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Boating Magazine*

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Oil Creek State Park, Oil City, Venango County

photo-PFBC archives

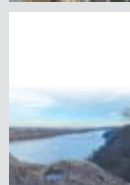
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Covers



Front cover: Crystal Williamson with her friend Nancy Yurik traveled from Mechanicsburg, Cumberland County, to Lake Nessmuk, Tioga County, to experience ice fishing in the Pennsylvania Wilds. *Photo by PFBC archives.*



Back cover: A view of the Susquehanna River from Susquehanna Riverlands State Park, York County. *Photo by PFBC archives.*



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KEEP FISHING



by Timothy D. Schaeffer
Executive Director

As outdoor enthusiasts, we know we don't need to pack away all of our outdoor gear when the days are shorter and the temperatures are cooler. Keep your tackle box and rod out and ready, pull on warmer clothes, take cold water safety precautions, and you're ready to go.

Unique to Pennsylvania, find your spot along one of Lake Erie's many tributaries for the fun of steelhead fishing. Learn more about the mile creeks beginning on page 6. Don't limit your fun to the northwest corner of the state. Late fall fishing is

abundant across Pennsylvania. Try your hand at late fall bass (pages 12-13) or Walleyes (pages 16-17 and pages 34-35).

Learn more about the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail, where you'll find many opportunities for bass fishing. You can also plan now to paddle down the trail next year (pages 22-25).

If getting out on lake ice is how you keep your fishing season going, brush up on ice safety on page 36. Knowing more about the behavior of ice and when it forms will take away the guess work.

Enjoy the end of the 2026 fishing season and get ready for a fabulous 2027. Read up on the 2027 Seasons, Sizes and Daily Limits (page 10), and keep fishing through the winter. ☐

PFBC ON THE JOB

Ethan J. Duffy
Waterways Conservation Officer

My connection to Pennsylvania's waterways began at a young age. Growing up, I spent hours outdoors fishing, exploring streams and developing an appreciation for fish and wildlife. What started as a childhood passion eventually grew into a desire to protect and conserve the natural resources.

I'm fortunate to have a career with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) as a Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO). As a WCO, I have the opportunity to combine my passion for the outdoors with my responsibility to protect Pennsylvania's aquatic resources and promote safe use of our waterways.

I currently serve as the WCO for Eastern Bradford and Northern Susquehanna counties. My duties take me across a wide variety of rivers, streams and lakes. While much of my work involves enforcing Pennsylvania's fishing and boating laws, the job goes beyond enforcement. I spend time educating anglers and boaters, conducting patrols, investigating violations, assisting the public and working with other law

enforcement agencies and community organizations.

One of the most rewarding aspects of being a WCO is interacting with people who enjoy Pennsylvania's outdoors. Whether I'm talking with an angler along a trout stream, checking a boat on the water, helping someone understand the regulations or participating in a community event, I have the opportunity to educate people.

Fishing is one of my favorite ways to enjoy the outdoors. I enjoy exploring streams and rivers in search of trout. There's something special about being on a remote stream, surrounded by mountains and forests, knowing it supports valuable fisheries.

As a WCO, I see Pennsylvania's waterways from a different perspective. I have the responsibility of protecting the resources for future generations. I'm grateful for being able to turn a lifelong passion for fishing and the outdoors into a career dedicated to protecting Pennsylvania's waterways. ☐



photo: PFBC archives

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



2027 FISHING LICENSES

Annual licenses are valid from December 1, 2026, through December 31, 2027. WHILE FISHING, your license must be, either in digital or print form, upon your person and provided upon the request of an officer.

Code	Type of Fishing License or Permit	Age	Cost*
101	Resident (Annual)	16-64	\$27.97
104	Senior Resident (Annual)	65 & up	\$14.47
105	Senior Resident (Lifetime)	65 & up	\$86.97
108	1-Day Resident (not valid March 15–April 30)	16 & up	\$14.47
119	Disabled Veterans Reduced Resident **	16-64	\$2.97
125	POW Resident Annual **	16-64	\$2.97
102	Non-Resident (Annual)	16 & up	\$60.97
113	Non-Resident PA Student (Annual)	16 & up	\$27.97
106	1-Day Tourist *** (not valid March 15–April 30)	16 & up	\$31.97
103	3-Day Tourist	16 & up	\$31.97
107	7-Day Tourist	16 & up	\$39.47
110	Voluntary Youth Fishing (Annual)	Less than 16	\$2.97
109	Mentored Youth Permit	Less than 16	\$0.00
150	Trout Permit	16 & up	\$14.97
033	3-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$40.97
053	5-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$66.97
063	10-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$131.97
151	Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$9.97
151SLE	Senior Lifetime Lake Erie Permit	65 & up	\$9.97
152	Combination Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$20.97

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.97 transaction fee. Excludes licenses or permits issued at \$0.00. ** Can only be issued if initial license was purchased at a County Treasurer or PFBC offices. *** Includes Trout and Lake Erie permits, not valid March 15–April 30.

2027 MULTI-YEAR FISHING LICENSES

WHILE FISHING, your license must be, either in digital or print form, upon your person and provided upon the request of an officer.

Code	Type of Fishing License or Permit	Age	Cost*
150	1-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$14.97
151	1-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$9.97
152	1-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$20.97
030	3-Year Resident	16-64	\$79.97
031	3-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$178.97
032	3-Year Senior Resident	65 & up	\$39.47
033	3-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$40.97
034	3-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$25.97
035	3-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$58.97
050	5-Year Resident	16-64	\$131.97
051	5-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$296.97
052	5-Year Senior Resident	65 & up	\$64.47
053	5-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$66.97
054	5-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$41.97
055	5-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$96.97
060	10-Year Resident	16-64	\$261.97
061	10-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$591.97
063	10-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$131.97
064	10-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$81.97
065	10-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$191.97

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.97 transaction fee.

STEELHEAD ALLEY— *Exploring Erie's Mile Creeks*





The overlook at the outflow to Twentymile Creek offers anglers a chance to see Lake Erie and the fresh steelhead entering the tributary.

by Christian A. Shane

photos by the author

“The rather small confines of the Lake Erie tributaries also cause steelhead to be very wary, making light tippets and drag-free drifts critical for the fly fisherman at times. This type of steelhead behavior is what really defines Great Lake steelheading (and particularly Lake Erie steelheading) and sets it apart from the Pacific Northwest approach in both technique and equipment.”

John Nagy, “Steelhead Guide: Fly Fishing Techniques and Strategies for Lake Erie Steelhead,” 2003.

As with any successful steelhead outing, one memorable November day on a Lake Erie tributary brought together ideal water levels, crisp weather and fresh steelhead pushing upstream. Armed with a spinning/fly combo rod, I fumbled to tie on a Green Weenie, pinched a splitshot and began working through a promising run. After several explosive strikes and a few missed opportunities, I finally guided a bright steelhead into the net, snapped a quick polaroid (yes, it was that long ago) and released it back into the infamous falls area on Sixteenmile Creek. That fish marked an important milestone in my fly fishing journey. It was my first steelhead caught on a fly. Like many Pennsylvania steelhead anglers, it also began years of traveling along Route 5 to explore the Erie mile creeks.

East of Erie lies several aptly named “mile creek” tributaries: Sevenmile, Sixteenmile and Twentymile creeks, named by their distances from the City of Erie and each with a distinctive personality. These mile creeks respond quickly to rainfall, snow melt and changing weather conditions. For anglers willing to monitor stream conditions and adjust their tactics, the mile



creeks offer excellent steelhead fishing and a chance to escape the crowds.

Twentymile Creek

Although Twentymile Creek stretches into New York, its final 4 miles before entering Lake Erie flow



Parking at North East Township Conservation Park off Route 5 gives anglers a starting point on Twentymile Creek.

through Pennsylvania. As the largest of the mile creeks, Twentymile Creek gives anglers more occasions to find willing steelhead in various flows and get away from the crowds.

In his Steelhead Guide, John Nagy describes Twentymile Creek: “Surrounding terrain and access points vary for the Lake Erie tributaries. Some terrain is very remote like the wooded environs of Twentymile Creek in Pennsylvania.”

At the mouth of the creek, North East Township Conservation Park on Route 5 provides day access parking and a walking trail to the lower mile into the lake. The trail leads to an overlook where anglers can observe waves rolling into Lake Erie while spotting fresh steelhead entering the creek.

As on any of the mile creeks, anglers are most successful by using short line nymphing techniques with appropriately weighted rigs and strike indicators. Streamer patterns swung through the tailouts of deeper pools can also be highly effective, particularly after fresh fish enter the system.



At times, fishing with egg patterns, such as Blood Dots or Nuke Eggs, is effective for steelhead on the mile creeks.

Sixteenmile Creek

A small- to medium-sized tributary, Sixteenmile Creek offers excellent fishing when the stream flows are right. Located near the intersection of Routes 5 and 89, it provides a classic small stream experience for anglers looking to test their technical skills.

In his Tributary Profiles, Nagy notes that Sixteenmile Creek “clears very fast after run-off (less than 12 hours) and lower portions are less susceptible to freezing, due to warm water discharge from the wastewater treatment plant.”

Experienced steelhead anglers closely monitor stream conditions and often move between Twentymile Creek and Sixteenmile Creek, depending on their water levels. When Twentymile Creek is running high, Sixteenmile Creek frequently offers more favorable conditions.

Old Lake Road provides limited parking, while Halli Reid Park offers additional parking and downstream access into the lake.

Because Sixteenmile Creek is smaller, steelhead are often more cautious in shallow water and fishing techniques vary. On their way in from the lake, fish will hide in plain sight behind rocks and in runs. Use light tippets, wear subdued-colored clothing, and use a stealthy approach when wading the smaller mile creeks.

Sevenmile Creek

For anglers willing to hike, Sevenmile Creek offers a rewarding small stream experience. Walk-in access from Route 5 allows anglers to fish both banks of the creek through public access provided by the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

When the flows are right, steelhead will make their way up the short distance on Sevenmile Creek, often reaching the Route 5 bridge. This creek is ideal when water conditions on all the other mile creeks are receding from rain and melt-off. Because the creek is narrow and clear, light tippets and smaller fly patterns, particularly eggs and nymphs, are often the key to fooling these wary fish.

As with all Lake Erie tributaries, anglers should respect private property, pack out all trash and follow all Pennsylvania rules and regulations regarding steelhead fishing. Before your trip, consult the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission’s Erie Fishing Easements online map to locate approved public easements and avoid trespassing.

Anglers fishing the Lake Erie mile creeks and all tributaries must possess a valid Pennsylvania fishing license along with a Lake Erie Permit (or Combination Trout/Lake Erie Permit), available at HuntFish.PA.gov.

