

Be prepared

On winter days with warm temperatures, many people take advantage of this gift from Mother Nature to enjoy the outdoors, fishing, boating, hiking and more. All too often people involved in these activities dress for the current climatic conditions and forget that, while it is warm, it is still winter. Incidents that would be minor inconveniences during the summer such as a fall into a creek, a boat motor break down or an underestimated distance or time required for a hike are more severe in the winter. Proper planning can make these mid-winter excursions safer and more enjoyable. A daypack with a warm drink and some high-energy granola bars help alleviate the severity of any mishap. Enjoy the warm winter days, but be prepared.—WCO David R. Keller, Adams and Western York counties.

Three generations of anglers

The absolute best part of my job as a waterways conservation officer is when I get to interact with the angling and boating public. Last fall, I was assisting with a trout stocking at Levittown Lake, a Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission managed lake, in Bucks County. As I was helping, I talked to a young woman and her four-year-old son. The woman explained that she had been coming to Levittown Lake since she was a little girl. Now, she was teaching her son to fish just like her father had taught her. A gentleman walked over, and he was the father and grandfather who had started the three generations of anglers.

There's not much that can top the feeling of the part we play at the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission in helping families have fun.—WCO Michael E. Johnson, Southern Bucks County.

Little piggy?

Recently, as I approached the fabridam in Shamokin Dam and walked across the head wall, what appeared to be a mink scampered across the walkway a few yards in front of me. It was going from the upstream side of the wall across the walkway and down the stones that make up the wall on the downstream side. I had been observing some people fishing below the dam. I noted a man with a small girl, and the girl pointed my way and said, "Look at the little piggy." I looked downward in the direction she was pointing and saw the animal's head poking out of the rocks. The man turned and said to me, over the roar of the waterfall, "He's a pet." I thought he meant that it was

his pet, and I had mistaken a ferret for a mink. He continued, "He's here all the time. People feed him fish." It turns out, it was a mink that was smart enough to make his rounds at a popular fishing spot.—WCO Steven G. Boughter, Snyder, Union and Western Northumberland counties.

The one that didn't get away

While checking anglers fishing at the Jockey Hollow Boat Launch in the Youghiogheny River Lake, I came across a young woman who excitedly had a fish story to tell me.

She was fishing one afternoon by herself at the access and was talking to her husband on her cell phone. He was kidding her that she wasn't going to catch anything. When all of a sudden, she got a hit on her rod. She grabbed the rod and set the hook and knew she had a big fish. The fish headed towards a downed tree, half exposed and on the other side of the channel. Then, the fish jumped out of the water, and she could see it was a nice largemouth bass. The line got wrapped around a branch as the bass was coming back down, and only half of it made it back into the water. There she stood with her rod in hand and a bass dangling from a tree branch across the channel. With her husband still on the phone, she asked him what she should do. He said she should swim out and get it. A friend had just driven into the access, and she confronted him with her dilemma. He said he had a life jacket in the back of his pickup, and she could use it. So, on went the life jacket, and out she went to retrieve her big catch. I asked her if she let it go when she got it untangled. Her reply, "No way. After all that, we had it for dinner." I believe she said the bass measured 17 inches and was



the biggest fish she ever caught. After hearing her story, I told her it would make a good stream note. She replied, "Yeah, and you can call it the one that didn't get away." And, so I have.—*WCO Daniel D. McGuire, Southern Somerset County.*

Street justice

One sunny day, I had a hearing at the magistrate's office on the North Side in Pittsburgh. When I arrived, I parked my vehicle across the street and could see a crowd gathering outside the court. As I exited the vehicle and walked across the street, I could see the judge in her courtroom robe and the secretary standing next to her. When the secretary saw me, she told me that the power was out in the building. With no windows, hearings couldn't be held inside. The judge asked me if my defendant was here. I replied, "Yes." She said, "Then, we'll just hold the hearing right here on the sidewalk." We were sworn in. After about ten minutes of testimony, the judge found the defendant guilty, giving new meaning to the term street justice.—*WCO Robert C. Wheeler, Western Allegheny County.*

Refuge area?

Years ago, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission had sections of several streams in Elk County designated as refuge areas. These areas protected stocked trout from fishing activity until a later time in the season. Due to changes in water conditions and other factors, action was taken recently to eliminate some of these areas.

