

# Pennsylvania **ANGLER & BOATER**



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Official Fishing and  
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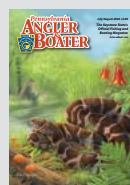
Delaware River, Morrisville, Bucks County

photo-PFBC archives

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## Covers



## WORLD SNAKE DAY • July 16, 2026

**Front cover:** The Northern Watersnake, *Nerodia sipedon sipedon*, is often seen by anglers streamside and is widespread across Pennsylvania. Read more about this nonvenomous snake and other native snakes on pages 8-10. *Artwork by Michael Kensinger.*

**Back cover:** Celebrate America's 250th anniversary by exploring Pennsylvania's waterways, like the Delaware River. It served as a transportation route during the American Revolution and signing of the Declaration of Independence. *Artwork by Michael Kensinger.*



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# ASSESSING THE SITUATION

by Timothy D. Schaeffer  
Executive Director

With so many factors out of our control—notably the weather—staff of a state fish and wildlife agency must be adaptable, resilient and flexible. I was reminded of that a few weeks ago when I joined a group of Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission biologists leading our newest class of Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) cadets on a Timber Rattlesnake survey. This training is important for WCOs as they are repeatedly called upon to assist the public when they cross paths with venomous snakes or to investigate situations where people pose a threat to fragile rattlesnake habitats. On these outings, cadets offer biologists additional eyes and feet to assess the snakes' long-term survival success.

I have been on these excursions before and, while I know they are for legitimate scientific inquiry, each time I feel like I'm on an adventure. Usually, the search party finds plenty of animals to give the cadets practice in handling and understanding the snakes while the scientists document important data. On this day, though, the cold and rainy conditions

had the few snakes we heard and spotted tucked deep into warmer and drier habitat.

The one snake we managed to handle reminds us of something important. These animals are extremely vulnerable, undeserving of their aggressive reputation and truly more afraid of us than we are of them. The female snake pulled from her deep hiding place was cold and sluggish. I certainly wouldn't have tried to handle her without our experienced staff, but this snake did not show any aggression. As a matter of fact, she did her best to keep away from us. She simply wanted to be left alone, and we would have granted her wish had it not been for scientific assessment.

If you ever see a rattlesnake, keep that in mind. Our agency is working to protect all of our state's reptiles, amphibians and their habitats. Read more about snakes in the feature articles in this edition. If you see snakes in the wild, let them go on their way. And, when the opportunity arises, remind others that they play an important part of the Penn's Woods ecosystem, and their negative reputation is undeserved. ☐

### Sightings:



## Graphic Key

These icons represent specific topics.



Amphibians and Reptiles



Boating



Catch and Release



Conservation



Fishing



Fly Fishing



Ice Fishing



Lakes



Paddling



Rivers



State Parks



Streams



Tackle and Gear

## PFBC ON THE JOB

**Matt Truesdale**  
Southcentral Region Outreach  
and Education Coordinator

I've always believed that fishing time is family time. The opportunity to connect with nature while spending time with the people I care about is a privilege. I thank my father for helping me appreciate these connections. Without him and my family, I would not be where I am today.

Now, I serve as the Southcentral Region Outreach and Education Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), providing educational programming for 13 Pennsylvania counties. My responsibilities include planning, coordination and facilitation of educational fishing and boating programs for the public, private groups, schools and other organizations. I'm also responsible for training individuals as Fishing Skills Instructors as well as facilitating Basic Boating Education Courses.

Growing up in central Pennsylvania, the outdoors has always been part of my life, and I have personally experienced the physical



photo: PFBC archives

and mental benefits associated with time spent in nature. One of the best and most rewarding aspects of my job is working with individuals and watching them discover the joy of fishing, boating and nature. This is especially true when I work with youth from urban areas who may not have previously experienced these opportunities. Seeing others catch their first fish, learning how to successfully cast a fly rod or kayaking are some of the best parts of my job. My goal is to always help others have a positive time outdoors while enjoying the resource. Without positive connections to the outdoors through fishing and boating, we may not have these wonderful natural resources for future generations to enjoy. ☐

# Women's Programs and Events

*All programs and events require registration.*

Event	Date/Time	Location
Women's Fishing	July 10 6 p.m.-8 p.m.	Gifford Pinchot State Park, York County
Women's Fly Fishing	July 11 9 a.m.-12:30 p.m.	Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County
Women's Pontoon Boat Fishing	August 14 2 p.m.-4 p.m.	Codorus State Park, York County
Women's Fly Fishing	August 19 10 a.m.-1 p.m.	Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County
Women in the Wilds— Fly Fishing and Stream Ecology	August 29 1 p.m.-4 p.m.	Hickory Run State Park, Carbon County
Women's Kayak Fishing	September 11 5 p.m.-7 p.m.	Little Buffalo State Park, Perry County
Women's Coffee and Casting Meet-Up	September 18 9 a.m.-11 a.m.	Gifford Pinchot State Park, York County
Women's Fly Fishing	September 25 5 p.m.-7 p.m.	Memorial Lake State Park, Lebanon County
Women's Fly Fishing	October 9 10 a.m.-12 p.m.	Whipple Dam State Park, Huntingdon County
Women's Fishing Meet-Up	October 16 3 p.m.-5 p.m.	Susquehanna Riverlands State Park, York County
Women's Fly Fishing Meet-Up	October 30 2 p.m.-4 p.m.	Codorus State Park, York County

***There's more!  
Highlighted  
programs and  
events only.***

**Register:**



## About the Artist

Craig Peterson, ARTWORKONTHERUN, creates nature-inspired 'coffee art' using coffee, watercolor and pen. Growing up in western Pennsylvania, he was constantly outdoors and still loves to explore



Pennsylvania. Becoming a full-time artist was never his plan, but his work grew into a full-time business. Follow him @artworkontherun, or say hello in person at the Mount Gretna Outdoor Art Show, Lebanon County, on August 15-16, 2026, and the Bedford Fall Foliage Festival, Bedford County, on October 10-11, 2026.



**FishandBoat.com**



# SOUTHEAST PENNSYLVANIA— A Paddling Playground



*by Carl Haensel    photos by the author*

If you're looking for great locations to spend time paddling, Southeast Pennsylvania offers an amazing diversity of options. From small lakes and ponds to larger rivers like the Delaware, Schuylkill and Susquehanna rivers to places like Blue Marsh Lake, Reading, Berks County, and Lake Nockamixon, Quakertown, Bucks County, there are hundreds of locations to get on the water. Once you're excited about dipping a paddle, the first step is exploring where to go.

## Find Your Water

Use the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) online County Guide as a great tool to find accesses near you. Featuring over 150 accesses on the Delaware, Lehigh, Schuylkill, Conestoga and Susquehanna rivers, plus more accesses on lakes and streams around the region, the map features all the information you need including what types of boats can launch, if there's a dock or ramp and other details like how to access fishing. It provides a good idea of what you'll find before you get there.

Pennsylvania's Water Trails are an incredible resource for paddlers looking to float a reach of one of our larger

waters. Water trails are available on the Delaware, Lehigh, Schuylkill, Conestoga and Susquehanna rivers, as well as Swatara Creek. Water trail guides discuss routes, difficulty, hazards and river sections, as well as the history, wildlife and fishing you may encounter. Detailed mapping helps you plan your day on the water.

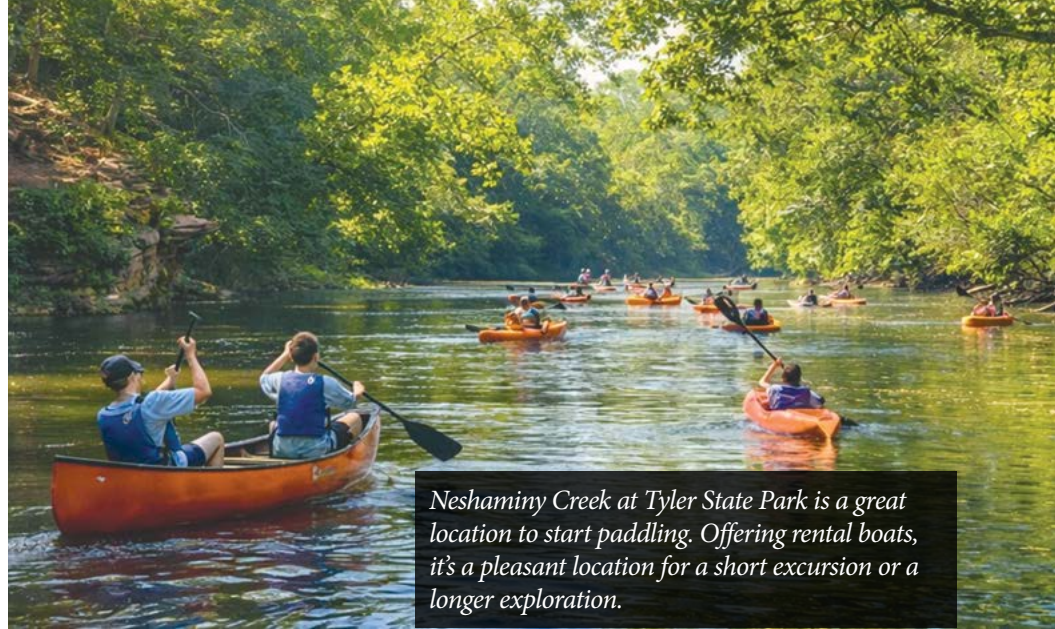
PFBC and Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR) lakes are found, too. From small to large, there are great paddling options that offer everything from a quick 30-minute spin on a small water body to a full day opportunity to explore a complex larger lake. Smaller lakes are great on windy days, when waves and other challenges may keep you off the water. Most state park lakes have excellent amenities for families looking to paddle including restrooms, picnic areas, shelters and easy parking.

## Options if You Don't Have a Boat

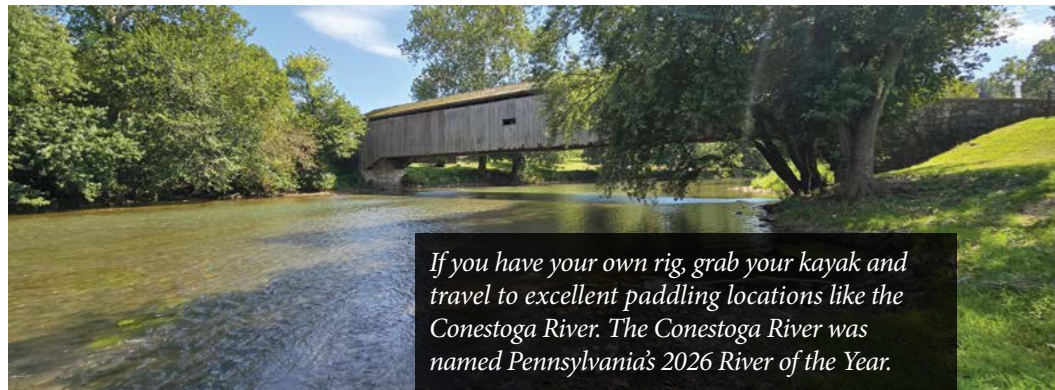
Want to paddle but don't have a boat? Boat rental options abound. State parks like Tyler State Park, Newtown, Bucks County, Marsh Creek State Park, Downingtown, Chester County, and Nockamixon State Park have easy options for folks looking to try things out for the first time. Operated by private concessionaires like Driftwood Water Adventures, these professionals can help get you on the water



Launch your canoe or kayak on a Southeast Pennsylvania waterway for a fun day of paddling.



Neshaminy Creek at Tyler State Park is a great location to start paddling. Offering rental boats, it's a pleasant location for a short excursion or a longer exploration.



If you have your own rig, grab your kayak and travel to excellent paddling locations like the Conestoga River. The Conestoga River was named Pennsylvania's 2026 River of the Year.

safely and smoothly, while providing the basic safety education beginners need. Other rental locations at county or township parks and other guided paddling trips are also available. Planned excursions on water trails like the Schuylkill River Sojourn and Delaware River Sojourn also provide rental, instruction and adventure for paddlers looking for a deeper dive into the sport. Boat rental businesses must follow PFBC regulations. Sojourns often offer multiple day options, on-the-water guides and an excellent community of friendship and camaraderie.

