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2011 Innovations Awards Application

ID # (assigned by CSG): 2011- _____

State: Pennsylvania

Assign Program Category (applicant): Natural Resources

1. Program Name: Conservation Landscape Initiative
2. Administering Agency: PA Dept of Conservation & Natural Resources
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9. *Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.*

The Pennsylvania Conservation Landscape Initiative is a place-based strategy for natural resource stewardship and advocacy in key landscapes across our state where there are valued natural assets and local readiness and support for land conservation, locally-driven planning, and community economic development efforts. Evaluations show these collaborations have helped local economies and shown people that government can make a difference.

10. *How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 28, 2011 to be considered.*

Formally established January 2007.

11. *Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address?*

The Pa Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (DCNR) was established in 1995, as a result of re-organization efforts that divided the Department of Environmental Resources into two Agencies and also moved Bureaus from other agencies into the new structure. The state organized its environmental and conservation programs into: the Department of Environmental Protection with responsibility for administering

the state's environmental laws and regulations; and, DCNR with the charge to steward and manage state parks and forests, provide grants and technical assistance for land conservation, community recreation, greenways and trails and rivers conservation, and to provide technical data on the state's ecologic and geologic resources.

As a relatively young agency, DCNR operated as disconnected Bureaus that cooperated only on a minimal basis on joint projects and efforts. For example a grant to develop a trail in a community next to a Park, might be awarded without coordinating with the Park Manager. Or Forestry Staff might launch a tree-planting program in a community park without coordinating with the Bureau of Recreation and Conservation. Trail standards between Parks and Forests were different – even though the lands might be connected to each other. While the Department was doing great work in each of its areas of responsibility, efficiencies, service, and coordinated efforts were lacking and thereby diminishing the effectiveness of the programs.

In 2004- 05, DCNR undertook an effort to engage the public in creating an action plan to direct the work of the agency. DCNR learned during this process that it needed to encourage more collaboration among the staff in its bureaus and also with the public, local government, and non-profit conservation and recreation partners. The public also asked for stronger, more seamless integration between all the state agencies to cut through “red tape” and deliver more significant impact for communities and for the citizenry.

Over the next few years, DCNR worked to develop new strategies and intra-agency collaboration to address these issues. The establishment of the Conservation Landscape Initiative (CLI) in January 2007 was the culmination of these efforts.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order.

The CLI program grew out of two successful pilot regional efforts: the PA Wilds, launched in 2003 and Lehigh Valley Greenways launched in 2006 respectively.

The PA Wilds is 12 county region of North Central PA that has more than 2 million acres (1.6 million of which are DCNR parks and forests) of public lands – equivalent to the acreage of Yellowstone National Park. The region is home to the largest elk herd in the northeast and some of the darkest skies in the country. It is also one of the most sparsely populated regions of the state – containing only 4.1% of the state's population. With the goal of helping communities capitalize on the economic potential of the public lands, DCNR re-organized staff in the region into geographically based recreation teams, appointed a full time coordinator to work with DCNR staff and communities to advance projects and invested more than \$126 million in park and forest infrastructure improvements; \$13 million in local parks and regional partnership grants; and in partnership with the Department of Community and Economic Development, \$5 million in regional marketing and \$5 million in grants and loans for small business development. The program paid off with the formal establishment of a twelve county intergovernmental cooperative agreement (the first of its kind in the state) and significant increases in economic activity as a result of additional visitors to the region.

