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Features

- 6** Paddle Together Paddle Smart
by Chris A. Calhoun
- 9** How to Set Up
a Beginner's Tackle Box
by Jeff Woleslagle
- 10** Finding Accessibility Outdoors
by Kimberly Refosco
- 12** Pennsylvania's Toothy Torpedo—
The Art of Catching Chain Pickerel
by Michael Kensinger
- 14** New Technology
Meets Old Corridors
by Zachary M. Rudd
- 16** A Yough Summer Float Trip—
The Banana Slam
by Christian A. Shane
- 18** Classic Lures—
Fishing Squarebill Crankbaits
by Darl Black
- 20** The Conestoga River—
A Journey Into the Commercial Past
by Brady J. Crytzer
- 22** Conestoga River Water Trail
by Bob Frye
- 26** Pennsylvania Turtles and
Lizards and Skinks
- 30** Favorite Bluegill Waters of Northwest PA
by Marilyn Black

- 32** Glamping in Pennsylvania State Parks—
Pack Your Rod and Tackle Box
by Jessica Aiello
- 33** Fireflies at the Water's Edge—
Why Conservation Matters
by Linda Stager
- 34** Wood Ducks and Watersheds
- 36** Keep it Contained—Protect Local Waters
from Aquarium Invaders
by Sean Hartzell and Sara Stahlman
- 40** Spring Walleye Must Haves
by Ross Robertson
- 41** Rock & Log
- 43** Dangers of River Dams
by Mark McLaughlin
- 44** Waterway Wonders
- 45** May/June Highlights
- 47** PFBC on Patrol

Regular Features

- 4** Start Your Summer
Water Adventure Wish List
*by Executive Director
Timothy D. Schaeffer*
- 38** Recap of 2025 Boating Fatalities
by Ryan C. Walt
- 46** Connect with Us



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Boat Commission**

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Susquehanna River, Lancaster County

photo-PFBC archives

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Covers



Front cover: A kayaker enjoys a day of paddling on the Conestoga River, Lancaster County. *Photo by PFBC archives.*



Back cover: A kayaker taking in the scenery while on the Conestoga River, Lancaster County. *Photo by PFBC archives.*

PA RIVER OF THE YEAR



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START YOUR SUMMER WATER ADVENTURE WISH LIST

by *Timothy D. Schaeffer*
Executive Director

Oh yeah! Are you ready to hit your summer stride for fishing and boating?

While you're getting out the warm weather water gear, it's the perfect time to start your summer water adventure wish list, and this edition can help. We've got lots of ideas for ways to enjoy fishing and boating with new places to go and fish to chase.

You can start with a few good pointers for a scenic and relaxing float on the Conestoga River Water Trail (pages 22-25). Get some helpful paddling tips for this water trail and other water-based trips (pages 6-8).

If fishing is on your summer bucket list, let us help you mix things up by tossing a line for a different species like the "toothy" Chain Pickerel (pages 12-13) or the feisty Bluegill (pages 30-31). If you really want a challenge, go for the Banana Slam (pages 16-17).

Maybe you've chosen to take this summer at a slow and relaxed pace. No problem, we have you covered. Wait for dark and set your sights on the charming night lights of the firefly (page 33) or make your next camping outing more about pampering than roughing it (page 32). And, no matter what you choose to enjoy around our fabulous waterways, remember all fun adventures should end with you safely returning home. Please wear your life jacket and follow the regulations for a given body of water. ☑

PFBC ON THE JOB

Sean Hartzell
Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator

My interest in aquatic resources started at about age 6 when my father began taking my sister and me to a small creek near my hometown of Bloomsburg, Columbia County, to explore and catch crayfish, turtles and frogs. So, I feel lucky that I sometimes get to catch crayfish through my role as the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (PFBC's) Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator. In this position, I help PFBC manage aquatic invasive species (AIS), often working with partners, agencies and organizations.

This work entails various activities to educate the public on AIS—what they are, why we are concerned about them and ways to prevent their spread. I also explore various waters of the Commonwealth doing monitoring work and assisting with AIS research on species such as the invasive New Zealand Mudsnail, Round Goby and Rusty Crayfish. I also do quite a bit from a "desktop" role including answering public

queries, compiling observational reports on AIS, completing grant activities and serving on various committees related to invasive species.

In my role, I've visited many lakes, reservoirs, rivers and streams throughout Pennsylvania, and I always love the opportunity to explore somewhere new. I purchase my fishing license every winter and spend as much of my free time as I can on the water. I love everything from chasing Brook Trout in tiny mountain streams to hooking into Smallmouth Bass in the Susquehanna River. I also have a fondness for Pennsylvania's native amphibians and reptiles and enjoy "herping." In particular, I love finding salamanders that breed in special temporary ponds in the springtime such as the Spotted Salamander. Pennsylvania has so much to discover, and I encourage you to explore a new waterway or try to catch a new species of fish this year. ☑



photo-courtesy of Sean Hartzell

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



National Safe Boating Week

May 16 – 22, 2026

National Safe Boating Week Programs and Events

Highlighted programs and events only. There's more!

All programs and events require registration.

Event	Date	Time	Location
Introduction to Kayak Birdwatching	May 16	9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.	Gifford Pinchot State Park, York County
Basic Boating Course	May 16	8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.	Smitty's Marina, Fayette County
Why Drown Initiative	May 16	9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.	Central Cambria High School, Cambria County
Basic Boating Course	May 17	9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.	Conewago Rod & Gun Club, Lancaster County
Virtual Kayaking Basics	May 19	6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.	Virtual
Kayak Fishing Basics	May 20	10:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.	Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County
Paddling Safely— A Virtual Introduction	May 21	12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.	Virtual
Kayak Fishing	May 22	6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.	Whipple Dam State Park, Huntingdon County

Photo: PIBC archives

Register for Programs and Events:



FishandBoat.com



PADDLE TOGETHER PADDLE SMART



What should've been a great outing often became a cautionary tale. That experience taught me something I've carried ever since—safe, fun paddling trips don't happen by accident. They require planning, awareness and mutual respect for each other, the river and the risks.

Whether you're paddling a lake with friends or joining a guided float on a Pennsylvania river, these five essential tips will help your group paddle smart and return with nothing but great stories.

Follow Legal Requirements

Understanding the law is the foundation of a safe trip. These aren't just rules—they're safeguards designed to prevent accidents and save lives.

Nearly nine out of 10 boating-related drowning victims weren't wearing a life jacket. That one piece of gear can make all the difference, especially in cold or moving water. Make sure everyone in your group understands what's required.

by Chris A. Calhoun photos by the author

I got my start as a river ranger on the Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, patrolling the stretch between Hancock, New York, and Narrowsburg, New York. Weekends brought a steady stream of paddlers—families in canoes, groups of friends in kayaks and outfitters guiding rafts. From my perch along the riverbank or drifting in my patrol boat, I saw it all.

Some groups glided downriver, prepared and in sync—laughing, exploring and making memories. Others weren't so lucky. I responded to capsized canoes, shivering paddlers, frustrated parents wrangling kids and tense arguments between friends. Too often, alcohol and poor planning turned a fun day into a risky one—sometimes ending in injury, or worse.

Key Legal Requirements in Pennsylvania:

- A United States Coast Guard-approved life jacket must be on board for each person and must be worn from November 1 through April 30 on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe, kayak or paddleboard.
- Children 12 years of age and younger on Pennsylvania waters underway in all canoes, kayaks, paddleboards and boats 20 feet or less must wear a life jacket.
- Boats must be registered or display a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission or Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources launch permit when using these state public access areas.
- A sound-producing device (like a whistle) is required on all boats.
- A signal light or flashlight is required on all unpowered boats if paddling between sunset and sunrise.



Safe, fun paddling trips require planning, awareness and mutual respect for each other, the river and the risks.

Map It Out

A great group paddle begins long before you're on the water. Planning ensures everyone is on the same page and ready for the expected and the unexpected. It's not just about route-finding; it's about minimizing risks and building flexibility into your trip.

Choose a route that matches your group's skills. Flatwater and Class I–II rivers are ideal for beginners. Research water flow, access points and emergency exits.

Trip Planning:

- Share a float plan with a trusted contact including take-out points, route, names of other paddlers in your group and expected return time.
- Check river conditions using online gauges or call a local outfitter.
- Carry maps showing access areas and alternate exits.
- Monitor weather forecasts. Know the signs of changing weather including darkening skies, rising winds and sudden temperature drops.
- Follow National Weather Service guidance. If thunder roars, get off the water. Avoid sheltering under trees and spread out on shore. Individuals should stay at least 20 feet apart from each other.

Bring the Right Gear and Plan for the Unexpected

The gear you pack shapes your experience. Someone will forget something, get cold or need help. Prepare for both comfort and emergencies.

Start with the basics. Every person needs a properly fitted life jacket and a whistle. Beyond that, pack smart to stay ready without being overloaded.

Essential Items:

- Life Jacket and Whistle (required by law)
- Phone in Waterproof Case, Radios and Power Bank
- First Aid Kit with Personal Medication, Bandages, Blister Care and Emergency Supplies
- Clothing for Sun, Wind, Rain or Cold
- Closed-toe Footwear that Stays on in the Water
- Sunglasses, Hat, SPF Lip Balm and Sunscreen
- Hydration and Snacks
- Dry Bag for Essentials
- Emergency Shelter, Fire Starter, Tarp, Cord and Lighter
- Emergency Light (flashlight or headlamp) with Fresh Batteries
- Throw Rope, Spare Paddle and Rescue Knife



Groups that paddle well together also plan and communicate well.

Manage the Group Like a Pro

Groups that paddle well together also plan and communicate well. Set expectations before launching and be ready to adapt once you're on the water.

Start by knowing each person's experience level. Pair new paddlers with more experienced ones. Assign a lead and a sweep (person who is in the very back of the group) to keep the group together. Review safety basics like defensive swimming and how to avoid foot entrapment before you push off.

Best Practices for Group Paddling:

- Talk about safety and trip goals in advance.
- Do a final gear check.
- Take a group photo at the launch.
- Use standard paddle, hand and whistle signals to communicate.
- Watch for hazards such as strainers (fallen trees), bridge pilings, low-head dams and fast currents.
- Identify who has rescue or first aid training.

Respect Water, Land and Others

Part of paddling smart is being a good steward. Our behavior on the water affects wildlife, landowners and fellow recreationists. Responsible paddling preserves the places we enjoy and keeps access open for all.

Encourage your group to leave every place better than you found it. Be courteous, quiet and conscious of the environment. Take a moment to appreciate the natural and cultural features of the places you visit. That connection is part of what makes group paddling special.

Responsible Paddling Reminders:

- Pack out all trash.
- Stay off private property unless invited.
- Use designated rest stops and launch areas.
- Give anglers space and avoid disturbing wildlife.
- Keep voices down and avoid disrupting others.

Whether it's your first time organizing a group paddle or you're a seasoned pro, using these tips will help you plan smarter, paddle safer and ensure everyone comes away with great memories. ☐



HOW TO SET UP *a Beginner's Tackle Box*



by **Jeff Woleslagle** photos by the author

For new anglers with fishing fever, the call of the water is strong. But, with all the gear available, knowing how to pack a tackle box can be confusing. Some basics will cover what most anglers need regardless of where they fish and what they pursue.

Hooks are first on the list. An assortment of baitholder hooks will cover most fishing in Pennsylvania. Smaller hooks are good for trout and panfish such as Bluegills and Yellow Perch, and larger hooks are ideal for Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass and catfish.

Anglers also need a few weights. Splitshot weights are small sinkers that clamp directly onto the fishing line with a pair of pliers or forceps. They are ideal for stream and river fishing to drift a bait or lure deeper into the current. Larger bell sinkers are good for keeping bait on the bottom when pursuing catfish, carp and suckers.

Barrel swivels and snap swivels should also be included. Small to medium ones reduce twist in the line. Snap swivels make changing rigs quick and easy.

Bobbers, another must have, suspend a bait or lure at the right depth and are good strike indicators. There are two main types—clip-on round bobbers and slip bobbers. Bobbers also act as weight on the line to increase casting distance. There's nothing more thrilling than watching a bobber disappear below the surface of the water when a fish takes the bait. Different sized bobbers are used for different sized bait. A few small to medium sized bobbers will get you started.

A pair of forceps will help unhook fish, attach small weights to the line and assist with knot tying.

If you're harvesting fish, a ruler or tape measure will ensure your catch is legal.

