

Pennsylvania **ANGLER & BOATER**

The logo for the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is a blue shield-shaped emblem. It features a white fish silhouette swimming to the right, positioned above a white boat silhouette. The text "PENNSYLVANIA" is written in white at the top, and "FISH & BOAT COMMISSION" is written in white along the bottom edge of the shield.

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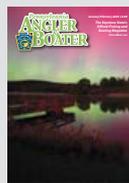


photo-PFBC archives

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Covers



Front cover: The Northern Lights at Hills Creek State Park, Tioga County. *Photo by Linda Stager.*



Back cover: Snow at French Creek, a tributary of the Allegheny River, near Deveraux Park, Union City, Erie County. *Photo by PFBC archives.*



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IT STARTS WITH YOU!

by Timothy D. Schaeffer
Executive Director

Like every edition of *Pennsylvania Angler and Boater*, the articles in the January/February 2026 magazine tell the story of fishing, boating and aquatic resource conservation. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) closed 2025 on a high note, and we're laying the foundation for the memories and stories of 2026.

Hundreds of thousands of people will start 2026 by traveling to Harrisburg for two of the biggest events of the year—the Pennsylvania Farm Show (January 10-17, 2026) and the Great American Outdoor Show (February 7-15, 2026). If you are among the masses who make their way to the capital city for one or both of these annual showcases, stop by our agency's interactive booth to tell us your own personal fish story, get your questions answered by a Waterways Conservation Officer or just say hello.

If you visit our booth at either show, please know the work highlighted and discussed by our team is fueled by a cycle of success generated by your purchase of fishing and boating equipment and motorboat fuel.

In 1950, the Sport Fish Restoration Act (Dingell-Johnson Act) was enacted to provide federal funding to state fish and wildlife agencies for the restoration, conservation, management and enhancement of sport fishing opportunities. The act was expanded in 1984 with the Wallop-Breaux



photo: PFBC archives

Ava Barlup, age 8, and Eleanor Barlup, age 10, pose with fish props in front of PFBC's photo booth at the 2025 Pennsylvania Farm Show, Dauphin County.

Amendment to provide further funding to the Sport Fish Restoration Program by including excise taxes on a wider range of fishing tackle and equipment, motorboat fuel and imported boats and fishing tackle. This amendment provided funding for increased boating access development and aquatic resource education programs.

The program is a good example of the "user pays, user benefits" model, with federal excise taxes on sport fishing equipment and motorboat fuel providing funding for fisheries conservation. Abundant, sustainable fish populations and safe, accessible boating facilities provide wide-ranging opportunities. Anglers and boaters respond by purchasing equipment manufactured by the companies that pay the excise tax. Simply put, anglers and boaters pay for and receive direct benefits.

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund needs to be reauthorized every 5 years, and the PFBC is an active member of a coalition of state and federal partners working to secure reauthorization in 2026 and ensure the future of these investments. ☐

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



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CHILLING TRADITION—

The History of Ice Fishing in Pennsylvania

by Brady J. Crytzer

When the temperature drops and the lakes freeze over, a quieter, colder tradition takes hold—ice fishing. This winter ritual, enjoyed by thousands across the state, boasts a deep-rooted history stretching back centuries.

Early Ice Fishing

Long before Pennsylvania became one of the original thirteen colonies, Native American tribes, such as the Lenape and Iroquois, practiced winter fishing on frozen lakes and rivers. Using sharpened tools made of bone or stone, they would chip through the ice and use spears or handmade lines to catch fish, primarily for sustenance. These early anglers developed clever techniques, such as the use of decoys and reflective materials, to lure fish closer to the surface.

As European settlers moved into the region in the 17th and 18th centuries, they adopted and adapted these techniques, blending Old World knowledge with Indigenous practices. For early pioneers and homesteaders in Pennsylvania's cold, mountainous regions, ice fishing was more than recreation—it was survival. A plentiful catch in the dead of winter could mean the difference between hunger and a full stomach.

Ice Fishing as Recreation

By the late 19th century, as industrialization changed the rhythms of daily life, ice fishing

began to evolve from necessity to leisure. With the expansion of railroads and improved access to remote lakes, winter ice fishing became a popular pastime, especially in northern and western Pennsylvania.

This period also marked the birth of the ice shanty tradition. These simple wooden huts (often homemade) offer protection from the wind and transform the frozen lake into a community gathering spot, where anglers tell stories, share hot coffee and enjoy a sense of camaraderie while waiting for a tug on the line.

Tools of the Trade

Throughout the 20th century, ice fishing gear saw significant advances. Hand augers gave way to gas and battery-powered drills, making it easier than ever to bore through thick ice. Tip-ups became popular in the mid-1900s, allowing anglers to monitor multiple holes at once.

By the 1970s and 1980s, Pennsylvania ice anglers began to embrace sonar and electronic fish finders. These new gadgets brought a high-tech edge to the age-old practice, helping anglers more precisely locate fish and adapt their strategies in real time.

Modern Day Ice Fishing

Today, ice fishing in Pennsylvania is as much about culture as it is about catching fish. From organized derbies

that draw hundreds of participants to quiet mornings on the ice, the activity has grown in popularity across all age groups.

Popular spots include Presque Isle Bay, Erie County, one of the first areas to freeze and a great destination for Yellow Perch, and the Pocono lakes, where ice fishing blends perfectly with the region's winter tourism. Meanwhile, Raccoon Creek State Park, Beaver County, Keystone State Park, Westmoreland County, and Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County, offer safe, accessible options for families and first-timers.

Tradition

While technology and tactics have evolved, the essence of ice fishing in Pennsylvania remains the same. It's about patience, persistence and the quiet beauty of a frozen lake under a pale winter sun. Whether bundled in a high-tech ice shelter or simply sitting on a bucket with a line in the water, ice anglers are part of a tradition that links generations of Pennsylvanians.

As long as the lakes keep freezing, the tip-ups keep popping and the fish keep biting, the story of ice fishing in Pennsylvania will continue to unfold one hole at a time. ☐

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.

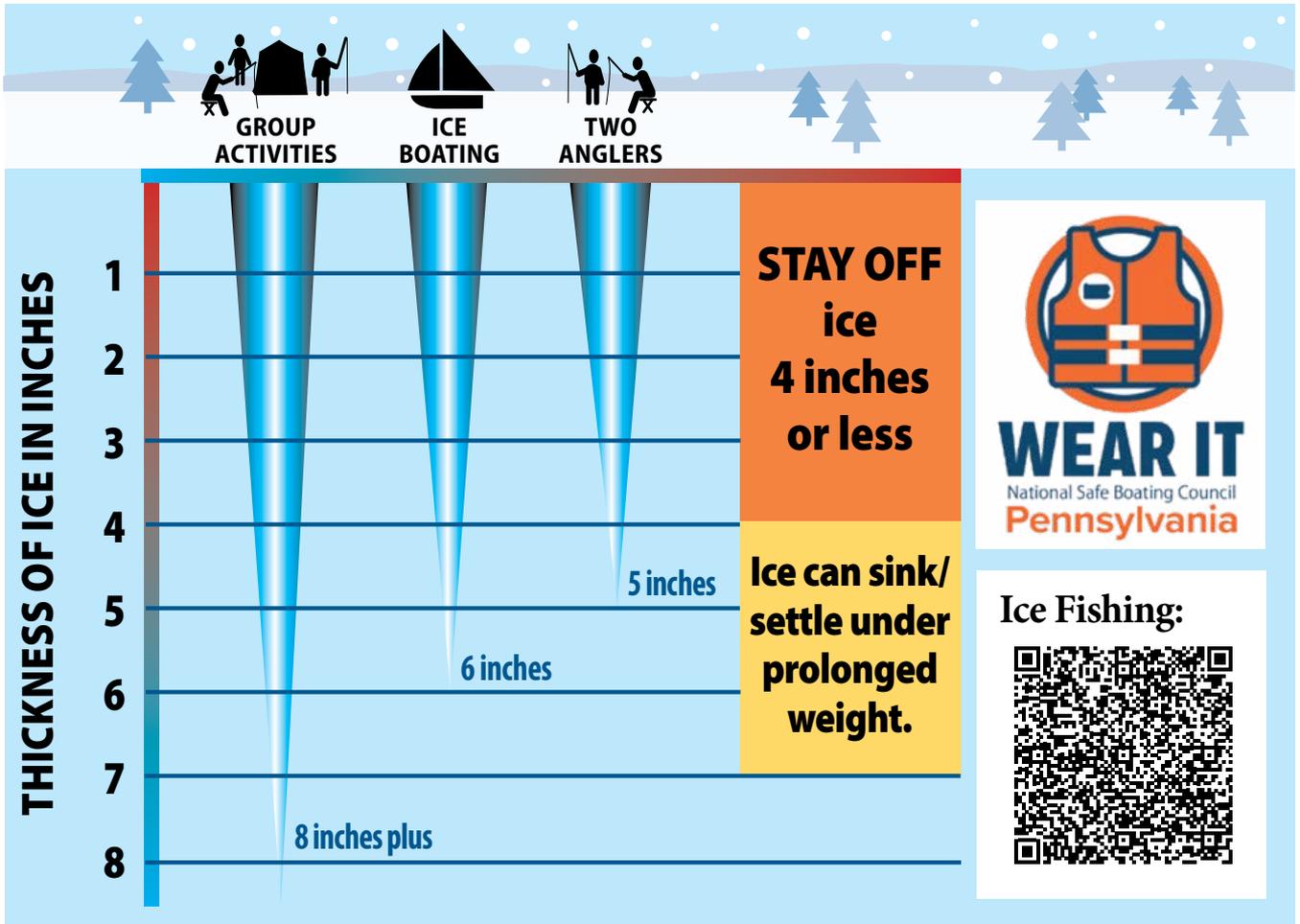


LAKE ICE SAFETY GUIDE

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.



Ice Fishing for Pickerel



photo-Don Kelly

by Don Kelly

“Flaaaaggg!” Excited words echo across the frozen landscape. Anxious anglers rush to be the first to grab the tip-up and tussle with a challenger on the other end. A short tug of war ends with a toothy grin sliding through the hole and onto the ice. The distinct black bar below its eye signifies this fish is a Chain Pickerel (*Esox niger*).

Much smaller cousins of the Muskellunge and Northern Pike, Chain Pickerel reside in many lakes and ponds throughout Pennsylvania. Don't let their size fool you. Pickerel share much of the same ferocity and

aggressiveness as the larger esocids, and they're a blast to target all winter long.

Pickerel live and feed in weedy areas, often in shallow water. Their coloration allows them to blend in while patiently waiting to ambush a tasty minnow or small panfish. Likewise, downed trees, stumps and artificial structures all provide good cover for lurking pickerel to hide. During the open water months, take a picture or mental snapshot of the lake and key in on weedy areas in the winter. On new or unfamiliar water, study depth maps and target coves with 4- to 10-feet of water. Pickerel sometimes travel to deeper areas, but starting shallow will yield good results.



A Chain Pickerel caught while ice fishing.

Tip-ups are the most popular and effective method to target Chain Pickerel. Spool them with 10- to 20-pound tip-up line, and tie a 4- to 6-foot leader at the end of the line with 10 pound fluorocarbon line. Use a size 4 or 6 circle hook and a small splitshot placed about 6- to 10-inches from the hook. A steel leader can prevent bite offs, but I generally find them unnecessary in the winter. Bait the hook with a lively shiner or Fathead Minnow, hooked behind the dorsal fin, and suspend the bait just above the weeds or other structure.

Likewise, with the same hook setup, you can target pickerel with a rod and reel on an automatic hook setting device. Use a medium or medium light action rod spooled with 8- to 10-pound monofilament line. Set both the drag and tension loose enough to allow the fish to fully take the bait before setting the hook.

Pennsylvania allows five total ice fishing lines, and it's best to stagger these lines at a variety of depths to find fish faster and effectively cover the area. Check the lines often to ensure they're properly baited. Replace sluggish or dead minnows with livelier bait.

Similarly, jigging for pickerel can be effective.

Minnow imitations and shiny spoons tipped with minnows, waxworms or minnow heads work well. Flashier patterns and plain silver or gold lures tend to be best.

