

Right to Know Policy and Procedure

Adopted December 16, 2008 by the Warren County Conservation District Board of Directors

Revised February 21, 2017

Revised September 14, 2023

Revised November 12, 2025

Public Access to Information

Warren County Conservation District

I. GENERAL

This policy establishes the District's procedures for meeting its obligations under the Pennsylvania Right to Know Law, which was revised in 2008. It applies to all requests for "public records." This document establishes the framework within which the District will exercise its administrative discretion in the future. The District recognizes the value of making information available to the public, and is committed to continually improving public access to public information and fostering public participation in the decision-making process.

The Office of Open Records may promulgate regulations setting forth different or additional requirements and procedures, and these should be consulted.

A. Open Records Officer

The District has designated the District Manager to serve as its Open Records Officer. All requests for public records are administered by the Open Records Officer. Requests should be directed to the Open Records Officer at the following address:

Name: Katie Stover
Title: District Manager
Address: 4000 Conewango Ave, Warren, PA 16365
Phone: (814) 726-1441
Fax: (814) 406-0005
Email: kstover@wcconservation.net

The District has also designated the Conservation Program Assistant as its Alternate Open Records Officer in the event of an extended absence of the District Manager. In the event of an extended absence of the District Manager, requests should be directed to the Alternate Open Records Officer at the following address:

Name: Sherry Moore
Title: Conservation Program Assistant
Address: 4000 Conewango Ave, Warren, PA 16365
Phone: (814) 726-1441
Fax: (814) 406-0005
Email: smoore@wcconservation.net

B. Requests for Public Records

All Right to Know Law requests must be received by the District's Open Records Officer. A requester may make, and the Conservation District may fulfill verbal, written (including email or fax) or anonymous verbal or written requests for access to records under this policy. If the requester wishes to pursue the relief and remedies provided for under the Pennsylvania Right to Know Law (i.e. pursue an appeal of a denial), the request must be in writing.

Requests must describe the records sought with sufficient specificity to enable the District to ascertain which records are being requested. The request must include the name and address to which the response is to be sent. See Appendix A for a sample request form.

If the District receives a request for a public record that is not in the possession of the District, the Open Records Officer will: 1) notify the requester that they do not possess the record requested; 2) direct the request to appropriate persons in another agency.

C. Classification of Records

Public Records

"Public records" are defined as

1. Information that documents a transaction or activity of the District, and that is created, received or retained pursuant to law or in connection with a transaction, business or activity of the District,
2. **Except** where a record meets any of the following:
 - a. it falls into one the exemptions under the Right to Know law,
 - b. access is restricted under any state or federal law or regulation or
 - c. it is protected by a legal privilege, such as attorney-client privilege.

Records Exempt from being Public Records

Under the law some types of records are not available to the public. In this category are personal notes, computer security information, draft minutes, notes from an executive session, confidential proprietary information or trade secrets, medical information, personal identifiers, employee records, labor relations, criminal and non-criminal investigative records, non-real estate tax records, driver records, attorney-client communications, or records that if disclosed could jeopardize state or federal funds. This is a partial list of the exempted records. For a complete list the requester may request a copy of Section 708 of the Right to Know Law from the District. The District will assume that the requester is not asking for these types of records unless specifically requested. In most cases, these exempted records will not be provided.

D. Procedures for Reviewing Requests for Public Records

Operating Procedures

The District's Open Records Officer will ensure that the Operating Procedures described in Section II of this Policy are followed.

Reviewing Records

Following the submittal of a request the District will make every effort to fulfill the request within five business days of receipt by the District's Open Records Officer. This may include notifying the requestor that the records will be made available for review and copying at the District.

If the request cannot be fulfilled in five business days, the District's Open Records Officer will send written notice, including email, to the requester stating the reason(s) why additional time is needed, when the office expects to be able to fulfill the request, and any fees that may be required. See Operating Procedures, Section II.