### What I Need to Launch

All watercraft users, including those with paddleboards, must have a properly fitting life jacket. Unpowered boats including kayaks, paddleboards and canoes can be launched at PFBC lakes and access areas or Pennsylvania State Parks/State Forests if they display a boat registration, Commission launch permit or PA DCNR launch permit. ☐



⬅️ Wear a properly fitting life jacket to go paddling. Locations like Blue Marsh National Recreation Area have life jacket loaner sites.

**Borrow Life Jackets:**



artwork-Michael Kensing

# Setting the Record Straight on Pennsylvania's *Slithering Serpents*

## by Michael Kensinger

As I wander the banks of my favorite Blair County trout stream, birdsong mingles with the steady ramble of the water. Clumps of curled leaves are pushed upward by unfurling ferns. Carefully stepping around a mossy bend, beams of sunlight break through the canopy along the streambank.

Then, I notice a creature that gives me pause—one that sparks a primal instinct of caution yet deserves as much admiration as the columbine blooming beside it—a snake.

In this case, a Northern Watersnake, *Nerodia sipedon sipedon*—one of 21 remarkable species of native snakes in Pennsylvania—each filling an important ecological niche.

### Along the Waterways

Anglers and paddlers are most likely to encounter the Northern Watersnake.

The watersnake suffers the worst reputation, often mistaken for a

copperhead and unnecessarily killed. In reality, it's nonvenomous and plays an important role in controlling fish and amphibian populations.

Another familiar snake is the Northern Black Racer, *Coluber constrictor constrictor*. Despite its intimidating name and fast movements, it's important to understand that this is one of Pennsylvania's most beneficial native snake species. Sleek, glossy and agile, racers rely on keen eyesight and speed to hunt insects, rodents, birds, frogs and even other small snakes in fields, forest edges, gardens and brushy habitats. Compared to Central Ratsnakes, *Pantherophis alleghaniensis*, Northern Black Racers are often described as more defensive, vibrating their tails in dry leaves and occasionally striking if cornered. If you encounter one, simply give it a wide berth, as the snake is usually searching for an escape route. Bites to humans are uncommon,

### About the Artist/Author



Michael Kensinger has built a career rooted in art, storytelling and conservation. An award-winning wildlife artist, writer and naturalist from Altoona, Blair County, Kensinger is best known for his evocative portrayals of wildlife. His work seeks to not only capture the beauty of wildlife but the emotional connection people share with the outdoors.

Kensinger's paintings and illustrations have appeared in publications including *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater*, *Pennsylvania Wildlife Magazine*, *Delta Waterfowl Magazine* and *Pennsylvania Outdoor News*.

His articles blend natural history, field observation and conservation storytelling to encourage readers to look more closely at the wildlife and ecosystems around them.

Through his paintings and stories alike, he hopes to inspire others to appreciate, conserve and remain connected to Pennsylvania's outdoors.



artwork-Michael Kensinger



and Northern Black Racers are nonvenomous. Their presence should be viewed as a sign of a healthy, balanced ecosystem. Like many of our reptilian neighbors, racer populations face mounting pressures from habitat loss, road mortality and unnecessary persecution fueled by fear and misunderstanding.

## A Closer Look at Venomous Snakes

Pennsylvania is home to three venomous snake species: the Eastern Copperhead, *Agkistrodon contortrix*, the Eastern Massasauga, *Sistrurus catenatus*, and the Timber Rattlesnake, *Crotalus horridus*. None deserve the level of fear they often inspire.

Copperheads blend perfectly into leaf litter. With such effective camouflage, it's easy to step near one without noticing it. Fortunately, their venom is relatively mild, and fatalities are extraordinarily rare due to modern medical care. Anyone bitten should seek treatment, but panic is rarely warranted.

The Eastern Massasauga is Pennsylvania's rarest reptile. This small, wetland rattlesnake lives in a few northwestern counties—primarily Butler, Venango and Mercer counties. With limited habitat and a small venom yield, it poses little threat to humans. The species is both state endangered and federally threatened.

The larger Timber Rattlesnake possesses more potent venom and deserves respect, but it's defensive rather

than aggressive. When threatened, it typically rattles to warn intruders away and almost always prefers retreat over confrontation.

## Why Snakes Are Misunderstood

Culture and folklore have long portrayed snakes as dangerous villains. In truth, snakebite incidents in Pennsylvania are extremely rare, and most occur when a snake is handled, cornered or deliberately harassed.

Misidentification also contributes to the problem. Harmless species such as the Eastern Milksnake, *Lampropeltis triangulum*, and Northern Watersnake are often killed, because they resemble copperheads—snakes that themselves are far less dangerous than many people believe.

The simplest rule is best—if you don't know its identification, give it space and leave it alone.

## Coexisting with Snakes

Snakes called Pennsylvania home long before our roads and hiking trails crossed the landscape. Coexisting with them is simple. Keep your distance, never attempt to handle them and resist the urge to kill out of fear.

The next time a snake crosses your path, pause, observe and appreciate.

What you're seeing is one of nature's quiet workers—misunderstood, essential and deserving of respect. In the best encounters, both of us simply continue on our way. ☐



# NOTES *from the Streams*

## Aquatic Resources

As Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs), our mission is to uphold and carry out the goals of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC)—a responsibility that may take unexpected forms.

During a firearms training session, our team was between strings of fire when one of the officers suddenly called, “Cease fire!” The command was unusual, as no one was actively shooting at the time. Then, we saw the reason—a tiny snapping turtle making its way across the firing line.

The hatchling had just begun its journey into the world, unaware of the danger around it. It was carefully and safely relocated away from the range and training resumed.

It was a reminder that our duty to protect Pennsylvania’s aquatic resources can appear at any time—sometimes even in the middle of firearms training.—WCO *Jeremy L. Yohe, Western Bradford and Sullivan counties.*



artwork-Andrea Feeney

## Lesson Learned

It was a beautiful day on the Monongahela River in Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, when a call came over the radio for a sinking vessel near the 18th Street Boat Access. We raced up the river to render aid to the vessel, arriving at the docks to see a common sight. The boater got so wrapped up in the excitement of boating season that a critical mistake

was made. The plug was not put in prior to launching and quickly the boat filled up with water.

I assisted the boater by pulling a rope to guide the boat back onto the trailer. Thankfully, we were able to winch it out of the water once we got it hooked. We prevented fuel or oil from leaking out and spared the boat from total loss.

This situation is all too common. But, it’s preventable. Taking an extra minute to run through a checklist prior to launching can save you and your family from stress, danger and loss of property.

Be safe on the water.—WCO *Matthew R. Scott, Western Allegheny County.*

## A Day to Remember

Some days, nature gifts you moments you’ll never forget. While stocking fingerling trout in the Lower Youghiogheny River, the fish culturist and I experienced some of the river’s most stunning and secluded areas. This section of the Youghiogheny River, known for its natural beauty, draws visitors from across the country. From awe-inspiring rapids to stone bridges, the scenery is unforgettable.

As we traveled from one stocking point to the next, we spotted a large, mature Central Ratsnake sunning itself along the bike trail. We also glimpsed a young coyote pup, trying to disappear into the thick brush. Aside from a brief snag that required pulling the stocking truck out of a tight spot, the day couldn’t have been more perfect.—WCO *Dorian D. Seibel, Fayette County.*

## Snake at the Door

I received a call about a rattlesnake in front of the doors at a medical building. Concerned for their patients, the staff wanted the “rattlesnake” removed. Based on the location, I was doubtful it was a rattlesnake, but I made my way to the facility. When I arrived, the staff came out to meet me and had been keeping a watchful eye from the window on the snake, which was now coiled around the base of a shrub. When I bent down to look at the snake, it was watching me and flicking its tongue. It was not a rattlesnake, and it was not even a native species to Pennsylvania. The snake was a 12-inch-long ball python. I uncoiled the python from the bush and put it in my snake tote. I’m not sure how the python got to the medical center as there were no houses nearby. My guess is someone no longer wanted it and released it. Unfortunately, not wanting a pet and releasing non-native snakes often results in the death of the snake, like a ball python, that relies on much warmer conditions. The snake had some injuries on its back and was thin. It was docile, so I decided to keep it for educational and outreach purposes. Reggie, named after its scientific name *Python regius*, now travels to outreach events and educates individuals on not releasing pets into the wild and helping reduce the stigma of snakes being scary.—WCO *Sarah R. Bartle, Franklin and Eastern Fulton counties.*



photo-PFBC archives

# ALWAYS WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET.



**WEAR IT**  
National Safe Boating Council  
Pennsylvania



## OPERATION DRYWATER

### July 3-5

By boating under the influence of  
drugs or alcohol, you're endangering  
your life and the life of others.

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Boating Safety:



photo-DFBCarchives



# Wade Fishing the Tioga River



*The Tioga River is a favorite destination to unwind, wade and make some memories on the water.*



*by Donald Kelly    photos by the author*

With a big ichthyology test coming up the following week, we decided to spend a few late nights studying and waiting for catfish to bite on the Tioga River. After all, what better way to remember scientific names of fish, than to identify them aloud while reeling them in? *Ictalurus punctatus*, Channel Catfish, *Ameiurus nebulosus*, Brown Bullhead, and even a few late night *Sander vitreus*, Walleyes, kept us entertained through the night. Rich in species, the river offered an education with many days and nights of endless fishing fun.

That was nearly two decades ago, and admittedly, I had to do an internet search of those scientific names for the correct spelling. What I never forgot, though, were the fish. To this day, the Tioga River is a favorite destination to unwind, wade and make some memories on the water.

Flowing through Tioga Lake, just north of Mansfield and north to the New York border, the Tioga River loosely parallels Route 287. Anglers can access the river at numerous public bridges, pull-offs and parking areas between Tioga and Lawrenceville. The Tioga Lake tailrace attracts the most angler attention with easy access and a large parking lot. Water releases from the dam dictate conditions, and the shoreline is easily wadable at normal summer flows. Known best as a popular Smallmouth Bass and Walleye spot, anglers can also catch Channel Catfish, Common Carp, hybrid Striped Bass, Rock Bass, crappies, perch and the occasional Largemouth Bass or stocked trout.

Continuing downstream, the river meanders through the countryside, creating a variety of shallow riffles, deep slow pools and swift runs. Various log jams, overhanging trees and undercut banks offer protection and make ideal feeding areas for hungry fish. Before

taking a step in the water, I always make a few casts tight to the banks and nearby structures to avoid startling fish hiding in the shadows.

## Match the Hatch

Gizzard Shad, among other baitfish, and plentiful crayfish and hellgrammites offer abundant food sources, and artificial lures mimicking them work well. In slower water and deep pools, I start with a 2- to 4-inch soft plastic swimbait on a 1/8- to 1/4-ounce jig head. White, shad or perch patterns take fish in clear water. After rain or in dirtier conditions, chartreuse and similar bright colors catch the attention of fish. Use a slow, steady retrieve. Squarebill crankbaits that bounce off rocky bottoms are also effective in similar color schemes.

Around structure and faster runs, drifting a small jig head paired with a 2- to 3-inch crayfish imitation can be successful for Fallfish, Rock Bass, Smallmouth Bass, carp and more. I generally prefer natural-colored crayfish imitations.

When the fish are in a finicky mood, drifting a live shiner or worm under a float is a great option, too. After dark, try a minnow or chicken liver on the bottom for catfish.