This season, enjoy going that extra mile in pursuit of steelhead. ☐

Mile Creek Fly Box Essentials

- **Blood Dot Eggs:** #10-#16, Orange, Pink and Chartreuse
- **Beadhead Nuke Eggs:** #10-#16, Alaskan Roe and Oregon Cheese
- **Stonefly Nymphs:** #8-#16, Black and Brown
- **Beadhead Green Weenie:** #12-#16
- **Egg Sucking Leeches:** #8-#12, Black, Purple and White

Steelhead:



Easements:



HuntFishPA:





2027 SEASONS, SIZES and DAILY LIMITS

COMMONWEALTH INLAND WATERS-2027

Species	Seasons	Minimum Size	Daily Limit
ALL SPECIES OF TROUT Additional regulations may apply-consult the current <i>Pennsylvania Fishing Summary</i> .	Statewide Opening Day of Trout Season April 3 at 8 a.m. through Sept. 6	9 inches	5-streams, lakes and ponds (combined species)
	Extended Season: Stocked trout waters Jan. 1 through Feb. 14 and Sept. 7 through Dec. 31	9 inches	3 (combined species)
	Extended Season: Waters not managed as stocked trout waters Jan. 1 through Feb. 14 and Sept.7 through Dec. 31	NO HARVEST - Catch and immediate release only	
BASS - Lakes, Rivers and Streams Largemouth, Smallmouth and Spotted Additional regulations may apply.	Jan. 1 through April 9 and Oct. 1 through Dec. 31	15 inches	4 (combined species)
	April 10 through June 11	NO HARVEST - Catch and immediate release only (no tournaments permitted) NO HARVEST begins at 12:01 a.m.	
	June 12 through Sept. 30	12 inches	6 (combined species)
Muskellunge and Tiger Muskellunge*	Open year-round	40 inches	1 (combined species)
Pickereel*		18 inches	4
Northern Pike*		24 inches	2
Walleye and Saugeye (Hybrids)	Jan. 1 through March 14 and May 1 through Dec. 31	15 inches	6
Sauger	Jan. 1 through March 14 and May 1 through Dec. 31	12 inches	6
American Shad**	Open year-round	No minimum	3
American Shad	Open year-round - Lehigh River, Schuylkill River*** and tributaries	NO HARVEST - Catch and immediate release only	
American Shad River Herring**	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND Susquehanna River and tributaries		
Hickory Shad**	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND		
Herring, Gizzard Shad	Open year-round	No minimum	50 (combined species)
American Eel	Open year-round	9 inches	25
Striped Bass and Striped Bass/ White Bass Hybrids	Open year-round	20 inches	2 (combined species)
Sunfish, Yellow Perch, White Perch, Crappies, Catfish, Rock Bass, Suckers, Carp, White Bass, Bowfin and Other Gamefish Not Otherwise Listed Additional regulations may apply-see <i>Panfish Enhancement Special Regulations</i> .	Open year-round	No minimum	50 (combined species)
Baitfish/Fishbait****(except Mudbugs/includes Crayfish)	Open year-round	No minimum	50 (combined species)
Mudbugs (Dragonfly Nymphs)	Open year-round	No minimum	Unlimited if taken from lakes, ponds, swamps and adjacent areas. 50 per day if taken from moving waters (rivers and streams).
Mussels/Clams	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND		
Paddlefish, Spotted Gar and Other Threatened and Endangered Species	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND		

SEASONS, SIZES AND DAILY LIMITS – Except for trout season, which begins at 8 a.m., all regulatory periods in the fishing regulations are based on the calendar day, one of which ends at midnight and the next of which begins immediately thereafter.

* Except those species in waters listed in the **Brood Stock Lakes Program**. Tiger Muskellunge is a muskellunge hybrid.

** Unlawful to take, catch or kill American Shad in the Susquehanna River and all its tributaries. River Herring (Alewife and Blueback Herring) has a closed year-round season with zero daily limit applied to Susquehanna River and tributaries, Lehigh River and tributaries, Schuylkill River and tributaries, West Branch Delaware River, Delaware River, Delaware Estuary, Delaware River tributaries upstream to the limit of the tidal influence and Conowingo Reservoir.

*** Lehigh River upstream of the first dam in Easton, Pennsylvania and its tributaries and the Schuylkill River upstream of the I-95 Bridge and its tributaries.

NOTE: It is not a violation of the bass regulations if a bass is immediately returned unharmed to the waters from which it was taken. It is unlawful for an angler to cast repeatedly into a clearly visible bass spawning nest or redd in an effort to catch or take bass.

NOTE: For bass regulations, power dam pools and recreational dam pools on the Susquehanna River and navigational dam pools on the Ohio River drainage are "rivers." It is unlawful to conduct a fishing tournament on the North Branch, West Branch or main stem of the Susquehanna River that allows a tournament angler to harvest bass.

NOTE: Stocked trout waters are closed to fishing from February 15 to the opening day of the regular trout season in April, unless included in the **Stocked Trout Waters Open to Year-Round Fishing Program**.

NOTE: Landlocked Alewife less than 8 inches in length taken from inland ponds, lakes or reservoirs that are collected by legal means may be harvested for use as baitfish.

NOTE: It is legal to fish for trout in Class A streams year-round, with no harvest beginning the day after Labor Day to the opening day of

trout season the following year. The exception is those stream sections designated as both Class A Wild Trout Streams and Stocked Trout Waters (Miscellaneous Special Regulations). These stream sections are closed to fishing from February 15 until 8 a.m. on the opening day of trout.

**** **BAITFISH** includes all forms of minnows; suckers, chubs, Fallfish, lampreys; Gizzard Shad 8 inches or less; and all forms of darters, killifishes and stonecats (except those listed as threatened or endangered species). Legally taken gamefish may be used as bait. It is unlawful to use or possess goldfish, comets, koi and Common Carp as baitfish while fishing. **FISHBAIT** includes crayfish, crabs and the nymphs, larvae and pupae of all insects spending any part of their life cycle in the water.

For all crayfish species, the head must be immediately removed behind the eyes upon capture unless used as bait in the water from which taken.



NOTES *from the Streams*

Not An Ordinary License Check

I've seen people try several different things to avoid a fishing license citation, but never anything quite like this one. I was watching a popular fishing spot from a hill above a dam doing what Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs) often do—watching from a distance to confirm a possible violation. On this day, there were two anglers fishing below me—one on the far end of the catwalk and another closer to me. As I started walking down the hill to approach the anglers, a third individual who had been standing on the catwalk spotted me. He immediately turned around and yelled, "Game Warden!" The angler closest to me looked up, realized what was happening and shouted, "Oh shoot!" Before I could take a few more steps, he launched his entire fishing rod into the river. For a moment, I stood there in disbelief. When I approached him, I asked him why he threw his rod in the water. His response was simple, "I don't have a license. Now I have to jump in and get my rod." Needless to say, he never jumped into the raging river to get his fishing rod, and the violations were appropriately handled.

The second angler shook his head, laughed and said, "I wish I got that on camera." To be honest, I wish we did, too.—WCO Logan T. Opfer, Greene and Southern Washington counties.

Interesting Work

While on foot patrol at Sixteenmile Creek, Erie County, I noticed a decent

amount of steelhead anglers having luck. I checked a group of anglers from Virginia for fishing licenses and noticed a rather large steelhead on a stringer. I asked to see the fish. One of the anglers pulled it out of the water. I could instantly tell it would weigh more than 10 pounds. I asked him the weight, and he said it was 12 pounds. The fish was about 33 inches long. That steelhead was the largest one I have ever seen taken from Sixteenmile Creek.—WCO Logan M. Schuller, Eastern Erie County.

Hats off to the Diehards

One November morning while patrolling Lake Erie tributaries, I thought, "these anglers are a different breed." I'm a fairly rugged outdoorsman—I trapped beavers in subzero temperatures and hunted mule deer in the highest mountains of Colorado. But, I don't want to stand at the mouth of Sixteenmile Creek, Erie County, staring into a 40 mile-per-hour wind coming off Lake Erie in 40-degree F temperatures for a fish

most people don't eat. So, my hat goes off to the anglers who battle the wind and water in the pursuit of Lake Erie steelhead.—Sergeant Tyler A. Soety, Northwest Region.

Close Call

I was patrolling along Oil Creek when a snowstorm started blowing in. The roads were completely covered and the snow was not letting up. I decided to start heading home as my shift was coming to an end. As I was driving down the road, I came across a car that drove off the shoulder and was stuck in the snow. I put on my scene lights and checked the occupants of the vehicle to make sure they were uninjured. After looking over the occupants, they shouted, "Thank goodness for beaver dams!" I realized the car didn't come to rest in the snow along the road as I initially suspected, it was saved from going into the cold creek by a big beaver dam. Thankfully, the occupants were okay and the only thing damaged was the beaver dam in the creek.—WCO Noah B. Grice, Venango County.

Cold Weather Life Jacket Awareness

In November, I encountered a person loading their boat while bundled up in layers. Before launching his boat, I asked if he was wearing a life jacket, because I did not see one. He didn't realize he left his life jacket in his car, because he was so bundled up. I reminded him that it was mandatory life jacket wear season. Always wear a properly fitting life jacket, especially during the cold weather season from November 1 to April 30.—WCO Sean P. Rae, Northern Chester County.



artwork-Andrea Feeney



Finding Late Fall Bass on Pennsylvania's Rivers

by Jeff Wolesslagle

Late fall can be an incredible time of year to catch Smallmouth Bass in Pennsylvania rivers, but they usually aren't in the same locations where you found them in the summer. When water temperatures decline into the 50s and lower, bass switch from aggressively feeding near shallow structure to conserving energy. But, they will seldom pass up an opportunity for an easy meal.

Look for bass in deeper pools and channels below riffles, bridge pilings, outside bends and dam tailwaters. At this time of year, bass are hunting for food without expending calories fighting heavy current. Focus on current seams and softer water along the edges of deeper channels. A channel on the Juniata River that is within easy casting distance from the shore has proven to be a consistent late fall hot spot for me. Rivers, like the Susquehanna River and Juniata River, also feature many areas of ledge-rock, and these locales may also be highly productive at this time of year. Places that feature large rock piles adjacent to deeper water may be ideal locations to target.

On sunny late fall days, the afternoon can often be the most productive time to fish. A rise of water temperature of just a few degrees can often trigger a feeding window. A savvy late fall angler knows that bass are still feeding at this time of year but less willing to chase bait. Slow, deliberate presentations are the best way to coax them into biting. Stable, normal flow conditions often offer the best fishing in late fall.

A 7-foot medium-power, fast-action spinning rod paired with a 2500-size spinning reel is perfect for late fall bass fishing. I like to spool the reel with 8-pound braided fishing line and fish about an 8-foot



photo-Ryan Rachiele

length of 8-pound-test fluorocarbon leader connected to my bait. The bite may often be subtle in the fall, so be ready to set the hook at the slightest tap on the line.

Some great late fall lures include suspending jerkbaits, soft plastic swimbaits on light jig heads, tube jigs, Ned Rigs and hair jigs. Hair jigs really shine when the water temperature dips below 45 degrees F, and the colors of black, purple and brown are often top producers. Green pumpkin, olive and crayfish patterns can also be effective. When fishing jerkbaits, vary how

