Just Sayin'

Last month's Update briefly noted "Ask your State Senators to not support SB857 which puts our state gamelands in jeopardy". In this month's *Ted Thoughts*, Ted went further about the bill in characterizing it as 'being very slanted in supporting developers.

The title of the bill shows why it is bad for the PGC, PFBC, and DCNR. *Providing Local Input for Certain Land Acquisitions*. The bill was *referred to the State Government June 18, 2025.*

The actual language does not simply seek local input. The legislation requires these departments to get local government approval before acquiring any intended land. The sponsor, Senator Hutchison makes it sound like the state swoops in, grabs the land it wants, when it wants, wherever it wants. Municipalities are then faced with the loss of tax revenue, while only being provided with a pittance of $3.00 as insufficient compensation. The Senator says the land loses its practical utility, serving only state purposes. Endless state government ownership of land inhibits direct community economic investment, such as housing development and private energy production, says Hutchinson. Aha! The secret phrase…housing development.

Let's look at some relevant factors:

- Most of the negatively impacted local communities involved in the rhetoric are in the northern third of the state–16 to be exact. Hutchinson was able to pick up three co-sponsors Pat Stefano, Judy Ward, and Chris Dush. Between the four of them only 6 of the 16 northern counties are represented. Why is there no support from the representatives of the other 10 counties?
- Yet, in the House, Representative Martin Causer (Cameron/McKean/Potter) praised the $3 "pittance" because new PILT (Payment In Lieu of Taxes) legislation had just doubled the rate set 15 years ago.
- The PILT provides much-needed compensation to communities that have a high amount of state-owned land that is not subject to property taxes. The bill will also adjust the rate for inflation every five years, ensuring our communities are more consistently and fairly compensated for the value of this land", Clauser said. Each of the three agencies would pay $9 per acre, split evenly among the county, municipality and school district in which the land is located. The increase will be funded through slot machine revenue.
- There are 28.8 million acres of land in PA. 2 million are set aside for public use. The PGC controlled 1.5 million of those. In 2024 PGC paid $1,800,000 and the gaming board put out an additional $9,100,000. We're not talking pocket change.
- The northern counties still produce lumber, gas, and oil. But they are unlikely to see major industrial or housing development. It is forest land. The infrastructure for significant manufacturing expansion isn't there and providing it would be cost prohibitive. Small manufacturing has downsized (Zippo in Bradford), merged (Corning in Brockway), folded (Adelphia in Coudersport) or fallen to the on-line foreign invasion. Recently (2018), a major fracking company lost a court battle to build a wastewater treatment plant adjacent to the Coudersport Area Municipal Authority's sewage treatment facility. The facility would have taken up to 42,000 gallons of fracking radioactive wastewater per day from Marcellus shale gas drillers to be "treated" and discharged into the Allegheny River. *[Sidenote: Even big money can't get a foothold in the northern counties if its actions violate the environment. The*

fracking company was owned by Pittsburgher Terry Pegula, billionaire owner of the Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabres. The company operated less than 20 well pads in Potter county but had permits for 60 wells.]

Hutchinson's political accomplishments read well, but nothing significant has changed in the northern counties since he was born. So now why the push to slow down the PGC. Maybe Ted's on to something.

On the other hand, in the House, Mandy Steele (D-Allegheny County, Cheswick) is trying to help the PGC. She introduced HB1811, *Removing the Price Per Acre Cap for Counties of the First Through Fifth Class.* Currently, the PGC is capped at a purchase price of $400 per acre. Steele says this makes it difficult to buy land with significantly higher values. This slows the development of new and expanding game lands, Steele says. *Referred to Game and Fisheries August 23, 2025.*

Steele also sees supporting tourism and conservation as another aspect of providing economic growth. She encourages municipalities, townships, and other government entities to apply for grants to that end, using the numerous commonwealth financing programs available to them.

So we have two bills. One apparently designed to support the PGC (HB1811). The other seemingly aimed at throwing a roadblock at the PGC (SB857) . Both would have a significant impact on the operations of the PGC. Will either make it out of committee for a vote? We'll continue to monitor the situations and keep you updated.

Lou Romito - Legislative Committee