A small selection of artificial lures can go a long way. Start with the basics like marabou jigs in white and black, a few twister tail jigs, some inline spinners and a few topwater lures that mimic small baitfish. Many anglers learn to fish with live bait and move on to artificial bait.

As you gain experience, expand your collection based on the fish you like to target and adjust what's in your tackle box to improve your fishing. ☑

Video:



A small one-tray tackle box is perfect to organize gear.



A simple tackle box is ideal for an angler who is learning the sport.



Start with a small selection of artificial lures.



photo-Linda Sager

Finding Accessibility Outdoors

by Kimberly Refosco

Time outdoors positively affects physical and mental health. Personally, it's the water in particular that draws me to nature. Visiting Pennsylvania lakes and rivers holds special memories for me and my time growing up fishing with my father. In the short span of time between my father being ill and his passing, we had a few opportunities to spend time fishing throughout Allegheny and Westmoreland counties. At a time when the convenience of accessibility mattered most, minor amenities (paved paths, park benches, tables, decks) allowed us to relax and fish. Twin Lakes Park, Westmoreland County, is a memory I hold as not only the last place that we fished together, but it was the last place that made it easier for us to fish together. We didn't have mobility challenges in terms of wheelchair use. However, the hinderance of a rolling oxygen tank still requires wider parking and a paved way through the lot to the fishing access. Even better, Twin Lakes Park provides a bench and table, which helps with fishing gear preparation. The deck space expands beyond the shallow water. This is a great feature that makes casting possible well beyond the obstacles. We were even able to access outdoor electrical outlets, allowing the option to plug in medical devices.

Another favorite spot of mine is Keystone State Park, Westmoreland County. I enjoyed many fishing days in this designated area with my good friend Jimbo (James Baker). The benefits include being close to home and a beautiful lake. In fact, Keystone State Park was voted as the best destination for fall foliage in the country (2023 USA Today's Readers' Choice Awards). The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's website and maps identify lakes and streams that are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible. In this lake, there is a designated ADA fishing area with parking, an ADA portable restroom and a paved path to the fishing area.

Pennsylvania is home to 684 streams and 130 lakes that are all beautifully maintained and also designated as ADA compliant.

Additional Tips

- Check park maps ahead of visiting. Many parks post ADA-route maps online.
- Contact park offices to ask about current conditions of ramps, docks and amenities.
- Look for local access areas that have informal ADA-friendly spots near parking (e.g., paved walkways next to canals or accessible riverfront promenades). ☐

Several Other Accessible State Parks

Presque Isle State Park, Erie County:

- **Multiple ADA-accessible fishing piers** with level, paved access—East Pier, North Pier, West Pier and Rotary Pavilion.
- **Paved trails** around the park are ideal for wheelchairs and scooters, with benches and rest stops along the way.
- **Accessible picnic tables** at multiple day-use areas and restrooms near accessible trails and fishing zones.

Pymatuning State Park, Crawford County:

- **Numerous ADA-accessible fishing piers** at Jamestown Day-use Area, Espyville Marina, Linesville Marina, Shenango River and Tuttle Campground.
- **Accessible boat and kayak launches**, offering gentler water access and easier shoreline fishing.
- **Picnic pavilions** with accessible picnic tables and nearby fishing spots.

French Creek State Park, Berks and Chester counties:

- **ADA-accessible fishing pier** in the day-use area with a paved path from accessible parking.
- **ADA picnic tables** near Hopewell Lake.
- **Paved accessible trails** with rest areas and benches nearby that connect to fishing sites.



Share Your Thoughts with Us

Pennsylvania Angler & Boater Survey

Take our 7-minute survey using the QR code on this page by May 31, 2026. Tell the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission what you want to see in *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* magazine—from story topics to access options and overall reader experience. If you have already completed the survey, share it with family or friends who read your copy of the magazine. ☐

Survey:



photo-PFBC archives



Pennsylvania's Toothy Torpedo— The Art of Catching Chain Pickerel

by Michael Kensinger

If you've fished Pennsylvania's lakes, ponds and slow-moving rivers, you've probably encountered the Chain Pickerel—a stealthy, toothy predator that's an absolute thrill to catch. Nicknamed the "Toothy Torpedo" for its elongated, torpedo-like body and sharp teeth, this species can turn an ordinary afternoon on the water into a real treat.

Know Your Quarry

Chain Pickerel are ambush predators that favor vegetation-rich areas. Submerged grasses, lily pads and weed beds are their hunting grounds, where they lie in wait for unsuspecting prey. These fish are often found along the edges of ponds and lakes, in channels between deeper water and thick vegetation or near drop-offs in slow-moving streams.

Unlike some gamefish, Chain Pickerel are opportunistic and aggressive. They won't shy away from a flashy lure, making them an excellent target for anglers looking for action. The key is to present your bait in a way that triggers their strike instinct without startling them.

Tackle and Techniques

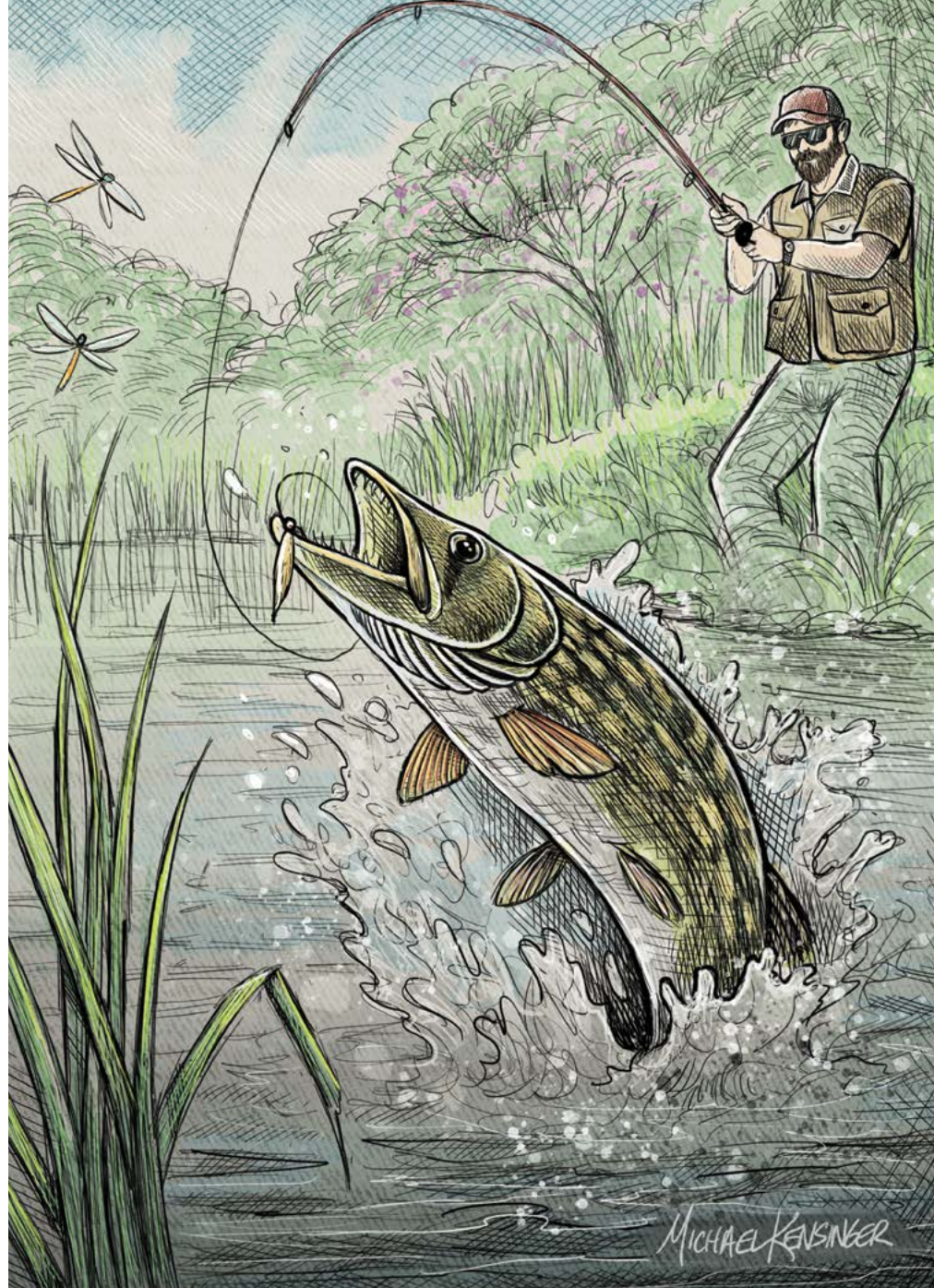
When it comes to fooling a Chain Pickerel, I've found that simplicity often wins. Rooster tail lures, spoons and streamers work exceptionally well. Their flash and vibration mimic small fish, attracting the pickerel's predatory instincts. I like to cast near the edge of a weed

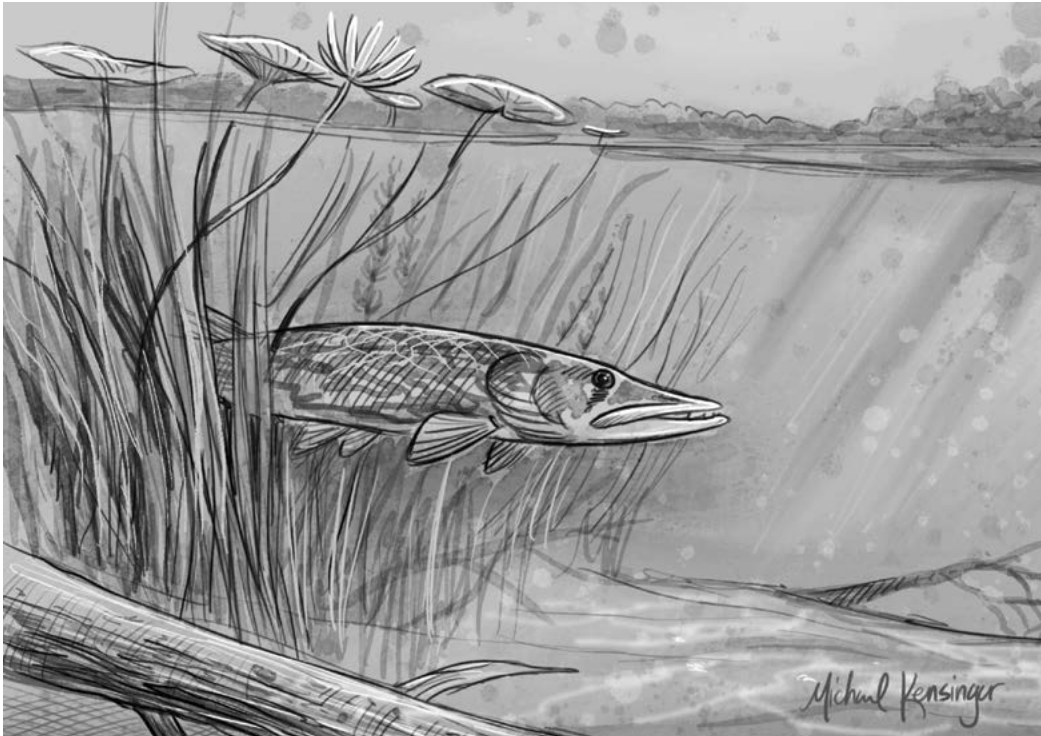
bed and retrieve my lure just in front of the vegetation, creating a tantalizing target that the pickerel can't resist.

For fly anglers, larger streamers or deceivers tied in chartreuse, white or olive patterns can effectively mimic baitfish. A steady strip, with occasional pauses, often produces explosive strikes. Don't be afraid to fish against the weed line. Pickerel are ambush predators, and they'll often explode from the vegetation to intercept a well-presented fly.

Reading the Water

Success with Chain Pickerel is as much about locating them as it is about lure selection. Look for areas where the water transitions from open to vegetation or where submerged weeds thin out near a deeper channel. Pickerel





In early spring, Chain Pickerel are often found in shallower water as they prepare to spawn. By mid-summer, these fish retreat to cooler, deeper pockets near weed beds.

love these “highway” spots, as prey fish naturally congregate along edges.

In early spring, Chain Pickerel are often found in shallower water as they prepare to spawn. By mid-summer, these fish retreat to cooler, deeper pockets near weed beds. Watching the water for sudden splashes or chasing baitfish can give you clues to their location.