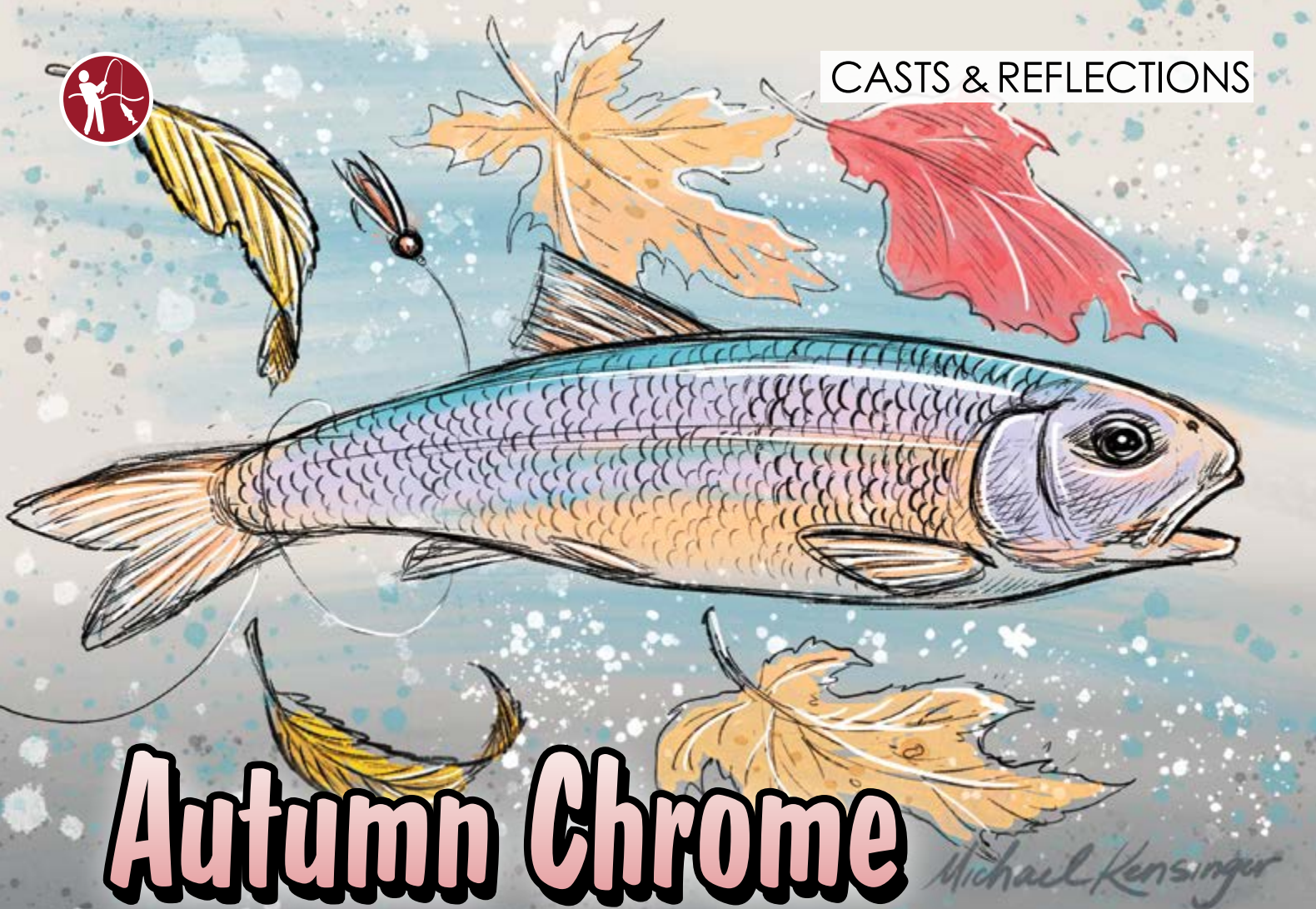


Smallmouth Bass

long you pause the bait during the retrieve. Strikes often happen when the bait is sitting completely still, so watch the line for any sudden movement. On some days, a longer pause will trigger strikes. At other times, a brief pause is more productive. The colder the water, the longer I pause the bait during the retrieve. If you locate schools of baitfish, the bass are almost always nearby. Work soft plastics, tubes, Ned Rigs and hair jigs as slow as possible. I remind myself to fish the baits at a crawl. Many strikes come after the jig touches

the bottom of the river or large rocks. Note areas you find fish, as they will most likely be productive again in future years.

Late fall can be an amazing time to pursue bass on Pennsylvania's rivers. Wearing a life jacket is mandatory on any boat less than 16 feet in length from November 1 through April 30, and it's always a good idea no matter the size of the watercraft or where you're fishing. If you're looking for big bass and an enjoyable day on the water, late fall can be a great time. ☐



artwork-Michael Kensinger

by Michael Kensinger

An autumn Pennsylvania stream is special. The sights, sounds and smells of the streamside permeate my psyche. Even in the heat of midsummer, when I'm indoors escaping the heat, I close my eyes, envision the stream and recall enough of it to stir my spirit.

As the summery rasp of katydids and annual cicadas diminishes and the chirps of crickets slow with cooling temperatures, leaves cascade into the water, which can be a hindrance to fishing. And yet, as leaf litter gathers at the ends of pools and autumn rains fill the streams, pockets of cool water deepen, providing refuge for one of my favorite native fishes—the Fallfish.

The Fallfish is a minnow. However, unlike the dace that swirl in the current, Fallfish can grow large and hit a fly or spinner with the gusto of a trout. Its name is a moniker for the perfect season to seek it out.

My fascination with Fallfish began with stories my dad told about the Little Juniata River when he was younger. He would cast Rooster Tails into pools below the riffles, just off Route 22, and Fallfish often made a memorable day on the water.

Now, in my early 40s, I find myself along the same water on the same search.

Clutching my fishing rod, I notice clusters of mushrooms pushing through damp leaf litter. Honey mushrooms and toxic jack-o'-lantern mushrooms serve as reminders that life continues

amid the decaying wood of the forest floor.

Stream fishing is still extremely good.

Generous rains have allowed the rivers and streams to swell, with water running deep, cool and clear.

The primary obstacle this time of year is, ironically, the same thing that makes it so beautiful—the leaves. Small rafts of multicolored leaves coat the surface. Those that become waterlogged sink, making snags a possibility.

Yet, beneath the leaves, gathered in a deep, slow-moving pool is one of my favorite flashes of autumn color—silver.

They may not carry the prestige of wild Brown Trout or inspire the cult-like following of Smallmouth Bass, but native Fallfish (*Semotilus corporalis*)

have as much charm for those willing to get to know them.

Teach a new angler to appreciate Fallfish, and you will ensure good days of stream fishing.

They can be surprisingly powerful for their size and landing a nice-sized Fallfish is just as exciting as a more glamorous fish. From my perspective, any Fallfish, pushing 12 inches in length is respectable.

A sizable Fallfish beneath an October sky can gleam like polished metal, its scales reflecting colorful foliage and bright blues of the sky—autumn chrome.

You don't need specialized equipment or an elaborate game plan to enjoy fishing for Fallfish. As the days shorten, they can congregate in deeper pools.

Some finesse is required, and I have startled a pool of Fallfish on more than one occasion, so avoid brightly colored clothes and stomping in the stream.

A light spinning rod with a small inline spinner, tiny spoon or jig is often enough. For fly anglers, small nymphs such as the Prince Nymph or Green Weenie can be equally productive. Fallfish are opportunistic feeders, and a little experimentation goes a long way.

My personal favorite is the Prince Nymph. It rarely fails me and often attracts bites from other species.

In autumn, I concentrate on deeper pools, runs and current seams, particularly where faster water empties into slower stretches.

I cast even in long, clear water runs that appear devoid of fish.

Despite their flashes of silver, Fallfish blend surprisingly well into their surroundings. Before you know it, you have an unexpected fish on the end of your line. In contrast to trout fishing, which can be a game of convincing a wary fish that there is no human being attached to the other end of the line, I find beauty in the uncomplicated pursuit of autumn chrome.

You cast, you retrieve and with a little luck, you feel a tap.

Then, suddenly, the rod tip jerks and something silver flashes beneath the water.

As with most fish I catch, I release Fallfish. As an admirer, I try to make the encounter brief while taking in some of the fish's detail and personality.

Maybe, that's the artist in me.

I slip a wet hand beneath the fish and support its body

just above the water, avoiding unnecessary squeezing. If I want a photograph, I open the camera app before the fish is in hand.

Then, I allow the fish to slip from my hands and disappear back into the water.

In my world, a great day of fishing requires no cooler, no stringer and nothing carried home except the memory of the fish.

Fallfish deserve that consideration.

In the fishing world, they have long been considered less-than-glamorous fish, often lumped into the broad category of "rough fish." Increasingly, however, I see anglers deliberately seeking these fish.

A Fallfish occupies its own place in the stream ecosystem alongside crayfish, darters, sculpins, suckers, minnows and even bass and trout.

It's both predator and prey. So, let us lower our brows, diminish the snobbery and pay tribute to a fish worthy of our admiration. ☐

artwork-Michael Kensinger



Michael Kensinger



Flowing Water Walleyes

from Shore in Late Fall

by Darl Black *photos by the author*

Late fall into early winter is considered the peak Walleye bite on Pennsylvania's flowing waters, with bank-bound anglers often making remarkable catches. As water temperature drops and water flow increases in major rivers, small rivers and large creeks, Walleyes launch into a feeding binge.

Alan Bell, Franklin, Venango County, focuses his fall and winter Walleye fishing on the Allegheny River and French Creek. "Not only is this period the best opportunity for numbers of eating-size Walleyes but for a trophy fish as well. From shore, I primarily target two different areas. First, I target weed beds on a flat

or ledge in 'neutral flow' water (i.e. slow eddy) with deeper water immediately adjacent to it. Decaying vegetation provides cover for baitfish, creating an attractive feeding area for Walleyes. The other top pick is anywhere a tributary stream enters the main flow, forming a defined seam between slower and faster water."

When Walleyes are actively feeding, Bell employs traditional minnow stickbaits, suspending jerkbaits and lipped shad-shaped divers to cover varying depths from just above the weed tops into deeper water. These hard baits are retrieved slowly, interspersed with pauses and twitches. When Walleyes are less active, Bell presents a 1/8- or 1/4-ounce jig with a chartreuse twister tail tipped with a live baitfish. The



Lure selection for late fall and winter Walleyes may look familiar, but the key is how they are presented in the cold water. The left column (from top to bottom): minnow stickbait, suspending jerkbait, shallow shad crankbait, deep shad crankbait and jig with a chartreuse curly tail. Right column (from top to bottom): two samples of suspending jerkbaits, two samples of soft plastic finesse fork-tail minnows, a swimbait and a blade bait. Traditional hand tied hair jigs are at the bottom center.

jig is hopped along the bottom while mild current sweeps it downstream.

Bell goes fishing regardless of the conditions, but he admits his most successful time is when water color is slightly murky to moderately clear with good flow.

Chris McVey, Hermitage, Mercer County, applies his shoreline fishing expertise on the Shenango River from the outflow of Pymatuning Reservoir to the backwaters of Shenango River Lake. This section of the Shenango River is shallow with large stretches of soft bottom littered with downed trees, random deep pockets and the occasional gravel outcropping.

"I'm not into ice fishing, so I concentrate on Walleyes and muskies in the river since those species are extremely active this time of year," said McVey. "The river bite usually picks up once water temperature drops below 50 degrees F. I initially favor suspending jerkbaits for Walleyes, using the typical crank-pause-pull-pause retrieve. But, when the water temperature drops close to 40 degrees F, I make a switch to soft plastic on 1/8- to 1/4-ounce jig heads and 1/4-ounce blade baits."

His soft plastic choices are finesse fork-tail minnows and paddle tail swimbaits. The finesse fork-tail minnows are fished on a 1/8-ounce jig head with a twitching stunned-baitfish retrieve just off the bottom. Swimbaits are typically on a slightly heavier head, retrieved at slow steady pace.

"A blade bait hopped along the bottom is an excellent presentation during the coldest water period in deeper mid-stream pockets, but somewhat tricky to fish from shore, because they snag debris easily," said McVey. "You need to know what's down there before pitching a blade. Over the years, I've learned where I can work a blade and where I cannot."

Personally, I would be remiss not to mention traditional hand tied hair jigs for coldwater Walleyes. A selection of 3/32-, 1/8- and 5/32-ounce hand ties in preyfish patterns are always within reach—no scent, no tipping with live bait—just straight up hair, feathers and tinsel. □



by Alex Zidock Jr.

Fore! If you like the feel of your favorite golf club, if you're a proud fireman, policeman or first responder, if your entire wedding party is anglers, or if you want to carry your loved one's ashes to a favorite fishing spot, you'll be interested in a rod builder I met at the Philadelphia Fishing Show last January.

Chuck Taylor does it all. He not only takes the meaning of custom fishing rods to a new level, but he's one of the few custom rod builders who will take your cherished vintage rod and make it like new.

Chuck's Custom Fishing Rods of Philadelphia grew out of a hobby of repairing his own fishing rods when he was a youngster. "Fishing in rivers and lakes all over the area and breaking and busting rods, I had to make my own repairs," said Taylor. It wasn't long before he was repairing rods for other folks, but he put his growing hobby aside to raise a family.

"About 20 years ago, when our kids all grew up, I got back into my love of repairing and working with fishing rods. That's when, besides fixing broken and busted equipment, I transitioned into also offering custom-built and custom-designed rods," said Taylor.

From the moment a client contacts him about a custom fishing rod, Taylor walks through the basics including

CHUCK'S CUSTOM FISHING RODS



photos-courtesy of Chuck Taylor

Chuck Taylor with some of his popular rods.



A custom built rod by Chuck Taylor.



Custom golf handles on fishing rods.



A hand-carved face handle.



A one-of-a-kind custom wrap.

photos-courtesy of Chuck Taylor

where and how the rod will be used and the rod action the client desires.

"I work closely with each client to craft a rod that's as functional as it's a one-of-a-kind design. Every build is hands on, collaborative and designed to perform perfectly on the water," said Taylor.