Bait and Switch

If you miss a fish on a tip-up or other device, immediately grab a rod and jigging rap or spoon. Often, the pickerel will come back and bite again.

Hold on. The strikes are quick and aggressive.

Pickerels are an exciting winter pursuit with fast-paced action that's fun for the whole family. Take along proper gear to safely handle fish. Use pliers and jaw spreaders to keep fingers away from their razor-sharp teeth. ☐



photo-Dan Kelly

A JawJacker, an automatic hook setting device, is ready for action on Hills Creek Lake, Tioga County.



photo-PRBC archives

Jordan Allison, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Fisheries Biologist, caught a Chain Pickerel while ice fishing at Hills Creek State Park.

Popular Lakes for Chain Pickerel:

- Beechwood Lake, Tioga County
- Black Moshannon Lake, Centre County
- Hills Creek Lake, Tioga County
- Rose Valley Lake, Lycoming County
- Tobyhanna Lake, Monroe and Wayne counties

Chain Pickerel:





SC
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SE
PA!

YEAR-ROUND TROUT FISHING

by Bob Frye

Acrisure Stadium and Lincoln Financial Field, home of the Pittsburgh Steelers and Philadelphia Eagles respectively, don't close when there's no football being played. They host concerts, trade shows, birthdays and corporate events during the offseason.

You know what else operates that way—Stocked Trout Waters Open to Year-Round Fishing—a trout permit is required to fish rivers and streams in this program but not required to fish lakes and ponds when targeting sportfish other than trout.

They, too, remain open during the offseason—from the third Monday in February until opening day—when most stocked waters are off limits to all fishing to host anglers seeking Walleyes, muskies, panfish and the like.

“The intention of this program is to allow fishing for other popular warmwater and coolwater sport fish,” said Nathan Walters, Coldwater Unit Leader for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). “These are destination waters that get good use for other species and have high-quality fisheries that can support that use.”

“So, we want to keep those opportunities open to anglers.”

Waters in the program aren't stocked with trout until as close to opening day as possible, or even until after, in the case of Lakeside Quarry, Lebanon County, to minimize bycatch and hooking mortality. Harvesting trout prior to opening day is prohibited to preserve a good opening day experience.

In the meantime, though, anglers can seek out those other species.

The southcentral and southeast regions of the state have their share of such waters.

The following were historically stocked with tiger muskellunge or currently stocked with Muskellunge:

- Canoe Creek Lake, Blair County
- Little Buffalo Lake (Holman Lake), Perry County
- Sweet Arrow Lake, Schuylkill County
- Tuscarora Lake, Schuylkill County
- Kaercher Creek Dam, Berks County
- Leaser Lake, Lehigh County

“And, the musky anglers like to fish for them in that winter period,” said Bryan Chikotas, PFBC Area 7 Fisheries Manager.

If the lakes were closed, like most stocked trout waters, that opportunity would vanish.

“Other waters across the two regions are in the program, because they're popular ice fishing destinations,” said Mike



Sweet Arrow Lake, Schuylkill County

photos-PFBC archives

Porta, PFBC Area 6 Fisheries Manager. Leaser Lake, Lehigh County, and Tuscarora Lake, Schuylkill County, two panfish fishing hotspots, are examples.

Other lakes in the program popular for panfish fishing in early spring, ice or no ice, are Koon Lake, Bedford County, and Lake Perez, Huntingdon County, which stand out for their sunfish fisheries, and Opossum Lake, Cumberland County, which is a Panfish Enhancement Special Regulations lake for crappies. Muddy Run Recreation Lake, Lancaster County, is another popular lake.

The program even includes a few stream sections. Portions of Tulpehocken Creek and South Branch Codorus Creek are always open, because they don't get stocked with trout before opening day, so there's no point in limiting fishing. Stony Creek, Dauphin and Lebanon counties, and Mountain Creek, Cumberland County, are open, in part, because designated reaches are on public land.

Lakes, ponds and other waters in the program provide anglers with opportunities to fish for something besides trout at a time of year when the action is good.

"The waters in this program are known to be popular with anglers utilizing the warmwater and coolwater fisheries at that time of year," said Walters. "We want to keep people fishing." □



Canoe Creek Lake, Blair County



Opossum Lake, Cumberland County

Southcentral and Southeast Stocked Trout Waters Open to Year-Round Fishing:

Lakes:

- Canoe Creek Lake, Blair County
- Kaercher Creek Dam, Berks County
- Koon Lake, Bedford County
- Lake Perez, Huntingdon County
- Lakeside Quarry, Lebanon County
- Leaser Lake, Lehigh County
- Little Buffalo Lake (Holman Lake), Perry County
- Muddy Run Recreation Lake, Lancaster County
- Opossum Lake, Cumberland County
- Sweet Arrow Lake, Schuylkill County
- Tuscarora Lake, Schuylkill County

Streams sections (see the *Pennsylvania Fishing Summary for section limits*):

- Mountain Creek, Cumberland County
- South Branch Codorus Creek, York County
- Stony Creek, Dauphin and Lebanon counties
- Tulpehocken Creek, Berks County



photo-Darl Black

Micro Lures for Maximum Fun

by Marilyn Black

The most exciting part of fishing for me is the tug on the line. Species doesn't matter. I just want to catch something. I'm sure that's the way it is for many anglers. Fighting and landing each fish is a treasured memory.

For excitement more often, use smaller-than-normal lures, micro lures, to draw more strikes from a variety of fish, especially when you're fishing from shore. These lures measure from 1- to 3-inches and weigh less than 1/8 ounce. Don't be concerned about big fish not showing interest in micro lures. A lifetime of fishing experience clearly proves that when properly presented, tiny baits catch predatory fish of all sizes.

Numerous lure manufacturers offer scaled-down models of some of their more popular artificial baits. Splashing, gurgling surface options include Rebel Wee Pop R (2 inches), Arbogast's Jitterbug (2½ inches) and Heddon's Tiny Torpedo (1/8 ounce).

Various slender minnow plugs are retrieved within inches of the surface, equally effective on streams and lakes. Examples are the Rapala Original Floating Minnow (2 inches), weighing 1/16 ounce, Rebel

Tracdown Minnow (1½- and 2½-inch sizes) and Rebel Minnow (2¾ inches).

Regardless of the diving lip size, 2 feet is likely the maximum depth for micro crankbaits. Fortunately, their natural swimming behavior can pull predators in from a distance. I enjoy success with the Rebel Teeny Wee Crawfish (2 inches), Yo-Zuri Snap Bean Crankbait (1 inch), Strike King Bitsy Minnow (2 inches) and several others.

A tight vibration and distinctive rattle are the trademark of lipless crankbaits. They can be worked at depths of 4- to 5-feet, because the lure sinks. In this category, you'll find the Bill Lewis Rat-L-Trap Tiny Trap and Rapala Ultra Light Rippin' Rap (#03 and #04).

Hand-tied hair jigs weighing from 1/64- to 1/16-ounce can be fished with a slow swimming retrieve along the bottom or at mid-depths. Soft plastic minnow and bottom critter imitations on a jig head, such as the Keitech Easy Shiner (2 inches), Lunker City Hellgie (3 inches) and YUM Craw Papi (3 inches), work the same.

Finally, my favorite micro lure is the safety pin spinner, known by today's anglers as a Beetle Spin. I was introduced to this small bait nearly 60 years ago on a balmy summer afternoon when my then fiancé, Darl Black, and I headed to a farm pond in eastern



The Rapala Original Floating Minnow, tied on a spinning rod, is shown with other productive miniature lures.

Mercer County for shoreline fishing. Darl handed me a 1/16-ounce jig head with an attached 2-inch beetle-like body and an overhead spinner clipped to the jig head. For the next hour, I fooled numerous fat Bluegills and Largemouth Bass up to 15 inches long with the Beetle Spin until a big snapping turtle engulfed it. I was hooked from that day on.

For optimal casting distance with micro lures, I recommend a 6- to 7-foot light power spinning rod with a fast or moderately fast tip. A reel loaded with 4-pound-test line will provide the best lure action for these tempting tidbits, while 6-pound-test line will reduce lure loss. Jumping to 8-pound-test line will likely impair the action for many micro crankbaits and minnow baits. Adding a splitshot to gain casting distance may interfere with the rolling-wobbling action of these miniature baits. Except for a tiny jig, which should always be tied direct, employing a small #1 locking snap will enhance the motion.

No matter where we go, we always have a couple of light power spinning combos and a utility case with a supply of micro lures in our vehicle, so we're always ready for a shoreline fishing adventure. Go micro, and have lots more fun. ☐



Al Bell, Venango County, caught this Largemouth Bass on a 2-inch Rebel Tracdown Minnow in the Brown Trout pattern.



The Stream Restores

by Michael Kensinger

After a stretch of long days and busy weeks, I found a moment to dip my boots back into the clear waters of one of my favorite streams. I'm blessed that the busyness has been mostly good with growth in my career as both an artist and writer.

The cost, though, is the loss of time to recharge in the great outdoors and the inspiration

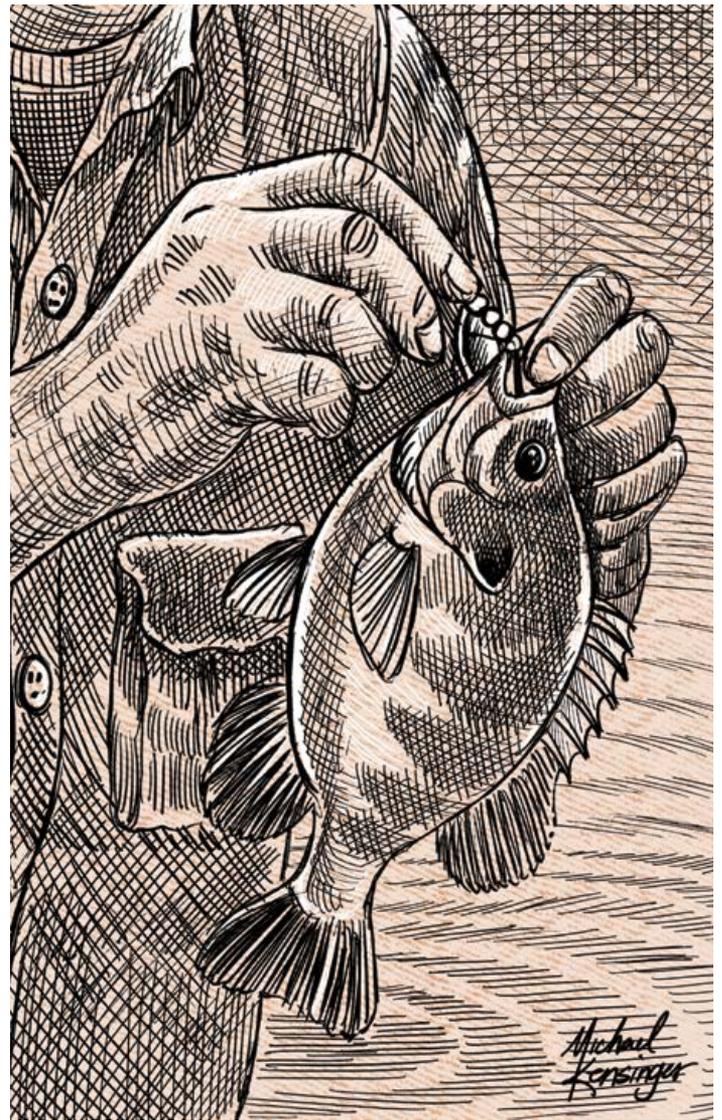
that comes with it. Without fresh experiences, what good is an outdoor writer? Without encounters with wild things, how can a wildlife artist paint with authenticity? So, with only a couple hours of daylight left, I grabbed my fishing gear, tossed it into the back of my car and made a beeline for the stream.

On the way, I laughed at myself. I hadn't even made time to wash the car. The windshield was a mural of bug guts, pollen and bird droppings. After a few hard sprays of washer fluid and

a swipe of the wipers, I could at least see the road.

At the stream's edge, with time short, I decided to forego the meditative tangles of fly fishing and reached for my 4-foot, 6-inch spinning rod spooled with 4-pound-test line. Into my vest went a small container of simple homemade spinners. Sometimes, simplicity is best. Today, I just wanted to catch fish.

