

Public Can Comment On Bald Eagle Proposal

Written by Australian Business

Game Commission considers removing bird from threatened species list.

HARRISBURG, Pa., Sept. 24, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- The Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners is considering a proposal to remove the bald eagle from the state's list of threatened species, and there's an opportunity for the public to weigh in on the matter.

The board on Tuesday voted to open a period of public review for a proposal to upgrade the bald eagle's status from "threatened" to "protected" in Pennsylvania.

The board still would need to vote once more before a change in status would occur, and the commissioners in making their decision will be taking public comments into consideration.

Tuesday's vote puts the proposal on a timeline to be approved as early as January.

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The proposal to remove the bald eagle from the state's threatened species list has its roots in a successful restoration program launched by the Game Commission 30 years ago. In 1983, when the first 12 eaglets were plucked from wild nests in Canada to be raised and released here, Pennsylvania was host to only three bald eagle nests -- all of them in Crawford County in the northwestern corner of the state.

Three decades later, there are more than 271 nests statewide. And it's clear the bald eagle no longer fits the description of a "threatened species" -- one that is in danger of becoming endangered throughout its range in Pennsylvania, said Patti Barber, an endangered bird biologist for the Game Commission.

"These birds are doing remarkably well and there certainly is room for their population in Pennsylvania to grow," Barber said.

Criteria for removing the bald eagle from the state's threatened species list are laid out in the Game Commission's bald eagle management plan. The plan calls for delisting eagles as threatened if all of four criteria are met for five consecutive years. There must be at least 150 active nests statewide; successful pairs in at least 40 counties; at least a 60 percent success rate of known nests; and productivity of at least 1.2 eaglets fledged per successful nest.

Three of those criteria already have been met for a five-year span, and eagles in 2013 will exceed for a fifth-straight year the requirement of nesting successfully in at least 40 counties.

Barber said removing bald eagles from the state threatened species list would neither hinder eagle populations in Pennsylvania nor knock off course the species' comeback here.

If the bald eagle is delisted, the bird will continue to be protected under the federal Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (the Eagle Act), the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and the Lacey Act. Under the Eagle Act, those who harm or disturb eagles are subject to a civil penalty of up to one year in jail or a \$5,000 fine for their first offense, and criminal convictions can result in fines as high as \$250,000.

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Additionally, state penalties for disturbing protected wildlife include fines of up to \$1,500 and bolster protection for Pennsylvania eagles.

Those wishing to submit comments on the proposal to remove the bald eagle from the state's threatened species list may send them by email to BaldEagleComments@pa.gov . Those who are without email may mail their written comments to the Pennsylvania Game Commission, ATTN: Bald Eagle Comments, 2001 Elmerton Avenue, Harrisburg, PA 17110-9797.

LANDOWNERS FACE EARLIER DMAP DEADLINE

Change aims to make all DMAP permits available when new hunting licenses go on sale.

The Pennsylvanians who line up to purchase new hunting licenses as soon as they go on sale often are driven by a desire to obtain special property-specific permits to hunt and harvest antlerless deer.

The only problem is that those permits, issued as part of the Deer Management Assistance Program, or DMAP, in some cases aren't available when license sales begin.

It's a scenario the Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners is looking to change.

The board on Tuesday voted to bump up the application deadline for landowners interested in taking part in the DMAP program. By requiring landowner applications to be submitted by May 1 – a month earlier than the current deadline – the commissioners hope all permits for all DMAP properties will be available when licenses go on sale.

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The Game Commission also would speed up its distribution of application forms to landowners, making the forms available at each of the agency's regional offices by Feb. 15 of each year.

"This change will benefit hunters, but there may be some confusion for landowners," said Chris Rosenberry

, who heads up the Game Commission's Deer and Elk Section. "In an effort to reduce potential problems, we will be sending letters and applications to landowners who participated in DMAP to assist them in making this transition."

DMAP provides an additional means for qualifying landowners to manage deer to meet their specific land-use goals. DMAP permits can be used only to harvest antlerless deer on the properties for which the permits are issued.

