

## **Guidelines for Working with Elected Officials**

Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation

Learn who your state legislators are and develop a good rapport with them. Do the same with your local government officials.

Always keep elected officials apprised of activities occurring in park or forest and invite them to attend. But be prepared: they may try to take a chunk of time in the agenda.

Keep the park manager or district forester informed of your intentions if you plan to contact government officials directly representing the friends group. If you do plan to contact an elected official, the friends' group *board of directors must agree* to this activity by majority vote. It is not in the group's or the park/forests interest if an individual decides to "end run" the chain of command of your park or forest.

Be open and helpful to elected officials when they call for information.

Seek out ways to include elected officials in functions, activities, sponsorships, ceremonies, etc.

When appropriate, include them in the decision making process if their communities or constituents could be impacted by the outcome of the decision.

Don't play favorites with elected officials.

Keep elected officials "in the loop" as much as possible. They can be a good ally to your work. The more they understand your work, the better position they are in to support your work.

Foster good relationships by being an active part of the community and by responding to appropriate requests for help. **REMEMBER: As a non-profit organization, you CAN NOT endorse or support political candidates. This also means that you must evaluate sponsorship of events to see if it might be perceived as an endorsement.**

Be proactive and innovative.

Respect elected officials opinions and position in the community, but keep in mind that being respectful does not mean agreement.

If controversy is anticipated, contact elected official immediately so that he/she can be informed and not a recipient of rumors.

**If you need advice in working with elected officials or are unsure if an activity is "legal" under non-profit guidelines, contact the Pa Parks and Forests Office at 717-236-7644.**