

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Executive Director's Report July 1, 2026, to September 30, 2026

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, 2026, through September 30, 2026.

WORKFORCE

Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Class

The 27th WCO Trainee class graduated on July 17, 2026. A ceremony was held for the eight graduating officers in the Capitol Building Rotunda and was attended by commissioners, staff and cooperating agencies. The new officers reported to their district assignments on July 20, 2026. Planning for the 28th WCO class has begun. It is anticipated that the class will begin their training in July of 2027.

Patrol Boat Acquisition

Through a Port Security Grant which was awarded to the Commission in 2024, a new patrol boat was delivered by Lake Assault Boats. In August, a 27' patrol boat equipped with an enclosed cabin was delivered to the Northwest Region Law Enforcement Office and will be used on Lake Erie.

Division of Licensing and Registration (DLAR) Enhancements

Staff set another benchmark for efficiency in boat registration processing. Last year, the application backlog was cleared on September 24, 2025. This year, the Commission was successfully able to clear the backlog on September 3, 2026. This was a result of continual process improvements, enhanced training and a streamlined workflow to keep applications moving through the pipeline as quickly as possible.

Customer Call Center Improvements

Call center operations for the Commission showed a marked improvement from the prior year. Call volume decreased 7%, which is a result of wider usage of DLAR's resource email accounts to resolve outstanding issues. In addition, the average call duration decreased 25% and the average hold time decreased 50%. Collectively, this demonstrates a more efficient customer service operation and allows staff to satisfactorily resolve customer needs more quickly.

ACCESS

Pennsylvania Fishing and Boating Access Strategy (Access Strategy)

The Commission completed a multi-year collaborative project with partners at the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) to create the Access Strategy. This Access Strategy provides tools and resources to identify new fishing and boating access sites, improve existing sites and maximize accessibility so that all users have access to fishing and

boating opportunities. The Access Strategy will help optimize access area placement, enhance current public access, prioritize under-resourced communities and areas with limited access, maximize accessibility for all users, and focus efforts on established Water Trails. The Commission and DCNR presented the Access Strategy and funding opportunities at the Delaware River Watershed Forum and the October Boating Advisory Board meeting. The Access Strategy is designed to serve as a practical toolkit for local governments, non-profit organizations and community partners seeking to expand and enhance public access opportunities.

Fishing and Boating Facility Grants

The 2027 Boating Facility Grant Program (BFGP) and Erie Access Improvement Program (EAIP) grant application submission period was announced in September 2026. The 2027 round of the BFGP has three focus areas that help to leverage and maximize available funding: projects in Lancaster County, projects that provide access to the Lehigh River and projects on officially designated Pennsylvania Water Trails. Enhancements to the programs include the development of a self-monitoring standard for all future grant awardees to assist in maintaining the condition of grant funded fishing and boating infrastructure. The deadline for applications is December 1, 2026.

Voluntary Public Access - Habitat Improvement Program (VPA-HIP)

The Commission received a grant of \$2.797 million to acquire public access easements over private land for outdoor recreational purposes related to fishing and boating. The VPA-HIP is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Pennsylvania was one of 19 states to receive such a grant. The funds are planned to be used from January 1, 2027 through December 31, 2029.

Access Improvement Projects

The following angler and boater access projects on Commission owned or controlled property were completed:

- **Harveys Lake Access, Luzerne County:** The parking area was resurfaced with new sealcoat, and fresh lane stripes were repainted. This access is the only public facility along Harveys Lake.
- **Goldsboro Access, York County:** Sub-base repairs and paving improvements were made to the parking area. This location provides boating access along the Susquehanna River.
- **Canonsburg Lake Access, Washington County:** A new accessible fishing pier and sidewalk were installed near the Commission's boat launch. The project allows for improved access to fishing along the lake.
- **Sportsman Access, Armstrong County:** A variety of drainage and site-maintenance improvements were completed at Sportsman Access that included the installation of headwalls at designated drainage locations, installation of new drainage piping and grading and leveling uneven areas. These improvements were completed to maintain the site, improve stormwater management and provide a safer and more functional area for the public.

- **Neshannock Creek Access, Lawrence County:** Repairs were made to the access area roadway which included the regrading and resurfacing of the road with crushed compacted stone.
- **Stillwater Reservoir Access, Susquehanna County:** The parking area and entrance roadway to the Stillwater Reservoir Access were rehabilitated.
- **Elk Creek Access, Erie County:** The trail that extends from the parking area to Elk Creek was enhanced by adding new trail stone surfacing and drainage culvert installations to improve user functionality.

Pennsylvania Outdoor Corps (PAOC) Projects

The Commission partnered with the Student Conservation Association (SCA) and DCNR's PAOC to complete the following projects to improve angler access:

- **High Point Lake, Somerset County:** Staff coordinated the Pittsburgh ASL Youth Crew in a project that involved the removal of invasive species along the lake shore and helped develop a lakeside trail adjacent to the north ramp access.
- **Holiday Road, Erie County:** Staff coordinated the Erie Youth Crew to complete a four-week project that included widening and improvement of the trail from the existing parking lot along Holiday Road to Crooked Creek. Box steps were constructed for the steepest section of the trail.
- **Tamarack Lake, Crawford County:** Staff coordinated the Meadville Youth Crew during a three-week project that involved the creation of a new walking trail along Tamarack Lake between public parking lots. This new trail will provide opportunities for the public to hike around the lake and for anglers to access fishing locations.

In addition to the completed access projects, the Commission delivered seven educational programs at various locations across the Commonwealth for nearly 75 participants from different PAOC crews. Topics included fishing, fly fishing, water education days and pond and stream study programs.

ENGAGEMENT

Multi-Level Educational Programs

A strategic approach involving advance planning and cultivation of partnerships resulted in a highly productive summer for angling and boating education. Staff implemented ongoing and new unique fishing experiences as part of the Commission's effort to offer multi-level (beginner, intermediate and advanced) fishing and paddling opportunities to customers. A large number of in-person public and non-public programs and meetups were offered on topics at all levels including different fishing methods, pontoon and kayak fishing, fishing for specific species (panfish, catfish, trout and musky), wildlife watching kayaking and audience specific programs (women, youth, families, young adults, adaptive needs, blind/vision impaired, seniors, Camp Cadet and Wildlife Leadership Academy). The enhanced and differentiated offerings included seven paddling programs and 62 angler education programs.

Highlighting the Commission's Mission

The Commission highlighted efforts to advance its mission to protect, conserve and enhance aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities across the Commonwealth through multiple outlets. Staff produced and shared the following videos highlighting the Commission's work:

- Water Under a Bridge: Building Fish passage in Pennsylvania - [link to video](#)
- Removing the Spring Garden Dam - [link to video](#)
- Better shoreline fishing at Briar Creek Lake - [link to video](#)
- Watercolor Angler: Painting Pennsylvania Fish - [link to video](#)
- Tracking walleye in Lake Erie - [link to video](#)
- Learn how to identify the Eastern Musk Turtle, formerly the Stinkpot Turtle! - [link to video](#)
- Did you know Pennsylvania is home to a softshell turtle? - [link to video](#)
- Learn about the Eastern Painted Turtle, a freshwater turtle found in Pennsylvania! - [link to video](#)
- Tending to Turtles: Removing a Dam - [link to video](#)

These videos are among the most popular content on the Commission's social media channels. Customers were also engaged through entertaining and helpful email newsletters that share information about upcoming programming, seasonal fishing tips and staff fieldwork highlights.

Women's Excursion: Explore PA's Grand Canyon by boot, bike and rod

Staff developed and led a new annual event, the Women's Excursion: Explore PA's Grand Canyon by boot, bike and rod). This effort was possible through key partners, including DCNR's bureau of Forestry and State Parks, This is My Quest, local Trout Unlimited chapters and local businesses. The three-day weekend combined companion activities like camping, hiking, biking, survival skills and building community for female anglers. The inaugural event brought together 32 women from across the Commonwealth, New York and Maryland.

On-Demand Pennsylvania Trout in the Classroom (PATIC) Workshop

The Commission partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Wildlife Leadership Academy and Asbury Wood to create the first on-demand and online PATIC workshop for teachers. Nearly 75 new teachers have taken the mandatory PATIC workshop since July.

Motorboat Operation Training

Staff provided annual training for Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) 501: Boating, Water and Ice Safety for Commission Staff and Volunteers. Training was held July 21-23, 2026, at Foster Joseph Sayers Lake in Bald Eagle State Park, Centre County. This year, 26 Commonwealth employees from the Commission and PA Game Commission (PGC) were trained. Since the inception of SOP 501 in 2023, 146 non-law enforcement staff completed the training in motorboat operations. The Commission continues to extend offerings to other state agencies for participation in the training. This year, invitations were extended to staff at PGC, DCNR, DEP, Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation.

National Association of State Boating Law Administrators (NASBLA) Annual Conference

From September 14-18, 2026, Commission staff attended and presented at the NASBLA Annual Conference in Knoxville, TN. Staff presented on Pennsylvania's Act 28 of 2025: Abandoned and Derelict Vessels (ADV's). Pennsylvania's Act 28 was the framework used by NASBLA to update the national model procedure for legislation on ADV's. This model act is now available to all states for implementation across the country.

NASBLA recognized the Commission's Bureau of Law Enforcement's Northcentral Region as the 2026 Operation Dry Water Northern Region Law Enforcement Award Winner. This award recognizes exceptional regional achievements in boating under the influence detection, deterrence and enforcement by an individual, a unit, bureau, division or a combination of the preceding, for outstanding work directly related to the Operation Dry Water heightened awareness and enforcement weekend. In addition, Representative Anita Astorino Kulik of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives was awarded the Garner Leadership Award for her role in passing Act 28 of 2025. The Garner Award is presented to those men and women whose outstanding effort and achievement have elevated state or federal policy interventions.

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Annual Meeting

The Commonwealth hosted the 116th AFWA Annual Meeting from September 14-18, 2026 in Lancaster, Lancaster County. Representatives from North American state, provincial and territorial fish and wildlife agencies and partner organizations gathered to network and discuss advancements, concerns and priorities. The meeting is an annual opportunity for fish and wildlife stewards to connect with colleagues on a national scale. Staff from the Commission and PGC facilitated event registration, attended committee meetings and presented during the week-long conference.

National Hunting and Fishing Day

Commission staff facilitated ten programs over the last weekend in September 2026 with partners across the Commonwealth, including but not limited to PGC, DCNR, the Penn State Extension, and Representative Carol Kazeem of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives to provide hands-on hunting and fishing experiences. This year's National Hunting and Fishing Day programming provided opportunities for families to participate in fishing activities like on-water fishing, kayak fishing and fly fishing with Commission staff, including our WCOs. Families were also introduced to conservation techniques by building fish habitat structures at Foster Joseph Sayers Lake in Blad Eagle State Park, Centre County.

Union City Aquatic Conservation Center (UCACC)

The UCACC staff provided 11 facility tours to various groups including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), University of Pittsburgh (4), Penn State University (2), DCNR, Kamin Science Center-Carnegie Museums of Pittsburgh and Pennsylvania Sea Grant, as well as U.S. Congressman Mike Kelly and his staff, representing Pennsylvania's Congressional District 16.

Supporting the Future of Fisheries Conservation

The Commission partnered with the Watersmith Guild (French Creek, Mercer County), the Wildlands Conservancy (Emmaus, Lehigh County), Trout Unlimited (Grantham, Cumberland County) and the Wildlife Leadership Academy (Lock Haven, Clinton County) to connect youth interested in fisheries science with Commission biologists to provide hands-on learning experiences such as fish identification, native and non-native macroinvertebrate identification, macroinvertebrate collection methods, and water quality assessment procedures. Commission biologists provided electrofishing demonstrations as part of their introduction to careers in the fisheries profession.

NON-GAME SPECIES AND HABITAT

Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan

The draft 2025-2035 Pennsylvania Wildlife Action Plan (Plan) was completed and made available for public comments. The Plan is a non-regulatory, proactive guide to identify, understand and protect Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). The Commission partnered with PGC, the public and conservation partners to develop the Plan, which includes 47 fishes, 19 amphibians and 18 reptiles. The Plan is available on the Commission's website and is intended to provide guidance to the public that will reduce future need for expensive species recovery plans by arresting the decline of vulnerable species.

Dwarf Wedgemussel Presence in the upper Delaware River

In 2023, the National Park Service along with partners (U.S. Geological Survey, the Commission and the Delaware River Basin Commission) were awarded \$86,000 by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation from their Delaware Watershed Conservation Fund. The purpose of the project is to establish baseline population estimates for the Dwarf Wedgemussel, a federally endangered species, in the upper Delaware River. In August 2026, the Commission completed the final quantitative survey at the Frisbee Island site near Equinunk, Pennsylvania. Over the duration of the project, more than 94 personnel hours of qualitative survey effort were expended to describe the mussel community and develop population estimates for the six observed species. The results of the effort will be used to inform environmental reviews for development projects in and along the river.

Blandings Turtle

Staff continue to work on augmenting the Blandings Turtle population in Erie, Pennsylvania. This summer, the Commission released 13 juvenile turtles that had been head started at the UCACC.

Aquatic Species Restoration

The Commission continued to propagate, conserve and restore non-game and rare species throughout the Commonwealth. This included biomonitoring to assess American Shad restoration efforts and field surveys to assess the survival and growth of stocked freshwater mussels propagated at the UCACC. The UCACC provided 400 propagated freshwater mussels to

support two mussel silo studies assessing water quality in Western Pennsylvania conducted by the Commission, USFWS and DEP.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Aquatic Conservation Center Development

The Commission advanced two statewide Capital Improvement Projects for its Division of Aquatic Species Restoration. Design of the Huntsdale Aquatic Conservation Center continued, and the design phase of the UCACC improvements was completed with construction scheduled to start in October of 2026.

Online Mapping Updates

The Commission advanced multiple projects focused on improving mapping information and accessibility. Staff developed a method of processing quarterly updates that reduces time needed for data entry and will add, delete or modify records automatically, allowing staff to complete additional tasks concurrently. The Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access (PASDA) layers were updated for Class A Streams, Fisheries All Sections, Trout Natural Reproduction, Fisheries Special Regulations, Water Trails, Stocked Trout Waters and Boat Accesses. The PASDA database is open to the public and allows organizations to share geospatial data. Staff also created a unified Hazards layer that includes Commission dams to be used in future map updates.

Walnut Creek Marina, Erie County

Commission staff obtained permits for construction through the Department of Labor and Industry while the Commission completed a roof replacement project which included the installation of a new asphalt shingle roof for the Walnut Creek Marina Visitors Center and storage building. Commission staff also completed a sediment removal project within the Walnut Creek habitat structure near the marina entry road, also known as the “Stop Sign Fishing Hole.”

Linesville State Fish Hatchery (SFH), Crawford County

Commission staff completed a sediment removal project from the settling pond which will improve the pond’s overall function, increase water holding capacity and allow for more effective use of the basin.

Dam Inspection and Rehabilitation Preparation

The Commission completed quarterly dam inspections at all 33 Commonwealth owned and Commission operated high hazard dams as required by PA Code, Title 25, Chapter 105 regulatory requirements. Staff commenced the drawdown of Rose Valley Lake, Lycoming County, and Fords Pond, Lackawanna County, in preparation for rehabilitation of the dams and spillways. Commission staff completed entrance road and fish salvage infrastructure improvements in preparation for fish salvage operations in October 2026.

SPORT FISH AND HABITAT

Smallmouth Bass in the West Branch Susquehanna River

The Commission monitored telemetry tracking equipment associated with the West Branch Susquehanna River Smallmouth Bass tournament telemetry study. Field activities consisted of retrieval, download and return of the 28 stationary acoustic receivers that are anchored in the West Branch Susquehanna River from Hepburn Street Dam in Williamsport to the Fabridam in Sunbury, and its major tributaries within this stretch of river. The acoustic receivers continuously monitor for sound frequencies emitted from acoustic telemetry tags that were surgically implanted into Smallmouth Bass. Fifty tagged Smallmouth Bass have been at large in the system since early June, and many of the acoustic receivers had tens of thousands of fish detections. Receivers will remain deployed until mid-November 2026 and will be redeployed again in the spring of 2027, to continue monitoring the movement of tagged fish.

Steelhead Angler Use, Harvest and Opinion Survey

Commission staff implemented an angler use, harvest and opinion creel survey on Lake Erie tributaries to collect information from steelhead anglers to inform future management of the fishery. The last creel survey on Lake Erie's tributaries was in 2004.

Willow Run Fish Habitat Improvement

Commission staff partnered with PGC, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and Juniata County Conservation District to improve fish habitat on 1,600 feet of Willow Run located on State Game Lands 215, Juniata County. Willow Run is a Class B wild trout stream that Commission staff identified as having physical habitat characteristics that limit its overall habitat quality. The project stabilized streambanks, increased overhead cover and enhanced the riffle, run and pool habitat. Additional projects in this watershed are currently in the planning phases.

Summer Stockings

Since July 1, 2026, Commission-affiliated cooperative trout nurseries have received approximately 400,000 fingerlings from Pennsylvania SFHs. Commission staff completed adult trout stockings in the Youghiogheny River, Fayette County, below the dam for the Fourth of July and Labor Day holidays.

Warmwater and Coolwater Stockings

The Commission enhanced future sportfishing opportunities throughout the Commonwealth through the stocking of yearling warmwater and coolwater species including approximately 21,850 Muskellunge, 2,200 Northern Pike, 12,000 Blue Catfish and 9,100 Channel Catfish. In addition, approximately 77,000 Yellow Perch fingerlings and 1,200 Largemouth Bass advanced fingerlings were distributed to Commonwealth waters.