Lehigh Valley Greenways encompasses Lehigh and Northampton counties in southeast Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania's third largest urban area, with about 630,000 people, the Lehigh Valley consists of three cities – Allentown, Bethlehem and Easton – and a total 62 municipalities. It is one of the state's fastest growing regions, with a population increase of 8.7 percent between 2000 and 2007, largely as a result of an influx of new residents from nearby New Jersey and New York. Lehigh Valley Greenways originated from the Bushkill Creek/Two Rivers Area of Northampton County where DCNR's Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center is a major ecological and recreational hub. The work in the Lehigh Valley focuses primarily on greenways, trail development, and land preservation along with the development of three nature centers to connect the region's residents with nature. Although the region has little state land, this major population hub is a critical constituency for the department. State Parks is leading the development of trail connections from the Jacobsburg to surrounding communities; Forestry is heading up a major urban tree-planting effort; and Recreation and Conservation is leading community greening, land conservation, and recreational and natural resource planning efforts. The lead external partner is the Delaware & Lehigh National Heritage Area which helps to facilitate community partnerships and collaboration with other state agencies. The effort has lead to the permanent conservation of nearly 1,300 acres of valuable habitat and recreational, nearly 20 miles of new

trails, more than 1,000 street trees in urban areas, and the development of for model conservation ordinances four implementation by local government.

The success of these programs, coupled with the data from the action planning process, led DCNR to consider formalizing the approach and implementing it in additional regions. In 2006, DCNR convened a group of funders, conservation leaders, and land trusts in a “critical dialogue” focused on developing new strategic collaborations in key landscapes. This dialogue helped the Department to hone in on appropriate areas in the state to launch the program. Out of all of this the Conservation Landscape Initiative was born (January 2007), formalizing this landscape approach and giving support, resources, and a department focused priority to the efforts.

In 2011, DCNR, other state and federal agencies, community leaders, local governments, philanthropies and non-profits are working collaboratively on the ground in seven CLIs: PA Wilds, Lehigh Valley Greenways, Laurel Highlands, Lower Susquehanna, Pocono Forests and Waters, Schuylkill Highlands, and South Mountain.

CLIs operate through an innovative leadership model that encourages department staff at all levels and across bureaus to be leaders and advocates for the work. Staff who “step up” are designated as leaders in a matrix management approach in which a section chief may be running a team which includes division chiefs and bureau directors. To assist with this leadership model, DCNR has launched an intensive leadership development program to cultivate leaders across the department.

Each CLI Team has a DCNR staff lead and a staff lead from an external non-profit partner, with funding provided for that position by DCNR grants and often with additional support from state, federal and private sources. The partnerships include many stakeholders that work to identify key issues, areas of intersection, and aligned issues.

While each of the seven designated CLI’s has a unique focus and is tailored to the special features and culture of the landscape they all share these core principles:

- Locally-driven planning for
 - Conservation
 - Recreation
 - Community Revitalization
- Land Conservation
 - Natural Areas
 - Wildlife Habitat
 - River and Watershed Protection
 - Trail and Other Nature Based Recreational Development
 - Enhancing Existing Public Lands
- Community Revitalization
 - Bringing new life to small towns through nature based tourism and recreation (e.g. PA Wilds, Laurel Highlands)
 - Re-thinking small and mid-sized cities as hubs linked via the green infrastructure of the surrounding landscape and connected via a system of local trails (e.g. Lehigh Valley Greenways, Schuylkill Highlands)
- Civic Engagement
 - Steering Committee of internal (cross-bureau) and external partners that work together to establish the vision, goals, and action steps (work plan) for the landscape.
 - On-going dialogue between DCNR and our partners. The CLIs are based in a model of community empowerment, in that all the members of the partnership have input into the decisions.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

There is a national, and indeed international, movement toward landscape level management and collective decision making around natural resource conservation through community engagement. What makes the Pennsylvania CLI program particularly novel is the focus on linking public lands with their neighboring communities to improve their financial future and quality of life. Also unique is that the state natural resource department is taking a proactive role in community and economic development by providing its own financial and technical resources and facilitating leveraging of resources from other agencies, and state, federal, local and private partners.

The scale of the program is also impressive. The seven regions in the CLI program encompass nearly 50% of the state's land area and include 73% of the Commonwealth's 2.1 million acres of state forest lands, along with 54% of the 117 State Parks. By contrast, the Regional Plan Association's recent inventory of northeast region landscape level efforts found that a majority of the 145 efforts identified were at the local or county level. The CLI program also smartly targets existing funds to early implementation projects including improvements in park and forest infrastructure, on-the-ground trail, interpretative, and directional signage in communities and mini-grants to assist local groups and communities with small projects that need seed money to take root.