*I generally prefer natural-colored crayfish imitations.*

## Beyond the Fishing

Tioga River offers scenic views and abundant wildlife. Bald eagles and ospreys “fish” the same waters. Beavers drag branches to their dens, and deer stop by for a quick drink. Standing knee deep in their world brings back great memories and the anticipation of what we’ll encounter next. ☐



# TREASURE HUNTING with Canoes and Kayaks



*Two young kayakers display some of the treasure they recovered while paddling along the Pymatuning Reservoir.*

by Jerry Bush

photos by the author

I chatted with my grandchildren as I placed several kayaks into the water. I asked the kids if they wanted to search for treasure. Eager smiles crossed their faces before they asked the obvious question. “Is there really treasure here, Grandpa?” I replied, “Well, anglers lose bobbers and lures they snag on rocks and shrubs along the shore, where they can’t reach them. We can find that discarded gear while paddling and retrieve it. And, if we put the items in a tackle box reserved for you kids to use when you go fishing, couldn’t we consider that a treasure?”

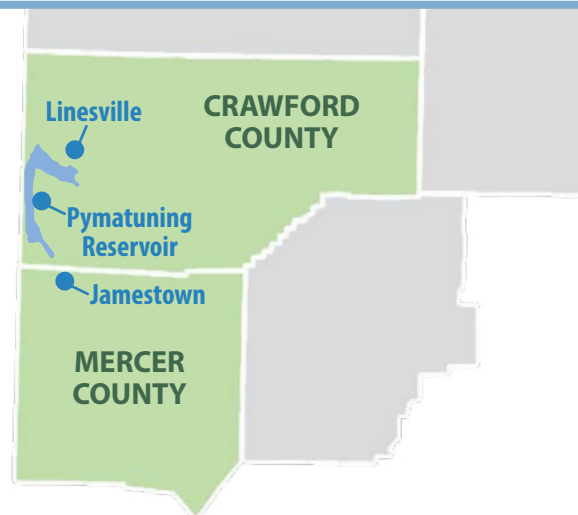
Finding it also an opportune moment for a conservation lesson. I explained the environmental value of clearing litter and materials left along the shore that is harmful to birds and other wildlife. The children were anxious to paddle around a few of Pymatuning Reservoir’s, Crawford County, large bays.

Every angler can appreciate how quickly the cost of gear adds up. A single, misguided cast can result in sacrificing a \$1 bobber and a \$5 lure to an out-of-reach, overhanging limb or submerged obstacle. Because of their shallow draft and maneuverability, canoes and kayaks can retrieve snagged lines, bobbers and lures abandoned near stream banks and lake shorelines.

Searching for lost tackle treasure keeps kids engaged in the trip, especially if they’re fond of fishing. You can grab an unused or inexpensive tackle box and encourage them to fill it up with their treasure. Young anglers, who ask for new tackle, may be satisfied and pleased with filling their own box with bobbers, lures and weights. You can also make a scavenger hunt for them to complete.

Safety is always most important. Adults must monitor every situation and guide youngsters, who may get fixated on colorful or shiny objects. Be prepared for anything. Take along items you may need to assist such as clippers and a folding knife. It’s the adult’s tool to use if a paddler gets a life jacket strap tangled with brush along the shoreline or if kids find tangled fishing line in vegetation.

Make young paddlers aware of an angler’s fishing zone and remind them to stay clear of an angler’s casting area. Our primary goal is to locate abandoned gear that is not near active anglers. And, have fun. ☐



In addition to 25 yards of discarded fishing line, these are some of the items recovered from Pymatuning Reservoir.

### Advice for Shore Anglers

- Don’t cast into areas where tangles are likely to occur and unlikely gear can be retrieved.
- Fishing lines and lures left behind do not only have monetary value, but abandoned gear is hazardous to birds and other wildlife.
- Purchase an aluminum, extendable, lure-retrieving pole.

### Advice for Paddlers:

- Minimize noise and avoid paddling directly into space where people are actively fishing.
- When tangled lines and lost gear are observed near an active angler, paddle to an unobtrusive location, approach the angler on foot and ask if he or she would like you to retrieve the items.
- Properly dispose of all recovered fishing line.
- If you accidentally paddle too close to an angler, apologize and communicate when a tight spot requires passing.
- Respect wildlife and their habitat.
- If you retrieve lost fishing gear but are not an angler, donate recovered items to thrift stores.



# CLASSIC LURES—Fishing Swim Jigs



## by Darl Black

photos by the author

When is a jig not a bottom-bouncing lure?—when it's steadily retrieved at mid-depth.

In the early 1960s, the "Arkie-style" skirted jig dressed with pork chunk gained a reputation as a bottom-bumping lure for targeting Largemouth Bass in submerged cover. Eventually, innovative anglers began teaching jigs to swim instead of sink. The concept of swimming a jig concurrently arose in two areas of the country—the Coosa River in Alabama and Mississippi River in Wisconsin. Both areas feature shallow backwater environments with abundant aquatic vegetation, but swim jigs weren't available nationwide until around 2000.

Models specifically called swim jigs have key design features different from flipping or dragging jigs. Swim jigs have a cone or wedge head with the line tie positioned in the front tip of the head. This configuration (plus weedguard) helps the jig slip through vegetation and brush on a steady retrieve with few hang-ups. Available in  $\frac{3}{16}$ ,  $\frac{1}{4}$ ,  $\frac{5}{16}$  and  $\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce weights, swim jigs have noticeably fewer strands of skirt material than traditional jigs. Swim jigs are dressed with a wide-tail 3- to 5-inch grub or a small soft plastic swimbait.

A swim jig is the perfect presentation for a complex cover situation in a lake or river including any



*A Smallmouth Bass caught on a swim jig fished along a rock, stump and deadfall bank at Shenango River Lake, near Hermitage, Mercer County.*

combination of deadfalls, grass beds, willow brush, stumps/logs, rock piles and open water. Retrieve speed can be varied from superfast (waking the surface) to moderate or slow.

Available in various patterns, swim jigs are devoured by any gamefish species dining on smaller fish. The northern-style swim jig is a favorite of anglers seeking Smallmouth Bass. Often referred to as skirted grubs, northern-style swim jigs have a standard wire hook enabling them to be fished on 10- to 14-pound fishing line. Southern-style swim jigs feature a larger hook of stout wire, requiring much heavier line. □



*Pictured (left) is a northern-style swim jig created by Tom Monsoor. On the right is a southern-style swim jig designed by Mitch Looper.*



# Car Camping at SHAWNEE LAKE

by Tyler Frantz

photos by the author



**M**y 10-foot kayak bobbed quietly on the lake as I surveyed the map the ranger at the visitor's desk handed me at Shawnee State Park, Schellsburg, Bedford County, less than an hour earlier. Hand scribbled pen marks indicated likely holding spots for bass, panfish and pike, and a quick glance across the cove to a rounded point revealed fallen timber submerged in the water.

Paddling over for a closer look, I angled sideways and tossed a crankbait toward the bank. My hunch about this promising position was confirmed when a hefty bass slammed my lure during the retrieve, almost like a welcoming extension of local hospitality. I was instantly glad I made the trip.

The 451-acre Shawnee Lake serves as a central hub for the state park that shares its namesake. Nestled within nearly 4,000 acres of natural space, it's historically remembered as an 18th century Native American village and the overnight campsites of General Forbes and George Washington.

As a mid-August getaway, I planned an overnight stay of my own—hauling my kayak on my SUV roof rack for a simple, affordable visit to this storied destination. Since it's located roughly 2 hours from my home, the plan was to fish for an evening, car camp overnight, fish the morning bite and then hit the road again around lunchtime.

With campsites starting at \$22 for modern non-electric and \$27 for modern electric, Shawnee State Park offers some of the cheapest accommodations on prime fishing water in the state. Cabins and RV sites are available, but my humble bunkhouse was the back of my SUV with the seat folded down, plus the addition of an inflatable bed pad and sleeping bag.

Running a small battery-powered fan helped keep things comfortable in the steamy summer air, and a pop-up canopy strapped to my roof rack for



transport served as a dry space for cooking, eating and hanging wet clothes overnight when rain showers passed through the area. I boiled water over the fire and fueled up with dehydrated meals pouches, which are ideal for quick solo camping excursions focused more on the fishing than the regular comforts of home. Sure, I was roughing it a little, but I was primarily there to fish.

Shawnee Lake is routinely stocked with warmwater gamefish, harboring Bluegills, Largemouth Bass, Muskellunge, Northern Pike, Smallmouth Bass, Walleyes, Yellow Perch, carp, catfish, crappies, pickerel, suckers and sunfish. The lake is also managed by Big Bass Program Special Regulations, which allows the bass to achieve considerable growth.

Every Largemouth Bass I caught was of respectable size and sported a silvery-green sheen to its flank. They responded well to crankbaits worked slowly away from suspected holding locations near structure,



*Humble accommodations in the back of an SUV provided all I needed for overnight fishing opportunities.*



*The healthy bass in Shawnee Lake are hefty in size and aggressively fight. I had good results with both crankbaits and soft plastic lures.*

↑ *Having never fished Shawnee Lake before this trip, I picked up a map of the lake and was quickly catching fish.*

and I also nabbed a few with soft plastic lures rigged wacky and Ned-style, where vegetative cover was evident. All were healthy and fought vigorously.

Launching from Diehl Boat Launch and paddling northwest provided access to enticing habitat with dense lily pads on the section west of Route 96, but due to muddy water, I didn't have as much luck here as in the main lake. I was also hoping to luck into a Northern Pike, rumored to roam near the Colvin Boat Launch, but found only bass willing to cooperate.

Regardless, my quick visit to Shawnee Lake was enough to justify a return trip to these historic waters, where one certainly doesn't require luxurious accommodations to catch big bass. ☐



*Shawnee State Park offers cabins, modern electric and modern non-electric campsites within nearly 4,000 acres of natural surroundings.*



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# THE SHENANGO RIVER— From Crooked-Mouthed Swamp to Conservation Legacy

by *Brady J. Crytzer*

**B**y the early 20th century, the great wetlands along the Shenango River had already lived many lives.

Years before surveyors hammered stakes into the muddy earth, the place now called Pymatuning Reservoir belonged to the forest and the people who understood it best.

The Seneca Nation of the Iroquois Confederacy hunted the wetlands. It was called *pie-ma-tun-ing*...“the crooked-mouthed man’s dwelling place.”

This phrase did not describe a twisted face but rather a crooked character. Names in the old languages often carried stories now lost to time and contained hints of personalities or legends that once echoed through the swamp.

For centuries the land remained a wild and watery frontier. Then, during the 18th century, European trappers pushed into the region, drawn by the promise of beaver pelts—soft brown currency in the global fur trade.

Canoes passed through reed-choked channels where steel traps waited beneath the surface. Soon lumbermen followed.

The towering white pines of northwestern Pennsylvania were a treasure beyond price in the Age of Sail. Straight, tall and resilient, they were perfect for ship masts.

Axmen felled the giants and floated the timber downriver, transforming the forest into cargo bound for distant ports.

History turned again in 1784 when Native American leaders signed the Treaty of Fort Stanwix. Representatives of the Wyandot and Iroquois ceded



photo-courtesy of Shenango River Watchers

↑ Paddlers glide across water that was once farmland.

lands north of the Ohio River to Pennsylvania. With ink on parchment, the swamp that had sustained native hunters for generations opened to settlers from Connecticut and New York.

Pioneers of the 19th century tried to carve farms from the soggy wilderness, draining patches of marsh and battling clouds of mosquitoes. Most failed. Others endured, discovering that onions and hardy root crops could thrive in the rich, black soil beneath the swamp water.

The Shenango River though remained untamed.

In 1868, the Pennsylvania General Assembly ordered a survey to estimate the cost of entirely draining the Great Pymatuning Swamp. The idea was a simple one—turn the marsh into fertile farmland.

But, engineers soon realized that draining the wetland would starve the industries downstream in the Beaver and Shenango valleys of the water they relied upon. The plan quietly faded away.

Then, a different vision emerged.

In 1911, engineers proposed building a dam across the Shenango River. Instead of draining the swamp, they would flood it. In its place, they envisioned a vast reservoir that could regulate river flow, prevent floods and supply water to the growing industrial towns of western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio.