He makes everything from ultralight trout rods to tuna rods as well as freshwater rods, saltwater rods, ice fishing rods, spinning rods, baitcasting rods and fly rods. "I can make any type of fishing rod for any occasion. I only use quality parts and offer a wide choice of components with each build. Handles are either hand-carved or custom-constructed to reflect the purchaser's whims, even copying a golf club grip. And, my one-of-a-kind wraps really make a rod stand out as a truly custom build," said Taylor.

And, if the occasion happens to be a wedding, Taylor's custom rods for groomsmen are a big hit. Each rod is custom-colored to match the wedding party's formal wear. Individual names, the names of the bride and groom, the date of the wedding and any other pertinent information adorn each rod. For couples who enjoy fishing together, "his and hers" look-alike rods are also popular.

Some of the best-selling rods are the ones he makes for firemen and policemen. "The policeman's model sports the thin blue line, the blank is custom-painted, and the theme is carried through

the rod. Firemen's rods are also color coordinated and adorned with a fireman's hatchet," said Taylor. On these rods, Taylor includes names, badges, department or engine numbers.

One of the most unusual custom rods Taylor builds is the memorial rod, where he combines a loved one's ashes with the epoxy in the final finish. "A son may want to take his dad along with him to what was once their favorite fishing place or a spouse of an avid angler may just hang the rod containing the ashes of their loved one above the fireplace," said Taylor. With or without ashes, his memorial rods, bearing names, personal achievements, dates and significant places can be passed down through the family as heirlooms.

Based in Roxborough, a Philadelphia suburb, Taylor offers his services and products in surrounding counties, where he displays his rods at a variety of fishing shows. "Word is spreading about the variety of custom work I produce, so we're getting calls and requests from all over the country," said Taylor. ☐

Chuck's Custom Fishing Rods

chuckscustomfishingrods.com



painting-Charles T. Webber-The Underground Railroad-Cincinnati Art Museum

THE RIVER ROAD TO FREEDOM— *The Susquehanna and the Underground Railroad*

by Brady J. Crytzer

The Susquehanna River's role in the Underground Railroad owes much to simple geography. Rising near Cooperstown, New York, the river runs roughly 450 miles through three states before reaching the Chesapeake Bay at Havre de Grace, Maryland. For freedom seekers moving north in the nineteenth century, that long north-south course proved to be vital. It offered water, food and a fixed point of reference in an otherwise uncertain landscape.

As the Underground Railroad took shape across the North, the river became one of its most important corridors.

Two crossing points in the lower Susquehanna River were especially important—Peach Bottom, Lancaster County, and Wrightsville, York County.

Peach Bottom's location, near the Pennsylvania-Maryland border, made it a natural "first stop" for those fleeing enslavement in the south. Its ferry crossing, supported by conductors operating out of Havre de Grace, allowed freedom seekers to move north through the rugged terrain of southern York County.



artwork-Internet Archive Book Images. No restrictions, via Wikimedia Commons

Robert Brown, alias Thomas Jones, crossing the river on horseback at night.

The risk at every stage was considerable, and success depended heavily on the network of local conductors willing to assist.

Wrightsville's significance centers on the Hybla House, a site for which an unusually large body of documentation survives, given how little written record typically exists for Underground Railroad activity. The crossing traces to John Wright Sr., who established a ferry opposite what is now Columbia, Pennsylvania.

Wright's landholdings passed to his children after his death, but it

was his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, guided by their Quaker faith, who used the family's position at Wrightsville to assist freedom seekers across the river. This work continued for nearly 50 years.

Quaker influence shaped both crossings. As Quakers moved westward from Philadelphia into Lancaster and Adams counties, they brought with them a settled opposition to slavery. Combined with the region's geography, this created the conditions that made south-central Pennsylvania an important corridor for those moving north.

It's worth stating plainly that abolitionist support, while significant, was not the primary force behind the Underground Railroad's success. That distinction belongs to the freedom seekers themselves, whose courage and endurance made the network possible in the first place.

This aspect of history is often underrepresented, largely because so little documentation of their individual

experiences survives. Reaching the Susquehanna River didn't guarantee safety. The Fugitive Slave Act made it legal for bounty hunters to pursue and capture escaped individuals even in free states, and freedom seekers faced hunger, exhaustion and constant risk of capture along the route historians have called "the Pilgrim's Pathway."

Samuel Berry was born enslaved in Maryland and purchased his own freedom and that of his family before settling in York, Pennsylvania. He subsequently became an active conductor, assisting others despite the danger involved. On at least one occasion, he was beaten by bounty hunters for sheltering a freedom seeker.

According to his daughter's account, Berry worked through the day, rested briefly and spent his nights aiding others. He died a free man who had devoted much of his later life to helping those still seeking freedom.

The Christiana Resistance of 1851 further illustrates the Susquehanna River's role in this history. When Maryland slaveholder Edward Gorsuch arrived in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to reclaim escaped individuals, residents refused to comply. The confrontation escalated into an armed clash in which Gorsuch was killed.

The federal government responded by deploying Marines and charging 37 people with treason. After a 3-month trial, in which Pennsylvania congressman Thaddeus Stevens led the defense, the jury returned a verdict of not guilty. The result had significant implications for the broader antislavery movement in the years leading up to the American Civil War.

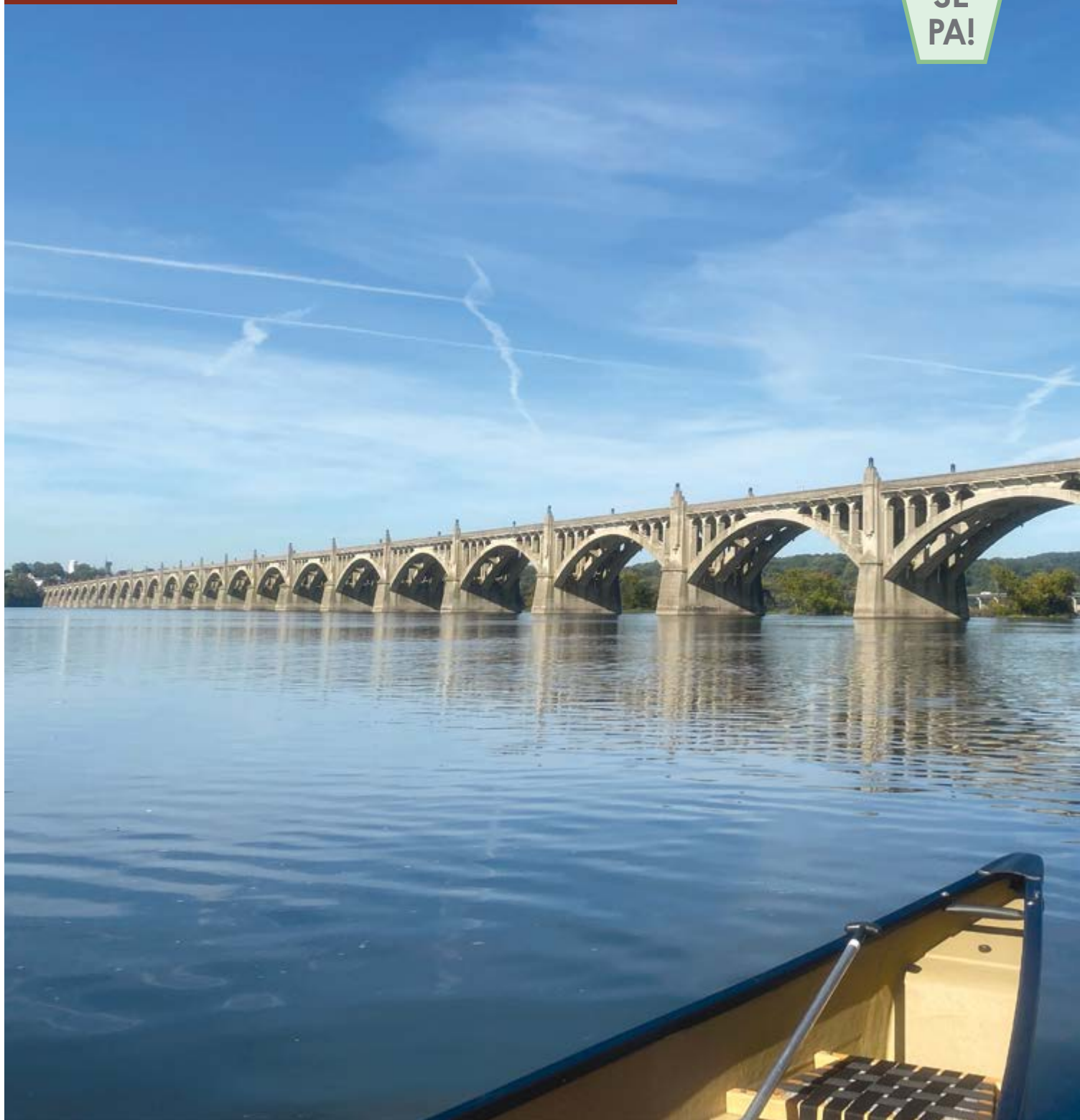
This history reflects the Susquehanna River's dual role. It was a physical route toward freedom and a lasting record of the individuals, communities and institutions that shaped Pennsylvania's response to slavery. □

*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.*

Lower Susquehanna River *Water Trail*

SC
PA!

SE
PA!





Canoeing on the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail.

photo-PFBC archives

by Bob Frye

The lower Susquehanna River Water Trail is a great introduction to paddling on the 444-mile Susquehanna River. It runs 53 miles, from the New Market Access near Harrisburg to Broad Creek in Maryland. It's mapped, so boaters can find information on access points, hazards, attractions and more.

Some sections of the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail are free flowing, often shallow and frequently rocky. Others are impounded. You'll find Lake Frederic, Lake Clarke, Lake Aldred and Conowingo Reservoir, which offer opportunities for larger boats.

"That's what's so unique about the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail—it alternates between the lake-like, really wide-open stretches and what some call pothole geology," said Alana Jajko, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership Executive Director. "It's all about the route you choose and what you want to see."

Some of the free-flowing sections, famously described as "a mile wide but an inch deep," are marked by bank-to-bank rock gardens. Paddlers may have to zigzag all or much of the way across the river's breadth, winding through stones and over sandbars, to navigate a path forward. Progress can be tricky in times of low water.

Downriver of Chickies Rock, a popular overlook that's also a fabulous sight from water level, and the Safe Harbor Dam lies the Big and Little Indian Rock Petroglyphs. They're only accessible by boat during the right water level conditions. Visitors can see as many as 400 carvings representing a thunderbird, a woman giving birth, animals, footprints and more. The carvings are considered one of the largest collections of indigenous rock art left in the eastern United States.