Hooking and Landing

Chain Pickerel have small, sharp teeth, so always use a wire leader if you’re trolling or casting metal lures to prevent bite-offs. A firm hookset is essential, as their elongated mouths and aggressive strikes can result in short strikes or “nicking” the bait. Once hooked, pickerel fight hard with sudden, darting runs, making for an exciting battle even on light tackle. Their vigorous head shaking can readily sever light lines. When using ultra-light spinning gear, I retie my line if a pickerel has had it in its mouth.

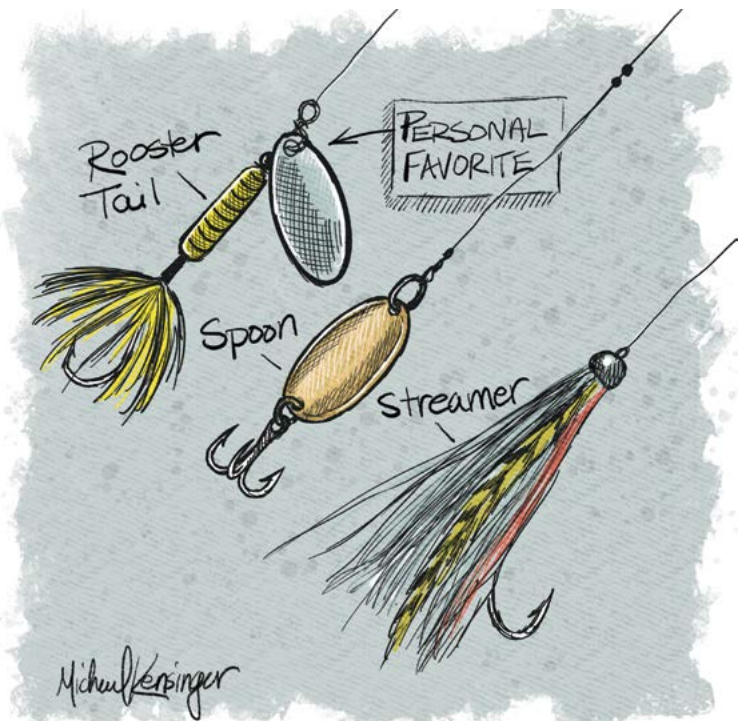
Chasing the Toothy Torpedo

For many Pennsylvania anglers, the Chain Pickerel combines challenge with pure adrenaline. Its aggressive nature, cunning ambush tactics and explosive strikes make it a favorite among anglers who enjoy action-packed fishing sessions. And, while not as highly regarded as bass or trout for

eating, pickerel are fun to target, excellent for practice with finesse techniques and a thrilling addition to any angler’s repertoire. I’ve found them to be more willing to hit in the heat of the afternoon, and their beautiful patterning makes for a stunning fish photo.

Whether you’re flipping a spinner along a weed line, stripping a streamer in fly fishing style or teasing a spoon near a lily pad, the “Toothy Torpedo” is ready to reward anglers who learn its habits. For

those looking to add a predatory punch to their Pennsylvania fishing adventures, chasing Chain Pickerel is one pursuit that rarely disappoints. ☐



When it comes to fooling a Chain Pickerel, I’ve found that simplicity often wins. Rooster tail lures, spoons and streamers work exceptionally well.

New Technology Meets Old Corridors

*by Sergeant Zachary M. Rudd
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission*



photo-Sergeant Zachary M. Rudd

In the summer of 2025, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Bureau of Law Enforcement added another patrol tool—e-bikes.

It turns out that this modern mode of transportation is uniquely suited to the historic pathways along Pennsylvania’s waterways. In the 1800s, freight was often carried on barges being pulled by mules along canals. These canals connected to nearby waterways, which provided the water supply and a relatively flat route. With a system of locks and dams, they tackled elevation loss and established a commerce corridor (canal) and a much-needed mule path for the towing.

With the rise in steam power, the canals and their mule paths with their locomotive friendly low gradient changes, gave way to wood ties and steel rails.

With the advent of a highway system and big trucks, most of the canal paths turned rail lines were left sitting idle until non-profit groups and townships began revitalizing them for runners, dog walkers and anglers.

These now urban recreational paths that offer great access to fishing are often not accessible by car and already used by bicyclists. So, where our patrol cars don’t reach, our e-bikes do.

Waterways Conservation Officers are used to finding versatile ways to conserve our aquatic resources and serve the anglers and boaters of Pennsylvania. Like foot patrols and boat patrols, no one tool does it all, and the e-bike program is a true asset. ☐

photo-WCO Nathan R. Ritigley



WCO David Raulfs Jr. on the Northeast Region e-bike.

photo-Sergeant Zachary M. Rudd



Walnutport Canal Spur in Walnutport, Northampton County, looking toward the Lehigh Gap.

photo-Sergeant Zachary M. Rudd



De&L Trail in Easton, Northampton County, is too narrow for a vehicle.



A YOUGH SUMMER FLOAT TRIP— *The Banana Slam*

by *Christian A. Shane*

photos by the author

You’ve probably heard of the “Trout Slam” or the legendary Alaskan “Salmon Slam,” the act of catching all the major species in a single day or summer. But, how about the “Banana Slam?” It’s a quirky, unofficial badge of honor whispered among the Laurel Highlands Guide Service (LHGS) guides and local anglers on the Youghiogheny River in Southwestern Pennsylvania. To earn it, you must land a Rainbow Trout, a Brown Trout, a Brook Trout, a golden Rainbow Trout, and then, seal the deal with a bonus Smallmouth Bass—all in one float.

Brahn Tahn

As summer rolls in, thoughts of work and responsibilities wash away when taking the annual trip down the Middle Youghiogheny River with Rob Walters, a veteran LHGS guide. After rigging up the raft, we’re usually immediately into fish as Walters assesses the weather, reads the water, identifies the

bugs and selects the patterns, which are somehow always the correct choices.

Early on, Walters spots a pod of fish popping on the surface in what he calls “Brahn Tahn,” (Brown Town in Pittsburghese), where prime Brown Trout like to hold. After fumbling an initial cast with a #16 Caddis Fly, I dropped the bug into the correct bubble line. Boom! A yellow flash boils on the surface. Digging down into the depths of Brahn Tahn, the fish rips off long powerful runs you’d expect from a wild river Brown Trout. Eventually, it slides into the net—our first fish of the day nearing the 20-inch mark.

Ramcat Rainbow

As the fog burns off, we continue downstream, picking off Brown Trout as they reveal themselves sipping on the surface. Walters anchors the raft below Ramcat Run put-in, where the pool plunges into a large, oxygenated drop-off. He ties on his go-to guide pattern designed to draw Rainbow Trout off the bottom—a large ISO imitation.

With buoyant fibers keeping it riding high through the riffles, the fly barely drifts before a hefty



The first fish of the Banana Slam was a Youghiogheny River Brown Trout, and the second fish was a Rainbow Trout. Then, a golden Rainbow Trout was caught, completing the Trout Slam. Eventually, the author caught a Smallmouth Bass (not pictured) to complete the Banana Slam.

Rainbow Trout surges from the depths and crushes it. I set the hook, and the battle is on.

The Rainbow Trout cartwheels through the sunlight, its flanks flashing silver and pink before splashing down into the current. With a few strong tugs, I eventually lure it into our awaiting net. Another impressive fish, this one over the 20-inch mark with a vivid rosy blush along

its lateral line. As the rod sags, Walters releases the trout back into the depths.

Brookie Interlude

We drift on, grateful for cooperative fish and light river traffic. Walters rows while we snack on homemade muffins from the local bakery, keeping an eye out for more bug activity.

Lighter insects begin to emerge, prompting a change in flies. A lone trout consistently feeds above a large boulder downstream, so we anchor up and carefully work the fish. Walters ties on a #16 Light Cahill, and I cast out into the bubbly seam.

The first strike comes fast, and I'm late on the set. The second one connects. When the fish slides into the net, its red and orange spots and wormlike vermiculations reveal a surprise—a rare Brook Trout, pushing 16 inches. We marvel at the diversity the Yough offers in June.

Now, the only trout missing from the Banana Slam is a golden Rainbow Trout. We scan the water for that unmistakable yellow blur as we continue downstream.

Golden Challenge

The golden Rainbow Trout remains elusive through the usual holes. The dry fly action slows with the bright sunlight, so Walters switches tactics, rigging for the subsurface. He ties on a red Squirmy Wormy pattern trailed by a heavily weighted Copper John. About three-quarters through the drift, we spot it—a yellow shape shifting in the dark current. Walters quietly anchors the raft, lining us up without startling the golden Rainbow Trout.

On the second drift, I observe the banana-colored trout engulf the worm. The fish bolts, darting side to side and bending my rod to its limit. I coax it back into the main flow. I hoist my rod high, and Walters scoops up the golden giant. We admire its golden hue and red lateral stripe before releasing it back to the depths.

Walters laughs and announces that I've officially completed the Trout Slam. "All you need now is a Smallmouth Bass for the Banana Slam."

Bass Bonus

By evening, the sun drops behind the ridges and the valley cools. Walters swaps my rig to a white Murdich Minnow, a convincing imitation of the Yough's silvery baitfish.

Elephant Rock soon comes into view, signaling the final stretch of the float. I make the last few casts along the edge of a massive boulder near the confluence. Halfway through the retrieve, I feel a subtle tug. As I reel in closer, glowing red eyes confirm the final species of a trout-filled day, a Smallmouth Bass. We celebrate before releasing the fish back into the river. The Banana Slam is complete.

The Youghiogheny River continues to draw me back in pursuit of another Banana Slam, though I haven't managed to repeat the feat yet. ☐



CLASSIC LURES— FISHING SQUAREBILL CRANKBAITS

by *Darl Black* photos by the author

In 1967, Tennessee angler Fred Young carved a spot in sportfishing history by whittling a piece of balsa wood into a fish-shaped squarebill shallow running crankbait—the Big O.

Other crankbaits at that time (i.e. Original Bomber and Hellbender) had large deep diving metal lips, which produced a wide wobble with lots of resistance. The Big O was the first to provide a tighter, rolling wiggle like a baitfish and could be retrieved faster than other hard-body baits.

The new lure was extremely effective at catching bass around shallower cover, but these lures were scarce and expensive. Some anglers even rented them for tournaments until Cotton Cordell obtained the rights to mass-produce the lure in plastic. Today, imitations are common.

← An array of different squarebill shallow running crankbaits in various color schemes. Some examples are no longer in production but may be found online. From top to bottom: Cordell Big O, D Bait, Rapala DT FAT, Blazer Custom Squarebill and Lucky Craft 1.5 DRS Squarebill.

Tackle

For short-distance casting accuracy and successful hooksets, use a 6- or 6.5-foot moderate-action baitcasting outfit with 10- or 12-pound-test line. Moderate-action rods flex further down the blank than fast-action rods. Some anglers run braided line with an 8-foot monofilament leader on the reel. I prefer straight monofilament fishing line. A spinning outfit may be used but is less accurate.

Presentation

Before casting, visualize a retrieve path. The squarebill's secret ability is bumping and banging through shallows deflecting off wood and rock, then returning to dead center to continue the retrieve.

When the bill strikes a firm object, the lure kicks sideways or flips up—a trigger for predatory fish. If forward progress is halted due to an unseen object, stop cranking, so the highly buoyant bait floats upward, perhaps triggering a strike.

Squarebill models excel in 2- to 5-foot depths, while its coffin-shaped bill offspring imparts a similar tight wiggle and careening sidestep when bumping objects in 5- to 7-foot depths. These crankbaits are most effective during an unseasonably warm spell in the spring, the bass post-spawn, the shad spawn and when baitfish move shallow in the autumn. ▣



The difference in shape between a coffin bill and a squarebill crankbait is shown here. Most coffin bill baits have a diving lip that is a tad wider and slightly longer than on a squarebill, enabling it to dive a bit deeper and have a tighter wiggle.

➔ From top to bottom: Rebel Wee R, balsa coffin bill flatside of unknown origin, Xcalibur Squarebill, Tom Seward's Timber Tiger and Rapala DT Flat coffin bill.





The Conestoga River— *A Journey Into the Commercial Past*

by *Brady J. Crytzer*

Long before surveyors drew straight lines on maps or mills and stitched the countryside together with the sound of water wheels, the Conestoga Valley footprint was different. In the centuries before Europeans arrived, there wasn't a tidy, single-channel river we know today, but a sprawling wetland—a braided network of creeks slipping around islands of vegetation. Broad marshes absorbed floodwaters. Porous soils drank deeply. Thick-rooted plants anchored the land in place. It was a landscape shaped by water and time, resilient and alive.