The DMAP permits hunters obtain are separate from the antlerless licenses sent out by county treasurers, and DMAP permits are not counted as part of the three-license limit that exists for antlerless licenses in most parts of the state.

Hunters can get up to two DMAP permits per property.

DMAP permits can be purchased through the Pennsylvania Automated Licensing System (PALS), but because some properties make only a handful of permits available, securing a permit can be a challenge. That's why many of the hunters who seek DMAP permits each year buy their hunting licenses on the first day of sales annually – the second Monday of June.

Based on the application schedule that had been used, however, permits for many DMAP properties weren't available to purchase until late June, or even early July.

And if permits for a specific property weren't available right away, interested hunters had few options but to check back at a later time.

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"This change is one of convenience for hunters," Rosenberry said. "Now hunters will be able to purchase all of their hunting licenses and DMAP permits at one time."

STATE GAME LANDS 87 EXPANDING AGAIN

Acquisitions to add nearly 2,100 acres to Clearfield County hunting grounds.

Nearly 2,100 acres in Clearfield County are open to public hunting following a vote Tuesday by the Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners.

The board unanimously approved five land-acquisition contracts related to State Game Lands 87 that, in total, will add more than 2,088 acres to the game lands.

Additionally, one of the contracts acquires 305 acres in Jefferson County, adjacent to State Game Lands 54.

The additions to State Game Lands 87 are the latest in a series that in recent years has expanded what had been a 1,100-acre tract to more than 15,000 acres, said William Capouillez, director of the Game Commission's Bureau of Wildlife Habitat Management.

The contracts that will add to State Game Lands 87 include:

- Six tracts totaling more than 1,124 acres in Penn and Bloom townships, Clearfield County. The property is being offered for sale by Bell Run Properties LLC and includes wetlands considered an "Exceptional Value" by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, for a wild trout population there. Bell Run and tributaries to Bell Run exist on the property, and there is a good wildlife travel corridor there. The option price is a \$1 million lump sum to be paid with funds from third-party commitments for compensation of habitat and

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recreational losses that occurred on state game lands from previously approved projects. Bell Run Properties LLC is excepting and reserving coal, coal bed, methane and related solid hydrocarbons. Unless coal is being produced in payable quantities and/or an active mining permit exists, the reservation ends on Jan. 1, 2024

- Five tracts totaling about 547.5 acres in Brady Township, Clearfield County. This contract also includes the purchase of the 305 acres in Warsaw Township

Jefferson County

, adjacent to State Game Lands 54. In total, the 852.51 acres carries an option price of approximately

\$1,258,575

, to be paid with funds from third-party commitments for habitat and recreational losses that occurred on state game lands from previously approved projects. The Ideal Foundation, of Sykesville

, is offering the tracts for sale. The consideration is based on a price of \$1,100

per acre for the two parcels adjacent to State Game Lands 54 that include oil and gas rights. The oil and gas estate is believed to be already excepted and reserved on the other tracts, which are being offered for \$750

per acre. The largest of the Clearfield County

tracts is known as "Five Ponds" because five small fishing ponds have been created on the property. The tracts are mostly forested with a mix of northern hardwoods. The Ideal Foundation shall reserve all red maple on the property until

September 2016

. The

Jefferson County

parcels are forested with northern hardwoods with approximately 20 acres in reverting fields.

- Four tracts totaling 259 acres in Bell Township, Clearfield County. The property is the estate of Martin L. Bearer and is being offered at an option price of \$259,000

to be paid with funds from third-party commitments for compensation of habitat and recreational losses on game lands from previously approved projects. The headwaters of Laurel Run

traverse the property, with good woodcock habitat located along the stream bottom.