If the District's Open Records Officer believes that a record contains confidential proprietary information or trade secrets, the Officer will notify the third party that provided the information requested, within five days of the request. The third party will then have five days from receipt of the notice to provide input on the release of the record. The Officer will decide whether the information qualifies as confidential proprietary information or trade secrets within ten days after that third party has received the notice.

E. Denial of request for Public Records

If an agency's response is a denial of a written request for access, whether in whole or in part, the denial shall be issued in writing and shall include:

1. A description of the record requested
2. The specific reasons for the denial, including a citation of supporting legal authority.
3. The printed name, title, business address, business phone number, and signature of the open records officer on whose authority the denial is issued.
4. Date of the response
5. The procedure to appeal the denial

F. Access to Records

The District may respond by notifying the requestor that a record is available through publicly-accessible electronic means such as the District's website, or another agency's website. The District may also provide the records electronically through email or other means such as a CD.

The District may also choose to make the records available for review and copying at the District office. However, the District's copying facilities are limited. No records may be removed from the District offices except by District staff. If the District is unable to send the requested documents to the requestor, in-house arrangements will be made to have them duplicated. Copying and other fees are listed in Appendix B.

II. OPERATING PROCEDURES

A. Within 5 business days of receipt of written request by the District Open Records Officer:

1. Immediately upon receipt of a request the District Open Records Officer will date stamp the request, record the request in a logbook, compute the day that the five business day response expires and make a notation of that date on the request.

2. The District will do a thorough search for the records requested and determine whether they are public records as provided in the Right to Know Law.
3. For records involving programs delegated to or contracted with the District by DEP, the State Conservation Commission or other agency, the District will confer with the State Conservation Commission, DEP or other agency as needed. The District will also confer with District legal counsel as needed (DEP or Department of Agriculture legal counsel (or the county solicitor where appropriate)).
4. The District Open Records Officer reviews, signs, mails and logs response. **A response will be sent within 5 business days of receiving any written request.**
 - The response can be information about how and when the requestor can visit the District to view the records.
 - The response can include information that the requested materials are available upon payment of applicable fees.
 - The response can be a denial of the request in whole or in part; any denials will specify:
 - i. A description of the record requested
 - ii. The specific reasons for the denial, including a citation of supporting legal authority
 - iii. The printed name, title, business address, business phone number, and signature of the open records officer on whose authority the denial is issued
 - iv. Date of the response
 - v. The procedure to appeal the denial
 - The response may be a statement that the Open Records Officer will be taking additional time (not exceeding 30 calendar days) to respond, if one or more of the following reasons applies:
 - i. Removal of confidential proprietary (or otherwise restricted) information
 - ii. Records are at a remote location
 - iii. Specified staffing limitations prevent a timely response
 - iv. Legal review is required
 - v. Requester is not complying with the District's policies, including failure to pay fees
 - vi. The extent or nature of the request precludes a response within the required time period.

B. *After (if) the District Open Records Officer responds that some or all of records requested are available:*

1. The Open Records Officer provides access to the records as arranged with the requestor.
2. If records are electronic, Open Records Officer arranges for computer viewing, duplication or the District may respond by notifying the requestor that a record is available through publicly-accessible electronic means such as the District's website, or another agency's website.

3. If the District will make copies, and if copying costs exceed \$100, Open Records Officer collects costs before copying and logs payment; upon delivery of copies, Open Records Officer collects any unpaid fees and logs payment.
4. If the requester fails to retrieve the requested records within 60 days of the District's response the District may dispose of any copies which have not been retrieved and retain any fees paid to date.

III. APPEALS

A. Appealing the District's Response

The Right to Know Law provides an appeal process through the Office of Open Records. Here is a summary of that process:

1. File an appeal. If a requestor wishes to dispute the District's denial, the requester must send his or her reasons to the Office of Open Records,

ATTN: Liz Wagenseller, Executive Director,

Office of Open Records

Commonwealth Keystone Building

400 North Street, 4th Floor

Harrisburg, PA 17120-0225.