By about 1550, that valley lay within the world of the Susquehannock, who appeared along the Susquehanna River valley just as an earlier culture, known to archaeologists as the Shenks Ferry people, vanished. Whether disease, displacement or assimilation caused their disappearance remains uncertain. The Susquehannocks were powerful, feared and mobile—hunters and fishermen who stayed only as long as the land remained generous. They fiercely guarded their territory, sending war parties against outsiders who trespassed into their hunting grounds.

One of their most enduring marks still lies in the river itself. Just below the mouth of the Conestoga River,



photo-PPBC archives

Kayakers enjoy paddling on the Conestoga River, Lancaster County.

a rock known as Little Indian Rock bears petroglyphs carved centuries ago. Turkey tracks, deer and bear prints, birds and foxes are etched into stone. Two serpents stretch across the surface, aligned with the sunrise at the equinox—a reminder that this landscape once carried meanings far deeper than commerce.

The riverland would change in the seventeenth century, when the fur trade pulled Europeans deep into the interior. Swedish, Dutch, French and English traders competed, backed by colonial governors, eager

to keep their ports busy. These traders were often the first Europeans Native peoples regularly encountered. They learned Indigenous languages, married into Native communities and served as cultural middlemen. Sometimes, they smoothed relations, but sometimes, they inflamed tensions.

Along the Conestoga River, names still echo from that era. Quaker brothers Edmund and John Cartlidge established a trading post at the river's mouth, only to land in scandal after murdering a Seneca man in 1722. Though jailed in Philadelphia, they were ultimately released at the urging of Iroquois leaders. Other traders followed: Martin Chartier at Pequea Creek, Anne LeTort and her son James and the French trader Peter Bezellon, who carved "Peter's Road" across the countryside. It's a route that still defines township boundaries today.

The trade goods moved along water paths and portages—glass beads and brass bells, copper kettles and iron hatchets, knives, mirrors and rum. Pelts flowed east. European goods flowed west. The Conestoga Trail linked the Susquehanna River to Philadelphia, binding the interior to the coast.

Then, came settlers in numbers. William Penn's invitation drew persecuted religious minorities, including German Mennonites who settled south of the Conestoga River beginning in 1711. They carefully cleared forests, field by field, and soon needed sawmills and gristmills to support their farms. Waterpower became the valley's new lifeblood.

Industry followed water. Iron furnaces and forges sprang up along creeks whose names (i.e., Hammer Creek) still recall the clang of trip hammers. Rifle makers harnessed waterpower to bore gun barrels, helping make Lancaster County synonymous with the Pennsylvania rifle.

By the early 1800s, attention turned once more to navigation. Canal fever swept Pennsylvania as leaders sought to compete with New York's Erie Canal. The Conestoga Navigation Company, chartered in 1825, transformed the river with dams, locks and slack-water pools. By 1829, boats swiftly carried goods toward Baltimore. The system thrived briefly, then faltered after flood damage and the rise of railroads. By the 1850s, the canal fell silent.

Yet, the history remains. Beneath the modern river lies a layered past of wetlands and warriors, traders and farmers and mills and canals. The Conestoga River is shaped by water and human ambition alike. □

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.

Conestoga River *Water Trail*

SE
PA!





Paddlers on a return trip up the Conestoga River Water Trail, from Lake Aldred, Lancaster County, take out their kayaks.

by Bob Frye

photos by the author

It's about 15.9 miles from Brownstown to Safe Harbor, Lancaster County, in a straight line. The Conestoga River, though, covers 60 miles in making the trip.

It twists and turns and doubles back on itself time and again, like a soft rope stretched out, then pushed together from each end.

While the river might drive an efficiency expert crazy, the 32 miles that make up the Conestoga River Water Trail are delightful if you're a paddler.

"What can you experience? What you would never expect to find in rural Lancaster County," said Todd Roy, Conestoga River Club Director of Programs.

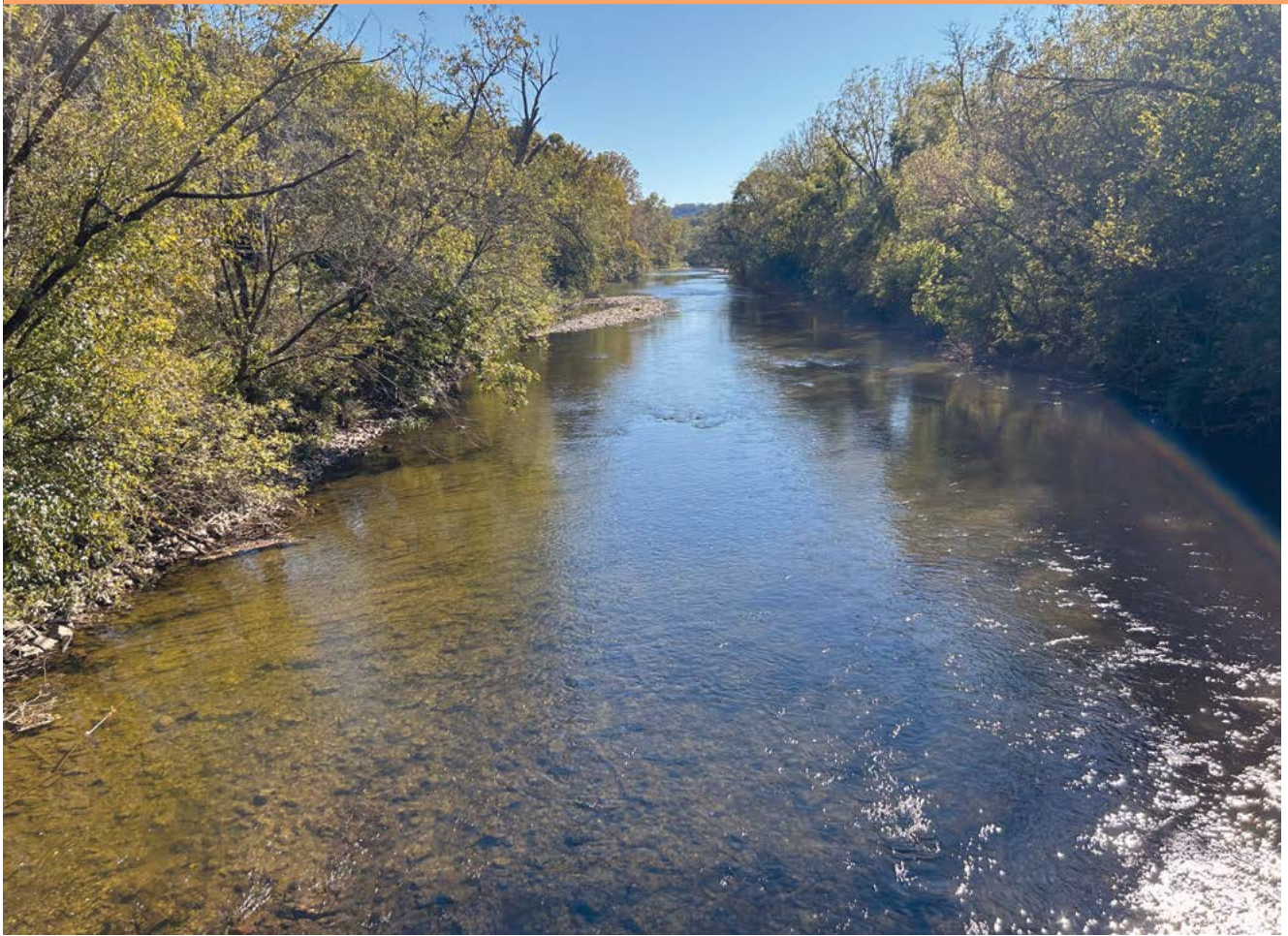
There's history—Conestoga wagons were made here, and steamboats operated on the river. There's plenty of wildlife as well including white-tailed deer, bald eagle nests, river otters and more. Old Order Amish and Mennonite communities mingle with more modern landscapes, too.

Exploring by river is easy, generally speaking. Under normal conditions, the Conestoga River Water Trail is almost exclusively Class I water, meaning even its faster stretches are beginner friendly. Paddlers can cover about 2 miles an hour on a typical float, assuming they paddle at a leisurely pace.

"Our river is pretty forgiving. If you are new to moving water or just looking for a very manageable day on the water, the Conestoga is perfect," said Roy.

That said, it's also true the Conestoga River Water Trail is "flashy," meaning it comes up quickly after storms to run fast and muddy brown. So, paddlers need to pay attention to water levels.

There are some hazards including several low-head dams and a weir.



A view of the Conestoga River Water Trail downstream of Rock Hill Access, Lancaster County.

Paddlers must portage around Zook's Mill and Water Works dams. All are marked by upriver signs outlining exclusion zones that are strictly enforced. Here as on virtually all rivers, old bridge abutments and downed trees collect debris and create strainers, which allow water to pass through, but trap objects, like boats.

The Conestoga River Club has online water trail maps. See conestogariverclub.org.

Paddlers should always adhere to paddling basics, like wearing a properly fitting, United States Coast Guard-approved life jacket. Attach a whistle to it. When needed, a whistle can save your life.

Leaving a float plan with someone at home, paddling with a partner and knowing how to self-rescue are also good ideas.

For paddlers who take precautions and safely paddle, there's a lot of fun to be had on the Conestoga River Water Trail.

The Conestoga River Water Trail is generally a productive water for fishing and supports populations of Redbreast Sunfish, Rock Bass and Smallmouth Bass. Smallmouth Bass up to 15 inches are possible wherever deepwater habitat is found.

Meanwhile, Redbreast Sunfish grow 7- to 8-inches long in some of the state's more productive reservoir populations.

Rock Bass get bigger than that at 9- to 10-inches long.

And, much bigger fish of all kinds are possible. The Conestoga River Water Trail empties into the Susquehanna River at Lake Aldred. That area is popular among anglers, who launch into the lake directly or float into it from the Conestoga River.

In spring, fish ranging from Smallmouth Bass and Walleyes to Channel Catfish and Muskellunge move up into the Conestoga River Water Trail to spawn. Then, it's possible to get fish best measured in pounds—4- and 5-pound Smallmouth Bass. Depending on species, that action can last from March through early June.

The Conestoga River Club's goal is to make more people aware of all that—the paddling, the history, the scenery, the fishing—so they not only spend time on the water but help care for it, too.

The club lists 14 access points and 3 portages on the Conestoga River Water Trail. But, some are admittedly simple paths to the river rather than obvious entryways. The group is working to

rehabilitate them as needed using a universal design—focusing on degree of slope, surface and more—so they’re both easily accessible for people of all abilities and able to withstand high-water events.

Another goal is to provide good, accessible parking, with signage in multiple languages, at each site.

The club also does annual cleanups—removing 7 tons of trash over the last 5 years alone—and leads various paddling outings, some for the community at large, others for specific groups.

A new water trail map is also being developed. Paddlers can get the current map at lancastercountypa.gov. Maps are waterproof and offer good information until the group’s new one is available.

That will be just one more piece of the water trail’s evolution. Marking its 50th anniversary this year, the Conestoga River Water Trail is helping people rediscover the river.

“That’s where you find the real magic in life, through a connection to the outdoors,” said Roy.

“So, we’re taking that neighbor approach, that grassroots approach, and getting our kids and neighbors kayaking on the Conestoga and sharing what we’ve learned and know. And, what we’ve learned is the river is a wonderful thing but still needs some help. It’s going to take everybody, so come and give us a hand.” ☐

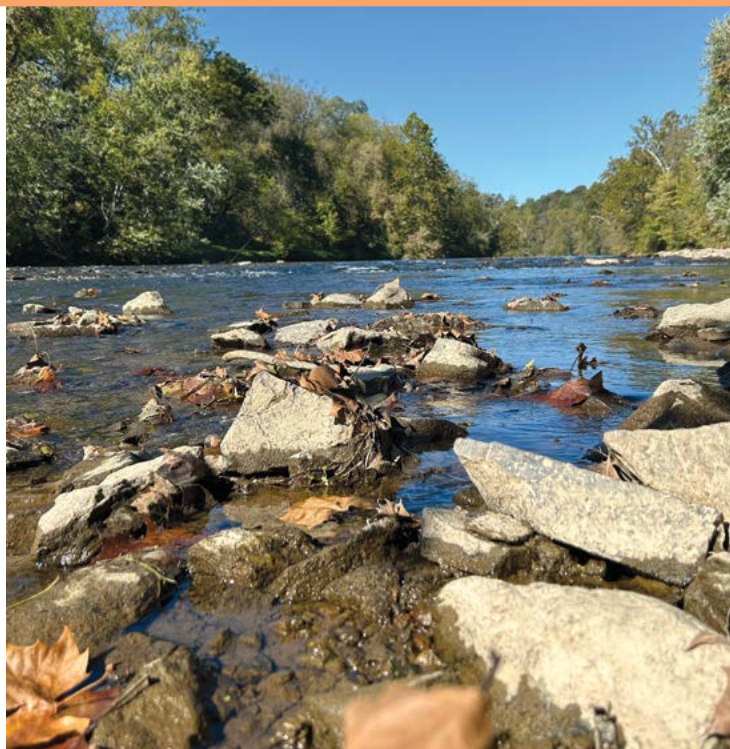
Wade and Shore Fishing:

Wade and shore fishing are popular in many places.