While removing the signs, it was not uncommon to find insects and other critters living behind the signboards. However, I was startled one day when I pulled a sign off a tree and was face to face with a mountain earth snake. This species of snake, which is rare in Pennsylvania, eats soft-bodied insects and their larvae. Even though small in size, it was still an unexpected surprise to me and gave new meaning to the term refuge area.—*WCO Thomas McMann, Elk County.*



photo-courtesy of WCO Robert V. Dunbar

Shawville power plant, Clearfield County, has removed over 2,000 pounds of trash from the West Branch of the Susquehanna River.

Shawville

Someone once said that authority is the power to help, as well as to limit. During the course of my duties as a waterways conservation officer, I am often faced with deciding whether to issue a citation, impose civil penalties or issue warnings for violations of our fishing, boating and clean streams laws. Every now and then, I'm able to find a middle ground, which benefits the resource and its users. Such was the case with the Shawville power plant.

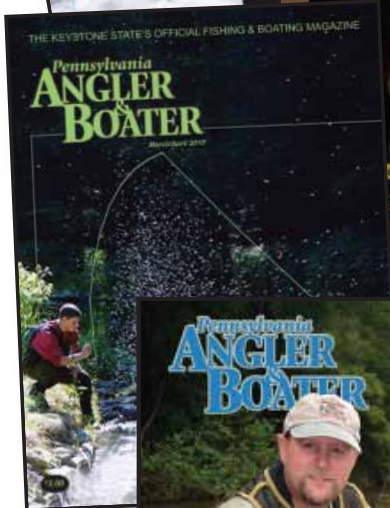
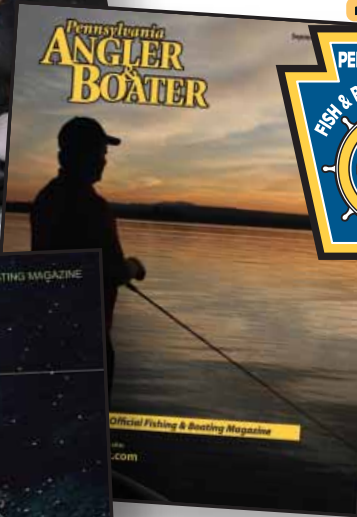
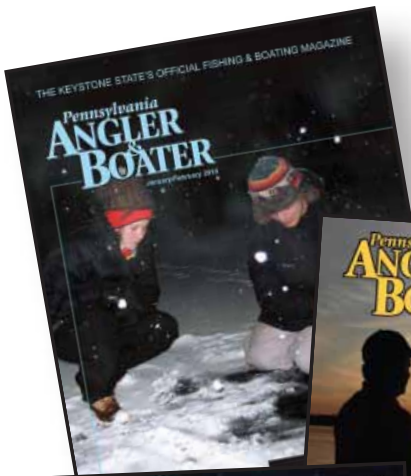
The Shawville power plant, Clearfield County, was built in the late 1950s when the West Branch of the Susquehanna River still ran red. The plant has been legally discharging superheated water to the river since it opened. However, water quality in the river has improved significantly over the past decade, and it now supports a diverse array of aquatic life, upstream of the plant. The thermal discharge remains as one of the major limiting factors in this stretch of water.

The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission built a case for imposing thermal limits and, with the help of local concerned citizens, was able to work with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to ensure that a permit was issued to impose thermal limits,

which would protect downstream aquatic life. The plant has until 2014 to come into compliance. In the interim, the plant has agreed to pay \$300,000 in damages. That money has been earmarked for watershed improvement projects, which will benefit local waterways.

In addition, the plant had been discharging blue, marble-sized foam balls into the river for decades. These balls were used to clean the inside of their pipes. The plant agreed to discontinue the use of the balls and, in lieu of penalties, agreed to organize and conduct a clean up of the river between Shawville and Deer Creek (14 river miles). So far, they have conducted two clean-ups and removed over 2,000 pounds of trash. The events have become so popular with plant employees and local conservationists that they intend to do it again next year.

As if that weren't enough, the plant has also donated an additional \$10,000 to local watershed groups for projects on Trout Run and Deer Creek. I tip my hat to the locals who supported our efforts and to the plant for going above and beyond what was required of them.—*WCO Robert V. Dunbar, Clearfield County.*



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