Nature soon proved the wisdom of such thinking.

In 1913, catastrophic flooding ravaged the region, causing nearly \$3 million in damage and claiming several lives. The disaster spurred lawmakers into action. The Pennsylvania legislature passed the Pymatuning Act, initially approving \$1.2 million for construction.

By 1917, the state committed \$400,000 on the condition that private investors purchase land on the Ohio side of the border. To meet the challenge, entrepreneurs formed the Pymatuning Land Company and began buying property acre by acre.

The effort continued through the 1920s until, in 1931, Governor Gifford Pinchot, a famed forester, conservationist and champion of public lands, approved \$1.5 million to finally complete the dam.

Construction demanded three years and the labor of 7,000 men.

When the work ended, the Shenango River valley had been transformed. The dam created a lake 16 miles long with 70 miles of shoreline and more than 17,000 acres of water. Through innovation and hard work, they created one of the largest lakes in Pennsylvania.

Holding more than 64 billion gallons, the reservoir stretched across the border into Ohio, reaching depths of 35 feet.

Today, the water lies at the heart of Pymatuning State Park, a sprawling conservation landscape of 16,892 acres in Pennsylvania.

In the 21st century, anglers cast their lines where trappers formerly set steel traps. Boaters glide across water that was once farmland. Bald eagles and migrating waterfowl circle above the lake that rose from the old swamp.

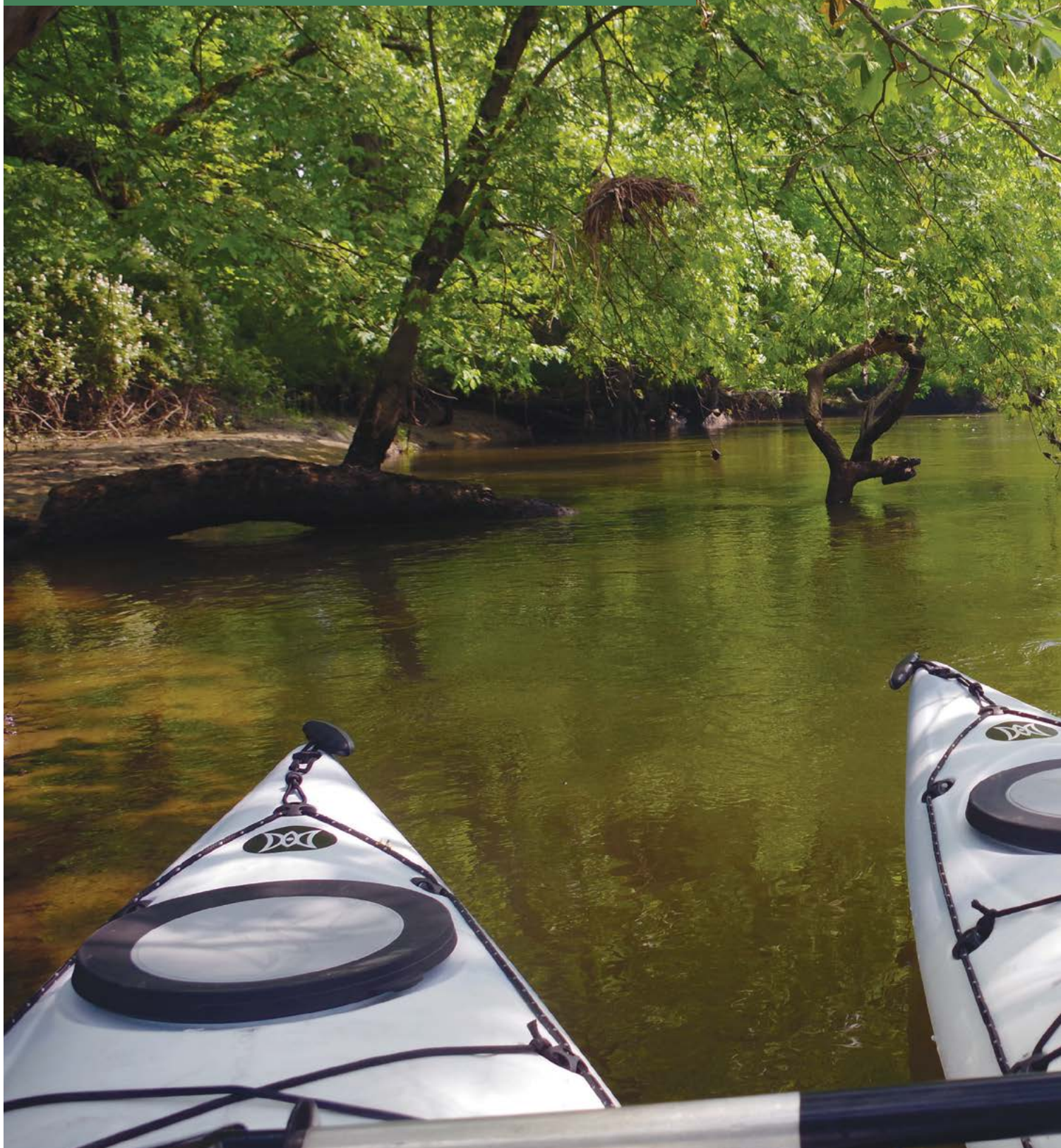
The Shenango River remains a place shaped by the meeting of nature and human ambition. It stands as a monument to history and conservation.

In a place where ducks walk on the backs of carp, the memory of a vanished wilderness still ripples across the water. □

*Brady J. Crytzer teaches history at Robert Morris University. The author of eight books, his work has been featured in The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal and USA Today. He lives and fishes outside of Pittsburgh.*

# Shenago River *Water Trail*

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*Despite increasing popularity of paddling the Shenango River, there are opportunities to get out on the water and enjoy quiet moments relaxing or watching wildlife.*

## **by Bob Frye**

*photos by the author*

**T**hough the Shenango River is a pretty tame river, a Class I water suitable for paddlers of all skill levels, its challenge is its incessant meandering.

The 23-mile Upper Shenango River Water Trail—and especially its first 10 to 15 miles—snake through the countryside.

“The way some of our paddlers describe the Shenango is to call it a ‘technical’ river,” said Brandi Baros, former president and current water trail manager for the Shenango River Watchers, which sponsors the river trail.

“It’s not like hopping on the Allegheny where you can get out in the middle of the channel, put your paddle in your lap, open up your cooler, have your lunch and just float. You’ve got to pay attention or you’re going to end up in a tree, on the bank or pointed the wrong way, because the river twists and bends.”

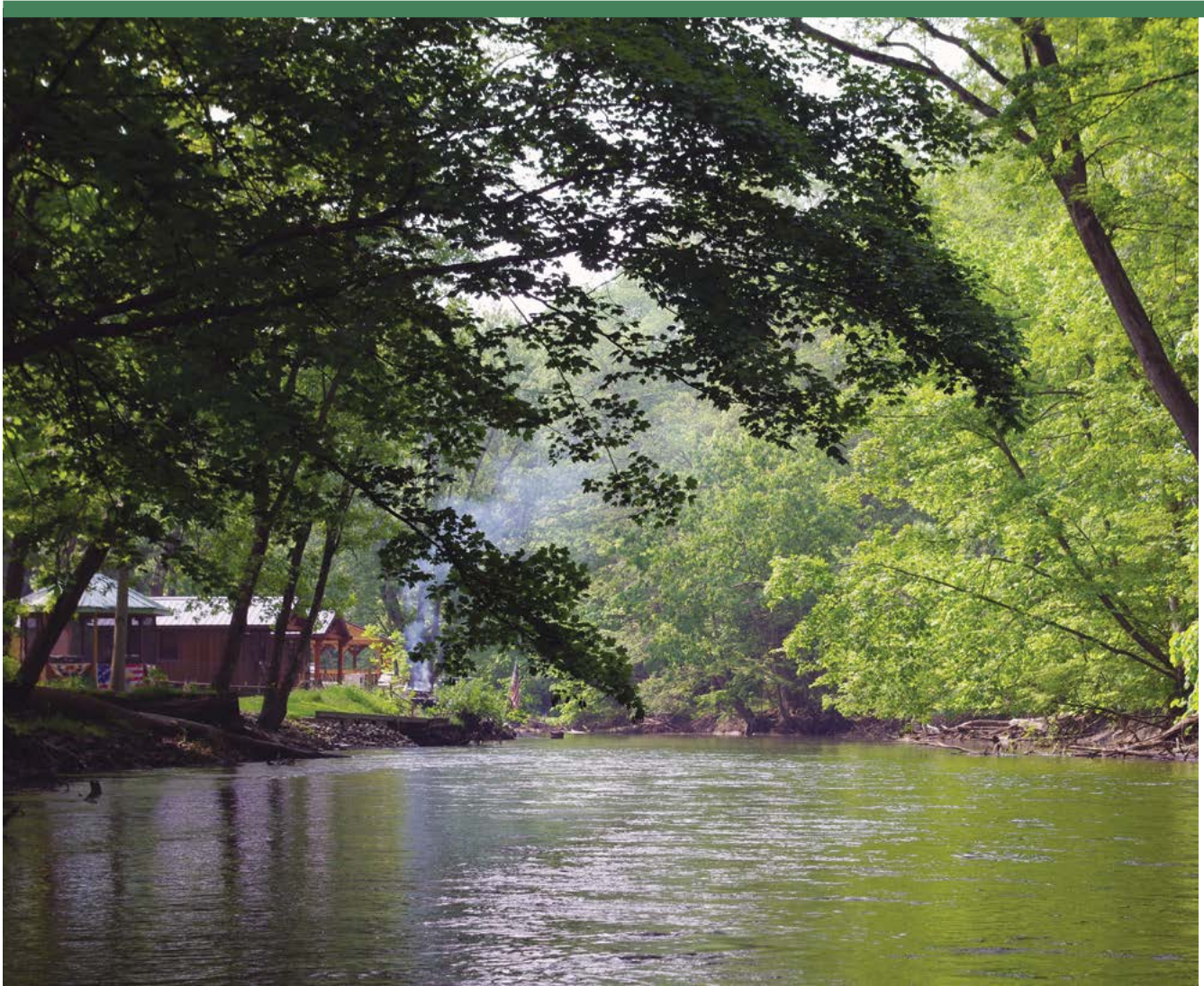
Its many rewards make negotiating the water trail worthwhile, though.

Running from the outflow of Pymatuning State Park, Jamestown, Crawford County, southeast to the backwaters of Shenango River Lake, Jefferson Township, Mercer County, the Shenango Valley holds plenty of wildlife. White-tailed deer, muskrats and beavers are common. Otters have been spotted near Pymatuning Reservoir. There’s lots of bird life, too, from green and great blue herons to ospreys and kingfishers.

This area is known for eagles. It’s one of the places these once rare birds first returned to Pennsylvania, and they’re still thriving. It’s not uncommon to spot three or four during an afternoon float.

“We are loaded with eagles,” said Baros. “They’re all over our watershed. It’s one of our real blessings.”

The river offers some good—and slightly mysterious—fishing, too.



*Though portions of the Shenango River Water Trail pass by homes and cottages, a trip on the river always feels quiet and peaceful.*

During the spring, the first mile or so down from Pymatuning Reservoir's outflow holds Channel Catfish, Muskellunge, Walleyes and even Flathead Catfish. As the weather warms, though, the fish move.

"Nobody really knows where they go after the springtime," said Davis Fray, a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission biologist, who helps manage the river and fishes it, as well. "It seems like they disappear. It could be they're going all way to Shenango River Lake."

"But, fishing pressure isn't all that high in the summer either, so it's kind of a mystery as to whether that's the case and what could be in the river year-round."

The stretch of the Shenango River from the New Hamburg Access, Mercer County, downstream to just upriver of Fredonia, Mercer County, gets stocked with Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout and golden Rainbow Trout in March and April. Another stocking of Rainbow Trout follows in October.

The river also sustains Smallmouth Bass.