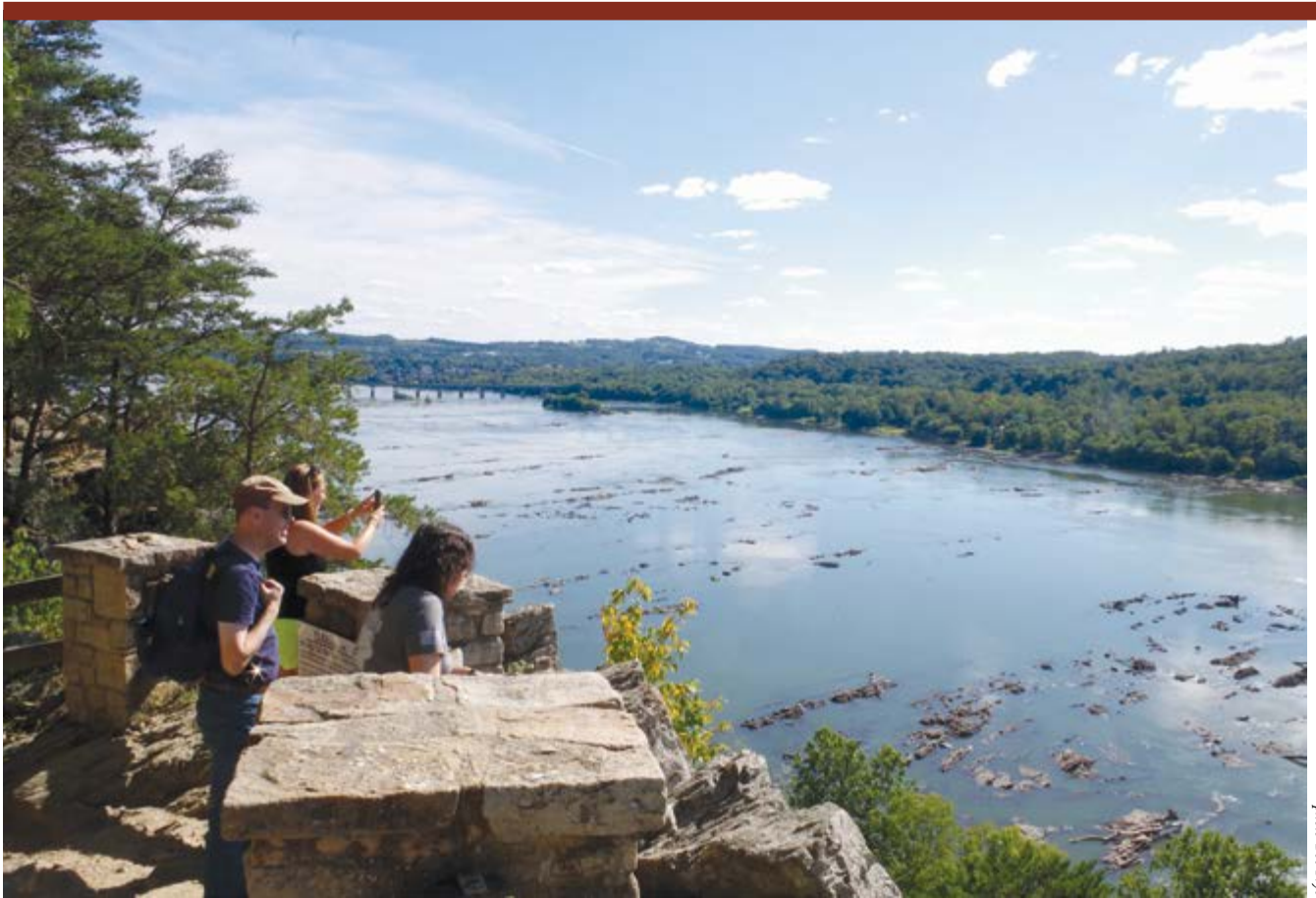


photo-Bob Frye

A view of the Lower Susquehanna River from the Chickies Rock Overlook, Lancaster County.

“In terms of points of interest, that’s definitely a highlight,” said Jajko.

The river trail offers plenty of other history. Paddle what’s known locally as the Muddy Creek Loop. It starts and ends at the Muddy Creek Access, on the shore opposite Susquehannock State Park. You can see Mount Johnson Island, the world’s first bald eagle sanctuary.

The Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail supports plenty of wildlife. The area designated as Conejohela Flats, downstream of the Wright’s Ferry Bridge and at the upper end of Lake Clarke, is wonderfully rich in bird life. Marked by a mosaic of ever-changing low-lying islands and mud flats, it’s considered an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society. According to the river trail’s sponsor, the Susquehanna National Heritage Area, only Presque Isle State Park, Erie, attracts a larger concentration of migrating shorebirds in Pennsylvania. As many as 38 species have been identified here, along with eagles, ospreys and herons.

Throughout the river, boaters can find multiple species of fish to catch. Though, Smallmouth Bass are the main draw.

“That’s the fishery that really draws people from far away,” said Garret Kratina, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Fisheries Biologist.

Disease impacted fish in the 2000s. The populations seem to have emerged from that storm. There are now lots of fish in the 12- to 14-inch class, with bigger ones to be found, especially in the more riverine, undammed sections around Harrisburg.

“There are trophy fish, for sure,” said Kratina. “You’ll get fish in that 18- to 20-inch range.”

“I would expect to find them in a lot of the rocky riffles and pools, the deeper runs. They are kind of an ambush critter, so anywhere they can duck in and out of the current and feed is good.”

The Smallmouth Bass fishery is primed to be good for a while, too. The PFBC does annual surveys on the river, sampling for adult bass. Recent years have shown multiple “strong, up-and-coming” classes to keep their numbers healthy.

Anglers can expect not only Smallmouth Bass, but catfish, Muskellunge and Walleyes.

“Overall, I would say the fishery throughout the river is in really good shape right now,” said Kratina.

Lots of people are taking to the river these days in search of fish and other fun. Among the North Branch



photos: Bob Frye

A look at the Susquehanna River from Hawk Point Overlook in Susquehannock State Park, Holtwood, Lancaster County. The islands shown here, during high water, include Mount Johnson Island, home to the world's first bald eagle sanctuary.



Paddlers navigate their way through a rock garden on the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail upstream of the Veterans Memorial Bridge, Columbia, Lancaster County, and Wrightsville, York County.

Susquehanna River Water Trail, West Branch Susquehanna River Water Trail and even Middle Susquehanna River Water Trail, the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail has the most recreation resources like outfitters, marinas and boat launches. Its lake-like sections allow paddlers to do loop trips that don't require a shuttle.

The plethora of activities on shore along the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail also draw visitors.

"You've got bike and hike trails, Lancaster Conservancy lands and cool river towns," said Jajko. "It all makes that region a playground for hiking, biking and paddling. You're surrounded by recreational opportunities."

The spectacular Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail is waiting for you to explore. ☐



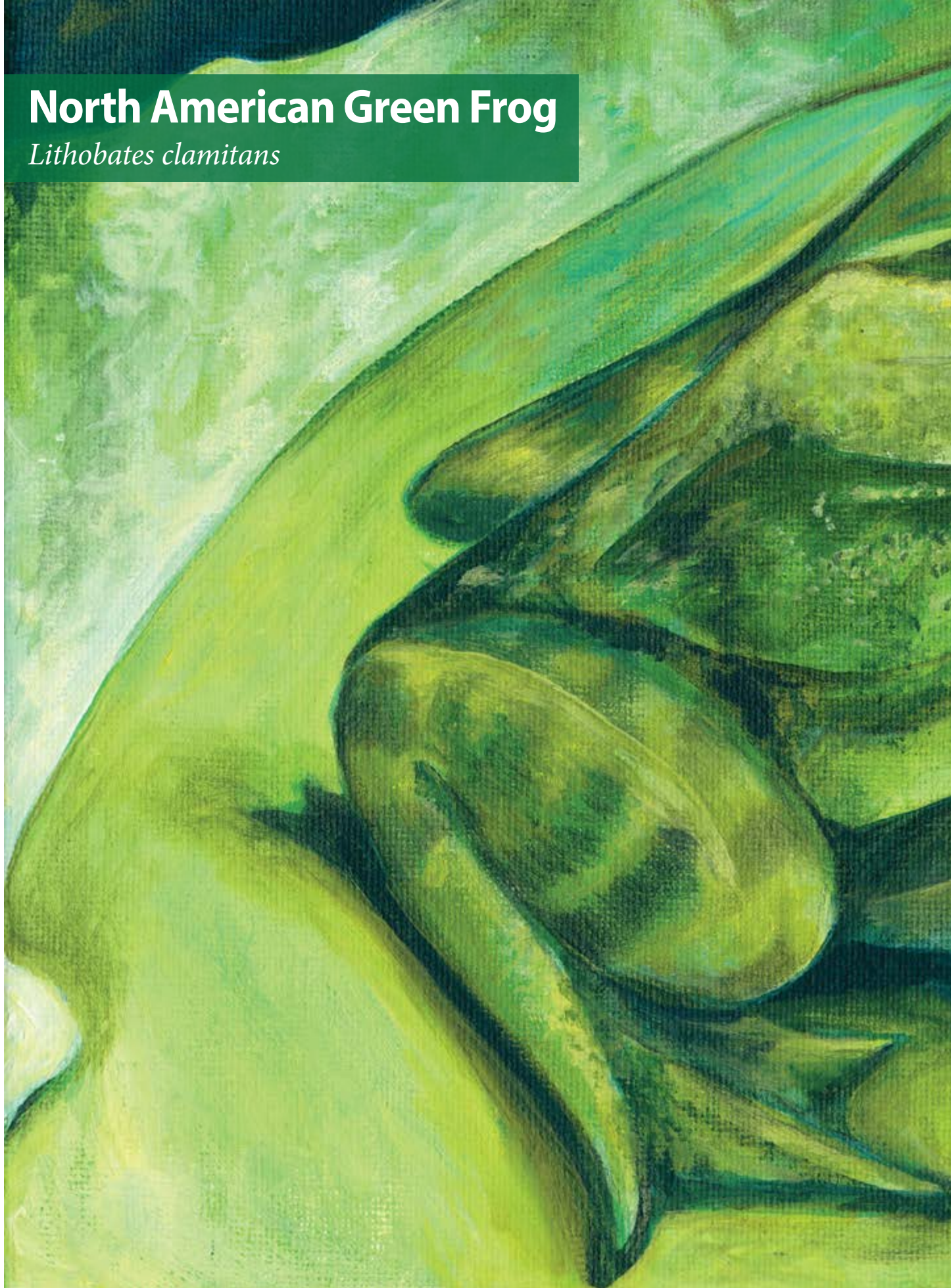
The Susquehanna National Heritage Area has informational kiosks along the river and trails outlining the history of the area.

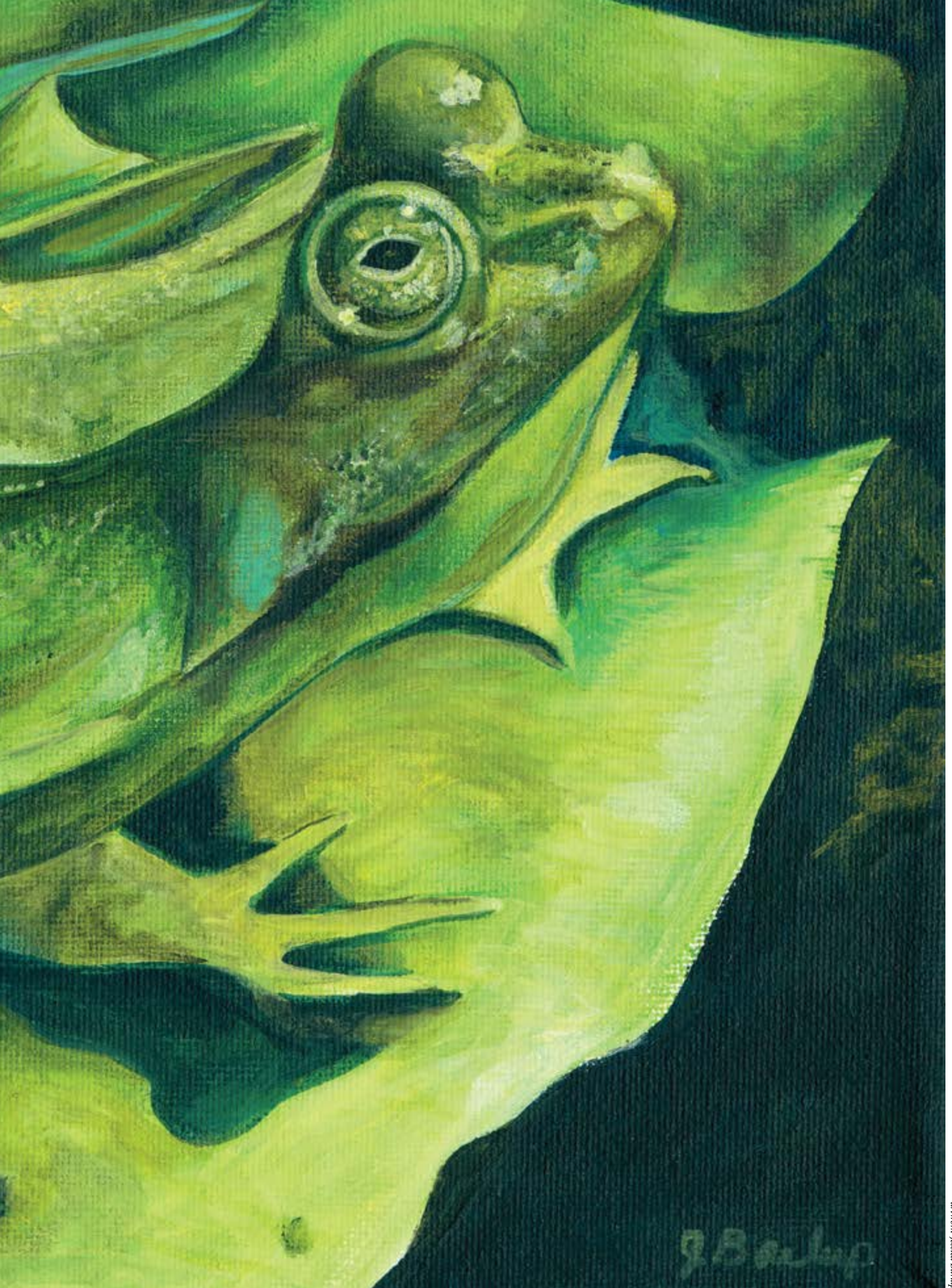
More information:

- Maps of the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail are available from the Susquehanna National Heritage Area (SNHA) at susqnha.org/explore/maps-guides. The SNHA also offers a free guide to paddling the Conejohela Flats area as well as guides to land trails, historical areas and river towns.
- Susquehanna Greenway Partnership (susquehannagreenway.org) offers suggested paddling itineraries for the Lower Susquehanna River Water Trail. It also leads guided trips on the river and offers other resources of interest.
- For guided tours of the Big and Little Indian Rock sites, visit safeharborpetroglyphs.com or kayaklanco.com/petroglyphs-guided-tour.

