

**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Executive Director's Report
July 1, 2025, to September 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 July 1, 2025, through September 30, 2025.

WORKFORCE

Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs)

The 26th WCO Trainee class graduated on July 18. A graduation ceremony was held for the 19 graduates in the Pennsylvania State Capitol Rotunda. The ceremony was attended by many staff members and Commissioners and included an address from Senator Patty Kim. The new WCOs reported to their district assignments on July 21.

The 27th WCO Trainee class reported for training on August 4. The ten cadets spent their first month of training at the H.R. Stackhouse Training School where they completed their Boating Safety Course and were introduced to staff from multiple bureaus within the agency. Education staff provided instructor training and on-water experiences that included Boating & Water Safety Awareness, Fishing Skills Instructor certification, flyfishing, and a paddling trip on the Susquehanna River where the cadets got the opportunity to test out their new boating safety and fishing skills. The class reported to Commonwealth University – Mansfield on September 2 where they will receive certified instruction on the principles of law enforcement.

Staffing Efficiency Upgrades

The Commission executed a contract with Dunn Corporate Resources, a national leader in unemployment cost management services, to provide the Commission with high-quality, effective solutions to minimize unemployment compensation costs. The contracted vendor will provide services related to claim handling, appeals, auditing benefits and charges, reporting, and client education. Additionally, overtime premium time reporting was reinstituted to assist bureaus with better managing their personnel budgets.

Division of Licensing and Registration Enhancements

Staff continue to operate at an efficiency level that has been unprecedented in agency history. Historically, the boat registration backlog peaks at slightly over 4,000 applications in late July or early August, with staff processing applications with a turnaround time of approximately 60 days. This year, during the peak period, boat registration backlog peaked at 1,097 applications, which is a decrease of 73%. The average turnaround time for boat registration applications never exceeded five days during the 2025 boating season, which is a decrease of 93%. As of the end of this quarter, staff are processing boat registrations the same day they are received.

Instructor Training and Feedback

Staff certified 70 new educators through two virtual Trout in the Classroom (TIC) workshops. The Commission also conducted two public surveys, one for the annual Women's Networking Social (Lancaster Flyfishing Show) and the other for the TIC curriculum development. Over 175 participants responded to these surveys.

Boating and Water Safety Education

Education staff from across the state participated in a one-day in-person and on-water National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Presenter's Guide to Paddlesports Safety training at Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County. The training was led by NASBLA Paddling Course and Instructor Charge leaders. The Commission was one of two state agencies invited to participate in the pilot and provided feedback on national draft guidelines. In addition, staff worked with the Pennsylvania State Fire Academy, Harrisburg Area Community College, and Montgomery County Fire Academy to pilot the first National Fire Protection Association 1006 Proboard Evaluation for Surface Water I/II & Swiftwater I/II Technician Programs.

North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative Assessments

Commission staff trained about 40 Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Forestry district staff and engineers to conduct North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Collaborative (NAACC) assessments for aquatic organism passage (AOP) at road stream crossings. The Commission held three day-long training courses in different regions of the state. There are trained NAACC lead observers in all but one DCNR forest district for the Commonwealth.

ACCESS

North East Marina

Ownership of the North East Marina has been transferred to the North East Community Marina Authority. The Commission entered into an agreement for a five-year lease with the Authority for boater access at the Marina. Additionally, the Commission retained a recreation easement on a portion of the property so that it stays open to the public in perpetuity.

Boating Access Grants

The Commission celebrated the completion and opening of the Riverside Park Boat Ramp and Adaptive Kayak Launch on the Schuylkill River in Chester County and the South Branch French Creek Boat Launch in Erie County. The Commission awarded Boating Facility Grant (BFG) funds to Masontown Borough in 2023 and Union City Borough in 2024 for the respective projects which consisted of river access design and construction. Staff announced that applications are now being accepted for the next round of the BFG with a deadline of December 1, 2025. Applicants must participate in an on-site visit with Commission staff to discuss their proposed project and are encouraged to keep accessibility in mind when developing their applications.

Access Improvement Projects

Commission staff completed the construction of the following angler and boater access projects across the state with the assistance of partner organizations such as the Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (PAOC) and County Conservation Districts:

- ***Upper Woods Access, Wayne County:*** A boat ramp rehabilitation project that involved the installation of new concrete planks. This upgrade improves the structural integrity of the ramp, providing a safer and more durable surface for launching and retrieving boats.
- ***West Falls Access, Wyoming County:*** The construction of a new parking lot was designed to increase parking capacity, provide safer and more organized vehicle access, and enhance the overall usability of the site for the public.
- ***Kilbuck Access, Allegheny County:*** A boat ramp rehabilitation project that involved the installation of new concrete planks. This upgrade improves the structural integrity of the ramp, providing a safer and more durable surface for launching and retrieving boats.
- ***Gilmore Farm property, Erie County:*** With assistance from the PAOC, the trail to Elk Creek was improved through the installation of steps and other upgrades, providing safer and easier access for anglers. In addition, a parking lot expansion was completed on the property, increasing capacity and enhancing the overall usability of the site.
- ***Tylersville State Fish Hatchery, Clinton County:*** A streambank restoration project was completed in partnership with the Clinton County Conservation District. This project stabilized the streambank, reduced erosion, and improved overall habitat.
- ***Auburn Access, Schuylkill County:*** A bulkhead replacement was completed at the site, improving structural integrity and ensuring safer, more reliable access for public use.
- ***Monongahela Access, Washington County:*** Contractors completed a boat ramp rehabilitation project that included the construction of a new concrete boat launch.