"There's a pretty good number of them," said Fray. "The downstream half of the water trail, downstream of Greenville, is where you start getting into the rocky habitat that Smallmouth Bass really like."

"You're not going to catch a really big one, but there are some decent ones. A 15-incher would be a trophy. But, there's a good amount from 10- to 14-inches that are big enough to give you a nice fight."

There's also some history to see. From just south of Greenville to Fredonia, the water trail was once part of the Erie Extension Canal, which was used to move coal. It only operated from about 1844 to 1870—often at a loss—before being eclipsed by railroads that could carry more freight faster and cheaper. But, parts of it are visible in places.

The Shenango River Water Trail has a good network of close-to-the-water accesses. There are six launches between Pymatuning Reservoir and Fredonia. They vary from large with lots of parking



An old railroad bridge over the Shenango River, Mercer County.



Mile markers on the Shenango River Water Trail allow paddlers to track their progress.

and bathrooms to more rustic. “But, the Shenango River Watchers are always coordinating improvements, tackling the launch at Kidds Mill this year and New Hamburg next,” said Baros.

While there are some stretches of the river, usually in the water trail’s lower half, that can get shallow in summer, there’s never a bad time to be on it.

“Not a lot of people seem to know or take advantage of our fall trout stocking, but it’s nice to be out there then, in October,” said Fray. “It’s a really pretty place to fish.”

“Paddling on a warm day in the fall when the leaves are turning is phenomenal,” said Baros. “You’re missing a treat if you hang up your kayak on Labor Day.”

It’s no surprise that more people are using the river. That’s led to more people taking better care of it, too.

“I moved here for a job,” said Baros. “I didn’t expect to fall in love with a river. But, I got out on the Shenango, and I fell in love with it. It made me want to take care of it. And, part of our driving philosophy at the Shenango River Watchers is that—if we get you out in the watershed and out onto the river or the trails along the river, you’ll fall in love with it and want to take care of it, too.”

It’s indeed a wonderful place to paddle—twists, turns and all. ☐

## Paddle Fest:

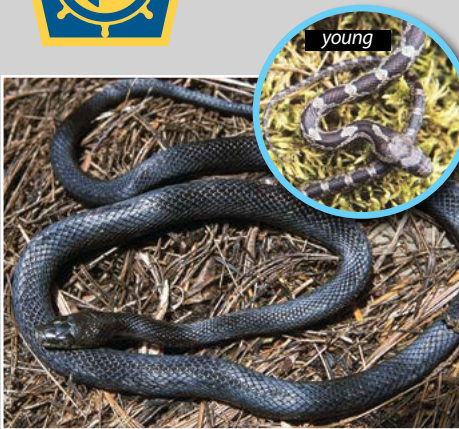
The Shenango River Watchers hold a Paddle Fest each year to celebrate the water trail, which benefits the organization.

This year’s Paddle Fest is on Sunday, June 28. Learn about future events, like the annual Lake to Lake Paddle Challenge, at [shenangoriverwatchers.org](http://shenangoriverwatchers.org).



The Shenango River Watchers annual Paddle Fest is a fun-filled day, popular with paddlers, that includes time on the river, as well as food, music and more.

## Nonvenomous Snakes



**Central Ratsnake**  
*Pantherophis alleghaniensis*



**Dekay's Brownsnake**  
*Storeria dekayi*



**Eastern Gartersnake**  
*Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*



**Eastern Hog-nosed Snake**  
*Heterodon platirhinos*



**Eastern Milksnake**  
*Lampropeltis triangulum*



**Eastern Ribbonsnake**  
*Thamnophis saurita*



**Eastern Smooth Earthsnake**  
*Virginia valeriae valeriae*



**Eastern Wormsnake**  
*Carphophis amoenus amoenus*



**Kirtland's Snake**  
*Clonophis kirtlandii*

photos-PPBCC archives

Candidate=Candidate Species    Endangered=Endangered Species    Special Concern=Species of Special Concern    Threatened=Threatened Species



**Mountain Earthsnake**  
*Virginia valeriae pulchra*



**Northern Black Racer**  
*Coluber constrictor constrictor*



**Northern Ring-necked Snake**  
*Diadophis punctatus edwardsii*



**Northern Rough Greensnake**  
*Opheodrys aestivus*



**Northern Watersnake**  
*Nerodia sipedon sipedon*



**Queensnake**  
*Regina septemvittata*



**Red-bellied Snake**  
*Storeria occipitomaculata*



**Short-headed Gartersnake**  
*Thamnophis brachystoma*



**Smooth Greensnake**  
*Opheodrys vernalis*

## Venomous Snakes



**Eastern Copperhead**  
*Agkistrodon contortrix*



**Eastern Massasauga**  
*Sistrurus catenatus*



**Timber Rattlesnake**  
*Crotalus horridus*



**SPECIAL CONCERN**

**Timber Rattlesnake**  
*Crotalus horridus*



# Sharing the Woods Safely— Rattlesnakes in Pennsylvania

by *Linda Stager*    photos by the author

**F**or many, the warmer months mean spending time outdoors—fishing at a favorite creek, hiking a wooded trail or riding a bike on one of Pennsylvania’s many rail trails. Along with wildflowers and vistas, our forests are also home to rattlesnakes.

The idea of encountering a rattlesnake is polarizing. Some folks are excited to catch a rare glimpse

of a fascinating reptile, and they approach the opportunity with curiosity. Others are frightened.

Knowing how to coexist with rattlesnakes, though, can make your time outdoors safer and far more enjoyable.

Pennsylvania has two native venomous rattlesnakes—the Timber Rattlesnake and the Eastern Massasauga. Both species are shy, protected and would much rather avoid you than confront you. Bites are rare and almost always the result of surprise, close contact or someone attempting to handle or harass a snake.



*A yellow phase Timber Rattlesnake hides in the rocks.*

*Along the Pine Creek Rail Trail, rattlesnakes bask under rocks.*

## Where Rattlesnakes are Encountered

Rattlesnakes favor rocky, sunny areas where they can warm themselves—south-facing slopes, rock ledges, talus fields and old stone walls. You may also see them near fallen logs or along less-traveled trails. Anglers sometimes encounter them near streams bordered by rocks. Hikers and cyclists may spot them crossing a trail to reach sunlit ground.

Rattlesnakes are most active from late spring through early fall, especially on warm days and during cooler mornings and evenings when they're basking.

## What to Look For

Rattlesnakes are well camouflaged. Watch for a thick-bodied snake with a patterned back that blends into leaves and stone. You may hear the rattle but not always. A snake may remain silent if it feels it hasn't been detected, so don't rely on sound alone.

Rattlesnakes come in two colors—yellow phase and black phase.

The key is awareness. Watch where you place your feet and hands, especially when stepping over logs, rocks or along narrow paths.

## What to Do

If you see a rattlesnake, stop and stay calm. Give the snake plenty of space—at least several yards. Most snakes will move away on their own once they sense you're nearby. If the snake is on your path, wait patiently or backtrack and go around at a safe distance.

Never try to move, poke or photograph a snake up close. That's when injuries happen.

## How Not to Be Afraid

Fear often comes from the unknown. Understanding rattlesnakes replaces fear with respect. These snakes play an important role in the ecosystem, helping control rodent populations and in turn controlling ticks.

Being safe in the woods isn't about being anxious; it's about being informed.

With awareness and common sense, Pennsylvania's forests remain what they've always been—a place of adventure, beauty and quiet confidence for everyone who ventures out. ☐

## Simple Habits that Reduce Bite Risk

- Wear sturdy footwear when hiking. For better protection, wear rattlesnake gaiters.
- Stay on established trails.
- Avoid stepping or sitting on rocks.
- Slow down in rocky or shaded areas when biking.
- Keep pets leashed and children close.

If a bite does occur, immediately seek medical care. Don't attempt folk remedies. Stay as still and calm as possible and get help.



# Bruisers in Bloom

by Braden Eisenhower

photos by the author



Bright colors stand out in dirty water and help Muskellunge locate lures.

This released Muskellunge is inches below the surface, yet it almost disappears in algal bloom.

Despite Pennsylvania's year-round Muskellunge season, diehard anglers pause during the hottest weeks of the summer, when water temperatures surpass 80-degrees F, knowing that any Muskellunge hooked in these conditions has a heightened risk of mortality, even when handled with best practices.

When safe conditions permit and spirits are high, Mother Nature hurls another obstacle our way—an algal bloom that turns the lake green.

Algal blooms can occur anytime during the summer when sunlight and stagnant water spawn the ideal environment for algae production in nutrient-dense water.

Although there may be harmful scenarios, the bloom I encounter in late August is a brief period (lasting only a week or so) in the normal cycle of an aquatic ecosystem. Generally, blooms of this nature are not harmful to fish or people.

I don't change anything about my fishing. I proceed with the typical fishing patterns conducive to late summer success without letting the stained water get to me.

Algal blooms are a mental hurdle easy to overcome. Sure, there are minute challenges like poor water clarity or debris on the surface. But, I haven't experienced any obvious negative effect in fish activity during other phenomena like cold fronts or the fall turnover period in late October or early November.

Anecdotally, I think casting shallow water is the safest practice in sub-80-degree F water. I classify shallow water as depths below 15 feet. By my estimation, Muskellunge inhabiting this zone are acclimated to warm water whereas open water Muskellunge occupy environments where oxygen and temperature may be vastly different.

While trolling is effective, pulling a Muskellunge from deep water may subject it to thermal shock or, although less likely, barometric shock. Plus, the fight is prolonged. A

Muskellunge caught casting in shallow water is corralled by a large net in mere seconds. Once netted, the Muskellunge remains in the water during the release process.

Nearly all lure styles are productive for shallow water casting. The "lure du jour" is based on fish activity across the spectrum with jerkbaits and plastic lures appealing to lethargic Muskellunge and topwater and bucktail lures capitalizing on aggressive feeders.

Muskellunge are efficient feeders. Still, I want to make it easy for them to locate, stalk and take my lure. Lure selection during a bloom prioritizes sound, vibration and profile.

The vibration from the blades of a bucktail lure, for example, will play to the lateral line of the Muskellunge. Bucktail lures also lend themselves to a straight retrieve that is easy for a Muskellunge to follow.