The reasons for the dispute must be mailed within 15 business days of the mailing date indicated on the District's response, or if no response is provided then within 15 days of the date the request is deemed to be denied.

The requestor's dispute letter must state the grounds upon which the requester asserts that the record is a public record and shall address any grounds stated by the District for delaying or denying the request.

2. Appeal Process. Unless the requestor agrees otherwise to the timing, the appeals officer will make a final determination within 30 calendar days of the date the dispute letter is mailed. Prior to issuing its determination, the appeals officer may, at its discretion, conduct a hearing. The appeals officer will provide a written explanation of the reason for the decision to the requester and the District. If the appeals officer fails to issue a final determination within 30 days, the appeal is deemed denied.

Office of Open Records – Official RTKL Fee Schedule

Updated December 30, 2022

Record Type / Delivery Method	Fee
Black & White Copies (first 1,000)	Up to \$0.25 per copy.
Black & White Copies (beyond 1,000)	Up to \$0.20 per copy. ¹
Color Copies	Up to \$0.50 per copy. ²
Specialized Documents ³	Up to actual cost.
Records Delivered via Email	No additional fee may be imposed. ⁴
CD / DVD	Up to actual cost, not to exceed \$1.00 per disc.
Flash Drive	Up to actual cost.
Facsimile	Up to actual cost. ⁵
Other Media	Up to actual cost.
Redaction	No additional fee may be imposed. ⁶
Conversion to Paper	Up to \$0.25 per page. ⁷
Photographing a Record	No additional fee may be imposed. ⁸
Postage	Up to actual cost of USPS first-class postage.
Certification of a Record	Up to \$5.00 per record. ⁹

¹ A “copy” is either a single-sided copy, or one side of a double-sided copy, on 8.5”x11” or 8.5”x14” paper.

² A “copy” is either a single-sided copy, or one side of a double-sided copy, on 8.5”x11” or 8.5”x14” paper. Note that a requester may ask for black and white copies even if the original is in color and color copies are available.

³ Including, but not necessarily limited to, non-standard sized documents and blueprints.

⁴ If a requester asks to receive records which require redactions in electronic format and the agency is unable to securely redact the records by electronic means, an agency may print the records to provide for secure redaction, then scan them in for delivery by email. Accordingly, the agency may charge the fees noted above for either B&W or color copies, as appropriate.

⁵ If an agency must print records to send them by facsimile, the agency may charge the fees noted above for B&W copies.

⁶ If a requester seeks records requiring redaction and the agency is unable to securely redact the records by electronic means, an agency may copy or print the records to provide for secure redaction. Accordingly, the agency may charge the fees noted above for either B&W or color copies, as appropriate.

⁷ If a record is only maintained electronically or in other non-paper media, duplication fees shall be limited to the lesser of the fee for duplication on paper or the fee for duplication in the original media, unless the requester specifically requests for the record to be duplicated in the more expensive medium. *See § 1307(d)*.

⁸ This assumes the requester is using his or her own camera, such as a cellphone camera, to photograph the records. *See Muenz v. Township of Reserve, OOR Dkt. AP 2015-1021, 2015 PA O.O.R.D. LEXIS 1176*. If redaction is required prior to the requester being granted access to photograph records and the agency is unable to securely redact the records by electronic means, an agency may copy or print the records to provide for secure redaction. Accordingly, the agency may charge the fees noted above for either B&W or color copies, as appropriate.

⁹ Under the RTKL, an agency may impose “reasonable fees for official certification of copies if the certification is at the behest of the requester and for the purpose of legally verifying the public record.” The OOR recommends no more than \$5 per record to certify a public record. Certification fees do not include notarization fees.

Additional Notes

Fees May Be Waived: All fees established herein may be waived at the discretion of the agency.