14. What were the program's start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

A key advantage of this program is that it did not require significant additional expenditures, but rather is a re-allocation of resources to focus expenditures strategically and to leverage monies across the agency and with other state, federal, local, and private funders.

Each CLI team has an internal lead (existing DCNR staff person) who had a portion of their job duties (usually 30-50%) directed to managing and coordinating the CLI work. In addition, external partners were funded to support on-the-ground collaboration, partnership building, and project implementation. The cost for this is approximately \$700,000 annually. Other expenditures are through the agency's annual budgeting process and use existing funds for park and forest infrastructure improvements, and targeted grants for community implementation projects and external partner support.

15. What are the program's annual operational costs?

As noted above the program was developed by re-prioritization of expenditures and re-assignment of existing staff duties. As such, it is not possible to clearly identify operating costs.

16. How is the program funded?

Agency general operating budget, agency augmentation funds (timber sales, oil and gas revenue, and park fees), and existing grant programs.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program? N/A

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator's name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

As previously noted, this program is built on the history and move toward collaborative models for government programs that is increasingly popular. However, we believe the CLI program is unique in its proactive stance, strategic direction of funding, and dedicated staff support. The primary lead on the development of the program is: Cindy Adams Dunn, Deputy Secretary for Conservation & Technical Services, DCNR, 400 Market St., Harrisburg, PA 17105; 717.787.9306; cidunn@state.pa.us

20. *Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?*

The National Heritage Area program and State Heritage Area Programs in PA, MD, NY, and UT take a landscape approach to resource stewardship and seek to connect local citizens to the preservation and planning process. These programs, however, do not have the same level of leadership and agency staff involvement as the Conservation Landscape Initiative. The CLI program is both an internal strategy to make government work more effectively and an external strategy to engage local leaders, non-profit organizations, and other in planning and project implementation.

The Regional Plan Association recently identified 145 landscape scale efforts in the Northeast Region, ranging from local land conservancies to federal landscape level programs. To our knowledge there are not similar programs that are lead by a state natural resource agency on such a large scale and with the combined goals of land conservation, locally-driven planning, outdoor recreation, and community economic development.

21. *Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?*

No. The program does not currently cover all regions of the state. We are undertaking efforts to implement similar strategies in the remaining areas. Furthermore, because this approach is flexible, new opportunities arise and the CLI teams are able to respond to them and form new partnerships for implementation quickly. For example, recently partnerships have been formed around marketing local wood products, marketing local foods, helping communities fund and build green infrastructure, and to implement “smart transportation” projects.

22. *Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program's effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.*

Knowing that measurement and evaluation are critical learning tools, in 2009-10 the department undertook a pair of studies to determine if the CLI approach is effective, how it could be made better and to look at ways that we could sustain the initiative. These evaluations showed us that CLIs do work – that collaborative partnerships, strategic grantmaking, and more meaningful engagement with citizens do pay off, with the results being more vibrant communities and increased opportunities for people to connect with the outdoors.

Specific examples include:

- CLIs opened the door for the DCNR to forge more effective collaborations with other state agencies. Departments are frequently aligning strategies with DNR, leading to greater leveraging of state resources in the seven regions. For example, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation gave priority to CLI identified projects in awarding funding for the new Smart Transportation Initiative.
- In the PA Wilds, DCNR staff leads a 12-county intergovernmental team (established through an MOU) that focuses on jointly addressing planning issues and preserving community character while improving the economy through tourism. In the Lehigh Valley, staff lead efforts to coordinate funding that has resulted in building the Bethlehem Greenway and new housing in the City of Bethlehem. In South Mountain, staff helped to secure federal land and water funding to match DCNR funds, protecting a critical forested buffer along the Appalachian Trail.
- This work has improved the relationship between DCNR and the general public. In the Laurel Highlands, Ohiopyle Borough had a rocky relationship with the state park engulfing the town despite the two entities needing each other for infrastructure and the outdoor recreation businesses that employ the town residents. In the last year, a joint master plan was developed that has led to two major projects - a green stormwater management system and smart transportation improvements to Route 381, which divides the park and borough.