I landed my first cast as the sun dropped toward the ridge. A Belted Kingfisher rattled so close to my head that I startled and



ducked. Maybe, I was in its hole. The spinner flickered through a trench in the current, and wham, fish on! A Fallfish flashed. Then, it threw the hook. Another cast, another strike and I had a beautiful Bluegill, still one of my favorite catches since childhood. Moments later, a sunfish gleamed in my hand, its gold and red fins catching the light.

The river offered more than fish. A red-bellied woodpecker scolded overhead, just before a bald eagle drifted down the valley, vanishing behind the trees.

Leaves in the current proved my biggest challenge that evening. Even a shred of debris clinging to the hook can turn fish off.

More than once, I reeled in nothing but a soggy scrap. Still, persistence paid off as a pair of wild Brown Trout rose from riffles, small but spirited, insect wings glinting above them in the fading light.

Later, a large trout slipped through my fingers. Snagged on a shallow rock, I crouched to free the spinner. Downstream, its back broke the current. I stood there muttering to myself in equal parts of awe and disgust.

But, the stream forgave me. More Bluegills followed, a silvery Fallfish and finally a 13-inch Brown Trout, with sparse black spotting and crimson flecks along its flanks. Every Brown Trout

seems painted differently, but this one, I thought, was perfect.

As the last light thinned, I smiled. In just a short outing, I landed 15 fish, from trout to chub, a true mixed bag of surprises. Heading back, I nearly leapt out of my boots after stepping on a ribbed belt, half-buried in the stones—snake-like enough to fool me. After my startled ballet leap, I laughed out loud. The day had given me fish, birds and even comedy.

By the time I reached the car, I felt restored. The river had run through me again, and I couldn't wait to share it with you. ☐



Hard Baits After Hard Water

by *Braden Eisenhower*

photos by the author

Anglers are rigid creatures. I'm guilty of several offenses, one being restricting lure styles to a singular application. I've often pigeonholed a lure to a time of year or arbitrary set of conditions. And, there's a good chance I presented that lure in only one manner.

This point is exaggerated in cold water when few lure styles are popular. We think of bottom-hugging presentations that remain in a fish's diminished strike zone. This principle works, of course. I deliver many hair jigs, soft plastics or live bait to several species.

Anglers often make the mistake of reserving hard baits like crankbaits, jerkbaits and lipless crankbaits for warm days and then fishing with punchy, erratic actions meant to elicit reaction strikes. However, these lures work as soon as the ice is off, with adjustments for a finesse presentation.

Flat-Sided Crankbaits for Walleye

In late January, my first open water exploits of the season have me shore casting crankbaits after dark for Walleyes on rivers and tailraces below dams. It's brutal, but if you enjoy solitude, there's no better time to be on the water than late winter at 3:00 a.m. when rod guides freeze shut between casts.

Cold water fishing isn't plug and play with any crankbait. The best crankbaits mimic shad and minnows and have flat sides that subtly roll side to side without much wiggling or wobbling action.

The retrieve is so slow it's maddening. Each revolution of the reel handle lasts at least 10 seconds. At this speed, the lure doesn't produce the customary



Lure shape is crucial in cold water. Bulbous crankbaits (left) have too harsh of a wobble. The subtle action of a slender crankbait (right) is preferred.

thump. It just imperceptibly moves through space—like a real minnow in frigid water.

Lipless Crankbaits for Largemouth Bass

Immediately after ice thaw, fish congregate in small areas where the water is warmest. Once water temperatures stabilize throughout the lake (around 50 degrees F), fish disperse.

Lipless crankbaits retrieved at moderate speeds are excellent search tools for Largemouth Bass and many gamefish. Their loud rattle chambers are useful in dingy waters, stained from snow runoff. Investigate stained waters first. These waters are apt to hold heat and attract baitfish and Largemouth Bass better than clearer waters.

Once bass are located, there are often other fish nearby. These spots coincide with cover or structure, where a vertical approach has merit. Fish the lipless crankbait with a jigging motion by first allowing the lure to fall to the bottom, then ripping it up a foot or so. The lure should fall to the bottom on a semi-slack line. This ripping cadence continues through the entire retrieve or until a fish pins the lure to the bottom.

Suspending Jerkbaits for Chain Pickerel

Suspending jerkbaits address the need for fish that won't chase moving lures. The key is to push the length of the pause well beyond your comfort zone. The magic pause may be 30 seconds or more, but anything past 5 seconds feels like an eternity.



Differing lure shapes among the same lure style can be advantageous. Lipless crankbaits with an oblong body (top) are excellent search baits, and lipless crankbaits with a more circular shape (bottom) excel with ripping retrieves.

With such long pauses, it's important to anchor the boat. Typically, fish have been located with other techniques like flat-sided crankbaits, lipless crankbaits or sonar. Another effective method is fan casting a wind-blown shoreline or breakline, anchoring and repositioning several times.



Lure shape can also be deceiving. Both of these lures are minnow-shaped suspending jerkbaits. However, the top jerkbait has subdued action, suitable for cold water. The bottom jerkbait requires hard twitches, so it's best for warm water use.

Suspending jerkbaits draw the attention of toothy critters. Targeting Chain Pickerel with small jerkbaits during cold, windy days has salvaged many outings.

It pays to stray from your routine by adapting warm water lures to the cold water environment. ☐

PFBC ON THE JOB

Chris Calhoun

Aquatic Resource Program Specialist

For more than 35 years, I have served with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (PFBC's) Water Rescue Program, leading curriculum development and instructor training that strengthens emergency response across the Commonwealth. A significant portion of my professional career has been devoted to water rescue—not only as a technician but as an educator. The PFBC's 16-hour Ice Rescue Instructor course provides rescuers with essential skills to evaluate ice conditions, use specialized equipment and perform safe, coordinated rescues. With decades of experience, I have witnessed the evolution of rescue gear, training



photo-courtesy of Chris Calhoun

practices and team coordination. I take great pride in knowing PFBC's training gives responders the confidence and competence to act swiftly and safely during high-risk, low-frequency incidents. I remind everyone venturing onto the ice to plan ahead—check conditions, share intentions and always wear a life jacket. When it comes to ice, frozen never means safe. ☐

TIC SPOTLIGHT

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photo-Laura Anderson

by Christian A. Shane

This month's "TIC (Trout In the Classroom) Spotlight" includes two high schools in the Northcentral region of Pennsylvania. These schools and other TIC schools across the Commonwealth will get their 'eyed' trout eggs from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission in early January for the TIC project launch.

- **Elk County:** Elk County Catholic High School, Laura Anderson, Grades 9-12, Biology, Academic Biology, Accelerated Biology, AP Biology, AP Environmental Science, Human Anatomy and Physiology, 17th Year TIC Participant
- **Union County:** Mifflinburg Area High School, Emil Stenger, Jr., Grades 9-12, 12th Year TIC Participant

Christian: What inspired you to begin raising trout in your classroom?

Laura: Our local chapter of Trout Unlimited contacted me about starting the project.

Emil: I took the Wildlife Leadership Academy program on Brook Trout called BROOKIES.

C: Tell us about your watershed (release site) and what connects your school and/or students to this place:

L: Our release site is Powers Run, Elk County. Powers Run is a tributary of the Clarion River, which is in the Ohio River Watershed.

E: Our release site is Rapid Run, Union County, which flows into Penns Creek.

C: Share a short story about what your students have gained from this experience?

L: My students, in all grades and classes, are thrilled to be part of the program. Even if they are not directly involved in the care of the trout, they're always interested in the life cycle, water quality and more.

E: My students enjoy raising the fish. In one lesson, they have to virtually create another aquaculture by choosing an aquatic creature and describing how they will raise it. They explain the why, its consumption rate and where to release it.

C: *What has been the biggest challenge or obstacle of the TIC project?*

L: We have been successful since the switch to Rainbow Trout. We had some major failures in years past with the Brook Trout—years where we lost all our fish. I also think it has been extremely helpful that the eggs are shipped after Christmas. The Christmas break contributed to a lot of issues with the trout remaining viable.

E: Dealing with fluctuations in water chemistry is a continuing concern.

C: *How do you integrate the TIC project into the classroom? Do you have a particular lesson that you enjoy teaching to incorporate the trout?*

L: My AP Biology course is typically responsible for day-to-day care of the eggs and fingerlings. They're responsible for writing a research paper on some aspects of the trout. In recent years, some avid anglers as well as students in my AP Environmental Science course have also asked to be a part of the program.

E: Fly tying—I didn't realize how many students have never tried fly tying and end up loving it, especially creating their own fly based on real trout food such as minnows, terrestrials and macroinvertebrates.

C: *Do you do anything special in conjunction with your TIC project that's related to fishing, watersheds, conservation or aquatic education?*

E: We provided special needs students with a "fishing for TIC" activity. We used handmade "fishing rods", wooden dowel rods with a string and magnet attached to each one. Then, we placed pictures of trout mounted to foam board upside down with a steel bolt at the top. Students were timed for 3 minutes to "catch a trout". They only kept the trout if they correctly identified it as a brook, brown or rainbow trout. Each trout had a weight associated with it, and the student calculated the total weight. The winner was the student with the highest total fish weight. ☐



Winter Fishing is Here!

Trout Stocking Schedules:



photo-Emil Stenger, Jr.

As part of Mr. Stenger's TIC project, students use a magnet to "fish" for foam trout.



photo-Laura Anderson

Students from Elk County Catholic High School release their trout into Powers Run Creek, Elk County.

BECOME A FISHING MENTOR



Borrow Gear:



ExplorePAWaters:



Fishing Skills Instructor Events:





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A RIVER REBORN— *The Rise, Fall and Renewal of the Clarion River*

by Brady J. Crytzer

In the heart of Pennsylvania's forested interior, a quiet revolution has unfolded. Not one of arms or ideology but of water and will. The Clarion River, once choked with the refuse of progress, now flows as a living monument to renewal. This humble waterway, once a black ribbon of industrial despair, now gleams with life.

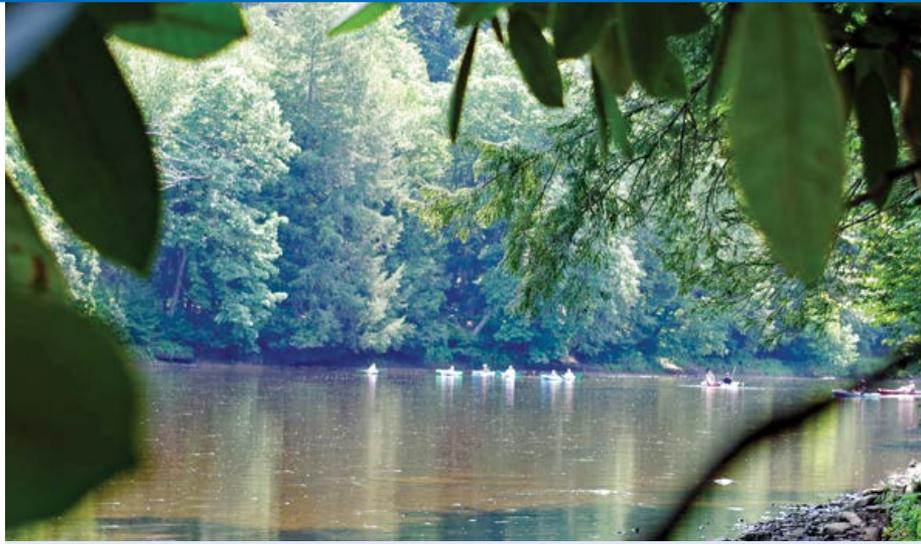
Its transformation is no accident. It's the result of generations willing to reckon with the legacy of industry and fight for a future shaped by stewardship and conservation. In the 19th century, the river became an engine of empire for western Pennsylvania. Its waters carried more than fish. They floated fortunes.

Logging crews harvested the towering white pines along its banks and forced their logs downstream by the brute force of splash dams—crude but effective structures that turned creeks into conveyor belts. When these dams were breached, torrents of water carried timber into the main stem of the Clarion River, where men known as “river hogs” risked life and limb to shepherd the cargo through the rapids. It was a marvel of coordination and a calamity for the ecosystem.