- More than 97 acres in Greenwood Township, Clearfield County. The property is being offered by Rorabaugh Lumber Co. for an option price of \$82,594.50

to be paid with funds from third-party commitments for compensation of habitat and recreational losses on game lands from previously approved projects. Rorabaugh Lumber Co. until November 2016

reserves the right to cut and remove all trees greater than 16 inches in diameter, with pulp wood

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to be removed upon mutual consent. The timber reservation is limited to one timber-harvesting operation period. The property is forested and Poplar Run bisects the property.

- A 60-acre tract in Penn Township, Clearfield County. The property is being offered by Thomas R. Lanager

for

\$39,000

and is to be paid with funds from third-party commitments for compensation of habitat and recreational losses that occurred on game lands from previously approved projects.

Approximately one-third of the property is forested with maple, birch, fire cherry and aspen.

One-third of the property is grassland. And the final third is a surface mine with some areas already reclaimed. The northern harrier, a state-threatened species, frequently is seen in the area. Mr. Lanager is excepting and reserving coal, coal bed methane, and related solid hydrocarbons. Unless coal is being produced in payable quantities and/or an active mining permit exists, the reservation ends on

Jan. 1, 2024

In addition to the purchases related to State Game Lands 87 and 54, five other acquisition contracts were approved by the commissioners on Tuesday. They are:

- A contract to acquire four tracts totaling more than 1,121 acres in Union Township, Tioga County

- . The tracts represent an indenture to State Forest Land and are being offered for sale by Cummings Lumber Co. Inc. The Game Commission would pay

\$3,150,000

for the land, with the money coming from third-party commitments for compensation of habitat and recreational losses on game lands due to previously approved projects. The property is forested with a mix of cherry, maple and other hardwoods, and also has several open meadow wetland and forested wetland components. The property has good public access from Ogdensburg Road and is partially bisected by the Tioga River. The nearest state game lands complex is State Game Lands 12, which lies approximately 10 miles to the east.

- The Game Commission would acquire the timber rights on a 193-acre tract in Union Township

Huntingdon County

- . Mr. and Mrs.

Earl Ritzman

and Mr. and Mrs.

James Shallenberger

are offering the sale of the rights. The option price is

\$299,999

, half of which is to be paid no later than

Dec. 31

- . The other half of the sum would be paid no later than

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Jan. 3, 2014

. This timber purchase comes from a 99-year timber reservation held by the Ritzmans and Shallenbergers on land the Game Commission purchased from U.S. Silica on

Nov. 21, 2000

. The timber being offered is high habitat value oak-hickory forest with a uniquely high percentage of hickory. The tract also contains vernal wetlands.

- A contract to purchase nearly 49 acres adjacent to two tracts of State Game Lands 312 in Lehigh Township

,
Wayne County

. The five tracts are being offered by sale by Alexander Kldiashvili,

Vartoush Marchese

and

Suren Vartanyan

for an option price of

\$150,000

to be paid with funds from the Game Fund. The property is forested with mixed beech and maple forest in early succession. Portions of the property include wetlands associated with Big Sampson Swamp, which comprise a large wetlands complex on State Game Lands 312.

Acquisition of this game lands will buffer future development and safety-zone issues, as well as provide snowshoe hare habitat.

- A contract to purchase more than 72 acres in East Brunswick Township, Schuylkill County

. The tract partially fills an indenture into State Game Lands 106. The property is being offered by

Patricia Anthony

for a

\$76,500

lump sum to be paid with funds from third-party commitments for compensation of habitat and recreational losses that occurred on state game lands due to previously approved projects. The property is located on the northern slope of the Blue Mountain, also known as Kittatinny Ridge – a significant fall migration flyway designated by

Audubon Pennsylvania

as the largest of the state's "Important Bird Areas." Access to the property will be through State Game Lands 106.

- A contract for 9.6 acres adjacent to State Game Lands 264 in Lykens Township, Dauphin County

The land is on two tracts owned by

Charles Fogarty

and

Larry Miller

, and is being offered for a lump sum of

\$50,000

. The sellers shall reserve the oil and gas for 25 years. The acquisition also will make moot and cause the settlement of an access-dispute case in Dauphin County Common Pleas Court.

