

**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Executive Director's Report  
April 1, 2025, to June 30, 2025**

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (Commission) strategic plan contains priorities involving workforce, access, engagement, non-game species and habitat, infrastructure, and sport fish and habitat. This quarterly report provides examples of the Commission's progress toward those priorities from April 1, 2025, through June 30, 2025.

**WORKFORCE**

**Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs)**

The 26<sup>th</sup> Waterways Conservation Officer Trainee class participated in their first Field Training assignments from March 29<sup>th</sup> – April 25<sup>th</sup>. The cadets participated in Mentored Youth Day and the Opening Day of trout season during this time frame and applied the different training disciplines they learned in the classroom to interactions they had with anglers and boaters on Commonwealth waterways. Additional classroom training included the principles of Boating Under the Influence and Seated Field Sobriety Testing, Inland Boat Operation and Marine Patrol Fundamentals, and Boat Incident Investigations. In addition to classroom training in these areas, the cadets participated in on the water instruction and scenarios utilizing Commission patrol boats. The cadets participated in a second session of field training from June 14<sup>th</sup> – July 11<sup>th</sup>.

On May 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, interviews were conducted to identify candidates for the 27<sup>th</sup> WCO Trainee class. A class of 12 cadets is anticipated.

**Customer Support Enhancements**

Staff continue to focus on improving customer service experience and reducing call center wait times and call durations without creating additional positions. Improvements include revising four Clerical Assistant 2 positions to the working title of Customer Support Representative and enhancing call center training for staff. Various process improvements within Licensing and Registration have resulted in:

- A 76% decrease in average hold time for customers.
- A 27% decrease in average call length.
- Ten staff from the Commission selected as Finalists for the 2024 Governor's Award of Excellence.

Additionally, the Commission transitioned their Boating Safety Education Certificate (BSEC) provider to a new vendor to facilitate a self-service online product for duplicate BSECs within HuntfishPA.

**Improving Efficiency and Addressing Accessibility**

Staff transitioned Safety Programing and oversight to the Office of Administration to enhance efficiency, consistency, and support. Additionally, the Commission implemented an agency-wide training program to assist staff with meeting federal standards for accessibility.

### **Swiftwater Rescue Recognitions**

The Heroes of Water Rescue Award for 2024 was presented to John Soderberg during the April Quarterly Commission Meeting. Additionally, staff completed Swiftwater Rescue Volunteer Service Recognitions, Inspections, and Certifications for Volunteer Fire Departments and city River Rescue crews across the state.

### **Connecting the Boating Community**

A Boat Rental Business Newsletter “FLOAT NOTES” was prepared and distributed for the first time to build better open communication of boating safety within the community.

### **ACCESS**

#### **Angler and Boater Access Restoration**

A roadway and parking lot resurfacing project was completed at Hunters Lake Access, Sullivan County. Additionally, a boat launch ramp rehabilitation project was completed at the Bloomsburg Airport Access, Columbia County.

#### **Voluntary Public Access Habitat Incentive Program (VPA-HIP)**

Since March 2025, the Commission has acquired six additional easements on properties throughout the state under the VPA-HIP program. These collective acquisitions form over 4 miles of perpetual public access to trout streams and are 100% funded by a federal grant in the Farm Bill for the purpose of increasing the public’s ability to access otherwise private lands. The new easements for fishing access include:

- Little Juniata Creek, Perry County, with designated parking areas, on 8,210 linear feet of stream.
- West Branch Susquehanna River, Cambria County, with designated parking areas, on 5,925 linear feet of stream. The West Branch of the Susquehanna River provides significant Class A Wild Brown Trout fishing opportunities in the area.
- North Fork Redbank Creek, Jefferson County, with existing public parking areas on 4,550 linear feet of stream.
- North Blacklick Creek, Cambria County, with designated parking, on 2,440 linear feet of stream.
- Pine Creek, Potter County, with designated parking, along 3,980 feet of this Class A stream.
- Sugar Creek, Venango County, on 930 feet of stream. This acquisition is adjacent to a neighboring, larger access which, combined, create over 2,500 feet of access.