Mining soon followed logging as the dominant industry. Coal was pulled from the hillsides, fueling the fires of Pittsburgh and beyond. By the dawn of the 20th century, the river was little more than a sluiceway for industrial waste.

Tanneries, mills and mining operations dumped their refuse directly into the water. One scientist described the Clarion River as “one of the worst in the state,” noting that its waters ran “as black as ink.” Locals dubbed it “Stump Creek,” a bitter nod to the deforested and barren banks that once cradled life.

By the 1970s, the Clarion River was an environmental disaster. But, because of the diligent efforts of residents and conservationists, the river got a second chance. The Clean Water Act



A group of paddlers seen through a “window” of mountain laurel along the banks of the Clarion River.

of 1972 marked a national shift in how America treated its waterways. The new law placed stringent restrictions on industrial discharges and made funds available for reclamation and remediation.

But, legislation alone would not save the river. That task fell to the people who lived along its banks. Grassroots groups took up the mantle, cleaning tributaries, sealing abandoned mines and planting trees to halt erosion and runoff. This was not just environmentalism, it was restoration, inch by inch.

By the start of the 21st century, signs of life returned. Fish repopulated the waters. River otters slinked along the banks. Bald eagles and ospreys soared overhead. Most telling was the reintroduction of over 36,000 freshwater mussels (nature's living water filters) and the return of the hellbender, a giant salamander that can only survive in the cleanest of waters.

Today, the Clarion River is no longer a cautionary tale. Paddlers glide through its bends, anglers cast their lines and children swim where their grandparents once feared to wade. Its transformation is a testament to what can be achieved when a community refuses to abandon the places that made them.

The Clarion River's story is not simply one of nature's resilience. It's a distinctly American story of redemption, of frontier conquest and of destruction met with healing. It's, as all good history is, a story not just of what was but what can be again. ☐

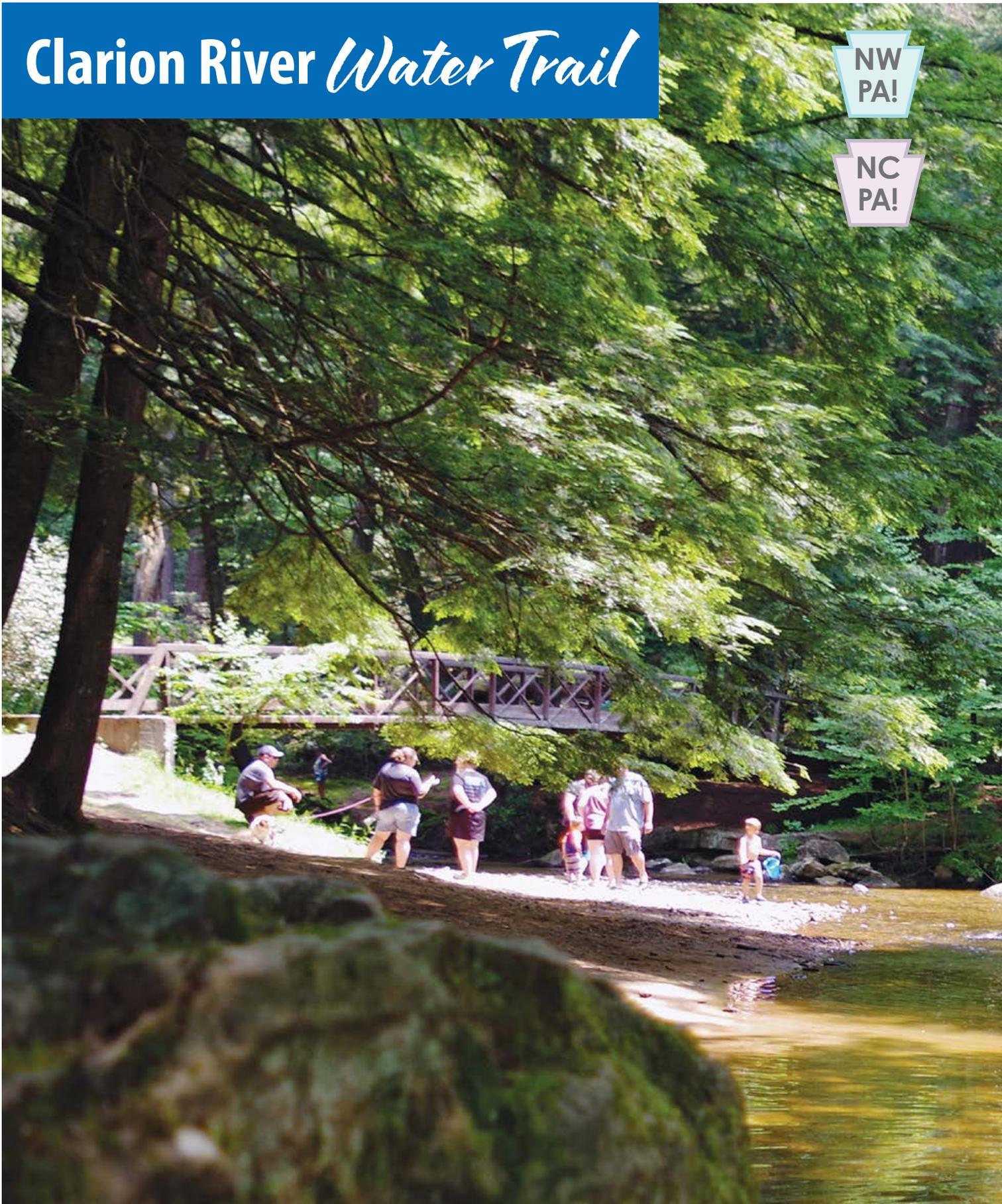
← *Parts of the Clarion River seem wild and untouched—some bear evidence of its history as a transportation corridor.*

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.

Clarion River *Water Trail*

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Visitors to the Clarion River can stop to fish or play in Toms Run, Clarion County, in Cook Forest State Park. It's a stocked trout stream that holds fish into summer.

by Bob Frye photos by the author

The assessment was, in a word, grim.

In 1968, Congress created the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Its purpose was and is to “preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations.”

Not long after, the U.S. Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Outdoor Recreation sent out a task force to determine if the Clarion River was worthy of inclusion. It released its findings in May 1971.

The news wasn’t good.

“The Clarion River-Pennsylvania: A Wild and Scenic Rivers Study” report stated the river was free flowing, with water sufficient to support recreation, at least in spring and early summer, and surrounded by country “pleasing to the eye.” It passed through Allegheny National Forest and Cook Forest and Clear Creek state parks, areas of “considerable natural beauty” and “increasingly popular as scenic and recreational attractions.” There were deer aplenty, too.

But, the report also made clear the Clarion River was troubled in big, limiting ways. Pollution that looked bad and smelled worse limited recreation, hurt the fishing and even made it unsafe to play in the water. As a result, the study’s authors wrote, they couldn’t recommend the Clarion River for the program.

And yet, they offered a glimmer of hope.

“At such time as the water quality is improved to permit suitable outdoor recreation experiences, which are now precluded, the Clarion (River) should be reconsidered for possible addition to the National System,” they concluded.

That time arrived in 1996, when the U.S. Department of the Interior put 51.7 miles of the Clarion River, from Ridgway to Piney Dam, into the Wild and Scenic Rivers program. Today, the 110-mile Clarion River Water Trail is angler and boater friendly.

“It’s absolutely come back to life,” said Kylie Maland, Watershed Manager for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. “The quality of the water is improved. There’s what’s been described as world-class fishing. You see wildlife all the time. It’s just a beautiful river.”

Dale Luthringer agrees. An Environmental Education Specialist at Cook Forest State Park since 1996, Luthringer regularly leads float trips on the river. What paddlers can expect on the water depends in part on when and where they float it, though.



Overnight trips on the Clarion River are possible. The Clarion River Water Trail Middle Section map shows where some of that's possible, such as between river miles 72 and 70 and at Robin Island (river mile 68) and Millstone (river mile 64) accesses in Allegheny National Forest.

The Clarion River is almost entirely a Class I river, meaning “it doesn’t get any easier unless you’re on a pond,” said Luthringer. “The only rapids that rise even to a Class II are the so-called ‘X-Y-Z’ rapids just downstream of Arroyo, and only the ‘Y’ rapid is very technical,” said Luthringer.

But, the river can get too high, especially in spring. When the river gage at Cooksburg exceeds 6 feet, for example, the state park closes its launches. And, when the water gets too low, paddlers may need to portage their boats.

Most of the time, though, it’s incredible to paddle. The crowds prove it. Visit the river on a summer weekend around Cooksburg, where several boat rental businesses operate, and it’s almost always busy.

However, paddlers who want something different can find it.

“As soon as you get upstream to Clear Creek State Park, it gets a lot quieter, and the paddlers are more spread out,” said Maland. “It’s more of a slower pace.”

Likewise, the downstream portions of the river are more remote. Luthringer especially likes to do the 9 miles between the Gravel Lick and Mill Creek launches.

“That’s a gorgeous stretch. You don’t see anyone really until you get to the backwaters of the Piney Dam. It’s wilderness.”

“And, you never know what you’re going to see. We’ve had black bears, we’ve had deer cross the river, we’ve had a bobcat watching us from a rock outcrop as we go by. There are eagles, ospreys and otters, though they’re good at hiding. You just never know. It’s a beautiful river.”

The fishing is just as appealing, if likewise different by location.

“Smallmouth Bass are your main gamefish,” said Garrett Herigan, a fisheries biologist in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission’s (PFBC’s) Area 2 office, Tionesta. “From the backwaters of Piney Dam through Cook Forest State Park to the upper stretches of the wild and scenic portion of the river, it’s all great Smallmouth Bass water. The numbers are pretty good. The average fish isn’t exactly huge, but there’s definitely quality fish found there.”

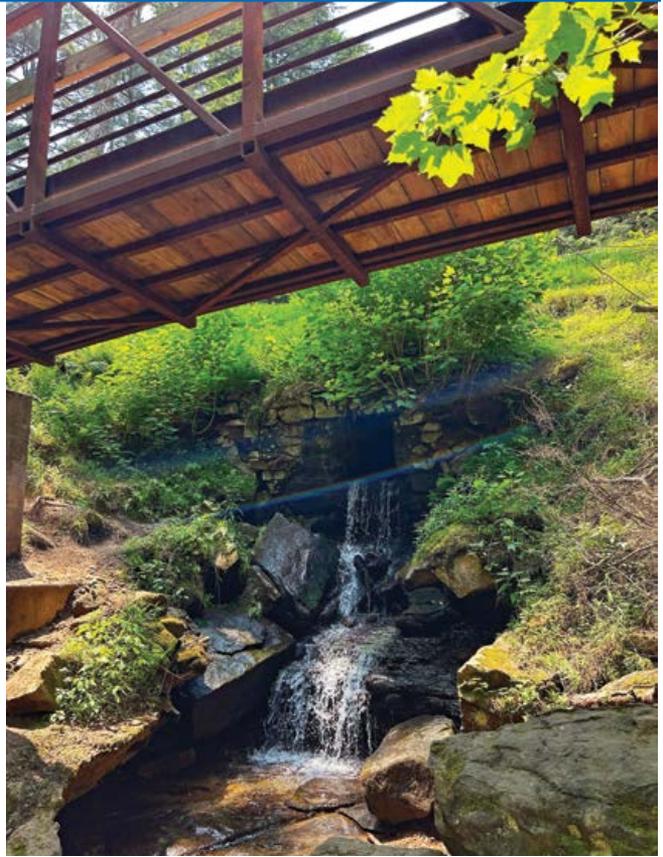
Anglers close to Piney Dam get some Walleyes. Meanwhile, those who fish the river upstream can find big trout.

“The Brown Trout frequently exceed 20 inches, and some of them are even in the mid- to high-20-inch range,” said Herigan.

Paddlers and anglers can enjoy its fishing, its scenery and its history in day or multi-day trips. There are opportunities to camp along the river, from dispersed sites to state park with bathrooms and showers or private cabins and campgrounds.