ENGAGEMENT

National and Local Conference Attendance

Staff from multiple bureaus attended conferences and symposia to build stronger partnerships, improve knowledge in their subject areas, and present on Commission initiatives in Pennsylvania. The following conferences were attended by Commission representatives:

- States Organization for Boating Access (SOBA) Symposium in Providence, RI.
- Pennsylvania Greenways and Trails Summit in Harrisburg, PA.
- Natural Resources Conservation Service's Pennsylvania State Technical Committee in Harrisburg, PA.
- Northeast Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (NEPARC) annual meeting at the Poconos Environmental Education Center in Dingmans Ferry, PA.
- National Association of State Boating Law Administrators annual conference in Des Moines, IA.
- Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Atlantic Striped Bass Management Board meeting in Arlington, VA.

Boating, Water, and Ice Safety Training

From July 22-24, 37 Commonwealth employees from various agencies including the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), Fish and Boat Commission (Commission) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) completed training for *Standard Operating Policy 501 - Boating, Water, and Ice Safety for Commission Staff and Volunteers* at Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County. Additionally, this year staff from DCNR, Pennsylvania Turnpike, and Pennsylvania Department of Motor Vehicles who use watercraft in the scope of their employment were invited to participate. Since the inception of *Standard Operating Policy 501* in 2023, the total number of non-law enforcement staff trained in motorboat operations through this policy has reached 120 employees.

R3 Grants

The Commission awarded \$190,000 in grant funding to support 16 education projects in ten counties that foster interest in fishing and boating in Pennsylvania through the R3 (recruitment, retention, and reactivation) Education Grant Program. The application submission cycle for the 2026 R3 grants opened on September 15 with a deadline of December 1, 2025. Awardees will be announced in late Spring 2026.

Rock and Log Activity Books

In continued efforts to engage all ages and various interests, the agency has developed a set of color sheets and activity books hosted by the Commission's lively animated characters Rock and Log. Legislators, educators and some partners use them to reinforce boating safety and conservation lessons, and to educate the public about the work of the agency and the way customer dollars support fishing and boating opportunities across the Commonwealth.

Aquatic Resource and Angler Education

Education staff from three regions partnered with the PAOC to deliver eight different programs to 62 participants from the Erie Youth Crew, Meadville Adult Crew, Ridgeway Youth Crew, Dubois Adult Crew, Lock Haven Youth Crew, and "Roving" (statewide) Adult Crew. Topics included catfishing, flyfishing, hike-in fishing, stream study, aquatic macroinvertebrates, amphibians and reptiles, and aquatic habitats. In addition, staff instructed 24 different angler education programs, reaching 893 participants. Program topics included kayak-fishing, fly fishing, catfishing, fishing meetups, learn-to-fish, State Police Camp Cadet fishing, Fishing with Latino Outdoors, and a bilingual/Spanish-speaking safe paddling program.

Hunting and Fishing Day at the Capitol

On September 9, 2025, the Commission participated with the PGC and other partners to host a Hunting and Fishing Day at the Capitol. Staff hosted a backyard bass casting practice area, stocking truck, and law enforcement boat at the event. In addition, education staff facilitated five different regional angler education programs and events with several partners as part of National Hunting and Fishing Day on or around Saturday, September 27.

NON-GAME SPECIES AND HABITAT

Dwarf Wedgemussel Surveys

In 2023, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) awarded the National Park Service (NPS) a Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund grant in the amount of \$172,400 to reevaluate the distribution and status of the federally endangered Dwarf Wedgemussel (*Prolasmidonta heterodon*) in the Upper Delaware River. As a project partner, the Commission pledged \$86,000 in matching funds via staff time, travel, and equipment usage to assist with the field component of the project. This July, Commission staff assisted partners from the NPS, the United States Geological Survey (USGS), the Delaware River Basin Commission, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) with inventory and monitoring surveys at three sites where Dwarf Wedgemussels were documented by the USGS in the early 2000s. In total, 17 sites were qualitatively surveyed resulting in the collection of two Dwarf Wedgemussels from one of the three sites where they had been documented previously.

ChesWILD West Branch Susquehanna River Mussel Restoration

As part of the ChesWILD grant funded West Branch Susquehanna River Mussel Restoration Project, the Commission is working to restore freshwater mussel populations upstream of the low-head dam in Lock Haven, Clinton County. The dam prevents the upstream migration of host fish into areas where mussels were eliminated by historical pollution. Juvenile Yellow Lampmussels were obtained from partners at the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and placed in mussel silos at six sites between the mouth of Kettle Creek and Lock Haven. The mussel silos will be checked monthly to assess growth and survival prior to full scale restoration efforts using propagated mussels from the Joseph P. Manning Mussel Hatchery in Maryland. Additionally, adult Yellow Lampmussels that had previously been collected, tagged with passive integrated transponders (PIT), and translocated upstream of the dam were monitored for survival at the six recovery sites. Of the 60 tagged mussels stocked in 2024, more than 80% were recovered with less than 5% perishing during the nine-month period.

Another aspect of the project involved assisting project partners at Commonwealth University-Lock Haven with propagating Eastern Elliptio using juvenile mussels (glochidia) from adults collected from Pine Creek, Clinton County. American Eels taken at Conowingo Dam on the lower Susquehanna River, were exposed to known concentrations of Eastern Elliptio glochidia for varying times to assess optimal coupling conditions. These efforts will guide future project activities anticipated in 2026. The 2025 efforts resulted in the release of approximately 6,700 inoculated eels across the six recovery sites, which puts the partners more than halfway to their grant objective of releasing 10,000 eels bearing juvenile mussels.

Hellbender Salvage

The Commission assisted with the salvage of Eastern Hellbenders in Columbia County, prior to the removal of Boone's Dam. Additionally, Union City Species Recovery Unit staff assisted in the salvage of Eastern Hellbenders from a Crawford County Bridge site prior to demolition. Fifteen male hellbenders from the bridge project were transported to the Union City Aquatic Conservation Center where they will be held until the bridge project is completed.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Law Enforcement Fleet Replacement

The Commission replaced several patrol boats. A 21' Boston Whaler was assigned to the Southwest, a 19' G3 was issued to the Southcentral, one 17' G3 was provided to the Northeast and another 17' G3 was assigned to the Southeast. Maintaining a functional fleet is crucial to ensuring safe boating within the Commonwealth.

Lake Erie Unit Facility Opening

The Commission celebrated the opening of a new facility which will house the Lake Erie Unit based in Fairview, Erie County. The 2,800 square-foot building, located on the grounds of the Fairview State Fish Hatchery, contains a research laboratory, library, conference room, and modern office space for three full-time biologists, seasonal biologist aides, and a WCO. Staff who comprise the Lake Erie Unit play a key role in fisheries management for the Commonwealth's portion of Lake Erie, and collaborate with neighboring Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Ontario (Canada) to monitor fish health and determine annual harvest quotas for popular species within the lake, including Walleye and Yellow Perch.

Digital Mapping Updates

Commission staff updated online maps including Class A Streams, Fisheries, Trout Natural Reproduction with Tributaries, and Fishing Tackle Loaner Program (FTLP) sites. Updated maps were added to the Commission website and the Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access (PASDA) system where they can be accessed by other state agencies and the public.

Hatchery Enhancements

Two Avian Deterrent Systems (AVIX) utilizing a programable laser were permanently installed at Benner Spring and Bellefonte State Fish Hatcheries. This technology was tested in 2024 and proved to be 90% effective at deterring predation from birds. In addition, an automated fish grading and counting system was shipped by the provider, Faivre Group, and is expected to be delivered and in service soon.

SPORT FISH AND HABITAT

Pennsylvania Striped Bass Association Tournament Sampling

Staff attended the Pennsylvania Striped Bass Association (PSBA) Sunday tournament weigh-in to collect lengths and weights, and scales and heads/otoliths for age and growth analysis. Information from 20 adult Striped Bass, measuring from 25 to 41 inches and weighing from six to 26 pounds, was collected. The next PSBA weekend tournament is scheduled for Sunday October 26. This study was initiated in 2023 to gather information annually on the adult population made available through tournament harvest.

Summer Stockings

Since July 1, Commission affiliated cooperative trout nurseries have received approximately 500,000 fingerlings from Pennsylvania State Fish Hatcheries. Commission staff completed adult trout stockings in the Youghiogheny River below the dam for the Fourth of July and Labor Day holidays.

Smallmouth Bass Surveys

Staff sampled the lower Susquehanna River (three historical sites) to monitor young-of-year (YOY) Smallmouth Bass (SMB) disease prevalence. Two YOY SMB were collected, suggesting reproduction may have been negatively affected by high flows experienced during spring/summer. Disease was found on YOY Largemouth Bass collected during the survey but not observed on YOY SMB. Staff also surveyed YOY SMB at the Juniata River. The catch of two SMB produced a capture rate of 0.08 YOY/50-meter sampling site, which was well below the long-term median catch rate of two YOY/50-meter site. Total lengths for the two YOY were 22 mm and 33 mm. No disease was observed. Low SMB YOY production for the 2025 spawn was credited to above average river discharge during May, which was one of wettest on record in Southcentral Pennsylvania. Staff will have a better idea of this year's SMB reproduction following fall adult surveys.

Habitat Improvement Projects

Commission staff worked with numerous volunteers from conservation organizations to carry out habitat improvement programs that included construction and placement of fish habitat structures, stream bank stabilization, and turtle basking platforms.