

ENVIRONMENTAL SYNOPSIS

The Chairman's Corner

Rep. Scott E. Hutchinson, Chairman



This month's *Environmental Synopsis* is a little different from the norm. Instead of the usual Research Briefs normally found on pages 3-6, June's issue features the results of the committee's environmental questions asked as part of a statewide telephone survey entitled the Mansfield University State Survey 2005 (formerly known as The Public Mind).

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For the past several years the committee has sponsored a series of topical questions in order to gauge public opinion and sentiment on a variety of issues. You may recall previous years when questions focused on water and sewer services and recycling, all "hot" issues at the time, when the General Assembly was considering raising tipping fees on solid waste to renew the state's recycling grant program and was also mulling local communities' needs in regard to upgrading water and sewer systems. These issues are again...or still...timely policy questions today.

Also, the committee has asked a series of questions focusing on environmental attitudes and behaviors of Pennsylvanians. It is interesting to see what people do – or won't do – in support of improving their environment (the Environmental Action Index) and to analyze the reactions of different demographic groups to certain environmental issues and actions. We expect to repeat these questions in the future to see how attitudes and behaviors have changed – or if they have changed at all.

See pages 3-6 for the results of the Mansfield University State Survey 2005

This year, the committee focused on three basic areas: exposure to harmful substances in the environment, aquaculture and fish consumption advisories, and health advisories in general. The aquaculture questions were ones in which the committee has had a particular interest recently.

This year's survey also marked the second year in which the committee worked together with the Citizens Advisory Council (CAC) of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in formulating some questions having to do with environmental quality and public health.

(continued on page 8)

NOTES FROM THE DIRECTOR



CRAIG D. BROOKS, DIRECTOR

It's been surprising that the number of rivers and lakes with advisories warning of fish contaminated with mercury, PCB's and other pollutants continues to rise even though deposition of pollutants from the air has declined in recent years. In 2003, more than 3,000 advisories were issued by 48 states, an increase of about 300 advisories from the previous year. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has said that 24 percent of the nation's rivers and 35 percent of its lakes are under advisories. The latest information also shows that 100 percent of the Great Lakes and their connecting waters are under advisories.

Statewide advisories for rivers have also increased. The number of river miles under advisories went from 544,036 in 2002 to 846,310 in 2003, a 56 percent increase. The number of lake acres with advisories increased from 13,413,763 in 2002 to 14,195,187 in 2003, nearly a 6 percent increase. At the same time, mercury emissions have declined since 1990 when the Clean Air Act was reauthorized. An increase in water quality monitoring is thought to be responsible for the increase in advisories, which suggests that monitoring is up and emissions are down...that's a good thing.

See pages 3-6 for the thoughts of Pennsylvanians regarding fish advisories and PA aquaculture operations in response to a statewide survey sponsored by the Joint Committee

Meanwhile...aquacultural output, growing at 11 percent per year over the past decade, is the fastest growing sector of the world food economy. In the United States alone, sales have tripled since 1987, and doubled since 1992. The latest data on the entire aquaculture industry shows that it represents a billion dollar industry in the United States, with the Northeast region considered home to the second largest number of aquaculture farms in the country, with the third larg-

est value of total sales, just above \$127 million.

**National aquaculture production and sales - up.
Pennsylvania - down ???**

However, the advisories seem to affect different states differently. Pennsylvania producers of aquaculture products reported sales of \$9.1 million in a census conducted in 2004 by the Pennsylvania office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service for the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. There are currently 70 aquaculture operations in Pennsylvania, employing 131 people and paying quarterly wages of \$757,825. While national trends show increases in production and sales, the numbers in Pennsylvania represent decreases from previous years.

Because of this, the Joint Committee held a public hearing in Mount Pocono, Pennsylvania to discuss Pennsylvania's aquaculture industry and the effect federal fish consumption advisories have on the industry.

Pennsylvania operators feel strongly that the commonwealth could enjoy the same type of growth as seen nationally, but the perception of consumption advisories is having a negative effect on the industry. Pennsylvania fish are safe to eat; rarely if ever, approaching Food and Drug administration tolerance levels for contaminants. The question remains, "why are fish tolerance levels so closely monitored when other highly consumable foodstuffs have higher limits and no advisories?"