Visitors to the Clarion River may hike through the Forest Cathedral Natural Area at Cook Forest State Park. A registered National Natural Landmark, it's considered not only Pennsylvania's finest and largest old-growth forest, but it has some of the oldest trees on the East Coast.



A small waterfall along Toms Run in Cook Forest State Park.

Overnight floats take planning. The public land along the river is divided between state game lands, state forests, state parks and a national forest. All have their own rules.

"You can't just throw your boat in the water and then pull off wherever you want," said Luthringer.

But detailed river maps at pecpa.org/watertrails make planning a float easy.

Cook Forest and Clear Creek state parks offer guided floats at times, too. And, of course, the area around the river is home to lots of hiking and biking trails and other outdoor attractions for those who want to add some land-based adventures.

Access is always improving. While already good, there's generally public launches every 8 to 10 miles. A new boat rental business opened in Ridgway, Elk County, in 2025, and another is planned for Johnsonburg, Elk County, in 2026. That, together with ongoing access improvements in both communities, will help people get on the river between miles 94 and 103, a stretch that's remote, wild and scenic.

The Clarion River is closer than it's been in a century to being "the ideal training and touring course" for paddlers that the authors of the 1971 report imagined it could be.

"Back in the day, they say you used to be able to tell what newspaper or magazine the paper

mill in Johnsonburg was printing by the color of the Clarion River's water," said Maland. "Each publication had its own dye and its own color."

"But, it's a beautiful river today, the river I caught my very first river fish on. My love for the Clarion River runs deep ever since." □



There's plenty of wildlife to see along the Clarion River, from Canada geese to deer, bears, eagles, ospreys and sometimes otters.



2026 FISHING LICENSES

Annual licenses are valid from December 1, 2025, through December 31, 2026. 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.

2026 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.



NOTES *from the Streams*

An Angler's First Trout

On the day after the trout opener, I was patrolling my district in southern Montgomery County—checking anglers for fishing licenses and building connections. I saw a young angler who had two trout on his stringer. He was walking away from the stream, heading to the vehicle with his grandfather. I said to the angler, “Looks like you had a good turnout today. Awesome job.” He thanked me and told me this was the first trout he caught. The pure look of joy and excitement on his face is something I’ll never forget. I told them not to leave yet, because I had something to give the young angler. I completed a First Fish certificate and gave it to him to take home. I hope this is something he’ll never forget as well.—WCO Abigail G. Luteri, Northern Montgomery and Eastern Berks counties.



photo-courtesy of WCO Abigail G. Luteri

Great Friends

I was a new Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) in eastern Armstrong County during a preseason stocking of Plum Creek, and I was meeting my stocking helpers and landowners. These bonds and friendships are vital to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission for annually

stocking 3.2 million trout. On this day, the weather was extremely chilly, approximately 20 degrees F. We arrived at our first stop. I was eager to take a bucket of fish to the stream. My devoted stocking helper for both Armstrong and Indiana counties, Gary Stephens, was in front of me as we hurried to the stream with buckets of trout in each hand. When Stephens and I reached the edge of the stream to dump our buckets, he bent down to take the lid off, quickly standing back up as I was dumping my fish. At this moment, every fish went down his back. He was completely soaked. Quickly, we got all the fish into the stream unharmed, and we both laughed. I continuously apologized. After the stocking was over, I thought to myself, “he’s never going to stock fish with me again.” However, Stephens continues to stock fish, carry buckets of trout and always has a smile on his face. He even puts a sign on his back, so I don’t dump water and fish on him again. We have been close friends ever since that day, and he never lets me forget how we became friends.—WCO Kyle A. Wirick, Indiana and Eastern Armstrong counties.

I Hope No One Saw That

WCO’s get to see some interesting and funny things while we’re out patrolling. Most of the time, people don’t know that we have seen them fall or make mistakes. One day, while I was patrolling with my neighboring officer, putting up new signs along the stocked trout waters, it was our turn to be thinking, “I hope no one saw that”.

While putting up the signs, I thought we should put one up on a tree that had fallen across the

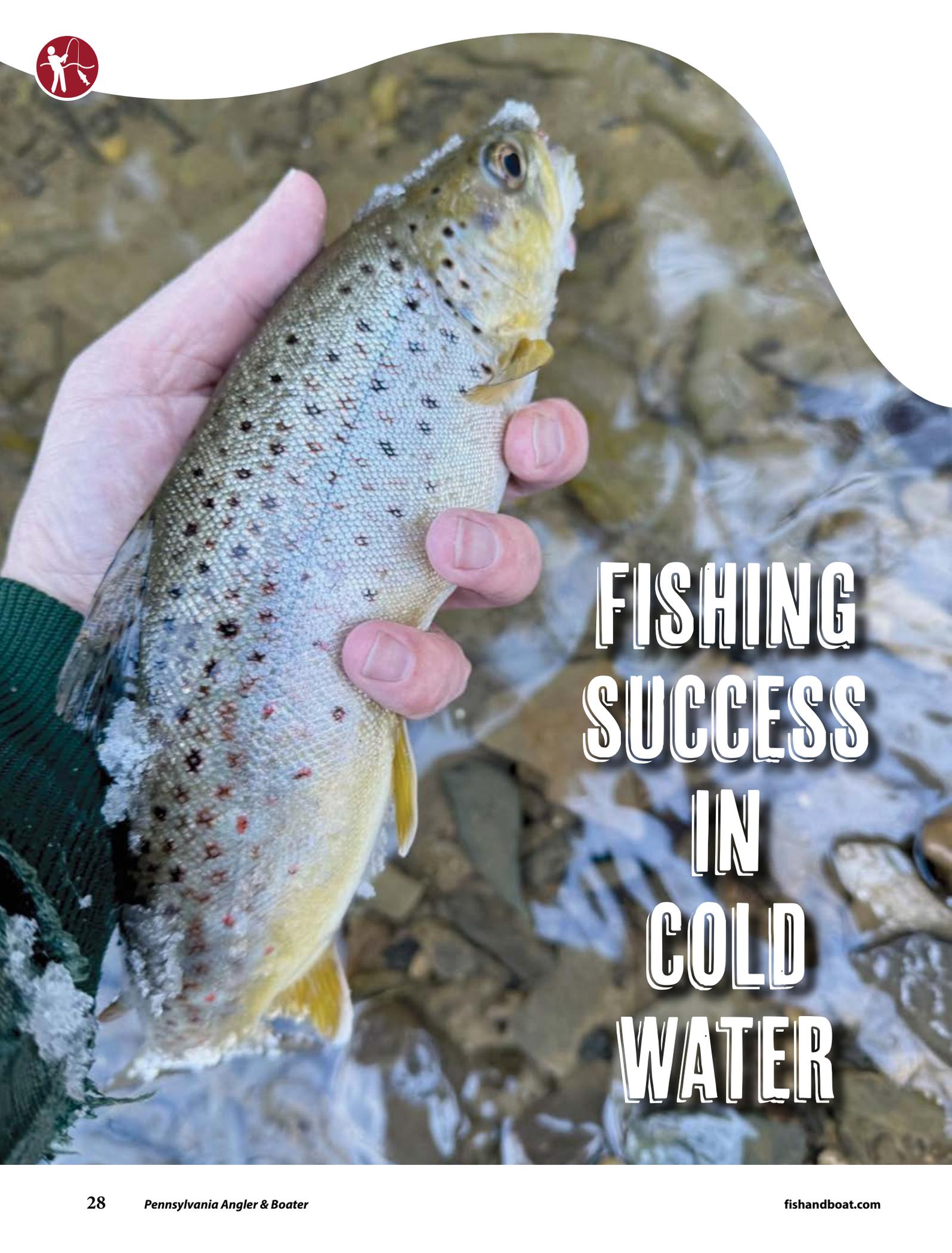
stream. The other WCO I was with decided to climb up on the root ball and make his way across the tree to put the sign above the water. He didn’t make it too far. As he climbed up the root ball, he somersaulted off it into the puddle where the tree previously stood. I helped him up. After making sure he was okay, although he was wet and muddy, we sat there and laughed.

He was thankful that no one was around and that I didn’t have my phone out recording his failed attempt.—WCO Nathaniel J. Yingling, Cambria County.

Small Talk

I usually don’t see much activity while patrolling a local marina in my district in the fall. On a chilly November day, I talked to a few anglers from the area who were happy to see me to report steelhead poaching activities. After I noted their helpful information, I made small talk with the anglers and asked them what they were fishing for in the marina. They answered Lake Trout. I was surprised and asked them if Lake Trout come close to the shoreline. Then, they showed me some pictures of giant Lake Trout they caught. I never knew big Lake Trout came so close to Erie’s shorelines. Making small talk pays off.—WCO Logan M. Schuller, Eastern Erie County.





FISHING SUCCESS IN COLD WATER

by Jeff Wolesslagle photos by the author

I vividly remember my brother coming home from fishing a nearby pond that was half covered in ice. He was excited to tell me that he caught three Largemouth Bass, and I was full of doubt. It was well before the age of cell phones, and he had no photographic evidence to back it up, so I felt my skepticism was justified. My doubt vanished the next day when we returned to the pond together. Just as he instructed, I cast a small white marabou jig onto the ice and reeled until it slid off the shelf of hard water and slowly sank into the open water. I lifted the jig slowly off the bottom and felt a subtle tick on the line. I immediately set the hook, and a nearly 2-pound bass surged back under the ice. We caught two fish each that day, and it taught me that even in cold water, if you can find where fish are holding and offer them the right presentation, you can catch them.

Low water temperatures can be intimidating to anglers, but they shouldn't be. Fishing in cold water can greatly extend your season. To find success in cold water though, there are some things to keep in mind. Fishing in cold water means adapting to the fish's reduced metabolism and feeding activity. It often requires a slow approach, especially for warmwater fish like bass and panfish. Typically, these fish don't chase baits as much, so the speed of most lure retrieves should be slow, often painstakingly slow. Hair jigs and marabou jigs are a popular winter lure choice and for good reason. Soft plastic baits such as grubs fished on a jig head can also be effective. Jerkbait can be great in cold water situations, and you'll want to pause the bait between sweeps with the rod tip. Bass will often strike the lure while it's motionless in the water column, so watch for the line to suddenly move sideways while the bait is sitting still. Live bait can also be a great choice. Shiners and minnows, for example, move slower in cold water and present enticing targets for bass and other predators. Bass in lakes tend to move lower in

the water column to avoid the chill on the surface, which can be near freezing. Smallmouth Bass in rivers often congregate near the bank on the side that gets the most sun exposure. Look for small channels and depressions near the shore where the bass may be holding. Cold water species like trout are often active regardless of the water temperature, so they are more likely to pursue faster moving baits like inline spinners. They are also much more likely to be dispersed in the water column and to aggressively feed.

When fishing in cold water conditions, patience and persistence are often the keys to success. Look for places where the sun can warm the water. A difference of even a few degrees can often be enough to get fish active, which means the feeding windows often occur in mid-afternoon when the sun is highest in the sky. Of course, your own comfort and safety are important. Dress in layers, take warm up breaks, and always wear an approved life jacket.

Don't give up on a fishing excursion just because the temperature dips. The fish are still present, and you can enjoy a great outing. ☐



The author with a cold water Smallmouth Bass.



Jerkbait are excellent cold water offerings for Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass.



The Little Juniata Creek, Perry County.



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PA!



Photo: Emily Bantz

bottom of a hill commonly used to access the creek. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) identified the need for the Elk Creek staircase project, and the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps in conjunction with the Student Conservation Association did the work. The crew put forth great effort to make Girard's Elk Creek more accessible to the community.

The crew began by mapping the plans for the staircase—first observing the hill and deciding where to place the first step, the angle to build it and necessary materials. Then, a path was cleared by moving the debris out of the area, and spaces were dug in the hillside for the stairs. As the crew progressed up the hill, the spaces needed to be dug deeper and deeper into the hillside, which proved to be increasingly challenging. Wooden planks were fitted into each space and drilled together to create each step. As days and weeks went by, the crew began to see progress on the staircase. The crew had many difficult and adverse moments throughout the project, such as large roots, rocks and other impediments in the path as well as intense heat at the height of each day. Roots were removed with a hand

Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps

by Lillian McKinley
Erie Youth Crew Co-leader

When the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps Erie Youth Crew first saw the intimidatingly steep hill at Elk Creek, Erie County, none of us believed that we could accomplish the challenging project ahead of us. The goal of the project was to build a staircase leading to the

saw, and rocks were dug out and relocated. Each of these difficulties provided a new challenge, but our teamwork and problem-solving skills pushed us through to the end. Even though the long and hot days proved to be exhausting, we still looked forward to seeing the completion of the project.