Medium Requested: A record being provided to a requester shall be provided in the medium requested if it exists in that medium; otherwise, it shall be provided in the medium in which it exists. *See § 701.*

Other Statutory Fees: If a statute other than the RTKL governs the amount an agency may charge for a certain type of record, the other statute controls. For example, a Recorder of Deeds may charge a copy fee of 50 cents per uncertified page and \$1.50 per certified page (42 P.S. § 21051). Police departments may charge up to \$15 for a copy of a vehicle accident report (75 Pa.C.S. §3751 (b)(2)); the Philadelphia Police Department may charge up to \$25 per copy (Id. at (b)(3)). State police are authorized to charge "\$5 for each copy of the Pennsylvania State Police full report of investigation." (75 Pa.C.S. §1956(b)). Other examples include the History Code, the Municipalities Planning Code, and the Criminal History Record Information Act.

Inspection of Redacted Records: If a requester wishes to inspect, rather than receive copies of, records which contain both public and non-public information, the agency may redact the non-public information. An agency may not charge the requester for the redaction itself. However, an agency may charge (in accordance with the OOR's Official Fee Schedule) for any copies it must make in order to securely redact the material before allowing the requester to view the records. If, after inspecting the records, the requester chooses to obtain the copies, no additional fee may be charged.

Enhanced Electronic Access: If an agency offers enhanced electronic access to records in addition to making the records accessible for inspection and duplication by a requester, the agency may establish user fees specifically for the provision of the enhanced electronic access. The user fees for enhanced electronic access may be a flat rate, a subscription fee for a period of time, a per-transaction fee, a fee based on the cumulative time of system access, or any other reasonable method and any combination thereof. Such fees shall not be established with the intent or effect of excluding persons from access to records or duplicates thereof or of creating profit for the agency. **NOTE: Fees for enhanced electronic access must be reasonable and must be pre-approved by the OOR. Please submit enhanced electronic access fee requests to the OOR.**

Fee Limitations: Except as otherwise provided by statute, the RTKL states that no other fees may be imposed unless the agency necessarily incurs costs for complying with the request, and such fees must be reasonable. No fee may be imposed for an agency's review of a record to determine whether the record is a public record subject to access under the RTKL. No fee may be charged for searching for or retrieval of documents. An agency may not charge staff time or salary for complying with a RTK request. No fee may be charged for an agency's response letter.

Prepayment: Prior to granting a request for access in accordance with the RTKL, an agency may require a requester to prepay an estimate of the fees authorized under this section if the fees required to fulfill the request are expected to exceed \$100. Once a request is fulfilled and prepared for release, the OOR recommends that an agency obtain payment prior to releasing the records.

Questions: If you have any questions regarding the OOR's Official Fee Schedule, please contact the OOR (email: openrecords@pa.gov, telephone: 717-346-9903).



Pennsylvania Office of Open Records

Standard Right-to-Know Law Request Form

*Please read carefully. Complete this form and retain a copy of **both** pages; this copy may be required if an appeal is filed. You have 15 business days to appeal after a request is denied or deemed denied. More information about the RTKL is available at <https://www.openrecords.pa.gov>. In most cases, a completed RTKL request form is a public record.*

SUBMITTED TO AGENCY NAME: _____ (Attn: AORO)

Date Request Submitted: _____ Submitted via: ☐ Email ☐ U.S. Mail ☐ Fax ☐ In Person

PERSON MAKING REQUEST:

Full Name: _____

Company (if applicable): _____

Please send response via: ☐ Email ☐ U.S. Mail

If you wish to obtain records that only exist in hard copy, or must be provided on an electronic storage device, you may be required to provide a mailing address to the agency. See Section 703.

Email: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____ Telephone: _____

How do you prefer to be contacted if the agency has questions? ☐ Telephone ☐ Email ☐ U.S. Mail

☐ **By checking this box, I affirm that my full name and contact information is true and correct, and that I am a legal resident of the United States. I understand that failure to check this box may result in the denial of my request and the dismissal of any appeal filed with the Office of Open Records.**

RECORDS REQUESTED: *Provide as much detail as possible, including subject matter, time frame, and type of record sought. RTKL requests must seek records, not ask questions. Use additional pages if necessary.*

*Form continues on page 2. Retain a copy of **both** pages.*