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NRSC-4-2024: OFFICE OF CONSERVATION

The Office of Conservation working group was tasked to review all functions located within the current Office of Conservation (OC). The working group recommended moving certain programs within OC to Enforcement, and any permitting functions elsewhere within the Department to OC. This proposed change makes sense given the streamlining of all functions within DENR and creates an office focused solely on permitting. The NRSC recommends that OC be renamed the Office of Permitting to better reflect its new mission.

Currently, OC holds permitting, compliance, and enforcement functions within divisions of jurisdiction. This structure has become outdated over time and not kept up with the additional duties that have been added over the past 40 years, meaning that it is not as efficient or as effective as it optimally could be. Under the current system, a member of the public may need to obtain permits from multiple offices and divisions to be able to do business in the state. There also can be overlap and duplication in permitting, or unnecessary delays due to lack of clarity on the permitting process. The NRSC finds that there is a need for modernizing OC to focus on the conservation of the state's natural resources through properly siting and organizing permitting and compliance activities.

The proposed permitting office can streamline the permitting process and oversee those permitting functions currently overseen by: (1) the pipelines division of OC, (2) Office of Coastal Management sections, (3) engineering division of OC, (4) injection and mining division of OC, and (5) 404 permitting if received. Creating one office to manage all permitting functions will not only streamline the functions of DENR but will also provide a more intuitive interface with government for industry while still providing the protection of a robust permitting system. The NRSC therefore recommends that the restructuring of all permitting functions into the proposed Office of Permitting be pursued.