After 3 long weeks, the Erie Youth Crew built 30 stairs. Trees, plants and branches were planted around the staircase to naturalize the environment and



The Erie Youth Crew's first look at the site.



The crew placing the stairs.

photos-Lillian McKinley

cover up the worksite. Our crew was extremely proud of their work and were thrilled to create easier access to Elk Creek. One crew member even expressed his excitement to bring his father fishing at the creek now that it was more accessible. We hope that the completion of the staircase project will allow more people to enjoy Elk Creek for many years.

The Erie Youth Crew consisted of five members and two crew co-leaders. Aiden B., age 17, who wants to be a marine biologist in the future, is grateful to have learned basic carpentry skills while working at Elk Creek. Caleb S., age 17, who wants to become a game warden colonel, enjoyed working outdoors and will always remember the big hills at Elk Creek. Samira B., age 17, who wants to become a lawyer for a nonprofit organization, enjoyed learning how to construct box steps. Mayada B., age 15, who has plans of becoming a detective, loved working in nature. Jaeden A., age 16, appreciated being outside all summer. The Erie Youth Crew was led and supervised by me and D'Shawn Barnes, both second year returning leaders.

The PFBC thanks the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps for their work and looks forward to future partnership projects. ☐



The completed stairs.



Trail Blazers

photo-PFBC archives

by Mike Parker
Communications Director
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Whether you're a lifelong creek stomper or you only recently embraced the "river rat" as your spirit animal, you've got some kindred spirits in Wayne County.

Dodging raindrops on a chilly October morning, members of the Lackawaxen River Trails (LRT) group led a long-awaited celebration to cut the ribbon on the new Indian Orchard River Access, just off Route 6 in Texas Township. The newest public access point, and the third to be dedicated along a 10-mile stretch of the Lackawaxen River in as many years, Indian Orchard is the final piece of the group's decade-long effort to enhance their local gem with modern amenities and create a true destination water trail for paddlers near and far.

"Growing up in Honesdale, I was one of those guys who always accessed the river in areas where we probably shouldn't have been, so we could play in the water all day," said Dan Corrigan, a long-time LRT volunteer. "For me, to be able to see these accesses being installed and come to fruition is amazing. We have been really blessed with a great group of people who have supported us through this effort, and we hope to see more development come along."

Corrigan and other volunteers, with a shared dream of better connecting the communities of Honesdale and Hawley, originally set their sights on public walking trails. Upon learning of funding opportunities through the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (PFBC) Boating Facility Grant program, they pivoted their efforts to focus on the water first. With buy-in from Wayne County as the grant applicant and pledges from local businesses to help meet matching funds requirements, potential access sites were scouted, local fundraising kicked into high gear and the first groundbreaking was held in spring 2022 at the former Industrial Point in Honesdale, which would be rebranded as Sycamore Point Park upon its completion in October 2023. Dedications at White Mills and Indian Orchard would follow in 2024 and 2025, respectively, almost exactly one year apart.

With all three accesses completed, an adventure down the entire Lackawaxen River Trail can begin at Sycamore Point Park, continue 3.4 miles downstream to Indian Orchard, 2.1 miles further to White Mills River Access Park and end 3.6 miles later at Bingham Park in Hawley, a pre-existing site that already included an unpowered boat launch prior to the expansion project upstream.

"I cannot over emphasize what you have done here and the model that it is," said Tim Schaeffer, PFBC's Executive Director. "I travel all over Pennsylvania, and this is not happening anywhere else. You know how special Wayne County is."



Indian Orchard, Wayne County, is the final piece of the Lackawaxen River Trails group's decade-long effort to enhance their local gem with modern amenities and create a true destination water trail for paddlers near and far.

Tim Schaeffer, PFBC's Executive Director, speaking at the Indian Orchard ribbon cutting.

photos-PFBC archives

Schaeffer credited the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for recognizing the significance of the Lackawaxen River Trail concept and providing additional funding through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund.

"This is one of the most noteworthy projects that has happened from here all the way to Philadelphia, and people are noticing," said Schaeffer. "Let's keep it going."

An initial feasibility study and portions of the Sycamore Point Park and White Mills projects were funded through the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' Community Conservation Partnerships Program. Beyond boat ramps, the new accesses were designed with safety, convenience and accessibility in mind, so each location includes Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessible parking, benches for wildlife viewing and composting bathroom facilities.

For anglers who utilize the new access areas for wading or a fish-and-float experience, the Lackawaxen River has typical warmwater attributes with flows heavily influenced by local rainfall. Anglers will find common fish species such as Fallfish, Pumpkinseeds, Redbreast Sunfish, Rock Bass, Smallmouth Bass and suckers. Sections 01, 03-05 are managed as Stocked Trout Waters and receive multiple PFBC stockings of Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout and golden Rainbow Trout each spring.

More information on the Boating Facility Grant program can be found at Fishandboat.com. ☐



Sycamore Point Park boat launch



White Mills boat launch



Get Involved!



photo-PPFF

by Jessica Aiello

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (PFBC's) mission is "to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities." The Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF) works "to inspire stewardship of Pennsylvania's state parks and forests." With more than 7,000 miles of streams and rivers and 56 recreational lakes (plus many smaller ponds) within the Commonwealth's state parks and forests, there is a strong synergy between the work of both organizations. Volunteering for PPFF can support the work of the PFBC while enhancing our many public lands.

PPFF fulfills its mission in many ways. The organization supports 47 volunteer friends groups across Pennsylvania that plan events, fundraisers and perform stewardship activities within state parks and forests. This includes a wide range of projects and events that appeal to anglers and boaters. For instance, PPFF and its friends groups have raised funds for and installed accessible boat launches and fishing docks at eight state parks including the newest ones at Chapman State Park, Warren County, and one soon to be placed at Locust Lake State Park, Schuylkill County, with plans for another nine parks to get one in the future. One of PPFF's priorities is to make outdoor recreation available to anyone and everyone who wants to participate.

Other activities include the placement of fishing line collection boxes at popular fishing areas to keep monofilament line out of aquatic habitats, weekend-long events specifically geared to help women learn outdoor skills like fishing and paddling and sailing classes and clubs like the one at Yellow Creek State Park, Indiana County.

"The community sailing program at Yellow Creek Lake offers affordable, US Sailing-certified lessons for beginners and experienced sailors alike," said Kenneth Sherwood, Sailing Base Lead. "Participants can go from first lesson to skipper in just one season, then join the club and enjoy open access to our fleet once they're certified.

We also support outreach programs with local schools and Scouting America."

Another example is the Ole Bull Kids Fishing Derby, held by the Friends of Ole Bull State Park, Potter County, on the first Saturday each June. The derby provides families with the opportunity to introduce their children (ages 2-12) to fishing and promote outdoor recreation and conservation.

Mary Hirst, a volunteer with both the Friends of Ole Bull State Park and R.B. Winter State Park friends groups, said, "Being involved with several friends groups and PPFF has allowed me to promote opportunities for outdoor recreation that will hopefully reinforce the importance of preserving our amazing natural resources for future generations."

Adding to the volunteering spirit, many friends groups hold semi-annual volunteer workdays, where participants clean up lake and stream shorelines, remove invasive plants and maintain structures like docks and trails. Check the PPFF events page for a calendar of volunteer opportunities and fishing and boating activities in Pennsylvania state parks and forests at paparksandforests.org/events.

Studies show that volunteering for a cause important to you is great for your well-being. Volunteering improves mood and decreases depression, reduces stress and builds a sense of purpose and community.

"For many years, the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation has promoted volunteerism as a way to improve overall health while keeping our outdoor environment clean," said Marci Mowery, PPFF President. "Whether someone officially joins one of our friends groups to volunteer on a regular basis or they participate in a one-day tree planting event, they are benefiting themselves and the natural world."

Get more information illustrating the positive impacts of volunteering to protect our natural resources on the PPFF website.

With so many volunteer opportunities that support the missions of both PFBC and PPFF, what are you waiting for? ☐

Accessible State Park & Forest Recreation Facilities

Accessible Amphitheater:

- Prince Gallitzin State Park, Cambria County

Accessible Equipment:

- Blue Knob State Park, Bedford County (pool wheelchair)
- Gifford Pinchot State Park, York County (two floating wheelchairs)
- Lackawanna State Park, Lackawanna County (all terrain wheelchair)
- Western Pennsylvania (bikes and kayaks)
- Prince Gallitzin State Park, Cambria County (beach wheelchair)

Accessible Fishing Docks:

- Colonel Denning State Park, Cumberland County
- Gouldsboro State Park, Monroe and Wayne counties
- Maurice K. Goddard State Park, Mercer County
- Ricketts Glen State Park, Columbia, Luzerne and Sullivan counties
- Tobyhanna State Park, Monroe and Wayne counties

Accessible Hunting Area:

- Cook Forest State Park, Clarion, Forest and Jefferson counties (access road)

Accessible Kayak and Canoe Launches:

- Beltzville State Park, Carbon County
- Chapman State Park, Warren County
- Frances Slocum State Park, Luzerne County (in development)
- Gifford Pinchot State Park, York County (in development)
- Hills Creek State Park, Tioga County (fundraising underway)
- Laurel Hill State Park, Somerset County
- Little Buffalo State Park, Perry County
- Moraine State Park, Butler County
- Prince Gallitzin State Park, Cambria County

Accessible Playgrounds:

- Cowans Gap State Park, Franklin and Fulton counties (accessible elements)
- Little Buffalo State Park, Perry County
- Samuel S. Lewis State Park, York County

Accessible Trails and Paths:

- Cook Forest State Park, Clarion, Forest and Jefferson counties (sensory trail)
- Gifford Pinchot State Park, York County (pathway to beach and Mobi-Mat to water)
- Lackawanna State Park, Lackawanna County
- Nolde Forest Environmental Education Center, Berks County (in development)

Accessible Wildlife Viewing:

- Michaux State Forest, Cumberland, Franklin and Adams counties

View Finders for People with Color Blindness:

- Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County
- Black Moshannon State Park, Centre County
- Colton Point State Park, Tioga County
- Cook Forest State Park, Clarion, Forest and Jefferson counties
- Hyner View State Park, Clinton County
- Kettle Creek State Park, Clinton County
- Leonard Harrison State Park, Tioga County
- Little Pine State Park, Lycoming County
- Sinnemahoning State Park, Cameron and Potter counties

PFBC ON THE JOB

Ryan Walt

Boating and Watercraft Safety Manager

My connection to water began long before I joined the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). Growing up near southcentral Pennsylvania, I was drawn to the power of water and the challenge it presents to those who work and recreate



photo-courtesy of Ryan Walt

around it. That respect for water and a desire to help others stay safe on the water, led me to a career focused on training Pennsylvania's first responders in lifesaving water rescue techniques.

As PFBC's Boating and Watercraft Safety Manager, I coordinate and instruct water rescue, ice rescue and emergency response training across Pennsylvania. Ice rescue training is one of the most physically demanding courses we offer, and it requires teamwork, communication and planning. Participants learn to recognize ice hazards, use specialized rescue equipment and perform rescues, all while immersed in realistic, cold water conditions. Seeing a student's confidence grow as they master these skills is one of the most rewarding parts of my job.

Every season brings unique challenges, from shifting ice conditions to remote training sites, but the mission remains the same—to make sure first responders have the knowledge and skills to effectively and safely act. Knowing that the techniques we teach directly contribute to saving lives across Pennsylvania reinforces why this work matters.

Through programs like Ice Rescue and Emergency Response, PFBC continues its commitment to public safety, supporting emergency responders and ensuring that Pennsylvania's waterways are safely enjoyed. ☐

PA Water Rescue:





FISHING FROM AN URBAN ANGLE



photo-PFBC archives

by Deborah Weisberg

Lev Wedner threads a worm onto a hook and jigs it among the lily pads at Lake Carnegie in Pittsburgh's Highland Park.

