



PROTECT CONSERVE ENHANCE

Fishing and Farming



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Give me a chance to explain this one because it will make sense if you can be a little patient. Anglers and boaters need to be concerned about farming and federal legislation called the Farm Bill. Every one of us who puts a boat into a lake, river or stream, or who casts a line or who even just likes to look at the water while driving by, should be concerned about what is happening in Washington, D.C., because it will directly affect your passion and recreation.

But why the Farm Bill? The simple answer is that this legislation affects the land, and what happens on the land affects the water. We cannot escape that connection and, in fact, we need to ensure that our interests are not forgotten in the messy debates and lobbying that take place in enacting any legislation. Just like the old saying, there are two things that you don't want to see—making sausage and making laws, it's often not pretty, but we need to be involved if we want the product to be palatable.

Let me give you a few examples of how Farm Bill programs directly affect all of us. There are many programs with the Farm Bill, but I am going to highlight only a few of them to illustrate the significance of this legislation. First, money from the Farm Bill provides support for dam removal. To date, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) funds, combined with other funding sources, have been used to support the removal of 11 dams, with four additional dam removal projects in the planning phase. When completed, these projects will improve the connectivity of over 120 miles of streams. By removing dams, Pennsylvania is improving passage for both resident and migratory fishes, as well as other aquatic life. Dam removal is just one of the critical habitat practices in Pennsylvania funded through WHIP.

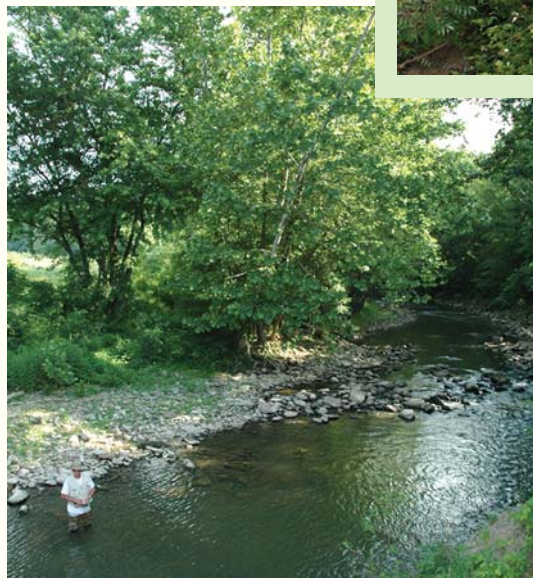
Also benefiting aquatic resources, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in Pennsylvania focuses primarily on water quality improvements through nutrient input reductions on livestock operations. Currently, only a small percentage of the program (less than 2 percent) is directed toward wildlife-related practices on farm operations. These practices include stream-bank fencing to keep livestock out of streams, native grass planting, and wildlife-friendly perennial biomass planting projects. There is untapped demand for wildlife practices in this program with the current producer demand for this program in Pennsylvania estimated to be at least four times the current annual level.

The last program I will highlight is the Pennsylvania Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), the Commonwealth's largest and most comprehensive environmental improvement program. It helps save millions of tons of topsoil from erosion, protects surface and ground water by reducing runoff and sedimentation, and increases wildlife habitat.



Photos: Spring Gearhart

The Pennsylvania Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is the Commonwealth's largest and most comprehensive environmental improvement program. It helps save millions of tons of topsoil from erosion, protects surface and ground water by reducing runoff and sedimentation, and increases wildlife habitat. At right, a Juniata County farm enrolled in CREP. One of the highlighted habitats for CREP is riparian buffers (below). Forested riparian areas are vital to maintaining and supporting high-quality fisheries.



CREP combines state and federal dollars with additional funding from non-government sources to tackle specific agriculturally related environmental issues. In Pennsylvania, CREP initiatives are tailored to address the environmental concerns of the Chesapeake Bay and Ohio River watersheds, as well as the surrounding upland habitat. The program is voluntary and offers financial incentives to encourage agricultural landowners and operators to enroll targeted environmentally sensitive and potentially fish-friendly and wildlife-friendly acres of pastureland and cropland.

One of the highlighted habitats for CREP is riparian buffers. Forested riparian areas are vital to maintaining and supporting high-quality fisheries. These trees help protect streambanks and provide shading, and they eventually provide woody debris for fish habitat. CREP also helps establish native grass stands, wetlands, wildlife habitat, grass filter strips, and other land improvement practices.

PA CREP is the largest and most successful CREP in the country, with more than 178,000 acres planned or under contract and increasing, with a maximum enrollment of 265,000 acres across 59 counties, for the benefit of soil, water, fish and wildlife.

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, in collaboration with many agencies and organizations nationwide, has been actively evaluating current Farm Bill programs. These findings and additional Farm Bill information can be found at www.trcp.org/ch_farmbill.aspx.

So although the Farm Bill may not initially seem to be an issue relevant to anglers, the benefits of even a few of these highlighted programs on fish habitat and water quality can be significant to the fish of Pennsylvania.

Fishing and books

This is the first time that I've mentioned a book in this column, but, like Oprah and her book club, I wanted to let you know about a book that has great fishing stories but also will challenge your thinking about fishing. Many of you have heard about the book *Last Child in the Woods*, by Richard Louv. He is the person who crafted the phrase "No child left inside" and was a keynote speaker at the Governor's Outdoor Conference held earlier this year.

I suggest reading his book from the year 2000, *Fly-Fishing for Sharks*, published by Simon & Schuster. You will get some good fishing stories, but what you really will read about is why people fish, and you will even be challenged about the ethics of fishing. The author is a fanatic angler, but he doesn't shy away from controversy. In fact, it is what makes the book worth reading. Get a copy and let me know what you think, but also let me know of other books that you've read on fishing that give insight into why we love the sport so much.

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