Please take a few moments to check out the results to several questions the Joint Committee posed as part of a 2005 statewide telephone survey conducted by Mansfield University. The questions deal with fish consumption advisories, their effect and the trust people place in them. Several questions also concern the aquaculture industry in general. It is interesting information and relevant to the issues raised above.

SURVEY RESULTS

Mansfield University State Survey



To learn more about what Pennsylvanians are thinking about the environment, the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee (JCC) again commissioned a series of questions through the Mansfield University State Survey 2005, an annual statewide telephone survey formerly known as "The Public Mind." This year, the survey polled 1,372 Pennsylvanians about a variety of environmental issues.

Issues touched on in the survey included how Pennsylvanians felt about harmful substances in the environment around them, the aquaculture industry and fish consumption advisories and health advisories in general.

I. The Environment Surrounding Us

The committee asked three questions about whether there are harmful substances in the environment around us, where they come from and how we detect them. A majority of Pennsylvanians believe they are being exposed to too many harmful substances (Chart 1).

What is interesting, however, is what people perceive to be the sources of these harmful substances, or more interesting what are not perceived to be sources. As Chart 2 shows, most Pennsylvanians feel good about their drinking water (only 2.9 percent think it is a harmful substance source), their food supply (5.1 percent) and the air they breathe (9.7 percent). While 37.2 percent cited a catch-all category of all sources mentioned, the single biggest perceived culprit was lakes and streams (31 percent).

These results seem to indicate that Pennsylvanians have a great deal of confidence in their public water systems to eliminate harmful substances that may be found in natural water sources, and that they consider their food supply to be safe. It appears that Pennsylvanians also feel progress has been made in cleaning up air pollution, but more work remains to be done in cleaning

up lakes and streams and in remediating environmental pollutant sources in general.

One way that Pennsylvanians decide if pollution is harming them is by observing what is happening to other life forms around them. Fifty-nine percent said that they would be concerned about pollution harming them if it was harming plants and wildlife around them.

Survey Says...

- The older one gets, the more one is concerned about exposure to harmful substances
- Rural areas (51.8%) felt nearly as exposed as urban areas (52.7%)
- Greater than 50 percent of the population of every geographical region of PA felt they were exposed to too many harmful substances except for Central PA (43.2%)

Chart 1

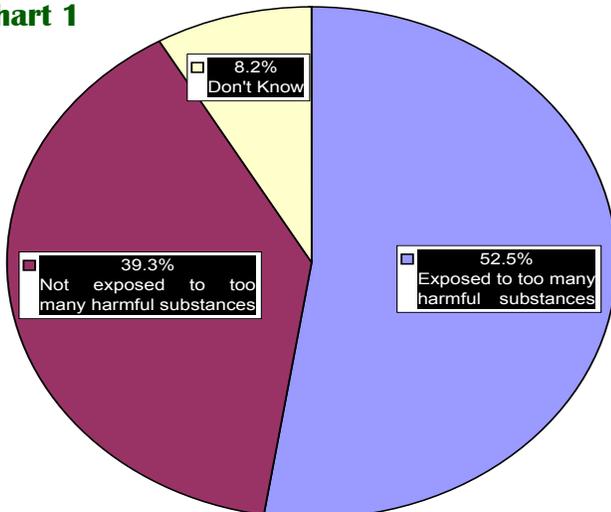
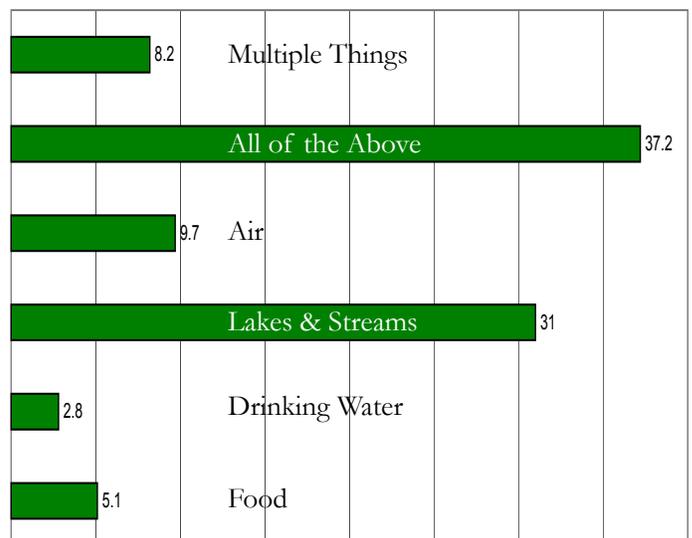