Conestoga River Park, near where the Conestoga River flows into the Susquehanna River, provides ample opportunities for both. There’s also good access around West Earl Township’s Sylvan B. Fisher Township Park and Manheim Township’s Perelman Park.

The City of Lancaster’s Walnut Street fishing access is popular with anglers, as well.

In all cases, consider water levels before wading, and only go into the water when it’s safe to do so.



The Conestoga River Water Trail is paddleable throughout most of the year. When it does get low, it becomes prime water for wade fishing.



Conestoga River Park has picnic facilities and more. It makes a good spot for either floating to the Susquehanna River or ending a trip upriver.

PENNSYLVANIA TURTLES



CANDIDATE

Blanding's Turtle
Emydoidea blandingii



ENDANGERED

Bog Turtle
Glyptemys muhlenbergii



Eastern Musk Turtle
Sternotherus odoratus



Painted Turtle (species)

Eastern Painted Turtle (subspecies)
Chrysemys picta picta

Midland Painted Turtle (subspecies)
Chrysemys picta marginata



North American Snapping Turtle
Chelydra serpentina



Northern Map Turtle
Graptemys geographica



THREATENED

Northern Red-bellied Cooter
Pseudemys rubriventris



Northern Spiny Softshell
Apalone spinifera spinifera



ENDANGERED

Southeastern Mud Turtle
Kinosternon subrubrum subrubrum

photos: PFBC archives

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

AND LIZARDS AND SKINKS



Spotted Turtle
Clemmys guttata



Wood Turtle
Glyptemys insculpta



Woodland Box Turtle
Terrapene carolina carolina



Broad-headed Skink
Plestiodon laticeps



Common Five-lined Skink
Plestiodon fasciatus



Eastern Fence Lizard
Sceloporus undulatus



Northern Coal Skink
Plestiodon anthracinus anthracinus

Reptiles and Amphibians:



Turtles:

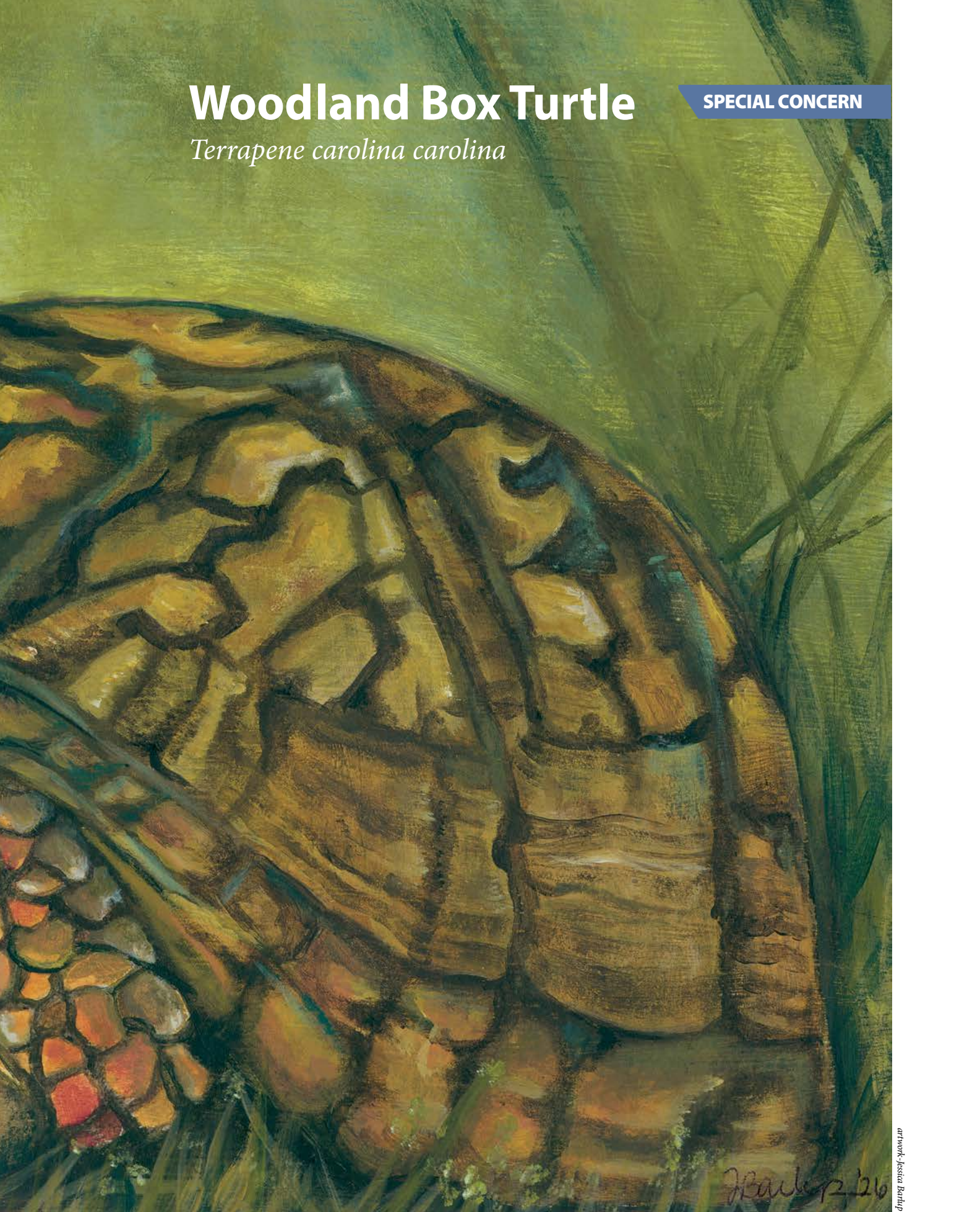




Woodland Box Turtle

SPECIAL CONCERN

Terrapene carolina carolina



artwork: Jessica Bahup



Favorite Bluegill Waters of Northwest PA

NW
PA!



photo-Darl Black

by Marilyn Black

I'll never tire of fishing for Bluegills. Feisty, hand-sized Bluegills and their panfish kin bring smiles to anglers young and old. I love the thrill of a bent rod with zigzagging line slicing through the water and the joy of examining my colorful catch. Here are some favorite waters in the northwestern corner of Pennsylvania for Bluegill anglers.

Conneaut Lake

Conneaut Lake's 928 acres in Crawford County is surrounded by private homes and docks with a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) access at the north end and municipally-operated Fireman's Beach (ramp fee charged) at the south end. It's where I caught my largest Bluegill and largest Pumpkinseed, so it is my favorite Bluegill destination, despite heavy summertime boat traffic. Visitors will need a boat

(unlimited horsepower) to reach Conneaut Lake's exceptionally large Bluegills and Pumpkinseeds.

In May and June, try fishing for Bluegills by casting to the inside edge of milfoil beds with a bobber and ½-ounce jig tipped with a maggot or leech. Later in summer the prime Bluegill bite occurs in 14- to 20-feet of water around humps and long points, with a tiny jig 8- to 10-inches above a ¼-ounce dropshot weight, fished vertically over deep-water schools located with a sonar.

Presque Isle Bay

In Erie County, 3,655-acre Presque Isle Bay offers fishing opportunities galore. Presque Isle State Park has four launch areas—Vista Launch, Niagara Launch, West Pier Launch and Lagoon Launch as well as fishing piers. Each launch accommodates different watercraft sizes.

Fly fishing for quality Bluegills is extremely popular in late spring and early summer, when anglers wade Misery Bay and along most of the peninsula's south shore. A bobber and fly cast on spinning gear is equally effective. Jig



A Road Runner Spinner Jig with a soft plastic beetle caught the attention of this Bluegill on Pymatuning Reservoir, Crawford County.

spinners fished along the deep edge of weedbeds and around submerged humps are productive in summer months. A good choice when fishing the city side is a mealworm tipped on a 1/32-ounce, 1-inch soft plastic jig below a weighted bobber.

Pymatuning Reservoir

Spacious 17,000-acre Pymatuning Reservoir borders Ohio, with most of its shoreline in Crawford County, Pennsylvania. With a 20-horsepower limit, boats launch from eight ramps on the Pennsylvania side. Other than at boat liveries, boat clubs and the Sanctuary Lake area, shoreline fishing is permitted almost anywhere on the Pennsylvania side. Late spring spawning occurs in 1- to 2-feet of murky water in protected pockets, coves and bays.

Weedbeds are sporadic but fallen trees and installed fish habitat provide ample cover for spring and summer Bluegills. Use sonar on your boat to pinpoint offshore brush piles and cribs. My favorite technique in summer on Pymatuning Reservoir is retrieving a tiny crankbait around cover, alternated with a jig spinner through deadfall branches.

Tamarack Lake

With 562 acres and a maximum depth of 13 feet, PFBC-owned

Tamarack Lake located southeast of Meadville, Crawford County, is the shallowest of my favorite Bluegill waters. It's essentially a flooded wetland with thick vegetation and submerged wood. The water is always pigmented from algae and plankton. After drawdown for dam repairs, the lake was refilled. Since 2025, the lake has been part of the Panfish Enhancement Special Regulations program, which allows harvest of Bluegills and other sunfish with a 7-inch minimum size limit, a 20-fish-per-day creel limit and a total creel limit of 50 panfish combined.

Electric motors are permitted on Tamarack Lake. Of its six access areas, only three are suitable for trailered boats, but none are deep enough for launching large boats. Fishing from the banks is permitted on most of the shoreline. Catch decent-sized Bluegills in summer close to shore or halfway across the lake.

In May, I like to walk along the shoreline dabbling a tiny jig tipped with a maggot suspended about 7- to 9-inches below a clip-on bobber fished on a light action 8-foot spinning rod. ☐

photos-Dart Black



This Bluegill was caught while fishing Tamarack Lake, Crawford County, using a Beetle Spin.



A Bluegill measuring more than 6 inches long was caught on Conneaut Lake, Crawford County.



While fishing Tamarack Lake, this Bluegill was caught using a live leech fished on a jig head.



GLAMPING in Pennsylvania State Parks— Pack Your Rod and Tackle Box

photo-courtesy of Jessica Aiello

by Jessica Aiello

If you love to camp but not buying and packing all the gear, Pennsylvania State Parks offer another option. One where all you need to bring is your rod, tackle box and a boat if you have one. Glamping provides a unique way to quickly get your line in the water.

Glamping or 'glamorous camping' as defined by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (PA DCNR) lets you enjoy nature without giving up comfort. Instead of bringing your own tent and sleeping bag, you stay in a hotel room-like tent already set up for you. It's like staying in a soft-sided, cozy cabin, and you still get to roast marshmallows, explore the outdoors and have fun just like traditional camping.

The Bureau of State Parks is bringing a family-run Georgia company that offers glamping locations in Georgia, Florida, Alabama and Virginia to Pennsylvania. Beginning this camping season, 54 sites will be spread across seven state parks equipped with all the gear a glamper could need.

Choose from two layouts—two queen beds to sleep up to four guests or one king bed and two bunk beds to sleep up to six guests. Each Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible glampsite comes with comforts from home: a coffee maker, mini fridge, rugs and lamps, electrical outlets and full residential-style A/C and heating, among other amenities. Outside the safari-style tents enjoy two hammocks for relaxing, a fire ring, a charcoal grill with

cooking grate, two camp chairs, a picnic table and string lights to set the mood.

"These new glamping opportunities are a continuation of the traditional state park overnight experience without requiring someone to invest a lot of overhead on all the camping equipment and gear," said Jason Zimmerman, Bureau of State Parks Assistant Director. "It allows access for folks who may be new to camping and want to experience it without buying a camper or tent. It's also good for people wanting to retire their camping gear or sell their camper and still camp."

