



Move HB 427 Ahead for Future Generations

Since 1994, the Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund has been providing funds to state agencies and local government to conserve some of Kentucky's most cherished places to ensure that we can enjoy our lands, waters, wildlife and heritage long into the future. In the nearly 30 years since the Fund was created, more than 38,000 acres have been conserved and managed for the benefit of all Kentuckians. Now the General Assembly is considering a bill that would enhance the Fund's ability to help protect water quality, improve wildlife habitat, and provide education and recreation benefits to all Kentuckians.

HB 427 would enable private, non-profit land trusts to apply for the public funding that is provided now through the state portion of the un-mined minerals tax, environmental fines, and sale of Kentucky nature license plates. But to be eligible to apply for the public dollars, the non-profit groups would have to provide a dollar for dollar, which would increase the total amount of funds being used to conserve wildlife habitats and safeguard our waterways. This creates unique public-private partnership opportunities and protects more of our cherished natural areas without using more tax dollars.

HB 427 is a good idea that some critics have co-opted with misinformation and misleading dialogue.

Who thinks it's a good idea? Members of the new ***Conserve Kentucky*** group, which includes organizations like The Nature Conservancy and the League of Kentucky Sportsmen.

Who thinks it's a good idea? Members of the House of Representatives who showed bipartisan support to pass it unanimously in committee and by a 94-0 vote on the floor.

Who thinks it's a good idea? Many members in the Senate where it was passed unanimously in the Natural Resources Committee and was requested to be placed on the consent calendar, again with bipartisan support.

Who thinks it's a bad idea? A few who have the misperception that it's a government giveaway, when in fact it leverages public dollars to conserve habitat and to protect rivers and streams. A few who think the program denies public access to private land, when in fact it increases public access to our forests and waterways.

So why should we be putting more emphasis on protecting our land and waters and improving the public's ability to participate in nature-based recreation?

- The Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources estimated that Kentucky loses 47,000 acres of wildlife habitat per year.
- Kentucky has lost approximately 81 percent of its 1½ million forested wetland acres that existed in the 1780's, putting it in the top 10 states with most wetland acreage lost by percentage.
- 68 percent (well over *half*) of Kentucky's river and streams are considered impaired as "primary contact recreation water" meaning people cannot swim in them without risk of adverse human health effects.
- Wildlife viewing, fishing, and hunting contribute more than \$1.8 billion in retail sales and service to the Kentucky economy annually.

Let's do the right thing and adopt HB 427. It's the first step in a series of steps we need to adopt to preserve our heritage so that future generations can enjoy them as we do. Time is running out. Let your state senator know today that you, too, support HB 427. You can call your legislator toll free and leave a message at 1-800-372-7181. It's easy – and it's the right thing to do.