North American Green Frog

Lithobates clamitans





artwork: Jessica Barlow



MORE THAN A CAST— *Amazing Women Anglers*



photo-PFBC archives

by Linda Stager

The smiles appeared long before the fish surfaced. A women's group gathered for the Women's Fly Fishing Clinic at Hills Creek State Park, Wellsboro, Tioga County.

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Instructor Amidea Daniel just finished saying, "This is your journey. You should make it what you want it to be. This does not have to be my way or anyone else's way. This is about you getting out there, being able to cast, having a good time and setting your own goals."

Uncertain looks relaxed, and from then on, Daniel had the group laughing and learning—learning the basics of technique but also what it's like to be part of a women's community of people who fish. Some participants had never held a fly rod before. Others had limited experience, but all of them came eager to learn.

Selah, age 16, and her mom, Daniella, sat together. During introductions, Daniella spoke about seeing fly fishing in the West and realizing that we had places to fly fish in Pennsylvania. When she saw the clinic's notice, she signed up. She brought Selah along, 3 hours from their home. Daniella was trying to teach Selah what she knew as a self-taught beginner but felt she wasn't giving her daughter the best information. They were here to learn the right way.

Selah added, "I'm just here for the ride."

But, something changed quickly for Selah. Those smiles? She was often the one smiling. They all learned about leaders and lines, rods and reels, casting technique and flies. But, they also shared laughs and celebrated small victories together.

By the time practice sessions ended, Selah was hooked. When asked how she felt, she said, "This is awesome. I didn't think I could do it, but I can!"

At the nearby lake, Daniel, with volunteer instructors Ashanti Davenport, Renee Kelly, Don Kelly, Kris Bretz and Jim Mucci, helped each participant.

Then, came the moment every beginning fly angler anticipates.

Daniella's line tightened. The rod bent. Moments later, she landed her first fish on a fly rod. Not long afterward, Selah followed with a catch of her own.

"This is awesome. I didn't think I could do it, but I can!"



photo-Linda Stager

Amidea Daniel, PFBC's Northcentral Region Outreach and Education Coordinator, instructing the Women's Fly Fishing Clinic at Hills Creek State Park, Wellsboro, Tioga County.



photo-Linda Stager

Amidea Daniel assists participants with practice sessions of line control while bringing in a fish. One partner is the angler; the other is the fish.



photo-PFBC archives

Volunteer instructor Kris Bretz and Daniella with her first catch on a fly rod.



photo: PPGC archives

Selah with her catch during the women's fly fishing event.

The size of the fish didn't measure their success. It was measured by something much more meaningful.

Women anglers are one of the fastest-growing groups in the fishing community today, and events like this clinic help explain why. They provide a welcoming environment where newcomers can learn, ask questions and discover that fishing is about far more than catching fish. It's about time outdoors, lifelong learning and the connections made along the way.

When Daniel pulled line off a fly reel, enough for each participant to hold, they formed a group connected by common interests and a passion for fishing.

Each one of these women will continue to experience the thrill that keeps anglers coming back to the water year after year. 🐟

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FROZEN DOESN'T MEAN SAFE— *What You Should Know*

by Chris A. Calhoun



photo-PFBC archives

Winter quietly settled into the Kettle Creek Valley, and before long, a glassy layer of ice spread across the lake. As a kid, some of my favorite memories were made ice skating with friends and family—laughing, spinning and exploring the frozen surface.

Our method of testing the ice was simple, if not reckless—find the biggest rock, toss it high into the air and see if it broke through the ice. If it didn't, we took it as a green light to walk, slide or even jump around. If we saw ice anglers already out there, that was all the reassurance we needed.

I once skated the entire length of the lake using an umbrella as a sail. On the way back, the ice near shore cracked beneath me. One leg plunged into the frigid water. I scrambled out, soaked and shaken. Looking back now, with decades of experience teaching ice safety and rescue, I see I was lucky.

How Ice Forms

When air temperatures drop, surface water begins to cool. That colder water sinks, replaced by warmer water from below. This vertical circulation continues until the entire body of water reaches a uniform temperature of about 39 degrees F (4 degrees C). Once that balance is reached, the surface cools further and ice begins to form.

Water is unique, because it expands as it freezes, making ice less dense than liquid water. That's why it floats. As cold weather continues, ice thickens downward from the bottom of the sheet, not the top.

But, just because the surface looks frozen doesn't mean it's safe.

It's More Than Just Thickness

Clear, hard ice, which may appear blue, green or even black, is the strongest. It forms under consistent cold and is relatively free of air bubbles. White or "snow ice", formed by refrozen slush, is about half as strong. Rotten or decaying ice—often milky or honeycombed—can appear thick but has a dangerously weak structure.

Even strong-looking ice can fail under the right (or wrong) conditions.

Minimum Thickness Guidelines

According to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission:

- 8 inches plus: group activities
- 5 inches: two anglers

These apply only to new, clear ice under stable conditions. Always measure the ice in multiple locations.

Weather, Wind and What's Underneath

Consistent cold builds strong ice. But, warm days, bright sun or even mild nights begin the weakening process. Sunlight reflects off rocks, docks and the lake bottom, melting the ice from below.



Wear a properly fitting life jacket or float coat.
photo: PFBC archives

Wind plays a role too. Light wind helps water evenly freeze, but strong wind can keep areas open or push thin sheets into danger zones. Current below the surface—often near inlets, outlets or underwater springs—prevents ice from forming or staying thick.

Snow, surprisingly, can be a hazard. It insulates the surface, slowing ice growth, and adds weight. Wet, heavy snow may cause flooding or slushy patches—both signs of stress.

Even unseen factors matter. Decomposing vegetation, fish and waterfowl activity can generate enough heat to weaken ice from below. And, on reservoirs, drawdowns may leave air pockets under the surface, making the ice above unsupported and deceptive.

Know Where You're Standing

Ice near the shoreline is often the weakest due to warmth from the ground, reflected sun and shifting water levels. Be cautious around:

- Shallow Coves
- Submerged Objects
- Natural Springs
- River Bends or Areas with Moving Water

River ice is dangerous, less predictable and more fragile, especially where current is present (stay off ice formed on moving water).

When to Stay Off the Ice

Don't ignore warning signs:

- Warm weather—especially multiple days above freezing
- Standing water or slush—signals melting and structural failure
- Long cracks or spiderweb patterns—indicate stressed ice

- Discolored or milky ice—often “rotten,” even if it’s thick
- Gaps at shorelines or open water—ice may be unstable at the edges
- Near docks, bridges, rocks or inflows—objects radiate heat
- Moving water—ice is always weaker and thinner

If the ice looks suspicious or shows multiple warning signs, the best choice is to stay off it.

Ice Safety Essentials

Even when ice looks inviting, it can change fast. Whether you’re skating, fishing or hiking, follow these core safety tips:

Wear a Life Jacket

Yes, even on ice. A properly fitting life jacket or float coat helps you stay afloat if you fall in—and buys you critical time during cold water shock.

Don’t Go Alone

Travel with a partner and carry essentials:

- Ice Awls or Picks
- Whistle
- Throw Rope
- Cell Phone in a Waterproof Case
- Ice Chisel
- Crampons

Know the Escape Drill

If you fall in:

- Try not to panic.
- Exit toward the ice you came from.
- Use ice picks to grip the edge.
- Kick your feet and pull yourself out.
- Roll away from the hole before standing.

If you witness a fall:

- Call 911 first.
- Avoid running out onto the ice.
- Reach or throw—don’t go.

Even trained rescuers approach with caution.

Oversight

Even at monitored public parks, lakes or recreation areas, no one can declare ice 100% safe. Agencies may report on conditions; however, ice conditions are constantly changing, and you’re ultimately responsible for your own decision to go out onto the ice.

For checklists, survival tips and ice safety graphics, visit **FishandBoat.com**. Search “Ice Fishing.”

I often think back to those childhood days—laughing on the ice, testing it with nothing but a rock toss and blind confidence. We were lucky. Now, after years of training others in rescue and survival, I know the ice can be extremely unforgiving.

Enjoy the beauty of winter. Share it with your family. But, take the time to understand the ice before stepping out. Be prepared.

Frozen doesn’t always mean safe. ❏

Self Rescue:



Ice Fishing:



Float Plan:



WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET.

Life jackets are required to be worn from **November 1 to April 30** in boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe, kayak or paddleboard.



Regulations:





More Stealth for More Winter Walleyes



by Ross Robertson

photos by the author

After 40 years of chasing Walleyes, I've concluded that they're afraid of their own shadow. These tasty and fun to catch fish require stealth to be tricked. In the wintertime, being stealthy becomes even more important. Here are a few factors to consider before your next Walleye ice fishing trip.

Foot Traffic

Live sonar has allowed us to see in real time how startled Walleyes can be from something as simple as dropping an ice scoop onto the ground or even someone

walking more than 100 feet away. This past winter, I watched a friend startle Walleyes below me as he drove his snowmobile several hundred yards away. Once is a coincidence, but when you see it repeatedly, you become a believer. During peak bite windows or when fish are below you, avoid all unnecessary movements.

Augers

A lot of anglers have made the switch to electric augers to avoid ornery gas motors and to be quieter. Ironically, studies show that a hand auger is actually the loudest. The blades scraping the ice creates noise and vibration that startles fish. The fact that a hand auger takes longer to drill than a powered one means more time scraping and making vibrations. Not what most of us thought, but it makes sense once it's laid out.



Walleyes require stealth to be caught, especially in the winter.



Use live sonar and watch how Walleyes respond in real time.



Cadence

This is another area where live sonar, cameras and a lot of time on the water have proven to be true. Walleyes are just flat out startled by different cadences at different times. I don't have a magic formula, other than I use live sonar and watch how Walleyes respond in real time. You can quickly adapt to different cadences but also presentations. If you see Walleyes run from a glide bait, try a rattle spoon or vice versa. This past winter, and time again, the best cadence was nothing at all. If you moved the lure at all before the Walleyes engaged on your lure they wouldn't even get into flasher range below the hole. Sometimes, nothing is the best thing. When this is the case, a tip-up or dead-sticked rod can be worth its weight in gold.

Ice Conditions

Fishing on glare ice may be slippery, but it can also be frustrating from a fishing standpoint. No snow coverage or clear ice allows for more light penetration, putting Walleyes on high alert. Look for small patches of snow (use a spud bar to check for safe ice) and pressure ridges, where ice can become layered. All these situations help act as a camouflage and put you in a better fishing area.