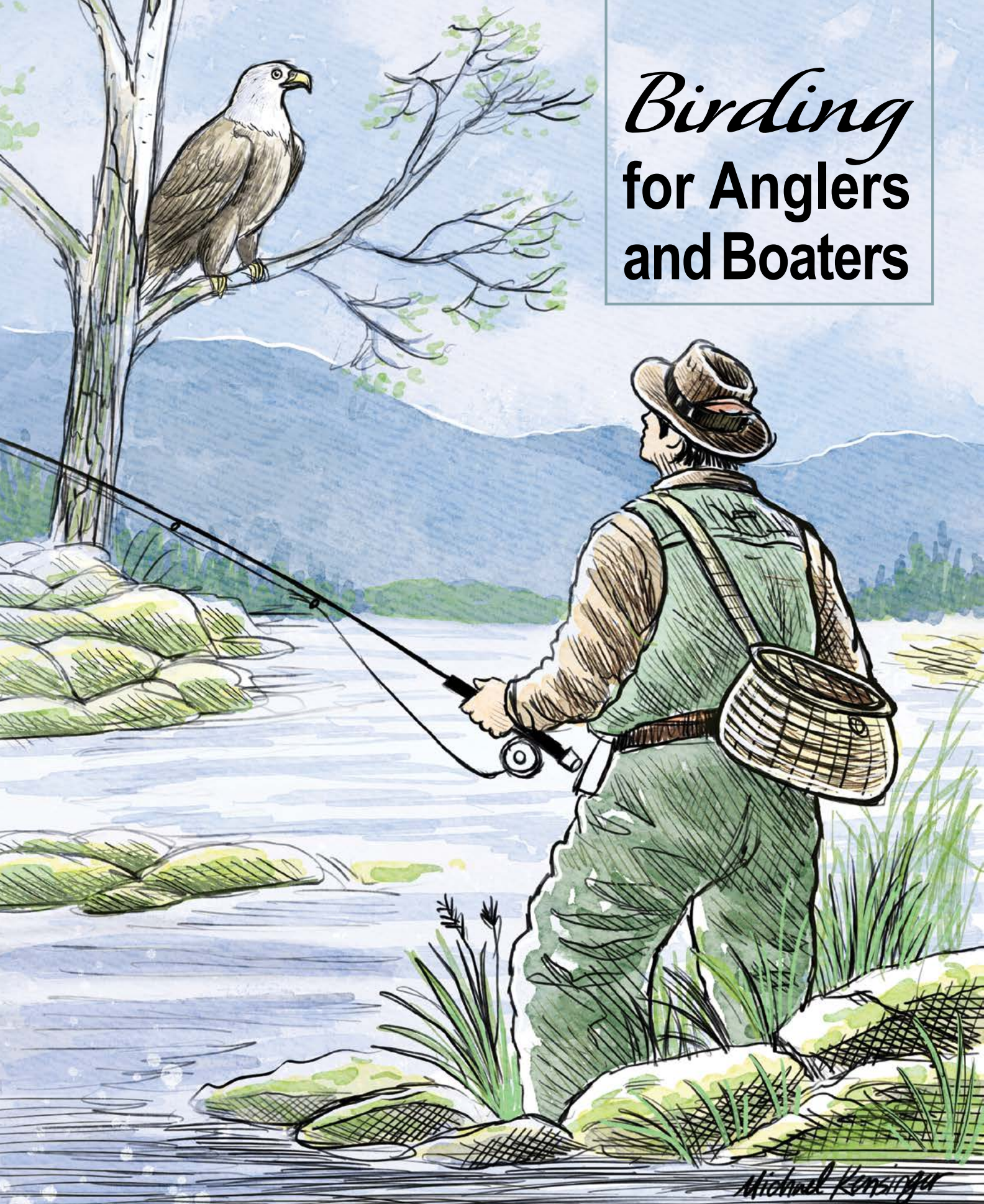
Twitch-pause retrieves from jerkbaits and soft plastics work best for neutral to uninterested Muskellunge. However, movement is the primary trigger, and an algae bloom may compromise a Muskellunge's vision and feeding ability. I upsize lures and avoid erratic cadences, so Muskellunge can better hone in on the bait.

Natural lure colors work during a bloom. Experiment with vibrant colors like chartreuse, fluorescent orange or solid white. Black is also productive for its silhouetting effect.

Fishing during a bloom is akin to driving in fog. Operate with a heightened sense of awareness, slow down and make deliberate movements. In particular, the figure-eight maneuver at boatside must be precise. Remain alert for following fish that creep in undetected. Above all, don't let a bloom throw you off your game. ☐



# *Birding* for Anglers and Boaters



*Michael Kensing*



*The opportunity to see snow geese at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area draws birders out of bed early on winter days. But, anglers and boaters can watch for birds and report what they see all year, collecting valuable data on species abundance and distribution in the process.*

**Y**ou could start a pretty fair-sized country using just birdwatchers from the United States.

According to the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), about 96 million Americans—one of every three people 16 years old and older—engages in birding. Pick them up and unite them under one flag and they’d qualify as the 17th largest nation out of about 200 on the planet.

They’re as avid as they are numerous, too. America’s birders annually devote about 7.5 billion days and \$107 billion to pursuing all things feathered, based on the USFWS’s most recent figures.

No wonder they’re a powerful force for “citizen science” bird research.

Right now, for example, the Pennsylvania Game Commission is conducting its 3rd Pennsylvania Bird Atlas ([pa.gov/agencies/pgc/wildlife/wildlife-viewing/birding/pa-bird-atlas](http://pa.gov/agencies/pgc/wildlife/wildlife-viewing/birding/pa-bird-atlas)). It aims to document the distribution and abundance of birds across Pennsylvania, with an eye toward identifying any long-term status changes. The survey, which continues through 2029, is “critical to the establishment of conservation priorities” for Keystone State birds.

Volunteer birders by the thousands are helping fuel that work. They sign up, creating a free eBird account at [ebird.org/atlaspa/home](http://ebird.org/atlaspa/home), and report their observations.

Still, all such efforts—this one included—are susceptible to gaps.

As stated by the USFWS, 95% of birders do most of their watching around home. That often generates lots of survey data from cities and suburbs—human population centers—and less from more remote or inaccessible areas.

That’s where anglers and boaters can help.

One priority for the atlas is collecting data on 60 “rare, secretive or high conservation priority species.” Those include multiple birds living near water—great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, yellow-crowned night herons, American black ducks, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, bald eagles and ospreys, among others.

Another priority is getting bird data from the interior of large tracts of public land. Anglers seeking stocked or wild trout in cold, tree-shaded, rocky streams may also spot American goshawks or cerulean warblers.

Everyone who adventures outside can help monitor Pennsylvania birds. So, whenever you’re on the water or fishing, get involved and share news of the birds you encounter.

It’s important work and fun, too. Ninety-six million Americans can’t be wrong. ☐



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# Favorite Largemouth Bass Waters of Northwestern Pennsylvania

*by Marilyn Black*

**T**he heat is on. Let's catch Largemouth Bass. Northwestern Pennsylvania offers several excellent destination lakes. Whether you prefer fishing from shore, paddlecraft or motorboat, you'll find some lakes that suit your style among my favorite Largemouth Bass waters in Northwest Pennsylvania.

## **Lake Wilhelm**

Lake Wilhelm, within Maurice K. Goddard State Park, Sandy Lake, Mercer County, never feels crowded. The 1,680-acre reservoir constructed in 1971 stretches for 6 miles through Sandy Creek. The 20-horsepower limit on boat motors supports pontoon boats and modest fishing craft, which access the water at the public marina and seven other launch ramps. Propelled by either electric motor or paddles, you may also



photos: Dan Black

explore the 240 acres, limited to electric motor, within Pennsylvania Gamelands #270 between I-79 and Milledgeville Road.

Trophy-sized Largemouth Bass at Lake Wilhelm have shifted their hunting grounds compared to a couple decades ago, when big bass inhabited deep structure. Summer and early autumn bass now relate primarily to weeds. Healthy bass tend to be caught during these hot months by anglers casting swim jigs, chatterbaits and hollow body frogs.

## **Pymatuning Reservoir**

At Pymatuning Reservoir, along the Ohio-PA state line, bass may be legally harvested year-round with a five bass daily creel and a minimum size of 12-inches long. You may think that such liberal regulations (and frequent bass tournaments, especially on spring weekends) would result in depressed bass populations, but that's not the case according to biological studies and most angler experiences. This 17,088-acre reservoir with its ample launch ramps and lots of public shoreline access offers varied habitats

*The author caught this bass while fishing from shore.*

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including vegetated bays, rock bottoms, submersed wood cover and an abundance of shoreline deadfalls. Recommended lures in July and August are buzzbaits, chatterbaits, small crankbaits, grubs and Ned Rigs.

## **Conneaut Lake and Presque Isle Bay**

Summer and early fall weekends are always bustling on Conneaut Lake, Meadville, Crawford County, and Presque Isle Bay, Erie, Erie County. So, plan weekday trips to both of these large unlimited horsepower waters during this time of the year. Come prepared to share your fishing arena with not only fellow anglers but also with people enjoying water sports. Largemouth Bass don't seem to mind. Topwater lures are exceptionally effective in capturing their attention and triggering hits. Also, good lure choices during the 'dog days of August' include suspending jerkbaits, lipless rattle baits, swimbaits, spinnerbaits, drop shot worms, Ned Rigs and frog lures.



*Northwestern Pennsylvania offers several excellent destination lakes for Largemouth Bass fishing.*

## Shenango River Lake

Near Hermitage, Mercer County, Shenango River Lake's fishery is classified in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Big Bass Program, meaning the daily harvest of Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass and Spotted Bass may not exceed four bass, each measuring at least 15 inches long. This fantastic 3,560-acre submerged-structure lake has virtually no aquatic vegetation. The combination of rocky points, roadbeds, rock piles, submerged stumps, ledges, channel drops and deadfalls on the shoreline make it a great location for throwing crankbaits. Also, productive for Largemouth Bass are swim jigs, swimbaits and spinnerbaits.

## Tamarack Lake

Tamarack Lake, Meadville, Crawford County, is newly classified in the Big Bass Program, after being rewatered by the PFBC after many years of dry bed awaiting repairs to both its dams. This extremely shallow 562-acre lake's stained water hides lots of submerged stumps and produces abundant aquatic vegetation. There is ample shoreline access, although fishing from an electric-powered boat or paddlecraft significantly expands your fishing options. Suggested lures geared for Largemouth Bass at Tamarack Lake include hollow body topwater frogs, chatterbaits retrieved slightly below the water surface and jig and craw flipped into openings among the weeds.

If your fishing family needs a break to stretch their legs, perhaps they'd like to try some stone skipping. ☐

## The Zen of Stone Skipping

Stone skipping is simply a person throwing a rock into water, while attempting to have it bounce on the surface before sinking. After all, hand-held rocks are free and plentiful. No equipment or special attire is needed, and there are many sites for this sport, which has been practiced for centuries.

For tips on optimizing the number of skips achieved, let's turn to the current Guinness World Record-holder for stone skipping, Kurt "Mountain Man" Steiner, Emporium, Cameron County.

- Select palm-size 3- to 8-ounce smooth pancake-shaped rocks about ¼-inch thick, preferably ones with a natural notch, so you can more easily initiate the desired spinning motion.
- Become a master of the physics of the pitch and cast by practicing, videotaping the cast, adjusting your throw speed and fine tuning the angle compared to the water's surface. Then, repeat until you can control a rock's trajectory while its kinetic energy dissipates with each rebound.
- Select optimal sites. Cast into flat (not waves or rapidly flowing) water and keep the wind at your back.
- The zen comes as you clear your mind and just be in the moment.

To view a slow-motion video of Steiner's September 6, 2013 World Record 88-consecutive-skip cast at Red Bridge on the Kinzua Arm of the Allegheny Reservoir near Kane, McKean County, visit [franklinpa.gov/Events/Rock in River/World Record Video](http://franklinpa.gov/Events/Rock%20in%20River/World%20Record%20Video).

To observe, meet and cheer for Steiner and other professional stone skippers competing in the Pennsylvania Stone Skipping Championship, held the third Saturday of every August, visit Riverfront Park in Franklin at the mouth of French Creek as it enters the Allegheny River. The 2026 date for this free event during the Rock in River Festival is Saturday, August 15. Categories are Youth, Amateur and Professional.



*Guinness World Record-holder for stone skipping, Kurt "Mountain Man" Steiner, demonstrates stone skipping.*

Photos-Dart Black



# 250 AMERICA PA Snapshot



photo-Linda Stager

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## What the Delaware River looked like to William Penn in 1683:

*“For the province, the general conditions of it, take as follows:...the air is sweet and the heavens serene, like the south parts of France, rarely overcast...the waters are generally good, for the rivers and brooks have mostly gravel and stony bottoms. Of fish there is the sturgeon, herring, rock, shad, catshead, sheephead, eels, smelt, perch, roach and inland rivers trout, some say salmon, above the falls (on the Delaware near Morrisville). Of shellfish, we have oysters, crabs, cockles and conches and mussels...”*

*courtesy of Doug Miller, site administrator, Pennsbury Manor*

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# Don't Let a Good Thing Go to Waste

photo-PFBC archives

*by Mike Parker*  
*Communications Director*  
*Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission*

**F**or catch and release anglers, the joy of simply catching a fish and then watching it swim away to be possibly caught again is all the motivation needed to wake up early and spend time on a favorite waterway.

That's a wonderful way to fish. But, then there's the rest of us—the meat seekers who also enjoy the pursuit and thrill of the catch but who are additionally motivated by the desire to extend our fishing adventures all the way home to a hot frying pan.