- Private, federal, and state investments in the CLI areas have brought the Commonwealth a significant return through increased economic activity and participation in outdoor recreation and park visitation, and improved quality of life for PA's citizens. In the PA Wilds an economic study showed that the region had a 5.3% increase in overnight leisure travel, a 6.3% increase in visitor spending, a 0.5% increase in tourism employment, a 5.4% increase in tourism earning per year, an increase in sales tax revenue of 2.7% per year, and a 13.1% increase in hotel tax revenues per year. In the Laurel Highlands, a recent study on the Great Allegheny Passage found that trail users and visitors were contributing more than \$40M to the local economy and small business owners indicated that one-fourth of their gross revenue was directly attributed to trail users and two-thirds reported that they experienced at least some increase in gross revenue because of their proximity to the trail. Over one-fourth of all businesses that were surveyed mentioned that they have or plan to either expand their operations or hire additional staff because of the impact of the trail. The effort has also resulted in attracting significant federal funding, including \$3.2M to the Borough of Ohiopyle, a gateway community in the Laurel Highlands, for stormwater and transportation improvements; and \$1.8 M in federal funding for land protection in the South Mountain.
- The effort has also been successful due to the partnerships staff developed with agencies such as DCED and PennDot. One DCED official involved in the PA Wilds said: "I've been involved in state government a long time, and I've never seen any region that's gotten this much attention. The coordination of different agencies - DEP, PAFBC, DCNR, - it's amazing." DCED provides funding for a small business ombudsman to assist local businesses in the PA Wilds; PAFBC and DCNR have collaborated on streamside plantings in the Lehigh Valley and PennDot has partnered with the team on Smart Transportation projects. This coordination of spending and assistance has leveraged state funds and attracted additional resources from private funders.

Community leaders have said about the Program:

"The Pennsylvania Wilds (Landscape Initiative) has provided a common focus that has brought a wide range of federal, state, and local agencies together to work on mutual issues that we all face. It has helped us to think about the area from a regional standpoint" Eric Patton, Millstone Twp, Elk County, Supervisor.

"The opportunity to move forward in Pottstown and the region with economic development solely depends on our partnerships through efforts like the Schuylkill Highlands CLI with state, county, and non-profits so that we can reach a harmony between urban areas and protected land. Through regional planning in both Chester and Montgomery County we have laid a course of action that will preserve those places that have been identified as special spaces. This will allow us to move forward with sustainable development and the redevelopment of our more urban communities" - Andy Paravis, North Coventry Township Board of Supervisors

"The state's work with Ohiopyle Borough over the last 4 years has been the best work I have seen in my more than thirty years as an outfitter." - Mark McCarty, Mayor of Ohiopyle and owner Laurel Highlands River Tours

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

As detailed in earlier sections the program grew from pilot projects in two regions to implementation in seven regions of the state. The program also added additional internal management structures, including an executive level oversight committee, and a full-time program coordinator.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

- Because the program puts a coordinated focus on targeted regions of the state, leaders need to assure that regions that aren't in the focus areas still receive funding and technical assistance. CLIs are about setting priorities and the public and legislators understand that if they are briefed on the outcomes.

- In this current economic climate the focus of the program should be the efficient, effective use of financial resources that is achieved by targeting funds and leveraging inputs from a number of sources.
- A significant investment of staff time is required to make the program work. Existing staff can be re-assigned but they need to have a modification in their job descriptions/job expectations in order to devote the time necessary to do this right. The pay-off is that the development of intra and inter-agency teams improves productivity, efficiency, and service to the public.