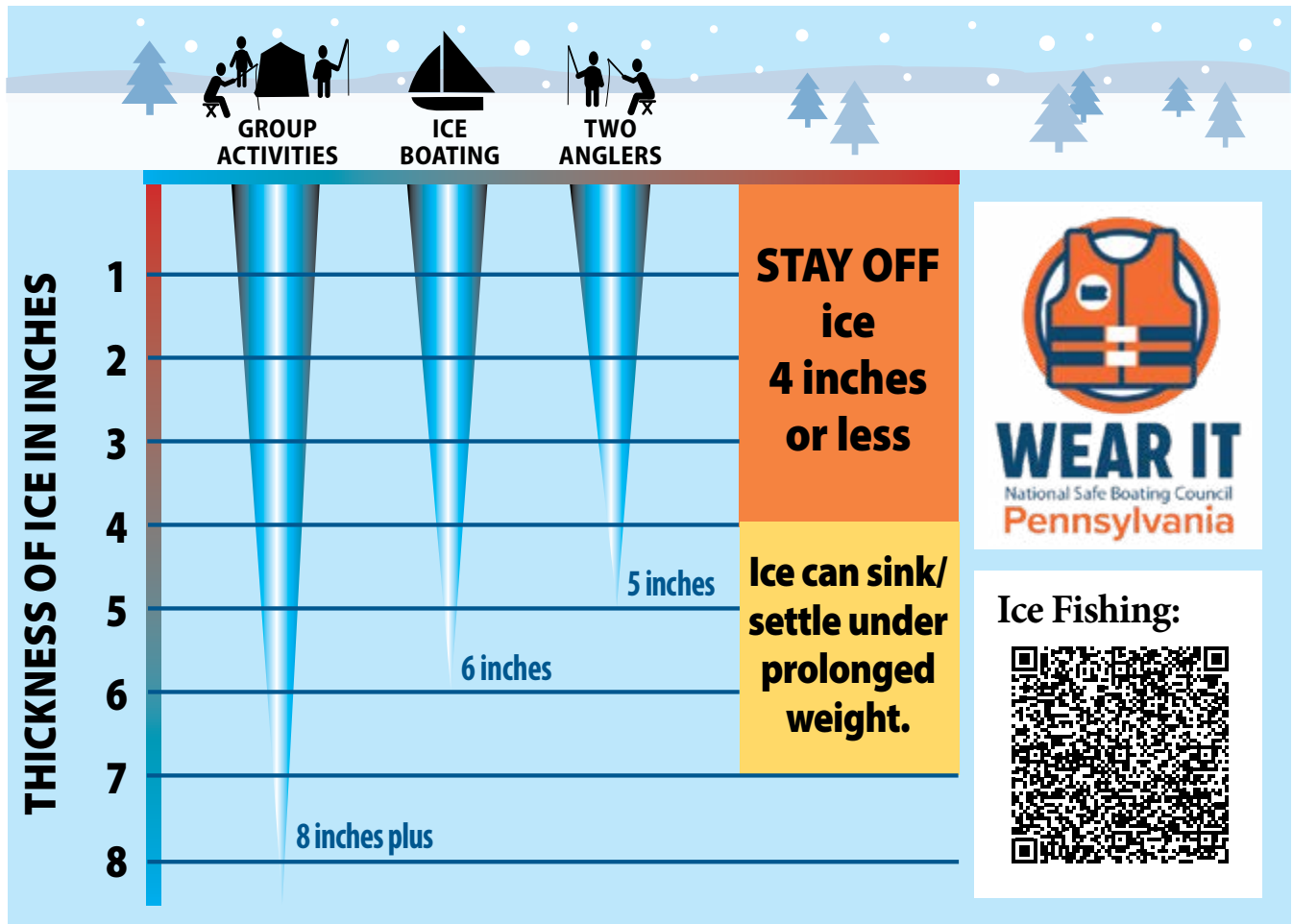
When it comes down to it, there's more than four things that will startle Walleyes under the ice, but being aware is important. As an ice fishing guide, I have seen countless times where something as simple as rubbing your feet on the ice or throwing items like a thermos onto the ice keeps anglers from catching fish. Go into silent fishing mode this winter, and you are almost guaranteed to catch more Walleyes. ☐

LAKE ICE SAFETY GUIDE

Stay off ice on moving water.

Ice is never 100% safe.

Minimum ice thickness guidelines for new, clear ice.



These are general ice thickness guidelines. Carefully check ice conditions before venturing onto the ice.

Ice Safety Tips

- Never go on the ice alone.
- Wear a life jacket or float coat.
- Test the ice.
- Stay off cloudy ice.
- Keep away from structures (like logs, stumps and rocks) and springs and shorelines, which may thaw first.
- Understand ice formation factors (like water chemistry, wind and sunlight).
- Have a plan for rescue (ropes, ice awls, ice picks).
- Learn self-rescue techniques.
- Dress in layers.
- Take a change of dry clothes.
- Don't drive on the ice.



Winter Trout Nymph Roundup

by Carl Haensel

photos by the author



Ready to chase trout this winter? Here's a short list of the top flies that will help you catch fish during the colder months of the year, plus other suggestions that you can try.



Winter trout nymphs from top to bottom: Caddis Pupa, sizes 14-18; Beadhead Hare's Ear, sizes 12-18; Copper John, sizes 14-18; Orange Scud, sizes 14-16; and Purple Prince, sizes 12-16.

Colder Water

As fall winds down and the sun rises lower in the sky, trout settle into their winter patterns. Colder water motivates trout to find deeper, slower water. When you rig up to fish flies in the winter, look for deep pools. Try to get your flies down into the depths, using splitshot or other weights if needed.

Nymphs

The most productive flies during the winter are nymphs. They imitate small aquatic organisms, mainly insects. Choosing patterns that imitate food available year-round, like caddis larva, mayfly nymphs, scuds or other immature aquatic organisms, is a good bet. Brighter flies with some flash can motivate trout to strike, especially if the water is off-color.

Dry Flies

While colder water temperatures slow down insects and trout, some insects still hatch during the winter. On warm days, midges and winter stoneflies can hatch, bringing trout to the surface. Flies like Griffiths Gnats in sizes 18-20 can work well.

Winter Streamers

If you're fishing during a period of unseasonably warm winter weather, try throwing streamer patterns if the water warms up. Beadhead Woolly Buggers in sizes 8-12 can work well. While trout are less likely to aggressively chase flies when it's cold, water temperature increases can get them active and moving, even in the middle of winter. ☐



photo-PFBC archives

Five-year Milestone for Three Rivers Blue Catfish

by Mike Parker
Communications Director
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Efforts to restore a long-lost native species to the Three Rivers in western Pennsylvania showed no signs of slowing down, as thousands of Blue Catfish were once again stocked this past summer.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (PFBC's) program to reintroduce North America's largest species of catfish to the waters they disappeared from in the early 1900s due to poor water quality is now in its fifth year, marking a milestone in a 15-year plan.

In a continued partnership, the PFBC received Blue Catfish eggs from the Ohio Department of Natural Resources in 2025 and raised them for 14 months at the Tionesta State Fish Hatchery (SFH), Tionesta,

Forest County. In 2026, the average size of the 10,000 Blue Catfish being stocked was nearly 12 inches.

"When we began this program in the fall of 2022, we were putting 3- to 5-inch fingerlings in the river," said Daren Reinhart, Tionesta SFH Manager. "From 2023 to now, we've been able to grow significantly larger fish that were at least 8 inches when stocked, to this year's fish that are 12 inches in length or more."

According to Reinhart and other hatchery staff who embarked on multiple 2-hour-plus road trips from Tionesta to Pittsburgh during the summer, larger, more durable Blue Catfish should have a much better chance at fending off predators including native Flathead Catfish and Muskellunge. The increased survivability is expected to kick-start the eventual trophy sport fishery throughout the Three Rivers.

"I think a lot of catfish anglers around here should be excited," added Reinhart.



Daren Reinhart, Tionesta State Fish Hatchery Manager, empties a net of Blue Catfish into the Ohio River, Kilbuck Township, Allegheny County.

For the initial 5 years of the restoration plan, Blue Catfish were stocked exclusively in the Ohio River from Pittsburgh's Point State Park downstream to the PFBC's access area in Kilbuck Township, Allegheny County. Beginning in 2027, another 5-year stocking effort will expand upstream into the lower Allegheny and Monongahela rivers.

"It's rare that we get the opportunity to restore a popular recreational species like the Blue Catfish within its historic range in the Ohio River Basin," said Geoff Smith, PFBC Warmwater Unit Leader. "This is owed largely to dramatic water quality improvements over the past several decades in the Three Rivers. Other states downstream of Pennsylvania including West Virginia preceded us with their own restoration efforts, and our surveys show fish from other states are finding their way upstream. Thanks to our stocking efforts, we expect to start catching fish that were introduced here in Pennsylvania soon."

With the ability to reach weights over 100 pounds and a habit of feeding during cooler months, Blue Catfish are extremely popular with anglers and have the potential to provide year-round trophy catfish fishing in the Three Rivers. However, with studies showing it can take upwards of 15 years for Blue Catfish to reach sizes of at least 35

inches and achieve sustainable natural reproduction, Pennsylvania's restoration plan includes protections for the fishery during its earliest stages. In July 2026, the PFBC Board of Commissioners voted to safeguard the up-and-coming, yet slow-growing Blue Catfish population with catch and release regulations within the Ohio River Basin.

"This is, again, a 15-year restoration plan, and we're only a third of the way in," said Reinhart. "We've put a lot of work into raising these fish, and we're both excited and optimistic that this is all going to pay off, not only for the Blue Catfish, but the anglers who supported this effort from the start." □

Special Note:

While Blue Catfish are a native species within the Ohio River Basin, they are not native to Lake Erie or the Atlantic slope basins in Pennsylvania including the Delaware River, Potomac River and Susquehanna River. Blue Catfish are considered highly invasive outside of their native range. Adverse impacts have affected fisheries where non-native Blue Catfish have been introduced including predation on threatened or endangered native species and commercially or recreationally valuable species. It's illegal for individuals to stock Blue Catfish into any water of Commonwealth.



Choosing the Right Ice Rod

by Donald Kelly

photos by the author

Success on Pennsylvania's frozen waters starts with having the right tools for the job. Once you have the proper safety gear, it's time to choose an ice rod.

With so many options available, where do you start?

First, think about the target species. Ultralight and light power rods work well with small jigs for panfish. Sensitive soft tips show even the slightest nibble from crappies, perch or Bluegills. Full fiberglass noodle rods bend deep and protect light lines while making even the tiniest fish feel like a monster. Rods featuring fiberglass tips, frequently referred to as 'quick-tips,' offer similar sensitivity to see the bite, coupled with a graphite backbone for stronger hooksets. Additionally, adding a spring bobber to any rod helps notice light bites.

Crappies often hit moving upward, relieving tension from the rod, instead of bending it. Consider a brightly colored, easy to see tip for better bite detection, too.

For larger predatory fish, like Walleyes or bass, look for a medium-light or medium power rod. The heavier action and stouter backbone deliver better hooksets, especially with bigger baits, and provide more control over larger fish.

Next, consider a length that fits your fishing style. Longer rods, 30- to 40-inches long, work great for hole hopping. The extra length lets you stand and stay away from the hole and easily work the entire water column. Inside a shelter, longer rods may hinder hooksetting with short ceilings and tight confines. Instead, rods that are 23- to 27-inches long tend to be more efficient. Plus, a shorter rod positions you closer to the hole for sight fishing and shorter jiggling motions.

For the most versatility, consider two setups. One dedicated for larger species and one for panfish. Find a few that feel nice in your hand, and get ready for a great winter season ahead. ☐

Ice Fishing Essentials



ROCK & LOG

FISH IN WINTER!