On Lake Erie, Erie County, which is home to approximately 50% of all the fish in the entire Great Lakes and known as the “Walleye Capital of the World,” many successful anglers are taking home fish at the end of the day. At the recommendation of those anglers, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) has partnered with other organizations to fund and construct three state-of-the-art fish cleaning stations on Lake Erie including at the PFBC's Walnut Creek Marina, the formerly PFBC-owned North East Marina and Lampe Marina in Erie.

At all locations, which are open seasonally to the public from May through October, anglers can utilize sinks, cutting boards and electricity, as

needed, to process fish into filets and then deposit the unwanted guts and remaining carcasses into a refrigerated depository. At Walnut Creek Marina, the PFBC partners with a vendor who visits the fish cleaning station up to several times per week to collect large bins of fish scraps and recycle the contents for agricultural use as fertilizer.

The popularity of these fish cleaning stations has been undeniable on the shores of Lake Erie, and now, the efforts are being lauded throughout the entire Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada.

In March, the PFBC partnered with the Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors & Premiers (GSGP) to sign the 100% Great Lakes Fish Pledge for Walnut Creek Marina.

“Walnut Creek is the 45th pledge signatory and the very first sportfish cleaning station to join the initiative. We hope to have many more,” said John Schmidt, GSGP Program Manager.

By signing the 100% Great Lakes Fish Pledge, the PFBC joins other entities in the United States and Canada to promote the full use of each fish caught, raised or processed in or from the Great Lakes region. This includes helping raise awareness of opportunities for innovative applications for fish byproducts including compost, fertilizer, protein, marine collagen, leather and other high value products.

“Pennsylvania anglers care deeply about our fisheries, and this commitment reflects that ethic,” said Tim Schaeffer, PFBC Executive Director.



*Products manufactured from fish waste include healthy pet treats, fish skin leather, energy drinks, garden fertilizers and packing peanuts.*

“Through our participation in this program, we are setting a clear expectation that fish byproduct should be handled responsibly and, wherever possible, put to productive use.”

According to GSGP, when only the meaty filets are kept by anglers, about 60% of the remaining fish is disposed of completely and ends up in landfills or is relegated to other inexpensive uses. The 100% Great Lakes Fish initiative seeks new and innovative ways to fully use each fish to reduce waste, create more value, generate jobs and support rural economic development.

In Iceland, where this approach to fish waste was pioneered, GSGP reports that the value of a single cod skyrocketed from the typical \$12 value per filet to, in some cases, as much as \$5,000 per fish when the full carcass was used to produce products including cosmetics, medical bandages and nutritional supplements.

“If we were to fully implement this 100% fish idea here in the region, we could see upwards of

\$20-million-plus dollars of additional value,” said Schmidt. “That’s less waste and fewer nutrients that end up in our lakes, going through our water treatment facilities and ending up in landfills. It also means fewer emissions from the decomposition of this material that could reduce millions of pounds of carbon dioxide and methane. There are real-world reasons why this is not a pie-in-the-sky idea.”

Schaeffer’s signature on the pledge on behalf of Walnut Creek Marina is significant as GSGP shifts its program focus from commercial fishing operations within the Great Lakes to recreational sportfishing.

To date, entities responsible for 90% of the commercial catch have already committed to the effort, but the recreational catch is equally large, representing a chance to double the potential economic impact including job creation throughout the region.

Beyond signing the pledge, the PFBC will continue to partner with GSGP to implement a pilot program using the Walnut Creek Marina fish cleaning station as a model for other similar facilities to maximize the use of discarded fish parts.

“We’re hopeful to see, in the future, some cool products beyond the fertilizer that’s being created today,” said David Naftzger, GSGP Executive Director. “What many of us have seen as a problem we have to deal with, when it comes to disposing of this fish waste, has now become a huge opportunity. What we used to throw away has the potential to be transformed into products that are higher on the value chain, and this partnership is really the beginning of something very big.” □



*(Left to right) Tim Schaeffer, PFBC Executive Director, and David Naftzger, GSGP Executive Director, display the signed 100% Great Lakes Fish Pledge at Walnut Creek Marina, Erie County.*



hopeful the bass and catfish would still cooperate. I gave him a quick tutorial on spincasting, and he was instantly making accurate casts toward the shore. In less than 12 casts, his line jumped. I instructed him to set the hook. After a few sweeping runs and some great acrobatics from the fish, I had the first Smallmouth Bass of the evening in the net. More and bigger fish would follow, and I could see his fishing confidence grow.

After the sun went down, I rigged up several heavy rods with chunks of fresh Fallfish for bait and placed them in the boat's rod holders. As we enjoyed the

## Take a Coworker Fishing

by Jeff Woleslagle photo by the author

When I learned that a coworker hadn't fished for many years, I invited him to go bass fishing. The forecast was calling for intermittent rain, but he insisted we still give it a try. After sharing a quick dinner, we stopped at a local sporting goods store to get his fishing license.

When we launched the boat, a light drizzle had begun. The water was slightly stained, but I was

unusually warm weather, we reminisced about the bass bite. It wasn't long until one of the rods began to bend. Soon, my coworker was asking how to handle the mysterious giant that was steadily peeling line from the reel. He did a great job not pressuring the fish. When the big Channel Catfish finally came to the net, my coworker was all smiles. About 20 minutes later, we were treated to a repeat performance with an even bigger one.

Fishing is a low-pressure and often relaxing activity. It fosters stronger relationships, trust, rapport, teamwork and collaboration as well as creating great memories.

When our evening of fishing came to a close, we were already planning our next trip. As we were putting the gear away, my coworker said, "Thanks so much for the invite. I forgot how fun this can be." ☑

# ROCK & LOG

## WILDLIFE WONDERS!

Reptiles (snakes, turtles, lizards and skinks) and amphibians (frogs, toads and salamanders) are active in warm weather. We hope you're lucky enough to see some of these amazing animals on your outdoor adventures.

Amphibians have skin that is permeable and must stay moist. Don't pick up amphibians if you have sunscreen, bug spray, lotion or other residue on your hands.

Help scientists better understand reptile and amphibian populations in Pennsylvania by reporting your sightings to the Pennsylvania Amphibian & Reptile Survey (PARS). When people submit their sightings, it helps scientists better understand the animal's status and location.



PARS:



## Turtle Crossings

Turtles may be seen crossing roads in the spring and summer. Remember, safety first when helping a turtle cross to the other side. Don't endanger yourself.

- Never hold a turtle by its tail, because it can injure the turtle.
- Use extra caution when encountering a Snapping Turtle. The Snapping Turtle has a strong bite and far reach. Gently move it along with a branch or broom.
- Return a turtle to the side of the road in the direction it was heading.

## Snake Encounters

- Snakes normally try to flee when a person approaches.
- Snakes are usually only aggressive when they feel threatened.
- Most snakes in Pennsylvania are non-venomous. However, it's best not to pick them up.
- Snakes are an important part of nature and shouldn't be harmed.



EXPLORE PA WATERS



Rock & Log:

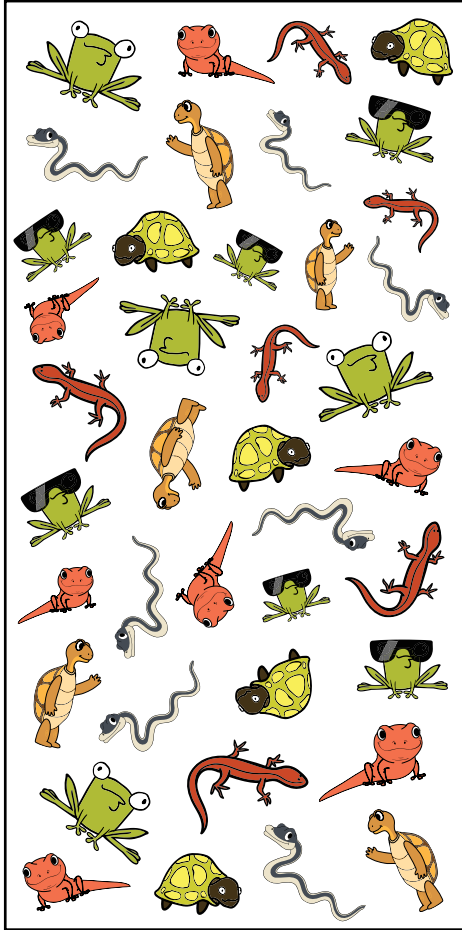


FishandBoat.com

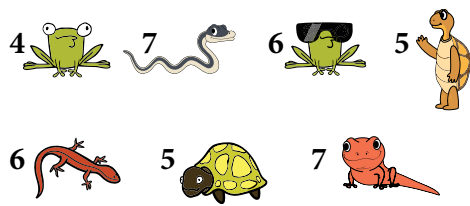


# I SPY Amphibians and Reptiles

Find the reptiles and amphibians using the key.



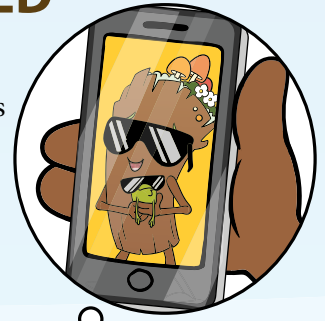
## The Key:



## KEEP THEM WILD

Wild animals don't make good pets. It's difficult to provide the food and habitat that wild animals need. Taking just one reptile or amphibian can be harmful to the local population. When you see a cool critter, take time to observe and appreciate it.

- Watch the animal at a comfortable distance.
- Take photos.
- Make sketches and notes about its appearance and behavior.
- Keep a nature journal.



## KNOW THE LAW

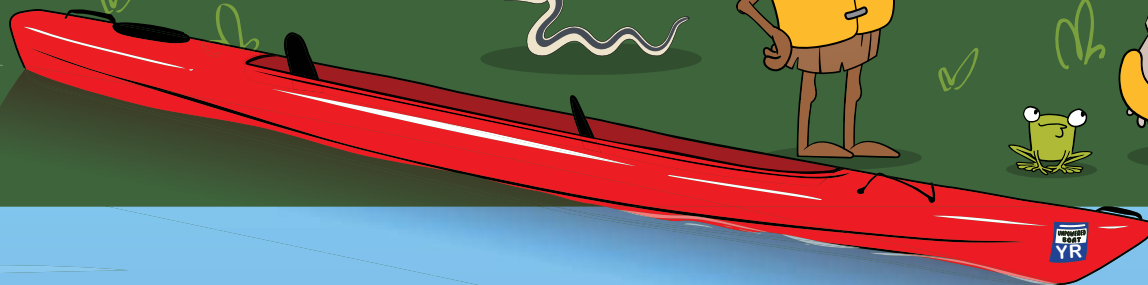
It's illegal to take or keep most species of reptiles and amphibians. Check the current *Pennsylvania Fishing Summary* for regulations.