Soon, there's a tug on his line as a Bluegill takes the bait. Lev reels in his catch, quickly removes the hook and tosses the fish back into the water.

It has been 2 years since Lev, now 8, was introduced to fishing at the 1½-acre reservoir through a free weekly program sponsored by the Anglers Fishing Club of Pittsburgh in partnership with the city and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC).

That first outing sparked a passion in Lev that delights his mother, Kim.

"He makes me take him all over Pennsylvania to fish!" said Kim. "It's a positive passion, one I can support. With fishing, there's no competition, like with baseball or hockey. And, it's 'screen free' time outdoors."

As a social worker, Kim appreciates how fishing enhances Lev's development by teaching him patience and enabling him to practice both fine and gross motor skills, from tying knots to precision casting. "He's also learning about ecosystems."

Taking Lev fishing gets her out into nature, too.

The Wedners are among dozens of parents and kids who have made Wednesdays with the club a part of their schedule April through September.

Ed Caldwell, club coordinator, and a cadre of other volunteers serve as mentors, having been certified as Fishing Skills Instructors by the PFBC.

On an afternoon last summer, Chuck Gaines worked with Carmine Rucker on how to properly release a small bass.

"I love fishing, and I love helping people accomplish something," said Gaines, a retired Pittsburgh police officer. "They're relating to nature and appreciating nature. Because the lake is catch and release, they're understanding the value of sustaining the resource."

"Kids typically come with their mothers," said Gaines, "and they're as excited as the kids."

Angel Smoot brings her daughter, Mimi Murithi, and son, Amani Murithi, by Uber every week.

“Amani’s dad showed him how to fish. Now, he’s teaching me,” said Smoot.

Given Amani’s enthusiasm they’re usually the last to leave the lake.

“Even if I don’t catch fish, it’s better than staying home and watching my phone,” said Amani, who, in his 2 years with the club, has caught some of Lake Carnegie’s biggest Channel Catfish and bass.

“It takes a lot of practice, but I’m getting pretty good.”

Aya Naitr, who moved to Pittsburgh from Japan, brought her son, Kaede Naitr, every week last summer and enjoyed watching his progress.

“The first time he couldn’t touch the worm or the fish,” said Aya, “and now, he’s okay with it.”

For Trevaughn Brown, helping his son, Jaiden Holtz, reel in a Bluegill, his first ever catch, evoked childhood memories of fishing with his grandfather. “It’s a good bonding moment,” said Brown.

The city stocks Lake Carnegie, and the PFBC provides rods, reels, bobbers, sinkers and hooks through its Fishing Tackle Loaner Program. A local bait dealer sells worms to the club at a discount.

The PFBC last year contributed materials for 10 catfish spawning boxes, which students at nearby Lincoln Elementary School and a local YMCA assembled.

Caldwell formed the club as an offshoot of an older organization, Let’s Go Fishing, which met every Saturday for years and now gathers once a month spring through summer. A newer club, F is for Fishburgh, also meets monthly.

“United in purpose, the groups support each other,” said John Blazosky, master naturalist and Lake Carnegie enthusiast, who marvels at their impact on young lives and their spirit of inclusivity.

“Every kid wants to feel that tug on the end of their line,” said Blazosky, “and you’ll never find a more diverse group.”

“Programs like these tap into an eager, but traditionally underserved, audience and raise awareness of fisheries close to home,” said Walt Dietz, PFBC Aquatic Resources Education Manager.

“Often, city residents want to fish but have no ride, no equipment and no know-how, so we’re working with partners across the state to promote opportunities. We fund programs through various grants, train volunteers to become instructors and show people that urban waters can be awesome fishing destinations,” said Dietz.

In Philadelphia, R3 funding has helped Discovery Pathways, a non-profit outdoors education and leadership organization, introduce more than 2,700 youths to fishing and kayaking in FDR Park. “About 94 percent of participants are people of color, and

98 percent have never fished or kayaked before,” said Andy Desko, PFBC Southeast Region Outreach and Education Coordinator.

“Besides getting people interested in new activities, we’re helping them develop an appreciation for nature, which leads to an interest in caring for natural resources,” said Desko.

The PFBC also partners with the Philadelphia Water Department to present Philly Fun Fishing Fest on the Schuylkill River and has engaged Easton, Pennsylvania’s sizeable Hispanic community with bilingual fishing and kayaking programs.

In downtown Wilkes-Barre, the PFBC sponsors weeknight catfish fishing at River Commons on the banks of the Susquehanna River and works with Riverfront Parks Committee to include fishing in special events, like Chalkfest.

“We attract all kinds of people including some who have not fished before but come out of curiosity,” said Allan Schreffler, PFBC Northeast Region Outreach and Education Coordinator. “When I ask them what they think, they say they had no idea there was so much recreation on the river.”

Christian Ostrowski, tournament angler, and other members of Suskie Bassmasters have been volunteer fishing instructors for years. “We like promoting the river and connecting people with nature,” said Ostrowski. “Kids catch on fast.”

Some of the longest running efforts to serve urban anglers are at Presque Isle State Park, which is just 4 miles from downtown Erie and easily reached by water taxi or bus.

“It’s not unusual to see anglers waiting for the bus with their gear,” said Jessica Rohrdanz, PFBC Northwest Region Outreach and Education Coordinator. “In summer, the trip is free Wednesdays and Saturdays.”

S.O.N.S. (Save Our Native Species) of Lake Erie Fishing Club has been pivotal in protecting shoreline access, and they partner with an array of organizations to sponsor fishing events for YMCAs, camps, schools, churches and veterans groups.

The club also maintains a PFBC tackle loaner site at the local library.

“We’ve introduced thousands of people to fishing—800 to 900 a year,” said Jerry Skrypzak, S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie Fishing Club President. “We know the programs are effective, because groups keep requesting them.”

One partner, COPPS (Community Oriented Police Probation Services), works specifically with youths from the Housing Authority of the City of Erie (HACE) in a three-day fishing program in June.

“It’s awesome,” said Cherie Kinem, Deputy Director for HACE. “Any time you bring a mentor into a child’s life, they’ve made a friend.” □



Preparing for Your Next Fishing or Boating Trip

by Linda Stager photos by the author

There's nothing quite like a day on the water. The gentle roll of the boat, the sparkle of sunlight on the surface, the anticipation of a strike on your line. All of it comes together to create one of the most enjoyable outdoor experiences.

But, the best fishing and boating trips don't happen by chance. They're the result of thoughtful preparation, attention to safety and a bit of planning. Whether you're setting out for a quiet afternoon on a local lake or a full weekend of fishing on bigger waters, getting ready ahead of time can make the difference between a stressful outing and a seamless adventure.

Here are some tips for making your fishing and boating experiences the best.

Inspect your Boat and Gear

Every successful trip begins with a well-prepared boat. Take time before launch day to give your vessel a complete check.

Fuel up in advance and carry extra oil and tools for quick fixes on the water. Safety equipment is

non-negotiable. Have a properly fitting life jacket for every passenger, a fire extinguisher, flares and a stocked first-aid kit. A whistle or sound device is also required.

Inspect rods, reels and tackle to confirm everything is in working order. Carefully clean your gear to prevent spreading diseases and aquatic invasive species from one body of water to another.

Pack the Essentials

Bring sun protection, sunscreen, sunglasses and a hat, along with clothing layers to adapt to changing conditions. Even on short outings, pack more drinking water than you think you'll need plus high-energy snacks to keep everyone comfortable. A fully charged cell phone or marine radio provides a lifeline if unexpected problems arise.

Respect the Rules

Each body of water comes with its own set of regulations, from no-wake zones to fishing restrictions. Take time to review these rules before launching.

For anglers, check licensing requirements and seasons, sizes and daily limits. A local bait shop can help you learn what fish are biting and where.



Inspect rods, reels and tackle prior to your fishing trip.

Keep an Eye on the Forecast

Weather is the wild card of any fishing or boating excursion. Calm mornings can quickly give way to wind or storms, so consult multiple forecasts and remain alert when you're on the water. When in doubt, it's always wiser to postpone a trip than risk safety in rough conditions.

Chart Your Course

Know your launch point and plan your route. Before heading out, share your float plan and estimated return time with a family member or friend.

Digital Float Plan:



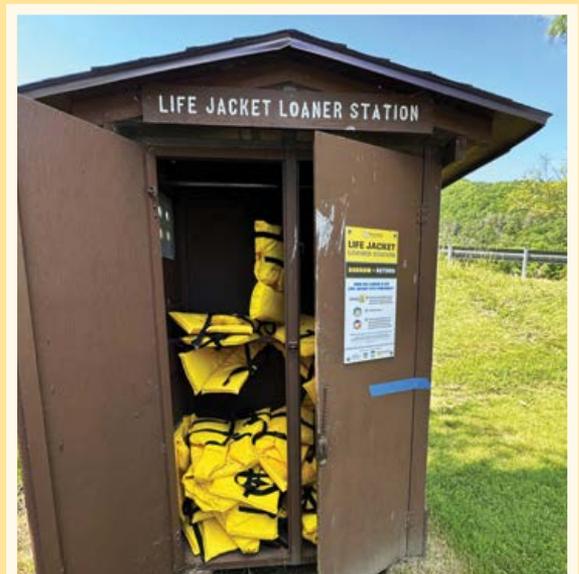
Enjoy the Experience

In the end, preparation is about creating the freedom to relax and enjoy yourself.

Whether it's the thrill of a hooked fish, the serenity of open water or the companionship of friends and family, a well-planned trip allows you to focus on the moments that matter most with safety at the heart of every trip. ☑



Properly dispose of your fishing line.



Life jackets save lives and are easy to borrow from life jacket loaner stations across Pennsylvania.

Borrow a Life Jacket:



STEP INTO BIG
ADVENTURES THIS YEAR.

Keep going.



The winter creates a variety of outdoor activities to make the most of the colder months in Pennsylvania, so set yourself up for a season of adventure. Buy your fishing license, and get your launch permit or renew your boat registration for the upcoming boating season today at HuntFish.PA.gov.

ExplorePAWaters.com

photo-PFEC archives

ROCK & LOG



Outerwear for Wintertime Fun!

If you're dressed properly for the cold, you can have fun and chill with your friends all winter long while enjoying Pennsylvania's outdoors.

- Warm Hat
 - Neck Warmer, Neck Gaiter or Scarf
 - Wind-resistant Coat
 - Thermal Socks
 - Waterproof Footwear/Boots (and removable ice cleats when going on the ice)
 - Snow Pants
 - Mittens or Insulated Gloves
 - Life Jacket or Float Coat (when going on the ice)
- Never go on the ice alone.*

EXPLORE PA WATERS®



FishandBoat.com

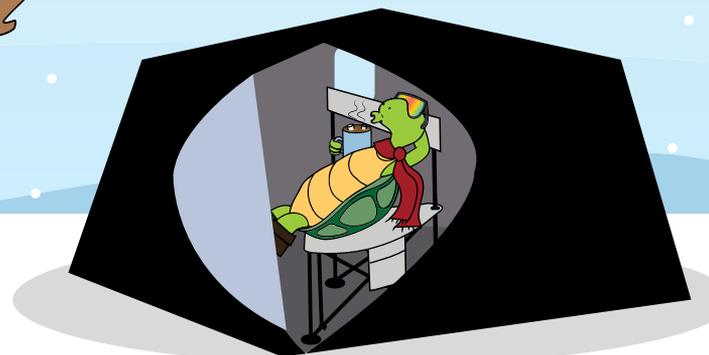
HELLO WINTER!

Here are some tips for catching a good time while ice fishing.

- Test the ice thickness.
- Stay off ice 4 inches or less and cloudy ice.
- Dress in layers.
- Check the weather forecast.
- Take a change of dry clothes.
- Bring a pop-up ice shelter to provide protection from wind and other weather.
- Use a bucket or sled to carry your equipment.
- Take a throw bag and ice picks (ice awls).

Explore the "Lake Ice Safety Guide" on page 7 for more information.