As winter approaches, most fish gather in river and creek bottoms and deep pools. Fish are ectotherms, so their body temperatures adjust to the surrounding water temperature. As water temperatures lower, fish metabolism drops, reducing activity and energy. Referred to as torpor, the need for food and oxygen drastically drops, helping fish conserve stored energy. Their heart rate and breathing also slow down, making them sluggish. This allows them to survive long periods with limited food and oxygen. Some fish species even develop specialized proteins to prevent ice crystals from forming in their blood.



Where Do Fish Go in Winter?

When lakes cool, fish seek refuge in deep waters. Due to a process called thermal stratification, an area of warm, dense water sinks to the lake's bottom, creating a temperate layer beneath the colder, less dense water and surface ice. This deep water protects fish from extreme cold. Fish hide under submerged logs, in rock piles and in weed beds for protection from predators. Different species prefer varying depths or structures based on their needs and typical behaviors, with some burrowing into the lakebed.



EXPLORE PA WATERS



Rock & Log:

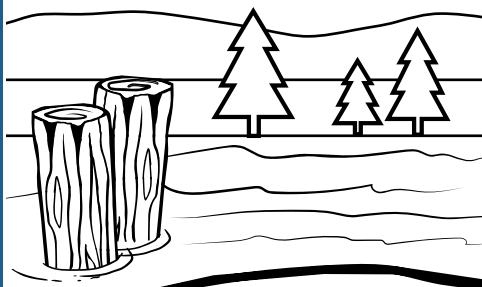
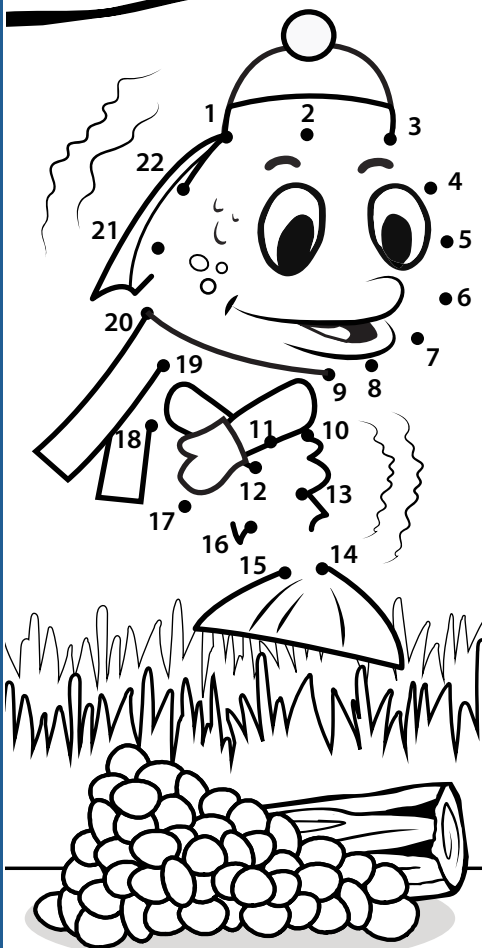


FishandBoat.com



Connect the Dots

Connect the dots from 1 through 22.
Then, color the picture, in marker.



A WINTER WONDERLAND

Pennsylvania has beautiful state parks to shake off the winter blues while enjoying the wonders of our natural spaces, winter fishing and hiking, too.

- Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County
- Black Moshannon State Park, Centre County
- French Creek State Park, Chester and Berks counties
- Gifford Pinchot State Park, York County
- Greenwood Furnace State Park, Huntingdon County
- Laurel Hill State Park, Somerset County
- Little Pine State Park, Lycoming County
- Maurice K. Goddard State Park, Mercer County
- Parker Dam State Park, Clearfield County
- R. B. Winter State Park, Union County
- Whipple Dam State Park, Huntingdon County



FISHING FIRST AID



A small, waterproof first aid kit should have antiseptic, bandages and cleansing wipes for treating minor wounds.



Carry a more robust first aid kit in your vehicle.

by Tyler Frantz photos by the author

It was a beautiful day to explore the peaceful waters of a nearby state park. I just unloaded the kayaks and got the kids into their life jackets. Burning time while my wife applied sunscreen, I walked my daughter by hand to see the dozens of geese loafing in the cove. But, on our way back to the launch, she tripped on some loose stones and took a tumble, mildly skinning her elbow.

Luckily, we were prepared. I dug into my dry bag to retrieve a small first aid kit. Then, my wife cleaned her scrape with an antiseptic wipe and patched her up with an adhesive bandage. With a gentle kiss, my little girl was good as new and ready to hit the lake.

Fish long enough and you're bound to have an occasional misfortune along the water. Slips, falls, hooks, brush and even fish teeth or fins occasionally cause unexpected scrapes and scratches. It's

important to be prepared with a basic first aid kit packed in a tackle box or fishing vest to properly clean and protect open wounds while fishing. Otherwise, you run the risk of infection.

Every angler should keep a routine assortment of medical supplies on hand for unexpected accidents. I carry a small waterproof container that holds hand sanitizer, cleansing wipes, antiseptic towelettes, gauze and different-sized adhesive bandages. In the vehicle, I have a more robust first aid kit with sting relief wipes, antihistamines, tweezers, hydrocortisone cream, disposable gloves, antibiotic ointment, pain relievers, instant cold packs, butterfly closures, bandages, medical tape and small scissors.

While serious emergencies warrant professional medical services, a basic first aid kit can handle most minor mishaps. Be prepared for the occasional injury and fish safely. ☐

Christmas, History and Holiday Fishing

It's the most wonderful time of the year to visit A Gettysburg Christmas Festival! This annual 3-day festival is being held on December 4-6, 2026, throughout historic downtown Gettysburg. The festival has everything from music, entertainment, shopping, dining, Santa and more.

Some additional features include tuba caroling, a gingerbread celebration, a holiday pop-up market and historic house tours.

If you need a break from the Christmas crowds, make your way to Caledonia State Park, Fayetteville, Franklin County, to enjoy the extended trout season. Check out Conococheague Creek, Rocky Mountain Creek and Carbaugh Run as they are known for Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout and native Brook Trout. Discover more at agettysburgchristmasfestival.com. 📱

Photo: courtesy of Caledonia State Park

Caledonia State Park, Fayetteville, Franklin County

NATURAL CONNECTIONS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR
IN NOVEMBER AND
DECEMBER THROUGHOUT
PENNSYLVANIA.



Photo: PPRC archives

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

Poecile atricapillus

Don't migrate south for winter and can be seen at your bird feeders all winter long.



Photo: Linda Sager

GREAT BLUE HERON

Ardea herodias

Most migrate for winter, but a few remain as wintertime residents.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER Highlights



NW
PA!

PRESQUE ISLE LIGHTS

Visit Presque Isle State Park, Erie, Erie County, for Presque Isle Lights, a holiday tradition that transforms the park with festive displays on select evenings from November 27-December 27, 2026. Don't let your outdoor adventure end with just the lights. Presque Isle is a year-round destination for outdoor recreation and fishing. Enjoy great fishing, explore the park and enjoy the lights.

Learn More:



SW
PA!

SANTA TROLLEY AND FISHING

Head to the Pennsylvania Trolley Museum in Washington, Washington County, and ride on a trolley with Santa. The Santa Trolley runs on select dates from November 27-December 20, 2026. See interactive exhibits and toy train displays. Visit nearby Canonsburg Lake, Canonsburg, Washington County, to fish for Bluegills, Rainbow Trout or White Crappies. Go to pa-trolley.org.



photo-courtesy of Pennsylvania Trolley Museum

NC
PA!

HOLIDAY CHEER

Travel back in time for old-fashioned fun. Bellefonte, Centre County, and Wellsboro, Tioga County, offer holiday experiences of yesteryear. Enjoy horse carriage rides, ice skating, crafts, gifts, food and more. Both towns are surrounded by outdoor adventure with state parks, forests, streams and lakes.

Bellefonte:



Wellsboro:



SC
PA!

FREEDOM AND FISHING

Relive history during Articles of Confederation Day at the Colonial Complex, York, York County. This free event is on November 14, from 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. and will include historic tradespeople, reenactors, musicians and more. After learning about our nation's history, complete your day by heading to the East Branch Codorus Creek for late fall trout action.

Explore More:



NE
PA!

RIDE THE RAILS AND REEL ONE IN

Take a ride aboard Steamtown National Historic Site's North Pole Limited, Scranton, Lackawanna County. With festive train rides and a visit from Santa, it's a great way to get the family outside and enjoy a holiday tradition. Make a day of it and explore the Lackawanna River and find its trophy trout. The North Pole Limited runs on select dates in December.

Discover More:



SE
PA!

CITY HALL TO THE PENNYPACK CREEK

Holiday crowds and winter trout share the same city, and December is a month where you can get both in a single day. Christmas Village, Philadelphia, is a German-style market at LOVE park and City Hall from November 21-December 27, 2026. At Dilworth Park, the Made in Philadelphia Holiday Market is November 13, 2026-January 1, 2027. Both are free to attend. After shopping, head to Pennypack Creek for stocked trout or the nearby Schuylkill River for various warmwater species.




Register for Our Upcoming Events!





photo-Linda Stager

NORTH AMERICAN BEAVER *Castor canadensis*

Remain active during winter until the water freezes. Then, they retreat to their lodges where they remain until spring.



photo-PFBC archives

STEELHEAD

Oncorhynchus mykiss

Begin migrating up Lake Erie tributaries in September, peaking in November.



photo-PFBC archives

WHITE-TAILED DEER

Odocoileus virginianus

Rut takes place in November and December, in time for hunting season.

PFBC ON PATROL



Our Northcentral Region law enforcement officers were recently awarded the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators 2026 Operation Dry Water Northern Region Law Enforcement Award. This award recognizes exceptional regional achievements in boating under the influence detection during the Operation Dry Water weekend in July.



Handling venomous snake calls is part of a Waterways Conservation Officer's (WCO's) responsibilities. WCO Curt T. Tereschak recently responded to a call for a Timber Rattlesnake. He carefully released the snake to a location where it will be safe.



WCO Matthew J. Visosky and WCO Luke E. Walter take the new 27-foot patrol boat assigned to Lake Erie out for its first patrol. The boat was acquired through a federal Port Security Grant.



WCOs encounter different medical situations while on patrol. To prepare for these occasions, they train in different ways. WCOs Krystal F. Daniele, Shane C. Casey and Michael C. Mielnicki are pictured conducting a CPR training on a patrol boat at Beltzville Lake, Carbon County.

photos-PFBC archives

‘Tis the Season to Give the Gift of Fishing!

FISHING LICENSES AND GIFT VOUCHERS AVAILABLE DECEMBER 1, 2026.

Buy Pennsylvania Angler & Boater gift subscriptions for family and friends.



**Purchase and redeem gift vouchers and all other licenses at
more than 700 issuing agents or online.**

HuntFish.PA.gov



➔ **Ryley Kuhn**, Loysville, caught this Smallmouth Bass in Shermans Creek, Perry County, while fishing with her boyfriend Wyatt Lowe. He taught her to fish this summer.

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

NORTHERN TWO-LINED SALAMANDER

Eurycea bislineata

The Northern Two-lined Salamander prefers wet, moist areas close to streams. Adults are 2½- to 4-inches long. Its primary color is yellow but may be tinged with brown, green or orange with a bright yellow belly. The back is nearly covered with a lighter stripe that runs the length of its body and bordered by narrower black or brown stripes that begin at the eyes and end on the tail.



DEKAY'S BROWNSNAKE

Storeria dekayi

The Dekay's Brownsnake is one of the state's smallest snakes, reaching 9- to 13-inches long as an adult. It's most active during the day and likes damp areas such as lowland marshes. This snake has large eyes and a pale yellow or brown belly edged with small black spots. Its back and sides range in color from gray to brown. Two rows of small dark spots border a wide stripe that runs down the center of its back.



EASTERN RED-BACKED SALAMANDER

Plethodon cinereus

The Eastern Red-backed Salamander is a terrestrial salamander, occurring in three different color phases. Adults are 2- to 3½-inches long. Marked with a broad stripe that begins at the head and continues down the back and over the tail, its sides are black. It favors cool, moist forests and hides under stones and logs during daytime hours. Sometimes, it burrows underground.