The glamping sites are buffered from surrounding campsites, not right on top of each other. Camping next to one is similar to being next to a camper or RV, which may also have string lights strung and some generator noises. Noise coming from a glampsite is regulated just like other state park campsites.

"While glamping has ancient roots—from royal tents to early safari camps—the modern version has grown in popularity since the mid-2000s," said Marci Mowery, Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation President. "For some people, adding a few comforts or staying in a designated glamping site can make spending time outdoors feel more approachable. Like Fishing Tackle Loaner Programs offered in state parks, glamping allows people to try an experience before investing in equipment and can help remove barriers for those who may find more traditional, primitive camping a challenge." □

Glamping Sites in Pennsylvania State Parks:

- Codorus State Park, York County
- French Creek State Park, Chester County
- Hickory Run State Park, Carbon County
- Hills Creek State Park, Tioga County
- Laurel Hill State Park, Somerset County
- Promised Land State Park, Pike County
- Pymatuning Sate Park, Crawford County

Reservations:



PAcast:



Discover More:





Fireflies at the Water's Edge— Why Conservation Matters

by *Linda Stager* photos by the author

Anyone who has spent a summer evening fishing in Pennsylvania knows the moment. Fireflies rise from the grasses along the bank, blinking in soft, deliberate rhythms.

For anglers, these small lights are as much a part of the experience as the tug on the line or the call of a night bird. They signal that the day is easing into something quieter—and that the ecosystem around us is alive and working as it should.

Fireflies, or lightning bugs, are more than a beautiful sight. They are an important indicator species, closely tied to healthy soils, clean water and intact habitat. Most fireflies spend the majority of their lives as larvae, living in damp soil or near wetlands, where they prey on snails and other small invertebrates. When fireflies thrive, it often means

the surrounding land and water are relatively undisturbed.

In the Allegheny National Forest, a rare firefly (the synchronous firefly) makes its home in the woods and grasses near Tionesta and is carefully protected. But, firefly populations are declining nationwide due to habitat loss, pesticide use, light pollution and changes in moisture levels.

Anglers are uniquely positioned to help. Leaving shoreline grasses intact, avoiding unnecessary chemicals near water, protecting wetlands and limiting artificial light at campsites all support firefly habitat. Darkness is essential for fireflies to communicate and reproduce.

Seeing fireflies reminds us of good times, but they also remind us that healthy fisheries depend on healthy landscapes. ☐



A synchronous firefly at Allegheny National Forest near Tionesta, Forest County.

Pennsylvania Firefly Festival:



A multi-exposure of fireflies in Tioga County.

WOOD DUCKS AND WATERSHEDS



Michael Kensinger

artwork-Michael Kensinger



Adult kaleidoscopic wood ducks are 18- to 20-inches long with 26- to 28-inch wingspans and weigh between 1- and 1¾-pounds. Male wood ducks, called drakes, exhibit exotic coloring.

Kaleidoscopic wood ducks—the males colored like stained glass windows—have made quite the comeback.

A century ago, habitat loss and unregulated market hunting had them nearing extinction. Their situation was so dire that the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 prohibited hunting them from 1918 to 1941.

Now, though, thanks to a more favorable landscape—heavy, for example, on mature trees with woodpecker holes and other cavities for nesting—and proper management, populations of wood ducks are stable to slightly increasing across Pennsylvania. United States Fish and Wildlife Service estimates put breeding pair numbers almost 30% higher than in the late 1990s.

Historically, mallards are Pennsylvania’s most commonly harvested duck, representing 40% of the overall annual take. Wood ducks rank second, at 30%.

“In some individual years recently, though, state-level harvest estimates for wood ducks have actually exceeded those for mallards,” said Ian Gregg, Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) Wildlife Operations Division Chief.

More proof of their rebound is visible where anglers in the know cast their lines at this time of year.

“Wood ducks return to Pennsylvania to breed in March and April,” said Andrew Ward, Pennsylvania Game Commission Game Bird Section Supervisor.

They stay through summer, hens producing 8- to 15-ducklings that ultimately drop to the ground—gently, like downy milkweed puffs—from nests as high as 60 feet.

The birds frequent swamps, marshes, ponds and shallow, slow-moving streams flowing through forests with islands in the main channel and plenty of oxbows or backwaters.

Savvy anglers know those latter waters also attract big fish in spring. “Smallmouth Bass—3- to 5-pounders typical of larger rivers—move into them to spawn, go dozens of miles upstream and stick around for weeks,” said Geoffrey Smith, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Warmwater Unit Leader.

“Those are some of the best fisheries we have, at least seasonally, with that May, June, July timeframe about peak,” said Smith.

“They’re accessible, too. These streams, which also draw Walleyes, muskies and panfish, are generally fishable bank to bank by wading or paddling.”

By late summer, however, many larger fish leave, soon followed by wood ducks that migrate south in September and October.

But, these streams hold both in abundance for a while. So, enjoy the fishing while watching for one of the waterfowl world’s greatest and showiest success stories. □



An invasive Red-eared Slider collected from the wild in southeastern Pennsylvania.

photo-Marlin Corn

KEEP IT CONTAINED—

Protect Local Waters from Aquarium Invaders

by Sean Hartzell
Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Sara Stahlman
Extension Leader
Pennsylvania Sea Grant

Keeping aquarium pets like fish, amphibians, reptiles, plants, snails or other aquatic invertebrates is a fun and popular hobby. It's estimated that you can find aquariums in over 13 million households in the United States. But, while the animals and plants stocked in home

aquariums and water gardens are attractive, they can become harmful invasive species if released into the wild. Many of the brightly colored and attractive aquarium fish, reptiles, amphibians and plants are exotic and not native to Pennsylvania. Some of the species cannot survive Pennsylvania's cold winters, but many others can adapt, survive and reproduce with the potential to harm native species, sportfish and habitats. Additionally, these species can spread diseases or parasites to wild animals, even if they don't appear to be sick themselves.

Goldfish have been found in waters throughout Pennsylvania and have become particularly abundant (with presumed reproducing populations) in parts of southeastern Pennsylvania and in Presque Isle Bay and Lake Erie, Erie County. In addition to competing

for resources such as food and habitat with other fishes, Goldfish can also make the water cloudy by stirring up mud as they look for food. The Red-eared Slider, a common pet turtle not native to Pennsylvania, is now abundant in some parts of the state. Red-eared Sliders may harm native turtles, such as Eastern Painted Turtles and the state-threatened Northern Red-bellied Cooter, by competing for resources.

Plants, such as water lettuce, a common floating water garden plant, can also wreak havoc. Water lettuce looks pretty, but it grows rapidly and can clog boating and fishing access areas, as well as harm native plants. Infestations of water lettuce have been found (and removed) in a few parts of Pennsylvania such as Presque Isle Bay and Conneaut Lake, Crawford County.

There are a few simple steps that owners can take to ensure that aquarium and water garden pets don't escape. Ensure enclosures are secure. Don't dump waste down the drain. Make sure water gardens are not connected to any natural waterways, and most importantly, do not release any unwanted pets. These actions are all key to preventing the spread of invasive species.

So, before you buy aquarium or water garden pets and plants, be sure you are ready for a long-term commitment and investment. Goldfish and Red-eared Sliders can live for over 20 years and grow large.

Not only is releasing aquarium pets bad for the environment and native species, it is against the law. Anyone caught releasing aquarium pets into the wild may face legal consequences, but there are options:

- Contact a pet retailer for proper handling advice or possible returns.
- Give or trade with another aquarist, pond owner or water gardener.
- Donate to a local aquarium society, school or aquatic business.
- Seal aquatic plants in plastic bags and dispose of them in the trash.
- Contact a veterinarian or pet retailer for guidance about humane euthanasia of animals.
- Bestow the animal to an aquarium pet adoption organization or a local aquarium pet surrender event.

Help protect Pennsylvania's aquatic resources and prevent the spread of invasive species. To find out more, visit Pennsylvania Sea Grant's website at seagrant.psu.edu. 📄

AIS Fact and Tip Sheets:



AIS Prevention and Management:



photo-James Grazio

Invasive Goldfish captured by biologists during electrofishing in Presque Isle Bay, Erie County. Released Goldfish can grow to several pounds and may lose their golden color.



photo-Amber Stillwell

Invasive water lettuce removed from Conneaut Lake, Crawford County.



WEAR IT
National Safe Boating Council
Pennsylvania

RECAP OF 2025 BOATING FATALITIES

by *Ryan C. Walt*
Boating and Watercraft Safety Manager
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

**Borrow a
Life Jacket:**



The “Recap of 2025 Boating Fatalities” is a summary of all fatal recreational boating accidents in Pennsylvania that year. This recap is intended to provide information to illustrate the importance of safe boating practices and help improve boating safety.

1. 1 Fatality

Allegheny River, Warren County
1/28/25, 2:24 p.m., Tuesday

A 20-year-old male is deceased after his 10-foot kayak capsized in icy cold water. The victim attempted to cross the Allegheny River to look at an unidentified object when he capsized. Two individuals witnessed the victim go under the water and not resurface. The victim was using a shovel as a paddle and was not wearing a life jacket nor was there one onboard. The victim did not have any formal boating safety education. Sudden cold water immersion may have been a factor.

2. 1 Fatality

Schuylkill River, Montgomery County
6/01/25, 8:56 p.m., Sunday

A 26-year-old male is deceased after his 12-foot open motorboat capsized. Due to recent rainfall, the river level was high with fast current. The boat was drifting down the river when the victim attempted to start the engine. In the process of restarting the engine, the boat capsized and became lodged against a construction flume pipe at a bridge. The victim was not wearing a life jacket, but there were life jackets onboard. The operator did have formal boating safety education.

3. 1 Fatality

Loyalsock Creek, Lycoming County
6/07/25, 11:17 a.m., Saturday

A 26-year-old male is deceased after his 8-foot kayak capsized in a strainer. Recent high-water events caused debris to compile. The victim was paddling with another kayak when both kayaks engaged tree debris across the creek. In an attempt to free the other kayak, the victim's kayak capsized. The victim was later recovered after a search. The victim was not wearing a life jacket, and there was no life jacket onboard. The operator did not have formal boating safety education.

4. 1 Fatality

Lake Wilhelm, Mercer County
6/11/25, 2:40 p.m., Wednesday

An 81-year-old male is deceased after he fell overboard while docking his 19-foot pontoon boat. The victim was the only individual on the boat, and no one witnessed the incident. He was not wearing a life jacket, but life jackets were onboard. The victim did not have any formal boating safety education.

5. 1 Fatality

Youghioghny River, Fayette County
6/13/25, 5:45 p.m., Friday

A 43-year-old male is deceased after his 9-foot kayak capsized in Ohiopele State Park. The river level and current were above normal due to recent rainfall. The victim and his friends were kayaking Class III rapids on the lower Youghioghny River when he got stuck in a hydraulic. The victim was wearing a life jacket. The victim did not have any formal boating safety education but was an experienced paddler.

6. 2 Fatalities

Lake Erie, Erie County
7/02/25, 3:57 p.m., Wednesday

Two 49-year-old males are deceased after leaving their vessel. The 24-foot cabin motorboat was broken down and drifting in the water awaiting for the towboat to arrive. While waiting, victim 1 jumped overboard and became distressed, victim 2 emptied his pockets and jumped in to assist, both subsequently drowned. The victims were not wearing life jackets, but they did have them onboard. The victims did not have any formal boating safety education.

7. 1 Fatality

Lake Wallenpaupack, Pike County
7/03/2025, 12:30 p.m., Thursday

A 42-year-old female is deceased after she fell off a tube being pulled by a rented 22-foot pontoon boat. The boat was making a turn and hit a wake causing the tube to flip. The victim was observed facedown in the water and was unresponsive. The operator did not possess a boating safety education certificate. The victim was wearing a life jacket. Alcohol and drugs may have been a factor.