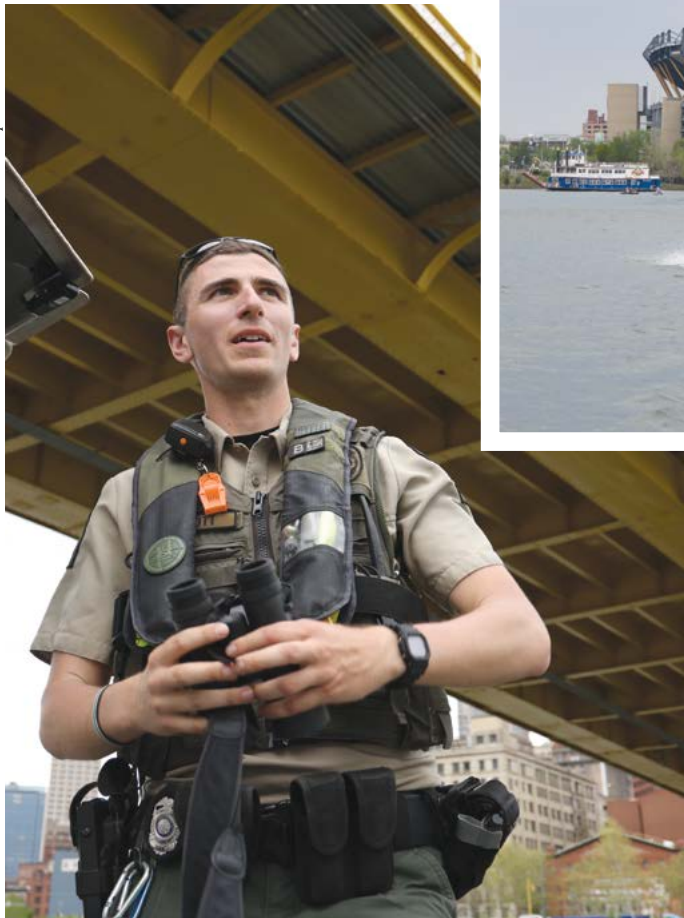
### Discover More:



### Regulations:



photos-PFBC archives



*In April, the NFL Draft was hosted by the City of Pittsburgh. Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs) from our Southwest Region assisted the United States Coast Guard, Pennsylvania State Police and Pittsburgh River Rescue with enforcing an exclusion zone outside Acrisure Stadium on the Three Rivers. The draft was held from April 23-25, but WCOs began around the clock patrols on April 21 and ended on April 26 to help ensure safety on the water for the event.*

## The One That Didn't Get Away

Sixteen years ago, Steve Isaacs, artist and bass angler, was looking for something to capture in his next painting. When he happened upon a fly angler along the Yellow Breeches, Cumberland County, he knew he found his subject.

His completed work, "Fly Fish'n," became a fixture on the wall in his home. Recently, when he and his wife downsized, the painting needed a new home.

He landed on the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and Tim Schaeffer, Executive Director.

"As soon as I saw Tim, I thought there's a man who would appreciate this painting," said Isaacs. ☐



photo-PFBC archives

*"Fly Fish'n" is now mounted on the lobby wall at PFBC Headquarters, Harrisburg, Dauphin County. Pictured (left to right) are PFBC Executive Director Timothy D. Schaeffer and Steve Isaacs.*

# All Star Summer Days



Celebrate two American traditions this summer with a trip to Philadelphia for Major League Baseball's All-Star Week and go fishing along the Schuylkill River. After the excitement of the games and the roar of the crowd, explore the Schuylkill River Trail for easy access to shoreline fishing spots including Walnut Street Bridge and Grays Ferry. Fish the bottom with heavy weights, and you may catch Channel Catfish, Common Carp, Flathead Catfish, Striped Bass, Yellow Perch, sunfish and even an occasional Spot as this section of the river is impacted by the tides. ☑

*photo-courtesy of Philadelphia Water Department*

*Schuylkill Banks, Schuylkill River Trail, Philadelphia*

## NATURAL CONNECTIONS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN JULY AND AUGUST THROUGHOUT PENNSYLVANIA.

*photos-PFBC archives*



**GOLDEN CHANTERELLE**  
*Cantharellus cibarius*  
Mushrooms begin fruiting in July.



**GREAT SPANGLED FRITILLARY**  
*Speyeria cybele*  
Butterflies emerge as adults in July and can be seen feeding near waterways.

# JULY/AUGUST Highlights

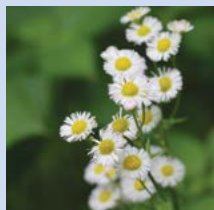


NW  
PA!

## CELEBRATE THE BLOOM

Stop by Jennings Environmental Education Center, Slippery Rock, Butler County, on July 25, 2026, to celebrate the bloom of native wildflowers, go on guided hikes and check out local artisans.

### Celebrate:



Fleabane

SW  
PA!

## AMERICA'S COUNTY 25/250

On August 5-8, 2026, Somerset County's 25/250 Celebration will honor the heroes of September 11, 2001 and America's 250th birthday. Enjoy performances from local groups and military bands, a Procession to Flight 93 and a parade, drone show and fireworks. The Quemahoning Reservoir is one of many opportunities for fishing and boating fun. Find out more at [americasco25-250.org](http://americasco25-250.org).



Tower of Voices

NC  
PA!

## FISHING, MUSIC, ART AND MORE

This July and August, venture to Centre County for fishing at Spring Creek for wild Brown Trout or Bald Eagle State Park for bass and panfish. Experience music and art at the Central Pennsylvania Festival of the Arts (July 9-12, 2026) in Downtown State College. Visit [arts-festival.com](http://arts-festival.com). Fishing, food and fun continue through August with the Grange Fair on August 21-29, 2026. Discover more at [grangefair.com](http://grangefair.com).



Bluegill

SC  
PA!

## FIREWORKS AND FISHING

Spend the day celebrating 250 years of independence this July 4 in Adams County. Explore the banks of the Conewago Creek chasing Smallmouth Bass in the morning. Then, travel a few miles south to Gettysburg for historical programs, family activities, vendors, food and live music. End the experience with an evening fireworks display. For more on Gettysburg events, visit [destinationgettysburg.com/event/a-gettysburg-4th](http://destinationgettysburg.com/event/a-gettysburg-4th).



NE  
PA!

## BENTON RODEO AND COOL WATER

The Benton Rodeo returns to Columbia County on July 14-19, 2026, bringing a full week of rodeo action, food and family events. Along with bull riding and barrel racing, nearby Fishing Creek and its tributaries offer cool water and hot fishing. Early mornings and late evenings provide excellent opportunities for Smallmouth Bass and trout.



Fishing Creek trout

SE  
PA!

## CELEBRATE IN NEW HOPE

Spend the Fourth of July weekend in New Hope, Bucks County, for a drone show, fireworks, live music and a parade—all happening between July 3-5, 2026. Watch a dragon boat race on the river with actors portraying patriots. This section of the Delaware River is a great place to fish for Smallmouth Bass and Walleyes.

### Learn More:





## Register for Our Upcoming Events!






**RED-SPOTTED NEWTS (EFTS)**  
*Notophthalmus viridescens viridescens*  
Red Efts emerge from ponds and vernal pools to live in the woods throughout August.



**RED-SHOULDERED HAWKS**  
*Buteo lineatus*  
Begin their migration south in late August.



**MONARCH BUTTERFLIES**  
*Danaus plexippus*  
Migrate up to 3,000 miles south through Pennsylvania on their way to Mexico in late August.

# Catfish Programs and Events

*Highlighted programs and events only. There's more!*

*All programs and events require registration.*

Event	Date	Time	Location
Catfish Fishing Meet-Up	July 15	7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.	Montgomery Ferry Boat Access, Perry County
Catfish Fishing Meet-Up	July 24	7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.	Evergreen Park, Allegheny County
Catfish Fishing**	August 6	5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	Caroline Lake, Bucks County
Catfish Fishing**	August 8	9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Caroline Lake, Bucks County
Catfish Fishing Meet-Up**	August 13	5:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.	Eston Wilson Lake/Hillside Park, Lackawanna County
Catfish Fishing**	August 15	10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.	Eston Wilson Lake/Hillside Park, Lackawanna County
Catfish Fishing**	August 16	10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.	Eston Wilson Lake/Hillside Park, Lackawanna County
Catfish Fishing Meet-Up	August 19	6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.	Burrell Lake Park, Westmoreland County
Philly Fun Fishing Fest	September 12	7:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Schuylkill Banks, Walnut Street Dock, Philadelphia County

**\*\*These programs will occur after a PFBC stocking of catfish to the waterway.**



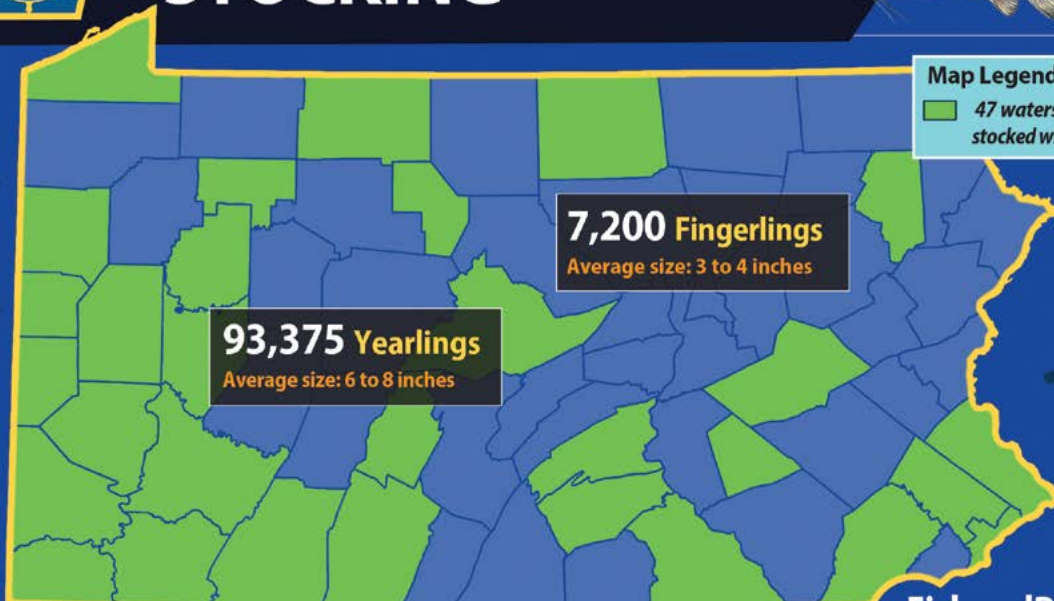
**Register for Programs and Events:**



**FishandBoat.com**



## 2026 CHANNEL CATFISH STOCKING



**Map Legend**  
■ 47 waters in 30 counties stocked with Channel Catfish

FishandBoat.com



➔ *Lee Jones, age 11, caught this 5-pound Largemouth Bass while fishing on a private pond.*

## Explore PA Waters

Share photos of your fishing and boating adventures. Remember to wear a properly fitting life jacket if you're on the water. And, make sure it's fully zippered and buckled.

### Share Your Adventure:



# PENNSYLVANIA AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

## NORTH AMERICAN GREEN FROG

*Lithobates clamitans*

The Green Frog is found throughout Pennsylvania and prefers the shallow water of brooks, streams, ponds and swamps. A medium-sized frog, adults average from 2¼- to 3½-inches long. The Green Frog is green or greenish brown to tan. It has dark brown or gray spots with a green head and upper lip. The Green Frog's solitary call can be heard throughout the spring and summer and resembles the twang of a banjo string.



## NORTHERN WATERSNAKE

*Nerodia sipedon sipedon*

Often seen by recreationists along the waters, the nonvenomous Northern Watersnake is active during the day and night. As adults, Northern Watersnakes range in size from 24- to 50-inches long. Usually, the Northern Watersnake is reddish brown or gray to brownish black with dark crossbands alternating on the front part of the body changing to alternating square blotches toward the rear and a well-defined head from the neck.



## COMMON FIVE-LINED SKINK

*Plestiodon fasciatus*

The Five-lined Skink is a smooth, shiny lizard most comfortable in a temperature range of 78- to 85-degrees F, preferring humid woodlands. Adult Common Five-lined Skinks reach an adult size from 5- to 7-inches long. This skink is brown to black with five broad, light stripes running the length of the body. In some adults, the pattern nearly fades with age. The tail of the juvenile skink is bright blue, turning gray as the skink grows older.



*Paddling through American History*

**Philly Phlotilla**

Saturday, July 11, 2026

9:30 a.m.-7:00 p.m.

Walnut Street Dock → Fort Mifflin

[schuylkillriver.org/america250-paddle](http://schuylkillriver.org/america250-paddle)

**The Epic Allegheny Odyssey**

Sunday, July 26-Saturday, August 1, 2026

Launch at 10:00 a.m. on Monday

Warren, PA → Emlenton, PA

[alleghenyodyssey.org](http://alleghenyodyssey.org)

**FISH-FOR-FREE DAY July 4**

**250 AMERICA PA™**



*Michael Kensinger*