Chart 2

Where do the harmful substances come from?
(Results are in percentages)



II. Gone Fishin'

The committee conducted a public hearing last summer regarding the Pennsylvania aquaculture industry and fish consumption advisories. The industry was concerned that overly alarming advisories were hurting their industry and belying the safety of farm-raised Pennsylvania fish. The committee decided to see what Pennsylvanians thought of the PA product and advisories.

The survey found that while 58.6 percent of Pennsylvanians were aware of the advisories, the amount of trust people put in the advisories varied widely (Chart 3). There were as many people who put little or no trust in the advisories as those who did trust in them. Despite a lack of trust by many, however, the advisories caused concern to 70.5 percent who saw or heard them and 73 percent said they followed the advisories' recommendations, whether or not they believed the warnings.

Two areas of concern to the committee are that only 42 percent were aware that Pennsylvania raises fish such as trout under controlled conditions, and that only 49.9 percent said they would feel comfortable eating PA farm fish even if they were told they were safe to eat. That says something about promotion of Pennsylvania's aquaculture industry and raises questions about what people have to fear about PA farm-raised fish.

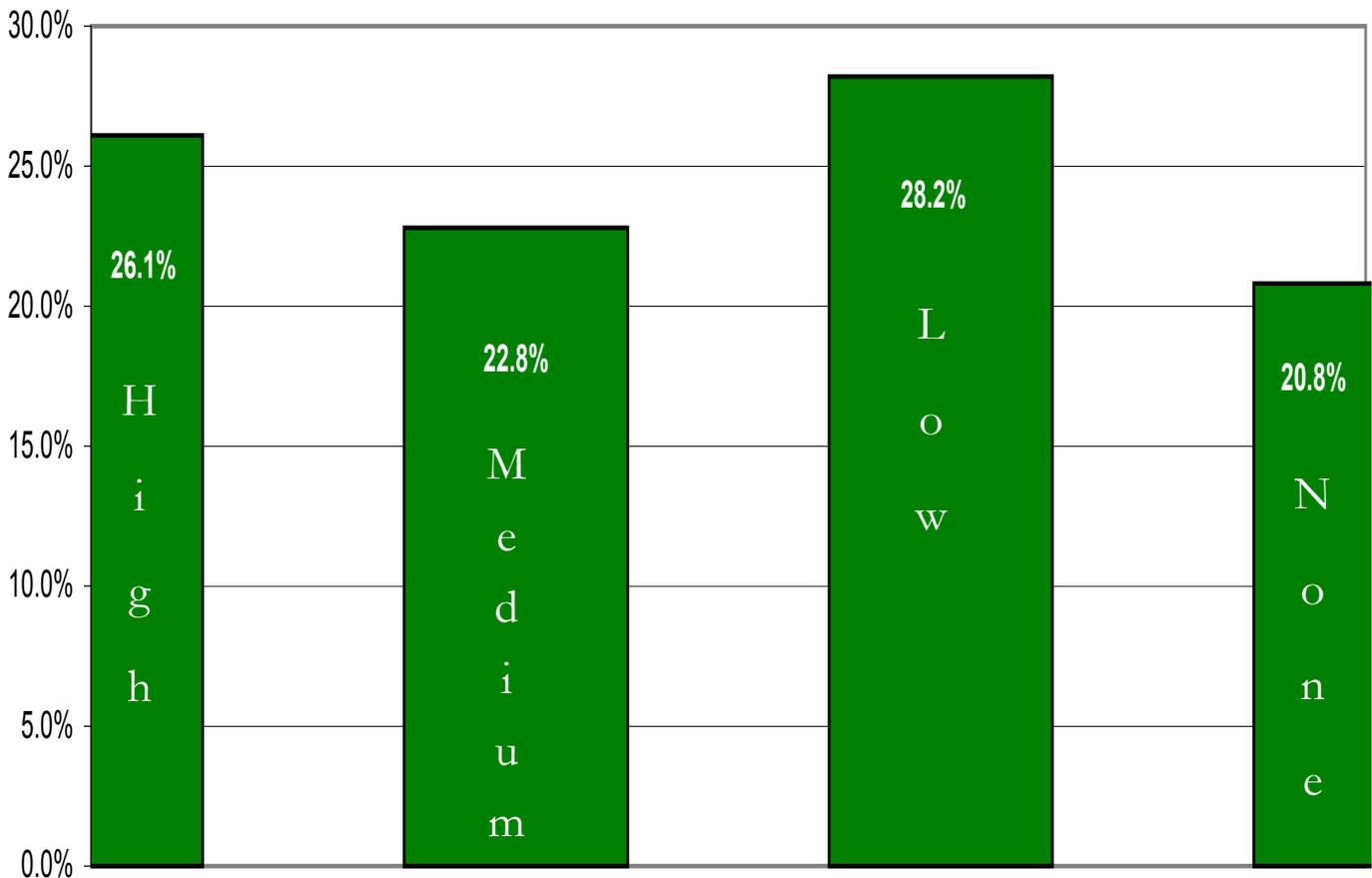
The committee believes that the safety level of Pennsylvania raised fish is high and should be presented more positively, rather than continuing to use fear-inducing advisories. There is a concern that a safe industry's growth potential is being harmed. Another indicator that more promotion of PA farm fish may be needed is that 61.4 percent said they would like to know if fish are wild or farm-raised when shopping.