ENERGY LEASES GENERATE \$9M IN REVENUE

Deals to yield royalties for years to come.

The Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners Tuesday approved a number of leases with energy companies that will result in more than \$9 million in initial revenue, and a yet unknown amount of royalties.

Most of the lease agreements result from requests by companies that have strong leaseholds in the surrounding areas, and already are in possession of the energy rights on Game Commission properties. The agreements ensure the fuels are extracted with little to no surface impacts on game lands. The agreements are:

- A lease with Chief Exploration and Development LLC of Dallas, Texas for approximately 19,133 acres on State Game Lands 12 in Bradford and Sullivan counties. Chief currently owns private leases on a large portion of State Game Lands 12, and the company also holds lease position on private lands immediately adjacent to state game lands and has drilled several horizontal wells to the game lands boundary. Under the agreement, Chief would make bonus payments in two installments. The first, \$3 million payment would be due within 60 days of the execution of the lease. The second installment would be due on the first anniversary of the agreement and would be in the amount of the balance of bonus value due to the commission. Additionally, Chief will pay the commission 23 percent in royalties for the oil, gas and hydrocarbons produced and sold from the areas in which the commission owns the oil and gas rights. Chief has also agreed to pay a well pad location fee of \$100,000 for surface damages for each well pad developed where the commission owns both the surface and the oil and gas rights, and a \$50,000 pad location fee where the commission owns only the surface rights. Chief has further agreed to store only freshwater in any impoundment and pay an impoundment fee of up to \$25,000 per impoundment.
- A lease with CNX Gas Co. LLC for approximately 1,692 surface acres and nearly 1,298 oil and gas acres on State Game Lands 245 in Washington County. CNX will make a bonus

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payment of \$3,893,970
as part of the lease, and will pay royalties at 20 percent for all oil, gas or other liquids and condensates that are owned by the commission and produced and sold from the tract.

- A lease with Talisman Energy USA Inc. for 91.44 acres on State Game Lands 140 in Susquehanna County

. Talisman would make a
\$228,600

bonus payment and pay 20 percent in royalties for all oil, gas and other liquids and condensates produced and sold from the proposed tract.

- A lease with P&N Coal Co., of Punxsutawney, to recover coal resources from 93 acres beneath State Game Lands 77 in Clearfield
County

P&N estimates there is about 137,400 tons of recoverable coal at the site. P&N would make an initial payment of
\$350,000

into the Game Fund, then after recouping that amount, would begin making monthly royalty payments to the commission. Royalties would be paid at a rate of 12 percent freight-on-board price (F.O.B.) or

\$3.50

per ton, whichever is greater, for coal with a BTU value greater than 9,500; and 10 percent F.O.B. or

\$2.50

per ton, whichever is greater, for coal with a BTU value of less than 9,500. F.O.B. is the price for which coal is sold at the pit.

- A lease with Fisher Mining Co. Inc., of Montoursville, to conduct surface mining on 66 acres of State Game Lands 75 in Lyc
oming County

.
Fisher

has agreed to an advance surface mining support payment of
\$1.5 million

, which, in addition to all merchantable timber values, will be deposited into the Game Fund or an interest-bearing escrow account for future land purchases. The coal royalty value of the proposed additional mining on the tract is estimated at

\$3.2 million

.
Fisher

also would agree to a reclamation plan to achieve forested post-mining land use, and the company would leave a coal barrier in place and add a minimum of 1,200 tons per acre of alkaline material to the pit floor.

- An amendment to an existing lease agreement with Range Resources Appalachia LLC for more than 62 acres on State Game Lands 117 in Washington County. Range would add nearly 43 acres to the lease. With the amendment, Range would make a bonus payment of
\$107,245

and pay 19 percent in royalties for the oil, gas and other liquids and condensates produced and sold from the proposed tract.

GAME COMMISSION TO TAKE DEEPER LOOK AT BAT DECLINES

Board says it wants to do what it can toward finding a solution.

The Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners said Tuesday it will be looking closely at what the Game Commission might do to help bat populations, which have been in decline due to White-Nose Syndrome (WNS).

White-Nose Syndrome is caused by a fungus and affects hibernating bats. The fungus, which is white in color, accumulates on the bats' noses and wings, and causes the bats to arouse often during hibernation, leading them to burn up crucial energy reserves. Most of the bats afflicted with white-nose syndrome end up dying, and the decline among bat populations has been sharp.

The commissioners said any actions they might take to help bats need to be taken soon, or the impact of WNS on bats might be too severe.

"I don't want to sit here in two or three years and say it's too bad we didn't do anything," Commissioner David Putnam said.

The board said it would be discussing the matter further at its December working group meeting.

QUAIL MANAGEMENT GIVEN BOOST

Commissioners vote to route \$250,000 from lease agreement to efforts outlined by plan.

The Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners hope to jumpstart the state's quail

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management efforts, and on Tuesday took action toward that end.

The board formed a committee to oversee implementation of the Game Commission's quail-management plan, which includes an initial survey to identify quail habitat and determine how many wild quail live in Pennsylvania.

Additionally, the board amended a nearly \$3.9 million lease agreement for oil and gas rights to route \$250,000 to wildlife management resources, specifically for the management of the northern bobwhite quail.

Commissioner Jay Delaney made the motion to amend the lease, and it was seconded by Commissioner Brian Hoover and approved by a 5-2 vote. Commissioners Charles Fox, Ralph Martone and Charles Fox voted against the measure, and Commissioner Ronald Weaner was absent.

Delaney said the Game Commission should place priority on efforts to manage bobwhite quail, since most reports indicate the species is in decline, and perhaps could be considered endangered.

The commissioners said the additional funding would help in providing resources for quail management.

REVIEW PERIOD TO BEGIN FOR BOBCAT, RIVER OTTER PLANS

The plans will be available online within a week.

The Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners on Tuesday voted to release to the public

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newly-drafted management plans for bobcats and river otters in

Pennsylvania

The commissioners were presented the plans at Monday's meeting.

The plans will be available on the Game Commission's website, www.pgc.state.pa.us within the next week, and there will be a 60-day period for the public to review the plans and submit comments to the Game Commission.

The Board of Game Commissioners will take all comments into consideration when casting future votes on the plans.

The Game Commission will issue a news release when the plans are available online.

CAMPFIRES ON GAME LANDS LIMITED

Change would require most to possess a valid hunting, furtaking or fishing license.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission doesn't have a problem with many of the small, open campfires set and maintained on state game lands.

Historically, hunters, trappers, anglers and Appalachian Trail through-hikers using state game lands have been permitted to use open fires for cooking or warming purposes.

Recently, however, there's been an increase of open fires at game lands that have nothing to do with the intended uses of game lands. And to address that problem, the Game Commission is putting limits in place to regulate who can set and maintain fires at game lands.

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Under the change, persons setting campfires on game lands must possess a valid hunting, furtaking or fishing license, or be through-hiking on the Appalachian Trail. Precautions must be taken to prevent the spread of the fire, and the fires must be attended at all times and extinguished completely before the site is vacated.

Fires will not be permitted at times when the fire index rating used by the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is high, very high, or extreme in that area.

A person causing a wildfire, in addition to facing possible criminal penalties, is liable for damages and the cost of extinguishing the fire.

ROE RECEIVES FOND FAREWELL

By the board's next meeting, executive director will be retired

This week's meeting of the Pennsylvania Board of Game Commissioners marks the last for Executive Director Carl G. Roe, who earlier this year announced his plans to retire Jan. 17

Many of the Game Commission staff members who spoke at the two-day meeting in Delmont, Pa. , as well as members of the board, and the public, wished Roe well in his retirement.

The board presented Roe with a framed art print in recognition of his service as executive director.

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The next meeting of the Board of Game Commissioners is scheduled to be held Jan. 26 to 28 at the Game Commission's headquarters in Harrisburg

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