### **ENGAGEMENT**

#### **Legislative Updates**

Act 15 of 2025 was signed into law and changes the composition of the Boating Advisory Board (BAB) by removing the Commission’s Executive Director and Boating Bureau Director. The two Boating At-Large members of the Commission are added to the BAB.

Act 21 of 2025 was signed into law and streamlines the process for disabled veteran licenses and provides discounted licenses for deployments of 60 days for domestic and international deployments.

Act 28 of 2025 was signed into law and addresses abandoned and derelict vessels in the Commonwealth, giving local entities more authority to investigate and remove abandoned boats, provide definitions for abandoned boats, and provide liability relief for removing such boats.

### **Linesville Open House**

Public outreach was extended with a successful and well attended Open House at Linesville State Fish Hatchery (SFH) on April 12<sup>th</sup>. Attendance increased to 2,000 from the previous year's 1,000 participants. Along with live amphibian and reptile displays, Walleye spawning, fish filleting and cooking demonstrations, Commission staff ran an extremely popular t-shirt fish printing station during the event. Several tactics in advance of the event supported public outreach including an email campaign to customers in the Northwest and Southwest regions.

### **Boating Safety**

Two Mission Monday presentations were offered in May to provide the public with information about safe boating and paddling. The presentations were part of a month-long effort to promote safe boating leading up to the Commonwealth's boating season. In recognition of National Safe Boating Week May 17<sup>th</sup> – 23<sup>rd</sup>, the public was offered many opportunities to engage in safe boating programs and events. Additionally, the Commission conducted a 2-week long paid awareness campaign reminding the public to wear their lifejackets at all times on the water with the "Can you Spot the Boater" campaign.

### **National Boating Outreach**

Staff attended the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Leadership Academy in Lexington, Kentucky and the American Boating Congress with the National Marine Manufacturer's Association (NMMA) in Washington, DC to discuss topics ranging from manufacturing, trade, sustainability, and boating access with all segments of the recreational boating industry.

### **Conservation Awareness and Outreach**

Staff facilitated the Aquatic Ecology Station at the Pennsylvania Envirothon at Windber Recreation Park in Somerset County for teams of five students from 64 counties across the Commonwealth. In addition to presenting safe boating information during the awards ceremony, staff offered a life jacket photo station for participating teams. Penncrest High School, Delaware County had the highest Aquatic Ecology score, was the overall winner, and will compete at the National Conservation Foundation Envirothon in Mount Royal University Calgary, Alberta, Canada in July.

### **Good Habitat = Good Fishing Education**

The Commission teamed up with Penn State University's (PSU) Joe Humphreys School of Fly Fishing to offer Good Habitat = Good Fishing programs at Colyer Lake in Centre County for 125 PSU students. Topics included the importance of lake habitat, construction of porcupine structures, and fly fishing. Pennsylvania Angler & Boater magazine will feature this cooperative effort in an upcoming article.

### **Women, Diversity, and Inclusion Leadership Retreat**

The Commission partnered with the PA Council of Trout Unlimited (TU) Women's Committee and hosted a successful 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Women's Mentor Retreat in May for 43 women from 23 counties and one from Maryland. The women represented 9 organizations and 16 TU Chapters. Photos and posts can be found on the PA Women Angler Facebook page.

### **NON-GAME SPECIES AND HABITAT**

#### **Bog Turtle Habitat Management**

As part of a State and Tribal Wildlife Grant (SWG) for the study and management of Bog Turtles in the Commonwealth, staff conducted Bog Turtle habitat management at several sites. Habitat management included removal of successional vegetation that encroached on nesting areas.

#### **American Shad Stocked**

The Anadromous Fish Restoration Unit completed the 2025 American Shad rearing season. Approximately 1.1 million American Shad fry were stocked into the Juniata River, Juniata County. Juvenile shad will remain in the river for up to a year before journeying to the ocean until they reach maturity.

#### **Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan (PA WAP)**

The comprehensive review and revision of the Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan (PA WAP) was advanced with key recent activities detailed below.