Survey Says...

- 48.3 percent says they eat fish caught in Pennsylvania's lakes and streams
- Awareness of the fish consumption advisories was much lower in Asian and Hispanic populations than the average
- More women (65%) than men (55%) would like to know if the fish they are purchasing is wild or farm raised in PA

Chart 3

What is your level of trust in the accuracy of Fish Advisors



III. Lost in the Ozone Again?...

Ozone action days and ozone health advisories would seemingly be expected to be familiar entities to Pennsylvanians. But such is not the case. Only 44.3 percent of survey respondents said they were aware of what ozone action days were.

A comparison of the reaction to ozone advisories versus fish consumption advisories is interesting. The level of trust in ozone advisories is much higher than that found for fish consumption advisories (Chart 4). In a nutshell, more than 75 percent of Pennsylvanians had a high/medium level of trust, while only 23 percent had little/no trust in the advisories, with only 2.8 percent having no trust at all.

The level of concern raised by ozone advisories was also much lower than that of the fish advisories (Chart 5).

Ultimately, the percentage of people who followed

the ozone advisory recommendations was nearly identical to that for fish consumption advisories – 70.7 percent for ozone advisories compared to 73 percent for fish advisories.

Survey Says...

- The Southwest region of PA is most aware of ozone action days – by nearly 11 percent more than any other geographical region
- The level of trust in ozone advisories is highest among high school and college grads, males, Blacks and residents of Southeast PA
- Ozone advisories raise the highest levels of concern among females, urbanites, Hispanics and Democrats

