



RESOURCE FIRST

What it means

Created in 1866 in response to diminished American shad runs and severe water pollution, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission has worked for nearly a century and a half to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities. The resource is the foundation of what we do. Without high quality streams, clean water and good habitat, we would have impaired ecological communities and greatly diminished or non-existent recreational opportunities. Over the years, our Resource First focus has resulted in decisions that have conserved, protected and enhanced aquatic species and their habitats while enhancing opportunities and enjoyment for anglers and boaters.

While the Commission has made great strides and realized many successes, we believe that we can do better. Our mission statement and the Resource First management philosophy clearly set the standard for us, and should be seen as establishing a model for others to emulate. The questions and answers below help clarify what "Resource First" means to anglers and boaters.

1. What is Resource First?

Resource First is a management philosophy that describes the first priority of the Commission's mission – to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources. The phrase was coined in the mid 1980s when the Board of Commissioners adopted a statement of policy for the conservation and management of fishery resources. This document, which is codified at 58 Code §57.1, states that it is the Commission's policy to protect, conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of the fishery resources of the Commonwealth, including reptiles, amphibians, and to provide continued and varied angling opportunity through scientific inventory, classification and management of that resource.

What started as a concept to guide fisheries management programs became a philosophy that would inform and guide all Commission efforts. Resource First represented a change in focus from recreational considerations alone to the resource and its users. Putting the "resource first" also recognized that without good water quality in sufficient quantities, there would be fewer recreational fishing and boating opportunities. In April 2008, the Commissioners took formal action to adopt the most recent iteration of Resource First, clearly reaffirming the Commissioners' expectations that the agency's activities, regulations and methods of work will be evaluated and practiced within the context of this philosophy. The entire text of the recently articulated Resource First philosophy can be found at

http://www.fish.state.pa.us/images/people/commissioner/resource_first.pdf.

2. Is Resource First the PFBC's mission statement?

No. The PFBC's mission continues to be to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities.

3. What has the PFBC been doing to reaffirm Resource First?

The PFBC has been operating under the Resource First management philosophy for many years. Recent accomplishments with Resource First in mind include:

- Removal of dams resulting in hundreds of miles of stream habitat restoration;
- Creation of a Division of Habitat Management staffed by regional biologists focused on habitat restoration, management and fish passage;
- Leadership in development and implementation of the National Fish Habitat Action Plan;
- Establishment of the 3 Rivers Ecological Research Center to coordinate and conduct resource-related research in the Ohio River basin;
- The hiring of fisheries biologists to enhance our ability to focus more attention on understanding and managing the aquatic resources of the major river systems, including the Monongahela, Allegheny, Ohio, Delaware and Susquehanna rivers.
- Cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection for the protection of Class A wild trout populations through designation of these streams as High Quality-Coldwater Fisheries;
- Hatchery filtration upgrades to improve water quality of hatchery effluent, resulting in several instances where water coming out of the hatcheries has lower sediment loads than the spring water coming into the hatchery;
- Reconnecting people to the resource and encouraging stewardship behaviors through the administration of various grants to grassroots efforts; and
- Thousands of permit reviews to assess potential impacts to the Commonwealth's aquatic resources, including threatened and endangered species, from activities such as mining, stream encroachments, highway construction, hydropower development and water withdrawals.

4. How will the PFBC continue to reaffirm Resource First?

In day-to-day operations, the philosophy puts to paper the firm expectation that staff will make decisions within their discretionary authority based on long-term conservation of aquatic resources and strive to make scientifically-informed decisions that consider and balance social and economic factors. In larger scale decision-making about the future of the agency and its programs, Resource First will be the foundation for upcoming strategic planning discussions between Commissioners, staff and stakeholders. The outcome of these discussions will be clearly identified goals, objectives, activities and measures framed by Resource First. Commission planning efforts currently underway or pending include the Trout Management Plan, Statewide Access Plan and the agency-wide five-year Strategic Plan.

5. Does Resource First apply only to trout?

No. Resource First applies to all aquatic resources –game and non-game species of fish, amphibians, reptiles, aquatic macro invertebrates and the aquatic habitats in which they live. Resource First is a guiding principle for all Commission programs, not just those related to fisheries management.

6. Will Resource First change the way fish are stocked?

Where and how we stock fish is a constantly changing process. For example, for many years biologists have considered the potential impacts that stocking fish may have on wild fish communities, which resulted in the current policy prohibiting stocking on class A wild trout streams. Recently, the Commission moved to an approach of stocking larger but fewer trout. The decision to stock trout into a stream is based upon many factors such as habitat, access and the level of wild trout. We also must determine if the stream should be stocked with catchable or fingerling trout.

The Resource First philosophy simply continues our efforts to determine the best possible management plan for each stream. We have found that some streams, when stocking is eliminated and harvest reduced through creel or gear limits, result in highly attractive fisheries (e.g. the Little Juniata and Spring Creek) while others don't respond as well. Therefore, Resource First directs the Commission to create a better understanding of streams to determine the effect stocking will have on these fish communities. In some streams stocking may be increased, for others it could be reduced, and for many it may have no impact. The key challenge with stocking is to best use our hatchery resources to provide the best possible fishing opportunity while at the same time allowing wild trout fisheries to attain their potential.

7. Many of our trout-stocked waters are located on private land. If the Commission stops stocking these waters it has been suggested that the landowners may no longer have any incentive to keep their land open to the public and anglers will lose valuable access for fishing. Will this be a consideration when deciding if stocking will be continued?

There are many considerations that come into play when making decisions about stocking. Resource First clearly places the emphasis on protecting the resource. If the Commission determines that stocking hatchery trout into a specific waterway will likely result in a significant negative impact on the wild trout population, the Commission may discontinue stocking in favor of the wild resource. We will work with the landowners and anglers to discuss the expected response of the wild trout and the trout population response will be monitored to evaluate changes. At the same time, the Commission will work with landowners to encourage them to keep their property open to the public for fishing and work to provide additional resources such as habitat improvement. We acknowledge that in some streams the response of wild trout may not be as predicted and we would then, after evaluation, consider resuming stocking.

8. If trout stocking is reduced or eliminated in some streams does this mean that hatcheries will be closed?

No, this simply means that we can reallocate those fish to other waters in the Commonwealth where wild trout simply cannot exist in fishable numbers due to habitat or water quality limitations. There are some streams and lakes, particularly in heavily fished areas, that would benefit from additional stockings. We may even be able to create new recreational fisheries in streams as water quality and habitat improve. Although it would be economically advantageous to reduce our reliance upon hatchery production of trout, it would not be prudent to do so at the cost of losing anglers and reducing recreational opportunities that support local economies.

9. How is boating affected by Resource First?

Resource First continues to guide all Commission programs, including those related to boating. Resource First reinforces the agency's responsibility of protecting aquatic resources and still providing boating opportunities for the public. It reaffirms the Commission's commitment to protect, conserve and enhance those resources through the use of good science while still providing high-quality fishing and boating opportunities.

10. Where do people, especially anglers and boaters, fit into Resource First?

Recreational users continue to be a priority to the Commission. When adopted years ago, Resource First represented a change in focus from considering recreational interests alone to considering the resource and its users, including social and economic factors.

The Resource First statement adopted in April 2008 does not represent a departure from this view. Through our commitment to protect, conserve and enhance aquatic resources, we will optimize

fishing and boating opportunities and provide better services to our aquatic resources, anglers, boaters and other citizens who enjoy and benefit from our Commonwealth's high quality waters and aquatic habitats.

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