8. 1 Fatality

Lake Erie, Erie County
7/18/25, 5:35 p.m., Friday

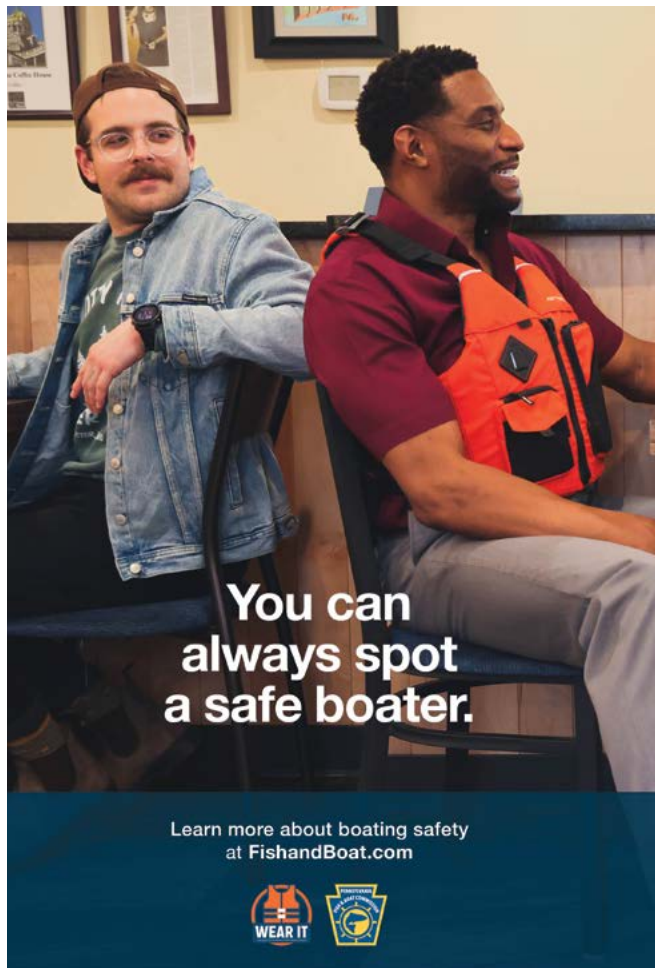
A 17-year-old female is deceased after the 10-foot kayak she was on capsized in Lake Erie. Two individuals took a kayak not belonging to either of the individuals and without permission of the owner. They proceeded to hand paddle the one-person kayak into Lake Erie. The kayak

capsized, and each victim was separated from the kayak. One victim was picked up by a personal watercraft that responded to cries of help from the beach. The 17-year-old victim disappeared. Her body was recovered two days later. The operator did not have any formal boating safety education. Neither the victim nor operator were wearing life jackets, and there were none onboard. Alcohol and drugs may have been a factor.

9. 1 Fatality

Acme Dam, Westmoreland County
9/17/25, 1:02 p.m., Wednesday

A 67-year-old male is deceased after his 12-foot kayak capsized while drifting on Acme Dam. The victim capsized without making a sound, and the kayak was later observed floating unmanned. The victim was not wearing a life jacket; however, there was one onboard. The victim did not have any formal boating safety education. Alcohol and drugs may have been a factor. ☐



When boating, remember to...

- Wear your life jacket. It floats, even if you don't. Wear it buckled and/or zipped.
- Never operate your boat while under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Look around. Avoid a collision by keeping a proper lookout.
- Watch your wake. It's the wave behind your boat and can cause damage.
- Stay away from manmade and natural hazards like dams and strainers (water passes through but boats do not).
- Never overload your boat. Keep your weight and gear centered.
- Stop that prop. Turn off your engine before picking up a skier or swimmer.
- Never anchor from the stern (back) of your boat—always at the bow (front).
- Stay with your boat on the upstream side if you capsize.
- Carry onboard a properly fitting wearable life jacket for each person on a boat.
- Never boat alone. Boating safety increases with numbers.
- Avoid low-head dams (both above and below).
- Carry a whistle that is audible for ½-mile.



SPRING WALLEYE MUST HAVES

by Ross Robertson photo by the author

Spring Walleye fishing can be some of the best fishing of the year, but having the right presentation may be the difference between catching and a heartache. Here are a few must have lures.

Hair Jigs

Use a hair jig made for Walleye or bass and not a saltwater jig that typically has too much hair in it. When it comes to hair jigs, often less is more. Have a variety of sizes, so you can fish it at any depth regardless of the wind or current. Add a minnow and a stinger hook when the bite is tough.

Blade Baits

One of the biggest mistakes with a blade bait is to move it too much. If you feel the ripple of vibration, you're moving it in the water column too much. Slow down for more success with a blade bait, particularly when the water is less than 45 degrees F.



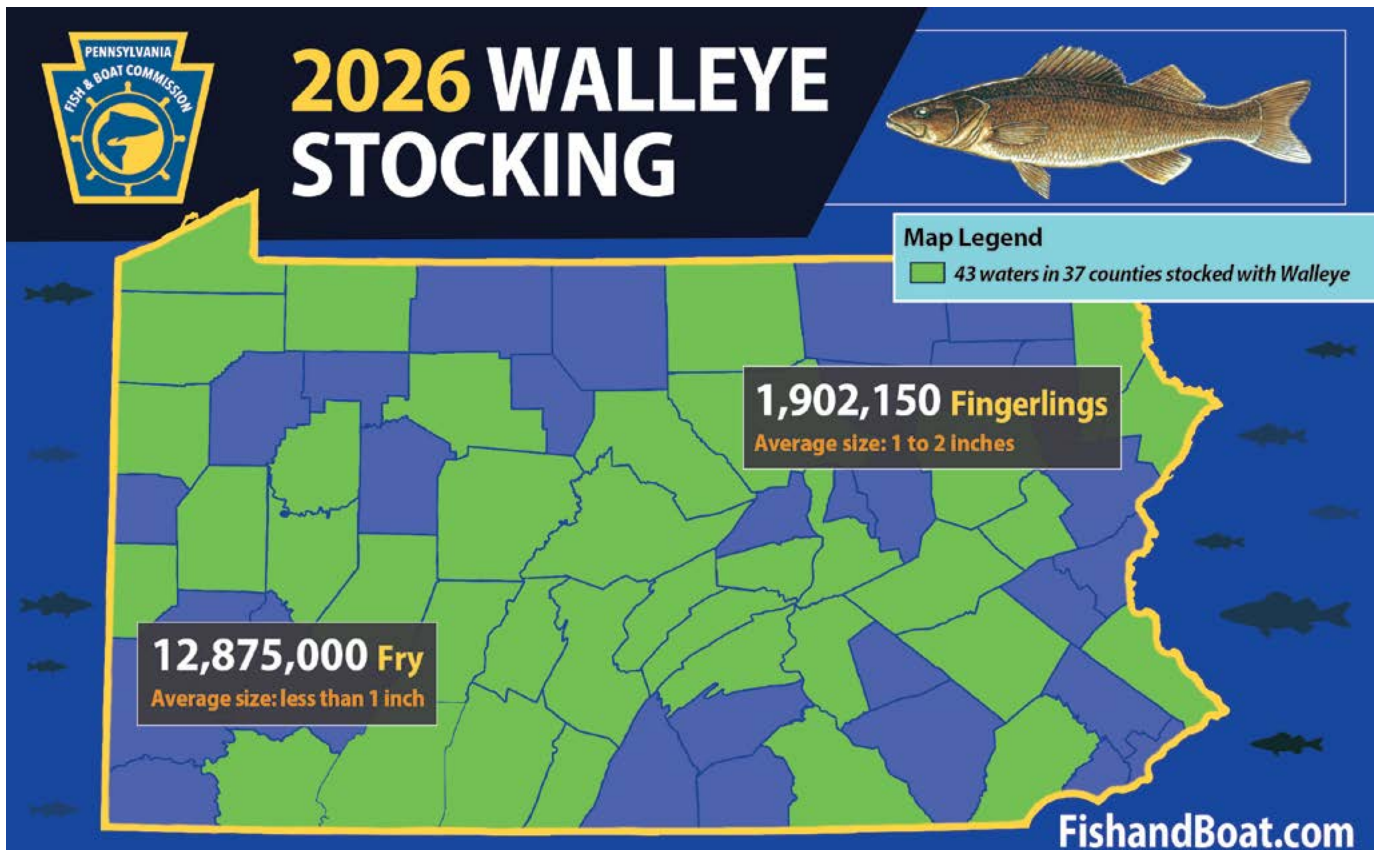
From left to right: Shallow stickbait, deep diving crankbait, blade bait and hair jig.

Stickbaits

When Walleyes are in shallow water or suspending over deeper water, troll or cast a subtle stickbait. Look for models that suspend and will allow you to fish them super slow.

Deep Diving Crankbaits

Trolling for Walleye is arguably the most consistent method for producing regular catches. Look for models in the 3- to 5-inch range with a slow roll. These can be trolled solo or with an added weight to gain additional depth. ☐



ROCK & LOG

FUN IN SUNNY WEATHER!

Lots of us love canoeing, kayaking and paddleboarding in the spring and summer. Here are some items that will make your time on Pennsylvania's waterways more enjoyable.

- Drinking Water
- Snacks
- Cell Phone in a Dry Bag
- First Aid Kit
- Flashlight or Headlamp
- Towel and Extra Dry Clothes (keep in your car)
- Throw Bag
- Launch Permit
- Float Plan
- Friend (never go paddling alone)



Launch Permit:



What to Wear on the Water

- Properly Fitting Life Jacket (required)
- Whistle (required)
- Sunglasses with Neck Strap
- Wide Brim Hat
- Water Shoes
- Sunblock
- Non-cotton Clothing that Dries Quickly (dress in layers as temperatures can quickly change)



EXPLORE PA WATERS



Rock & Log:



FishandBoat.com

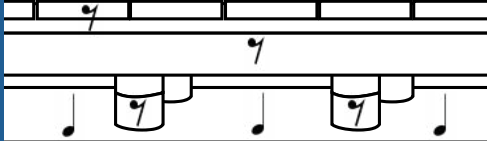
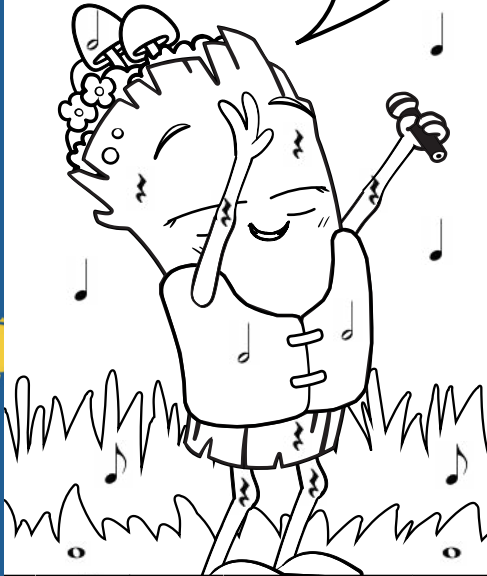


The Sound of Safety


Color the picture, in marker, using the key. Complete the picture with colors of your choice.

-2-3-4!

Now this is how you safely play, along the P-A waterways... Let's wear a life jacket!



The Key:

 Whole Note Dark Green	 Eighth Note Light Green	 Quarter Rest Dark Brown
 Eighth Rest Light Brown	 Half Note Orange	 Quarter Note Light Blue

BEFORE YOU GO



- Check the weather forecast. Watch for storms and high winds.
- Know the waterway before you start paddling.
- Make sure your float plan includes where you're launching and taking out.
- Watch for hazards such as low-head dams, strainers and other dangers.
- Take note of the water temperature, especially in May and early June. The water can be cold even if the air is warm.
- Be familiar with Pennsylvania's boating regulations.

