers in the field and give conservation police officers the support they need for such dangerous work. Doing so will ensure the safety of Penn's Woods and Waterways for all to enjoy.

Ed Zindell is the Vice President of the Pennsylvania Conservation Police Officers' Lodge 114 of the Fraternal Order of Police.