

**PA Senate Game and Fisheries Committee Hearing**  
**PGC Land Acquisition Process**  
**Testimony of Cliff Clark – Cameron County Community and Economic Development / IDA**  
**September 25, 2025**

My name is Cliff Clark. I am a lifelong resident of Cameron County and have been the Director of the Cameron County Office of Community and Economic Development since 1997 and the Executive Director of the Cameron County Industrial Development Authority since 2000. I also serve as the Director of the Cameron County Planning Commission and am a board member of the St Mary's Economic Development Corporation. I am a cyclist, cross-country skier, hiker, and past hunter and am very familiar with the Game Lands in Cameron County as well as the Game Lands bordering Cameron County in McKean County, and for that matter all of Cameron County.

Cameron County has long been a manufacturing community and while not always promoted, complimented by tourism and recreation. In the past 10 years, however, Cameron County has seen the loss of approximately 800 manufacturing jobs with the demise of GKN Sinter Metals, compounded by the downsizing or leaving of other corporate owned businesses. Correspondingly, the labor force has dropped from 2400 to now 1700. Thankfully, we do have Emporium Hardwoods which is now our largest private employer and it does provide good paying jobs. The full-time resident population has dropped, though offset some by more seasonal residents, and more and more homes and apartments are being marketed as vacation rentals. In that respect the property tax revenue has remained relatively constant, however, earned income tax revenue has decreased, and there is less spending within the community. And ultimately, the local governments have less of their own money to provide the same amount of required services. At the same time costs such as maintenance, supplies, and healthcare continue to increase, putting a financial strain on local governments.

As an economic development professional of 28 years, I have seen a transition in Cameron County. I saw the growth phase of our powder metal industry in particular and corresponding machining and tooling businesses only to now see their decline as a trickle down of the overall economy. Many people have moved. Many are commuting long distances. And many have taken much lower paying jobs. To combat the loss of manufacturing we have further embraced tourism, which indeed promotion of our public lands is a part of, however, it still is only complimentary to our manufacturing economy. Tourism does not bring the same return as manufacturing. And we actively seek funding to develop land for new businesses and to complete necessary community development and infrastructure projects.

In recent years the competition for public dollars has become greater. Cameron County has a history of being highly successful in obtaining funding for all types of projects though that success has declined. Some of that decline is due to less funding being available, or being more restrictive and precluding us, and correspondingly more competition from areas with larger populations where the cost benefit ratio is much greater. While more people may benefit in those places, we still have the same needs and the cost of projects is not proportionally less. Some is due to matching funds requirements which we do not have due to a lack of revenue which requires us to try to obtain local foundation dollars which are limited themselves, or obtain state or federal dollars which takes time and, again, subjects us to compete with larger areas. Or in

many cases we just have to forego an opportunity. Last year's Local Share Account Statewide program, for instance, which had hundreds of millions of dollars available, from which only Shippen Township in Cameron County was awarded a mere \$35,000, awarded tens of projects in most Counties, and even hundreds in metro areas which submitted the same type of projects the Emporium Borough did which was to pave streets. We were overlooked because our population is low, not because of a poor application.

The situation we are in as a County from an economic development standpoint is that we do not have enough money to do projects on our own. In some cases, where any project if being properly undertaken starts with engineering -- we do not have the funds to pay for that to get a project started. Yes, we receive Act 13 money but it cannot be relied on indefinitely and after paying for necessary services like our 911 system, there is little left. The only thing we have then is our property tax revenue which is limited, and currently maxed out in terms of millage. Tax increases are naturally very unpopular and justifiably so as there is no corresponding increase in public benefit and the people simply cannot afford it.

Developing new properties in Cameron County would unquestionably bring in more tax revenue and spending in the community. Development in Cameron County is very difficult as land is limited due to topography, burdensome and sometimes unreasonable floodplain restrictions, limited infrastructure, the approximate 70% of state owned land, and the number of large, corporate owned properties enrolled in Clean and Green- the last of which now that the PILT has been increased has a greater negative impact on tax revenue.

I cannot say what Cameron County would be like if all land were privately owned. I can assume there would be much less land available for outdoor recreation which is what makes Cameron County a special place for so many people. I can assume at the same time there would be more tax revenue and local governments would be in better financial condition to incentivize or undertake economic development projects. If the PA Game Commission, or any state agency, continues to acquire land it should very seriously consider avoiding the purchase of land that could be developed and instead focus on remote tracts that are inaccessible for practical purposes and could not be served by public utilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I would be happy to answer your questions.