



**PROTECT
CONSERVE
ENHANCE**

The Commission's Mission



*by Douglas J. Austen, Ph.D.
Executive Director
PA Fish & Boat Commission*



Each of us has a mission, whether we know it or not. For some people, it may be a highly evolved statement that governs all aspects of their lives. For the Fish & Boat Commission, the mission should encapsulate our reason for existing. It should describe to anyone, in simple terms, what we are about. As an independent Commonwealth agency and as one of the oldest and most respected state natural resource agencies, indeed a unique agency among the states, this mission should be seen as establishing a standard for others to emulate. It is the essence of who we are as an agency and as employees who work for the agency. With that in mind, the commissioners recently revised our mission:

The mission of the Fish & Boat Commission is to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities.

For those of you who are familiar with our previous mission statement, this may seem like a subtle change from the past. Indeed, it is simply a reversal of order—but with substantial meaning behind the change. The emphasis is clearly placed on “protect, conserve and enhance” while not in any way diminishing the recreational aspects of the agency. Essentially, this is stating that our primary mission is to the resource, secondarily to the use of the resource.

Without a doubt, this has to be true. The resource is the foundation of what we do. Without quality streams, without clean water, without good habitat, we would have greatly diminished or non-existent recreational opportunities. In fact, in 1987 the Commission embraced the “Resource First” motto as one way to further articulate this resource-based mission. In 1981, several years before “resource first,” the Commission rolled out Operation FUTURE (Fisheries Utilization Through User Resource Evaluation) and went through a difficult re-allocation of stocked fish, whereby stream characteristics instead of politics dictated stocking levels. Both of these efforts were part of the movement, which continues today, to base decisions on the resource instead of politics or simply educated guesses.

I believe that it is fair to say that the Commission has always been, at its core, a resource agency. But like any entity trying to live out its mission, be it an individual or a corporate body, we have not always fully and completely reflected those core values. We know that we can do better, and the redefined mission statement clearly sets this standard.

Created in 1866 with a goal of restoring anadromous runs of American shad, the agency has worked for nearly a century and a half on aquatic resources from every possible perspective. Through the resource devastation of the late 1800s and early 1900s, through the environmental movement of the 1970s and continuing today, the Commission has been active in protecting the resource. So how does this change in our mission statement really affect who we are?

First, it is a statement that reflects what has been increasingly happening in the agency but particularly so in the past several years. Consider the Commission's involvement and national leadership in dam removal. With over 70 dams removed in the past decade, fish passages constructed, and 100 or more similar projects in various stages of planning, the agency is an obvious national leader, catalyst and force in this vital effort.

Furthermore, our Division of Environmental Services provides review and input to over 3,000 permit requests per year with many of them resulting in modifications to land-disturbing projects that will better protect the resource. The recent creation of the Division of Habitat Management is opening new opportunities and creating real results in our streams, rivers and lakes. The agency's leadership in the development of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan and the State Wildlife Action Plan, active involvement in the Eastern

Brook Trout Joint Venture, monumental investment in hatchery water treatment system improvements, creation of the Three Rivers Ecological Research Center, recent initiation of a full review and updating of the Commission's trout management plan, and much more are all additional testaments to the transition of the agency to an even more resource-based focus than it was in the past.

So the trajectory is good. Where also will this revised mission statement take us in the future?