- Staff dedicated extensive time to review format and content consistency for Threats and Actions information entered by the Commission into the PA WAP database. Threats and Actions are essential components of the PA WAP.
- The Commission developed a provisional list of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) based on data provided by staff in the PA WAP database.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE**

#### **H.R. Stackhouse Improvements**

Improvements were made to the H.R. Stackhouse facility, Centre County. Site enhancements included landscaping, and the removal of trees damaged during spring storms, significantly improving the grounds surrounding the facility entrance. A new HVAC system was installed to serve the kitchen and cafeteria. Garage upgrades included the installation of a new roof, windows, main doors, overhead door, and gutters.

### **Fairview Hatch House**

Staff provided engineering design and construction management services for the construction of a new hatch house at the Fairview State Fish Hatchery in Erie County. The building will accommodate egg hatching and early life-stage rearing facilities for steelhead. Staff completed the installation and construction of new water supply lines, water discharge lines, fish rearing tanks, raised walkways, and water tank support systems. The initial testing of the system is complete, and the estimated timeframe for having fish in this facility is summer, 2025. These essential upgrades will continue to benefit anglers of the Commonwealth by increasing fish production efficiency and minimizing contamination.

### **Information Technology (IT) Upgrades**

A project to upgrade and replace aging host servers in the Harrisburg datacenter was completed, along with upgrades to the GIS and Registration and Titling Systems (RATS).

### **SPORT FISH AND HABITAT**

#### **Hatchery Stocking**

The Commission's trout hatcheries distributed 1,558,344 adult Brook, Brown, Rainbow, and golden Rainbow Trout from April through June 2025. During the same timeframe, hatcheries staff also stocked 575,200 fingerling Brook, Brown, and Rainbow Trout as part of the Put, Grow, and Take program. Hatcheries staff have also begun distributing 1,090,735 fingerling Brook, Brown, Rainbow, and golden Rainbow Trout to approximately 160 Cooperative Nurseries throughout the Commonwealth.

The Commission's warm/cool water hatcheries stocked 17,375,000 Walleye fry, 511,300 Walleye fingerlings, 6,010 tiger muskellunge yearlings, and 1,000 Spotted Shiner adults.

#### **Fish Surveys**

Staff evaluated warm-water and cool-water fisheries in numerous rivers and impoundments during the quarter. Highlights included the following two surveys:

- **Lake Canadohta, Crawford County** – A trap net survey targeting Walleye, Muskellunge, and panfish was conducted between April 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. The most abundant species captured were Yellow Perch (5,356), Walleye (36), and Muskellunge (14). The majority (~98%) of Yellow Perch captured were ≤ 5 inches. All but one Walleye captured were of legal size and four Walleyes captured measured over 26 inches. Muskellunge ranged from 30-44 inches.
- **North Branch Susquehanna River** – Staff surveyed 50 sites on the North Branch Susquehanna River for Muskellunge. A total of 20 Muskellunge were captured. Since 2017, passive integrated transponder (PIT) tags have been implanted in 178 Muskellunge. Three of the Muskellunge captured in April 2025 were PIT tagged. Two of the fish were first tagged during surveys in 2023 and 2024. The third recapture was a fish that was tagged five days previously and was recaptured approximately six miles upstream. These PIT tag studies provide information on survival, growth, and movement for these and other game fishes.

**Fish Cleaning Stations**

The Commission acquired the services of a vendor to remove fish waste from the Commission fish cleaning station at Walnut Creek Marina. Natural Upcycling, LLC provides fish waste removal consistent with protocols to ensure viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) is not transported to neighboring watersheds. This fish cleaning station supports anglers of the Lake Erie watershed.

**Warrior Run Stream Habitat Improvement**

The Commission partnered with the Northcentral Pennsylvania Conservancy, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, and the Northumberland County Conservation District to complete a 1,100 feet long stream habitat improvement project on Warrior Run in May. The project is located at the Warrior Run School District property and focused on improving fish habitat as well as stabilizing eroding streambanks that were jeopardizing the school's cross county track. Twenty-three devices were installed, and numerous trees were planted to provide improved instream and riparian habitat. This project will be utilized as an outdoor educational opportunity for the students at Warrior Run School District and will continue to make profound benefits to the watershed and the surrounding community for years to come.