Float Plan:



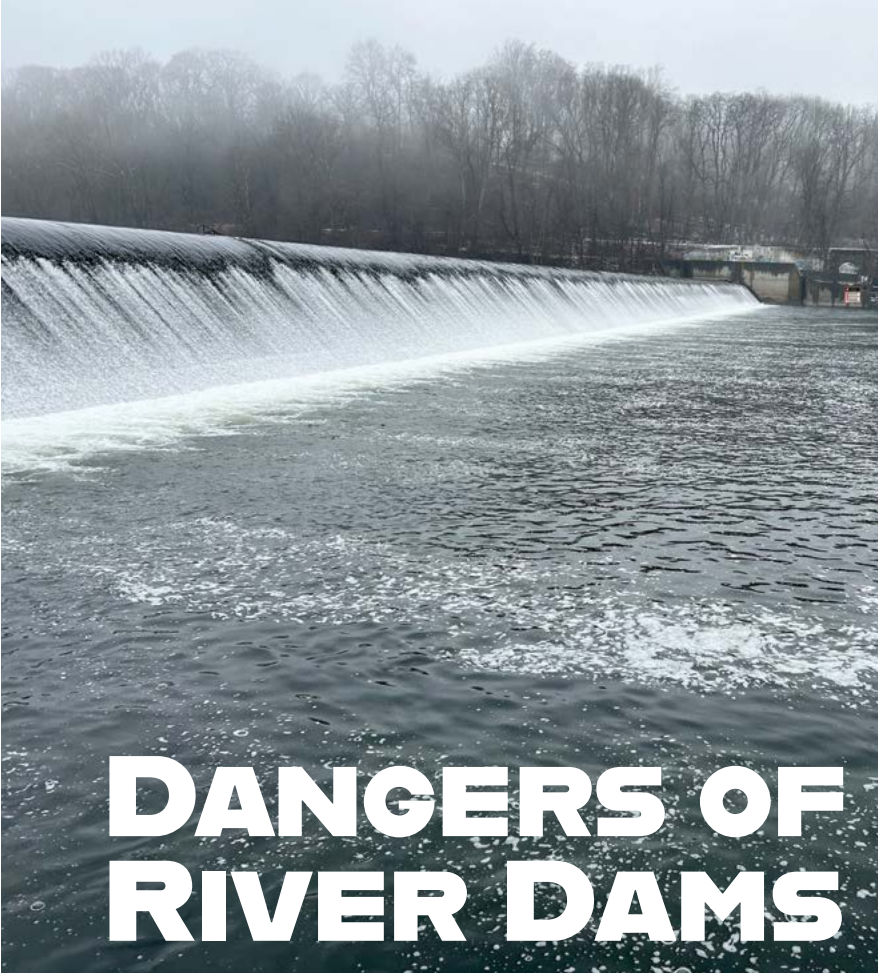
FIND YOUR FIT

Avoid wearing a life jacket that's too large. If you end up in the water, it can slip over your head. And, a properly fitting life jacket is much more comfortable.

Find the correct fit with the touchdown test. Raise your arms like you're signaling a touchdown in a football game. Then, have a friend lift the life jacket by the shoulders. It should come up no higher than your chin.

Touchdown Test:





DANGERS OF RIVER DAMS

photo-PFBC archives

*by Mark McLaughlin
Waterways and Marina Management Chief
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission*

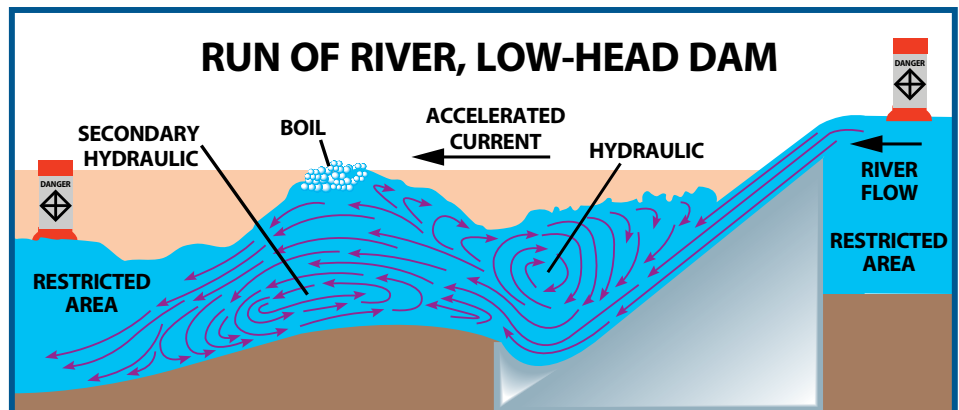
Run of River (ROR) dams, also commonly known as low-head dams, present real and profoundly underestimated dangers. Many of these dams were built during America’s industrial and agricultural growth to power mills, generate electricity and irrigate farmland. Although a few continue to serve their intended function, many remain long after the industries they once supported have faded, relocated or closed.

There are more than 13,500 ROR dams across the United States. In Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) has classified approximately 250 of these dams statewide. Act 91 of 1998, which was later updated by Act 39 of 2020, are the laws that govern these structures. Once PA DEP determines that a dam meets the ROR status, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) is responsible for making sure the owner or permittee has these dams properly marked with buoys, when required, and danger signs to alert boaters and anglers.

Even with buoys and danger signs in place, low-head dams have resulted in nearly 800 fatalities nationwide, according to the Low Head Dam Fatalities Database, which is compiled by the American Society of Civil Engineers to track both fatalities and locations of ROR dams. Unfortunately, according to this database, Pennsylvania leads the country with 108 recorded ROR deaths since the early 1900s. The Dock Street Dam, located on the Susquehanna River, Harrisburg, is considered one of the most dangerous ROR dams in the United States and has the nation’s highest number of fatalities. “These dams are especially hazardous, because they can be very hard to spot while approaching from upriver. The water flowing over the dam creates a strong, recirculating current downstream that can trap people and debris,” said Richard Morder, PFBC’s Aids to Navigation Manager. Anyone who witnesses someone trapped in the current or hydraulic at the dam should immediately contact 911 and attempt to keep a visual on their location. Do not attempt to enter the water to help; you could become a victim.

On a more encouraging note, Pennsylvania has taken a proactive role in addressing the problem. The Commonwealth has removed more than 400 unsafe or obsolete dams to improve safety and restore river ecosystems. These projects have reopened miles of stream habitat, improved fish passage and made waterways safer for recreation. State agencies such as PFBC, PA DEP and Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources work alongside nonprofit partners such as American Rivers and partners in the local communities to keep that momentum. Together, these collaborative partnerships continue to pursue additional dam remediation across Pennsylvania, providing public safety, environmental restoration and balancing the needs of the community. ☐

Hazards:





Birding and Fishing

Pack your fishing gear along with your binoculars for an outdoor weekend adventure in Blair County. First, stop at the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology's 2026 Birding Festival during the weekend of June 19-21 at the Blair County Convention Center. For a list of activities and field trips, go to pabirds.org/2026-overview. After visiting the festival, explore Canoe Creek State Park for some Walleye fishing on the lake. June is one of the best times of the year to fish for Walleyes. Other popular fish species including bass, catfish, crappies, trout, Chain Pickerel, Muskellunge and Yellow Perch can also be caught here. ☑

Canoe Creek State Park, Blair County.

photo-PA DCNR Bureau of State Parks

NATURAL CONNECTIONS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN MAY AND JUNE THROUGHOUT PENNSYLVANIA.

photos-PFBC archives



CALICO PENNANT
Celithemis elisa
These dragonflies begin to emerge as adults in May and June.



WOODLAND BOX TURTLE
Terrapene carolina carolina
Lays eggs in May and June.

MAY/JUNE Highlights



NW PA!

SUNSET AT THE BEACH

Bring your own kayaks or rent some at Presque Isle State Park, Erie County. Paddle around the ponds and lagoons, looking for birds and otters. On Wednesdays, June 17-July 22, 2026, end your day on the beach with free evening concerts, complete with local food trucks and extended swim hours.

Sunset Music Series:



SW PA!

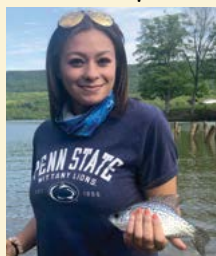
YOUGH RIVER RALLY

Grab your fishing rod and go to the Yough River Rally, taking place along the beautiful Youghiogheny River, Connellsville, Fayette County, on June 12-14, 2026. The festival is a major fundraiser for the General Braddock's Fish Club, a Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Cooperative Nursery that promotes youth education and annually raises and stocks more than 8,000 trout in the Youghiogheny River. This family-friendly event includes a kids fishing derby, "anything that floats" event, rubber duck race, music, food and more.

NC PA!

IT'S A CRAPPIE KIND OF DAY

Venture to Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County, to fish for crappies. In early to mid-May, crappies gather in shallow waters of lakes to spawn, providing excellent fishing opportunities for anglers. Crappies are not picky eaters and are territorial during the spawn. Other fish, like Bluegills and Pumpkinseeds, can also be caught this time of year.



An angler with a crappie caught at Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County.

SC PA!

SKYWALKERS AND SMALLMOUTH

Take your family out to the banks of the Susquehanna River for the annual Air Dot Show in Harrisburg, Dauphin County. This show takes place May 23-25, 2026, at the Harrisburg International Airport and will feature the United State Navy Blue Angels. Visit air.show/centralpa. Bring along your bass tackle to take advantage of some amazing Smallmouth Bass fishing.



Smallmouth Bass

NE PA!

FAST LAPS AND TIGHT LINES

June in the Poconos brings together two local favorites—the thrill of NASCAR at Pocono Raceway and the quiet pull of fishing along Brodhead Creek, Monroe County. While engines thunder, early mornings offer cool mountain air, moving water and the simple pleasure of a well-placed cast before the day's excitement builds. Whether you're on the banks at sunrise or winding down with an evening cast after the checkered flag, the Poconos offer a balance where high-octane excitement and outdoor calm naturally meet.

SE PA!

FLOAT OUR NATION'S RIVER

Join the Delaware River Sojourn this summer from June 20-26, 2026 and float a section of "Our Nation's River" by canoe or kayak to explore the natural and historical importance the Delaware River played as part of our nation's 250th anniversary. Learn more about the Delaware River Sojourn and how to register at delawareriversojourn.com. There are daily educational presentations planned and meals are included. Float for one day or multiple days. While spending time along the Delaware River, fish for catfish, Smallmouth Bass, Striped Bass and Walleyes.



Register for Our Upcoming Events!



EASTERN GREEN DRAKE
Ephemera guttolata
Begins hatching near the end of May.



NORTHERN WATERSNAKE
Nerodia sipedon sipedon
Begins courtship in May.



STRIPED BASS
Morone saxatilis
Continues migrating up the Delaware River in May.



➔ **Hunter Tatarko**, Twin Rocks, caught this 15-inch plus Rainbow Trout while fishing South Branch Blacklick Creek, Cambria County, with his friend. The fish was caught on his last cast of the day.

Explore PA Waters

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

Share Your Adventure:



PENNSYLVANIA AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

GRAY TREEFROG

Dryophytes versicolor

The Gray Treefrog is nocturnal and spends the day beneath loose bark or in the hollow of a tree. Gray Treefrogs are 1¼- to 2-inches long and greenish to brownish gray in color. This coloration creates natural camouflage. The back is marked down the center with an irregularly outlined blotch, and the thighs of the hind legs are bright yellow or orange on the insides and undersides. A light spot, edged in a darker color appears below each eye.



WOODLAND BOX TURTLE

Terrapene carolina carolina

Woodland Box Turtles are often seen terrestrial turtles. Adults reach 4- to 6-inches carapace (upper shell) length. The black or brown carapace of the Woodland Box Turtle is high-domed and keeled with yellow, orange or olive markings. Plastron (shell bottom) markings range from yellow, orange or olive on a tan, brown or black background. The male usually has red eyes, and the female normally has yellowish brown eyes with an upper jaw that ends in a down-turned beak.



NORTHERN RING-NECKED SNAKE

Diadophis punctatus edwardsii

The Northern Ring-necked Snake is a secretive reptile not often seen, usually moving about after dark. This relatively small snake is harmless though it can emit an unpleasant smelling musk to repel predators. Adult snakes reach 10- to 24-inches long and have a slender body. A golden or yellowish ring encircles the neck, and the body is gray or black. The belly is almost always a uniform yellow. Northern Ring-necked Snakes are partial to moist areas.



PFBC ON PATROL

photos-PFBC archives



Pictured (left to right) are Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Executive Director Timothy D. Schaeffer, Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer (DWCO) Carl "Sonny" E. Freeman, Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Sarah R. Bartle and Colonel Jeffrey R. Sabo. DWCO Freeman serves in Franklin and East Fulton counties. He is the Southcentral Region nominee for the 2025 Deputy of the Year. DWCO Richard A. Robatin (not pictured) is the Northcentral Region nominee. He serves in Snyder, Union, Western Northumberland and Montour counties.



Pictured (left to right) are Captain John G. Hopkins, retired DWCO Leroy V. Ammon and WCO Jeremiah D. Allen. DWCO Ammon is the Southwest Region nominee for the 2025 Deputy of the Year. He served in Beaver County.



Pictured (left to right) are DWCO Michael J. Eismont and WCO Noah B. Grice. DWCO Eismont is the Northwest Region nominee for the 2025 Deputy of the Year. He serves in Venango County.

DWCO John D. Schaffer (photo not available) is the Northeast Region nominee and 2025 Deputy of the Year. He serves in Southern Luzerne and Columbia counties.

DWCO Joseph B. O'Neill Jr. (photo not available) is the Southeast Region nominee for the 2025 Deputy of the Year. He serves in Delaware County.

MORE FISHING TRIPS

Keep going.

ExplorePAWaters.com

photo-PFBC archives