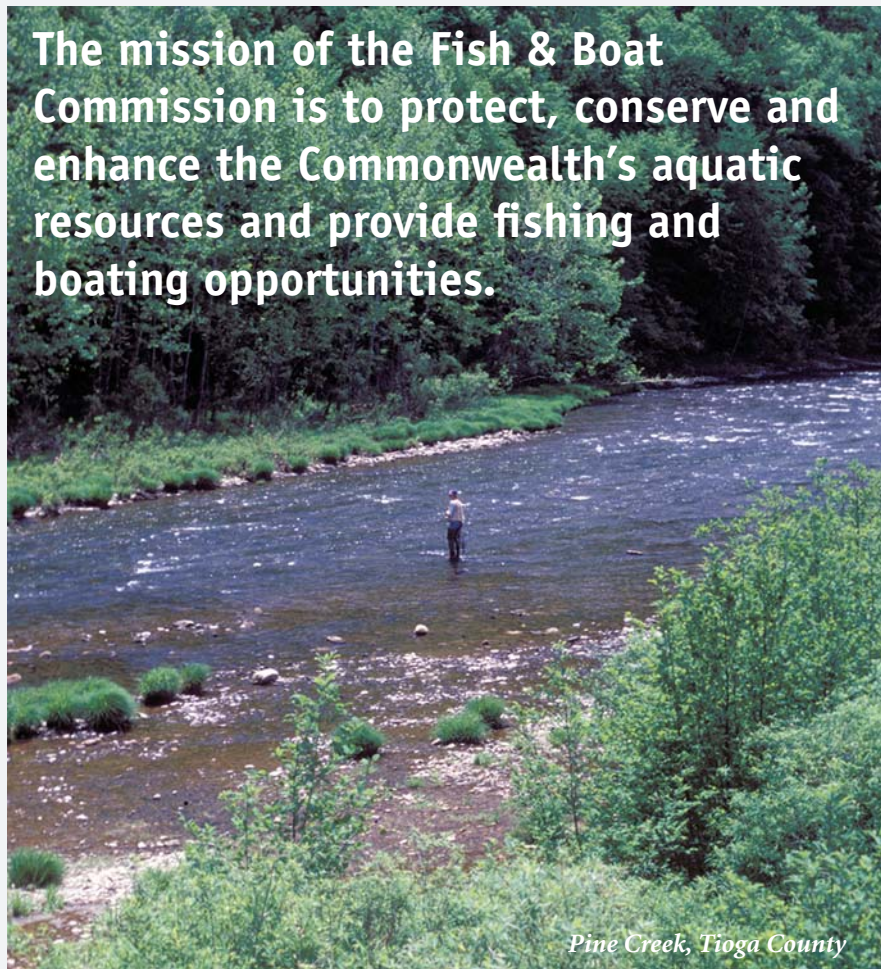
The opportunities, both immediate and those yet to be realized, are limited only by our imagination. For example, over the next 15 years, the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) will be the recipient of substantial new federal funds to address abandoned mine sites. The Commission is actively working with DEP and many partners to incorporate our expertise to ensure that the most appropriate streams are cleaned up and fisheries created where none has existed for decades.

In another important area, our fisheries managers will be expanding their fish sampling not only to document recreational fish populations clearly (such as bass, walleye and trout), but also to document firmly and track whole fish communities (such as minnows, darters and sculpins). This work will allow us to understand better the relationships between land use change, pollutants, and other effects on the resource as described by the characteristics of the fishes that respond to those human-caused insults. Through this and other information we will also be able to evaluate fishing regulation proposals and options better by examining potential resource impacts. To assist in this process, we anticipate that we will be increasing the number of field biologists over the course of the next year or so.

We will see an increasingly challenging situation with water allocations that has resulted from the growing thirst of households, golf courses, industry, agriculture and power generation. Place on top of these concerns the dire predictions of temperature and precipitation alterations resulting from global climate change. Clearly we have daunting issues ahead of us.

These substantial and serious environmental challenges, along with many others, certainly will garner the agency's increasing attention and focus. "Resource First" will be played out in each situation and response.

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Pine Creek, Tioga County

Photo: Russ Gerfing

However, the success of "protect, conserve, enhance" and a resource focus cannot be realized without the wholehearted and sincere adoption by the resource users and the citizens of the Commonwealth. To sing a song without an audience may lead to self-satisfaction, but it does little to create movement. Without people in the streams, on the lakes, or floating the rivers, we stand little chance of success. Thus, it is important to expand our ability to get the word out and to gain the full support of the angling and boating public. Without each of you and our many partners, we will stand little chance of meaningful success.

The adoption of a mission statement by itself does not create the proverbial "silver bullet" that will allow us simply and easily to address these challenges. But it does define the basis for our approach and a frame of reference against which our efforts can be evaluated over time. We hope that each of you will join us in reaffirming this approach and in partnering with the agency in this effort.

Douglas J. Austen, Ph.D.
Executive Director