Get Your License Today:



Winter Wonders

Search the scene for the gear you should take with you when ice fishing. Never go ice fishing alone. Kids should always take an adult with them.

Check the boxes as you find them.

- Life Jackets
- Ice Auger (to drill holes)
- Ice Fishing Rod and Tackle
- Bait (waxworms, maggots or red worms)
- Mittens or Insulated Gloves
- Ice Picks (Ice Awls)
- Bucket (to carry gear)



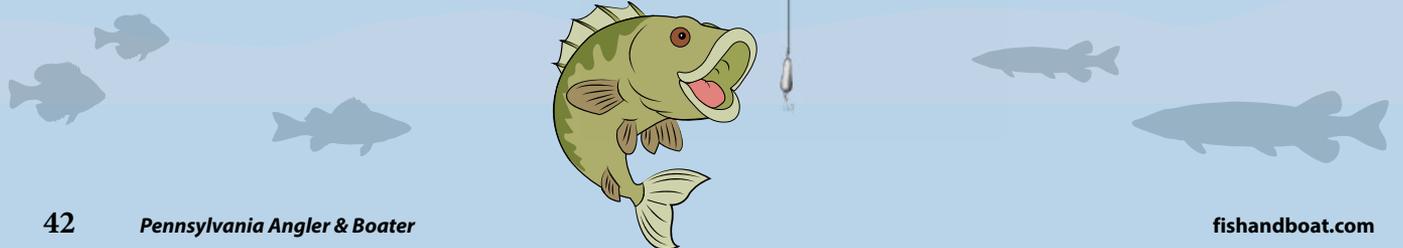
FISH ON!

- Fishing regulations including sizes and daily limits vary depending on where you're fishing. Review the current *Pennsylvania Fishing Summary* for details.
- You may use up to five fishing devices. For example, you can use three rods and two tip-ups.
- There's no limit to the number of hooks on a line except at Pymatuning Reservoir, Crawford County, where a maximum of three hooks per line is allowed.
- The hole you cut in the ice cannot be more than 10 inches at the farthest points.
- Check your jigging rods to make sure the line is not brittle and your tip-ups to make sure they are properly working.
- To increase your success on the ice, have a diverse selection of baits. Fish may be more selective in the winter. Live bait is often best (waxworms, maggots, red worms, live minnows). If you're using minnows, add an aerator to your minnow bucket to keep the minnows alive during your fishing trip.
- Colored feather jigs attract fish, especially when jigged up and down.
- The best fishing is usually early in the morning or late in the evening.

Ice Fishing:



Where to Go:



PFBC ON PATROL



Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Rachael L. Thurner-Diaz, Southcentral Region, assisted with a patrol detail on the Susquehanna River during the Air Dot Show held in Harrisburg. The United States Navy Blue Angels performed at the show and conducted maneuvers over the river.



WCO Kamron J. Bettinger, Southcentral Region, and WCO Derrick M. Noonan, Southcentral Region, participated in the National Hunting and Fishing Day event at the Pennsylvania State Capitol, Dauphin County, where they answered questions, handed out educational materials and had a patrol boat on display.



WCOs Matthew J. Viosky, Northwest Region, and Luke E. Walter, Northwest Region, along with troopers from the Pennsylvania State Police, patrol and provide assistance during Tall Ships® Erie. This festival is a multi-day event held on Erie's bayfront, where participants may board or go for a sail on these historic vessels.



WCO Cassidy A. Shawley, Northwest Region, participated in National Night Out at the Bloomsburg Fairgrounds, Columbia County, where educational materials were shared. Paddlers were given whistles to comply with boating regulations and increase safety.

Winter in the Wilds

A photograph of a snowy winter street scene at night. In the foreground, a large, snow-covered Christmas tree is decorated with warm white lights and red ornaments. To its left, a black street lamp with a glowing lantern is also decorated with a wreath and lights. The background shows a snow-covered sidewalk and a building with a window, all under a dark, starry sky. The overall atmosphere is cozy and festive.

In winter, a small town's glow is enough to warm one's soul. Wellsboro, Tioga County, a nostalgic, Hallmark-featured community, is such a town. Nestled within 1.2 million acres of state land, state parks and bordered by numerous streams and lakes, Wellsboro offers delicious dining, unique shopping and picturesque experiences in town and boasts adventures just beyond its borders.

Stay in one of the town's Bed and Breakfasts or hotels. Then, venture beyond the paved streets to the Pennsylvania Wilds. Try ice fishing on nearby lakes, snowshoeing at Hills Creek State Park's Winterfest or hike to view the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. Check with the Tackle Shack for ice conditions and the latest ice fishing and winter gear.

When you return from your winter wonderland adventures, warm up with a cup of cocoa and share your stories of the day by the fire at the historic Penn Wells Hotel. ☐

©High On The Mountain

photo-High on the Mountain Photography, Matthew Stevens

JANUARY/FEBRUARY Highlights



FIRST DAY HIKE

Ring in the New Year and America's 250th anniversary with a First Day Hike at Pymatuning State Park, Crawford County, on January 1, 2026. The hike starts at the spillway parking lot at 10:00 a.m. Bring your fishing gear to drop a line in the lake after the hike—the park educator will share where the fish are currently biting. For more, visit [events.dcnr.pa.gov/event/first-day-hike-247](https://dcnr.pa.gov/event/first-day-hike-247).



FISHING, FIRE & ICE

Embrace the winter season with the Uptown Somerset Fire & Ice Festival on January 16-18. The 2026 festival theme is "Historic Somerset," and the festival will offer more than 50 ice sculptures, an ice slide, fireworks, fire pits, live ice carvings, children's activities, music, food, a marketplace and more. Spend the weekend in Somerset and find ice fishing opportunities at nearby Laurel Hill Lake and Somerset Lake. Discover more at uptownsomerset.org/fireandice.



WHISTLE PIG ON ICE

Enjoy a weekend adventure by visiting the Groundhog Day event at Gobbler's Knob, Jefferson County. Then, try ice fishing at nearby Cloe Lake. The one-day event celebrates the famous groundhog (also known as a whistle pig, land beaver, woodchuck or thickwood badger) and the arrival of spring. Cloe Lake is 7 minutes away from Punxsutawney and offers opportunities to extend your visit with ice fishing for Walleyes, trout or bass. Explore more at groundhog.org.



PENNSYLVANIA FARM SHOW

Experience Pennsylvania's Ag culture at the 2026 Pennsylvania Farm Show, Harrisburg. Explore exhibits at the largest indoor ag exposition under one roof in the nation. Stop by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) booth to receive 10% off your 2026 fishing license, meet a Waterways Conservation Officer or biologist and take a photo with Rock & Log. Visit pa.gov/agencies/farmshow/pa-farm-show/daily-schedule.



WINE, FOOD AND TROUT

The Pocono Wine and Food Fest returns to Stroudsburg on Sunday, January 25, 2026, offering local wines and gourmet bites from local culinary talent. It pairs perfectly with a quiet morning on Brodhead Creek, Monroe County, where winter trout fishing means cold air, clear water and no crowds. Fish a few hours; then, head into town to warm up while exploring artisan crafts, wine accessories and specialty goods. Find out more at discovernepa.com/event/pocono-wine-and-food-fest-2026.



PHILLY FISHING SHOW

Get ready for your 2026 fishing trips with a visit to the Philadelphia Fishing Show January 9-11 at the Greater Philadelphia Expo Center, Oaks. Enjoy exhibits, seminars and attractions including the "Hawg Trough" mobile aquarium filled with trophy fish and a trout pond, where children can reel one in. Staff from the PFBC will be at the show. The expo center has a free parking lot. Kids (age 5 and under) get in for free. Visit phillyfishingshow.com.



PENNSYLVANIA AMPHIBIANS AND REPTILES

WOOD FROG

Lithobates sylvaticus

The Wood Frog is most active during the day. As an adult, it's a medium-sized frog averaging 1¾- to 2¾-inches long. More terrestrial than most frogs, the Wood Frog can also jump farther than many frogs. The Wood Frog's head is broad with a pointed snout. Its skin is usually a shade of tan. A prominent, dark mask covers each eye and extends along the side of the head to just behind the eardrum (tympanum). A Wood Frog's chest is marked with a dark spot located near the base of the forelimbs, and its belly is white.



RED-SPOTTED NEWT

Notophthalmus viridescens viridescens

A Red-spotted Newt progresses through three life stages: larval, red eft and adult. Each stage has its own coloration and habitat. Adults are active in water and can even be seen prowling stream bottoms through the ice. Red efts are terrestrial (found on land) in damp forest floor leaves and woody debris. In the eft stage, it's red to orange red with a row of black-bordered, red spots on its back. As an adult, it's olive to yellowish brown with a yellow belly and small red spots with black halos.



EASTERN GARTERSNAKE

Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis

The Eastern Gartersnake is the most widely distributed snake in North America. Adults are 18- to 26-inches long. It's active over a longer period than most snakes and can tolerate colder temperatures. Gartersnakes have musk glands that discharge odor to repel threats. Eastern Gartersnakes are dark green to black with stripes (normally three) down its back and sides. A double row of spots commonly appears between the stripes, sometimes giving a checkerboard appearance.



JAN	FEB	MAR	APR
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC

JAN	FEB	MAR	APR
MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG
SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC

STOCKED TROUT WATERS ON STATE GAME LANDS

Discussing the necessary components for a good day's fishing generates talk of tackle, fishing line, live baits, artificial lures, waders and boats.

Yet, most important are the fish and fishing waters. After all, you can't catch fish in waterways you can't reach. Fortunately, stocked trout waters on state game lands reliably offer both trout and guaranteed access, generally amidst beautiful settings.

"Plus, game lands are typically forested with good riparian buffers and tree cover along the banks, which provide better stream channels and stream habitat," said Nathan Walters, Coldwater Unit Leader.

Want to see for yourself? Here are some waters—entirely or partially on game lands—being stocked for the trout opener on April 4 Statewide.



Northwest

- **State Game Lands 143**, Warren County: Blue Eye Run gets Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout. Brokenstraw Creek gets Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout and golden Rainbow Trout.
- **State Game Lands 95**, Butler County: Twenty-acre Harbar Acres Lake gets Rainbow Trout, offers good shore fishing and has a small boat ramp.

Southwest

- **State Game Lands 51**, Fayette County: 4.22 miles of Dunbar Creek gets Rainbow Trout for Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only. A smaller stretch allows all fishing.
- **State Game Lands 232**, Washington County: Enlow Fork gets Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout.

Northcentral

- **State Game Lands 87**, Clearfield County: Curry Run and a portion of Laurel Run get Rainbow Trout and golden Rainbow Trout.
- **State Game Lands 208**, Tioga County: Long Run gets Rainbow Trout and golden Rainbow Trout.

Southcentral

- **State Game Lands 166**, Blair County: Canoe Creek gets Brown Trout, Rainbow Trout and golden Rainbow Trout.
- **State Game Lands 76**, Franklin County: Conodoguinet Creek gets Rainbow Trout.
- **State Game Lands 211**, Dauphin County: Clark Creek gets Brook Trout, Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout. A section is Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only.

Northeast

- **State Game Lands 12**, Bradford County: Little Schrader Creek and Schrader Creek get Brown Trout.
- **State Game Lands 127**, Monroe County: Tobyhanna Creek gets Brook Trout, Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout.

Southeast

- **State Game Lands 227**, Schuylkill County: Stretches of Little Schuylkill River and Locust Creek get Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout.

For more information, see the *Pennsylvania Fishing Summary*. ☐

Trout Streams:



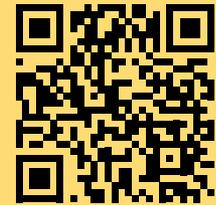
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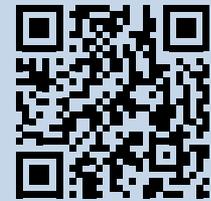
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EXPLORE PA WATERS



Teachers come in all shapes and sizes—even 4 inches long and slimy. The Eels In the Classroom program gives kids an up-close experience with Pennsylvania's amazing natural underwater world.

Eels In the Classroom:



➔ **Lamont Ramos,**
Bethlehem, caught this
Brown Trout on a fly while
fishing Monocacy Creek,
Northampton County.

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:



