



**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Annual Report to the Game and Fisheries Committee
Pennsylvania Senate
Timothy D. Schaeffer, Executive Director
March 26, 2025**

Good morning, Chairs Rothman and Boscola and committee members. My name is Tim Schaeffer, and I have the pleasure of serving as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (Commission). On behalf of the Board of Commissioners, Boating Advisory Board, and staff, we are pleased to present our 2024 Annual Report (Annual Report) to the General Assembly. As with past reports, it summarizes major initiatives and progress from the past year and captures highlights and examples from around Pennsylvania. An electronic copy of the report is also available on the Commission's website.

The Commission is a relatively small state agency, yet our work and impact extend to all corners of the Commonwealth. In 2024, our nearly 420 full-time and approximately 200 seasonal staff statewide delivered incredible results on behalf of the Commonwealth's anglers, boaters, and aquatic resources. Throughout Pennsylvania and during every season of the year, we work daily to implement our mission to protect, conserve, and enhance aquatic resources, and provide fishing and boating opportunities.

The theme of this year's Annual Report is "Partnerships for Success." My recently retired colleague and friend Robert Boyles from the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources was fond

of saying “conservation is a team sport” – and that is certainly true here in Pennsylvania. Every single one of the initiatives you will read about in the report has a partnership somewhere in its plan for success. Speaking of partners, we could not accomplish what we do without strong relationships with municipalities, other agencies, non-governmental groups, and businesses. Two of the most important partnerships we have are with the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and Pennsylvania Senate, which is why it is a pleasure to present this annual snapshot of some of the things we did in the past year across the Commonwealth. Before offering some highlights from the report, please note the most important point in the whole document as we near the opening day of trout season this April. I say it every time I am here and will say it again today – Wear your life jacket.

As a reminder, Pennsylvania has a cold-water life jacket wear requirement from November 1-April 30 on all canoes, kayaks, and boats under 16 feet. While the number of accidents during the cold weather months have remained steady over the past ten years, fatalities have been cut in half. The regulation is saving lives and is a poignant reminder that life jackets work.

If you remember two things from today, hopefully it will be our collaborative focus on partnerships, and a commitment to safe boating by encouraging your constituents to wear life jackets.

As I noted to the committee last year and as many of you have experienced for yourselves, one of the best parts of this job is introducing legislators and other partners to our team members who are out there delivering on the investments made possible by the purchase of fishing licenses, unpowered launch permits, and boat registrations.

Please know you have an open invitation to join us in the field to help stock fish; accompany our biologists on a stream, river, or lake survey; install fish habitat structures, restore streambanks, or stabilize eroded shorelines; learn more about efforts on behalf of species such as freshwater mussels

or timber rattlesnakes listed in the State Wildlife Action Plan; tour a fish hatchery; attend a safe boating, water rescue, or fishing skills training that we conduct during all seasons and in all corners of the state; join an engineer on a visit to a recently rebuilt dam or refurbished access area that is the centerpiece of local fishing and boating; or ride along with a Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) to hear firsthand what it is like to be on the front lines of conservation law enforcement and public safety. You will undoubtedly come away from the experience inspired and energized.

Upcoming Dates

- Trout Stocking Continues
- Mentored Youth Trout Day – March 29
- Opening Day of Trout Season – April 5
- National Safe Boating Week – May 17-23
- Fish for Free Days – May 25 and July 4
- Operation Dry Water – July 4-6

Summary of Notable 2024 Topics

2024 Fishing and Boating Participation

- Fishing
 - Over 824,000 Licensed Anglers
 - Over 435,000 Trout Permits
 - Relatively steady since 2019 (pre-Covid baseline)
- Boating
 - More than 235,000 Unpowered Launch Permits
 - Up 19 % since 2019
 - Slightly more than 280,000 Boat Registrations
 - Down nearly 7% since 2019

Legislative “Thank You”

- Therapeutic Recreation (Act 1)
- Sportsman License Plate (Act 51)
- Reauthorized Fee Authority (Act 129)

Partnerships for Success Special Section

- Local Partnerships, State Partnerships, Federal Partnerships
- Probation Mentor Fishing Program

Addressing Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS)

- Results of Notice of Stocking Implementation
 - 1,700 NOS submissions for 3,949 stocking events on 1,527 different waters
- AIS Composting Stations

Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Recruitment and Boat Upgrades

- 26th Class began training in August 2024; 27th Class anticipated to start in August 2025
- Completion of a three-year boat replacement plan with 26 new boats now in service

Examples from Commissioner Districts

- Habitat Projects & Access Areas
- Fisheries Management and Aquatic Resource Restoration
- Educational Programs
- Grants
 - Boating Facilities Grant Program
 - Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) Education Program
 - Cooperative Nurseries