Chart 4

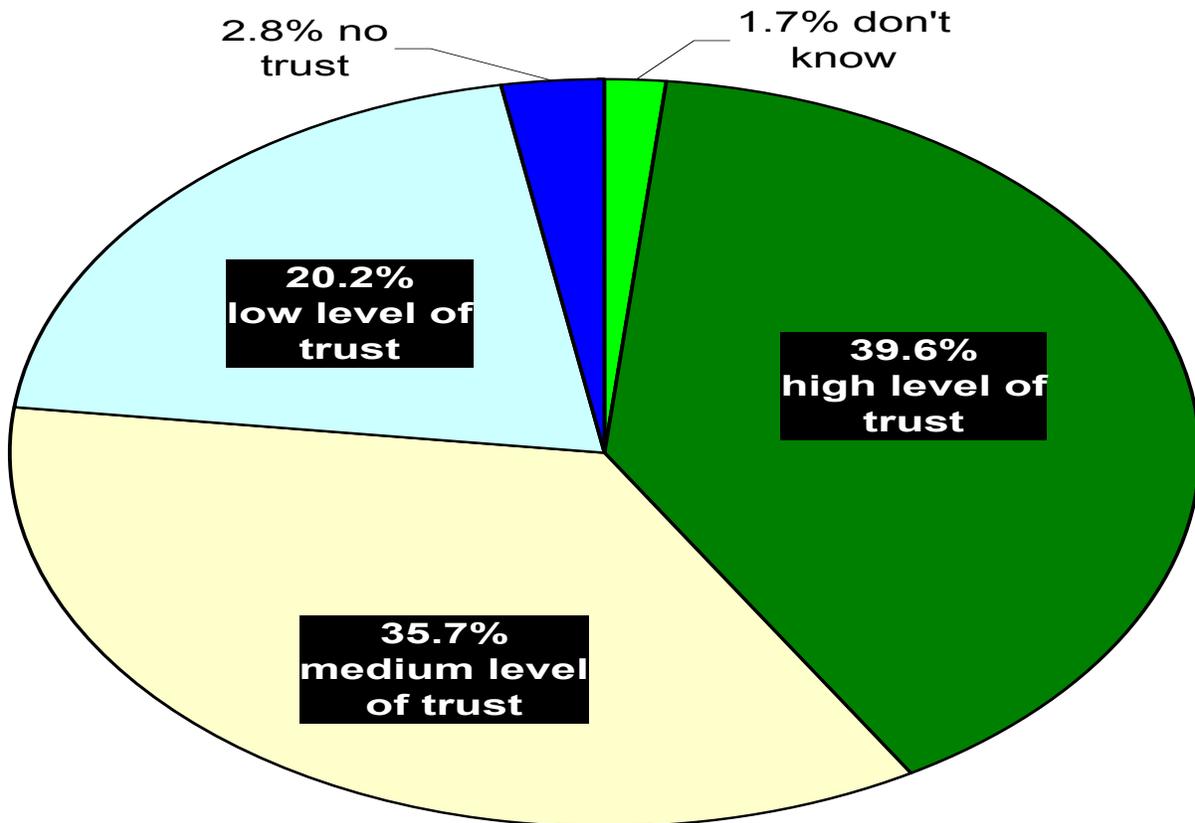


Chart 5

Are you concerned by these Health Advisories?

70.5% - concerned by fish advisories

58.1% - concerned by ozone advisories

IV. "The Medium Is the Message"...

So, given the varying levels of awareness, trust and concern regarding public health advisories, are they worth disseminating to the public in Pennsylvania? Well, 59.2 percent do say they find health advisories in general useful to them. Those who seem to make the most use of advisories are females, college grads and urbanites.

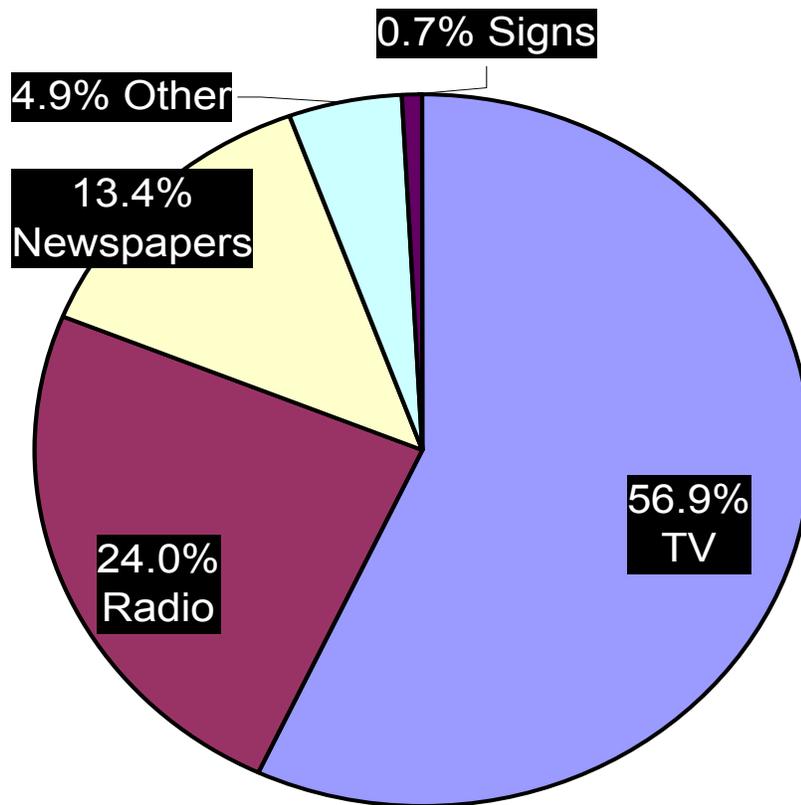
There is no question, however, no matter what the sub-group, that television is the medium to use to transmit health advisories (Chart 6). TV leads the way in every cross-tabulation, as well. Perhaps this is a reflection of lifestyles or technology or both.

Survey Says...

- Northeast PA is glued to the tube more than any other region of Pennsylvania, with 72.3 percent favoring TV as an advisory source, compared to the next highest percentage – 57.8 percent – in Central PA
- Republicans (65.3%) apparently watch more TV for health advisories than Democrats (51.3%) or Independents (53.8%), while Independents (32.7%) listen to more radio than either the Democrats (28.6%) or Republicans (17.7%)
- Signage will not get the desired health message across, as only 0.7 percent report that signs are the best way to reach them, even less than "other" (4.9 percent)

Chart 6

What is the best way for Health Advisors to reach you?



The Mansfield University State Survey

The Mansfield University State Survey is an annual statewide telephone survey, begun in 1990, of randomly selected Pennsylvania adults, which focuses upon issues facing the Pennsylvania General Assembly. The JCC sponsors a series of environmental questions.

A total of 1,372 Pennsylvanians were contacted for the 2005 survey. Respondents are proportionately represented in terms of geographical regions, sex and political party preference within the state to ensure an accurate sample. The margin of error in the 2005 survey is plus or minus 2.7 percent.

The 2005 survey was conducted in February and March under the direction of Mansfield University Professor of Sociology Dr. Timothy Madigan, PhD.

ON THE HORIZON...

A LOOK AT UPCOMING EVENTS

- ✓ Monday, June 27, 10 a.m., Room 205, Matthew J. Ryan Building – Public Hearing. The committee will conduct a public hearing into the cause(s) for the shortages of coal reported during the past year.

COMMITTEE CHRONICLES...

REVIEW OF SOME COMMITTEE MEMORABLE EVENTS

The staff and several members of the Joint Legislative Air and Water Pollution Control and Conservation Committee recently visited Reliant Energy's Seward Power Plant in Indiana County.

The plant, dedicated in September 2004, is the largest waste-coal fueled plant in the world. It produces 521 megawatts (net) of power and is a good example of a clean coal project, using the latest advanced technology as part of its fluidized bed combustion process, and cleaning up substantial amounts of waste coal found in piles in Pennsylvania. It is estimated that the plant will consume 100 million tons of waste coal over the next 30 years. The Seward plant, which



replaced an 80-year old, 200 mw plant

on the same site, has created hundreds of new direct and indirect jobs and estimates it has pumped \$30 million into the local community.

It has won the Platts Power Magazine award for Power Plant of the Year – 2004 and is part of the Commonwealth's renewable alternative energy portfolio standard.

These photos show various scenes around the plant during the committee's visit.



The CAC has been working on a cooperative project with the state Health Department seeking to establish a database by which links could be discerned between environmental quality and public health issues – if such existed – with the goal of informing Pennsylvanians about risk assessment and preventing negative health outcomes. As a matter of fact, the CAC and the Department of Health presented a progress report on their efforts at the committee's June 7, 2004 Environmental Issues Forum.

**For more information regarding the
Mansfield University State Survey – 2005,
contact the JCC office**

You may recall last year's survey revealed that:

- 78.1 percent felt there was a relationship between the quality of the environment and public health;
- 67.3 percent felt that the quality of the environment in their community had an impact on their health;
- 67.5 percent felt that the environmental quality in their home had an impact on their health; and
- 70.5 percent felt that their workplace environmental quality had an impact on their health.

Several of this year's survey questions follow up on those responses and seek to gauge environmental risks and how to deal with them.

I invite you to peruse the survey results on pages 3-6. Our Research Briefs will resume next month.

Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to wish everyone a safe, healthy and fun summer season. "See" you in these pages again next month.

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The *Environmental Synopsis* is issued monthly.

The newsletter examines timely issues concerning environmental protection and natural resources.

If someone you know would like to receive a copy of the *Synopsis* each month, please contact the committee office at 717-787-7570.



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