

photo: Jim Gallagher



# Straight TALK

by John A. Arway

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## A Saltwater Angler Registry

It shouldn't be a surprise to you that I like to fish, whether it is ice fishing for panfish on a frozen lake in northcentral Pennsylvania, trout or bass fishing on one of our 86,000 miles of rivers and streams or fishing for American shad on its migration up the Delaware River. I also like to taste the mist off of saltwater and enjoy occasional trips to the tidal Delaware, Chesapeake and Chincoteague bays and coastline of the Atlantic Ocean. Check out the photo (above) of the red snapper caught in the Gulf of Mexico.

So as a saltwater angler, I was surprised when the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) announced that a new federal law would require us to register with the National Saltwater Angler Registry ([www.countmyfish.noaa.gov](http://www.countmyfish.noaa.gov)). A license needed to fish in saltwater? Really? And, since

all of our watersheds ultimately flow into the ocean, would that mean I would also need to register if I fish in one of our fresh water rivers?

Within Pennsylvania, it turns out that the federal

requirement only applies to anglers who target or catch shad, striped bass and river herring from the Delaware River below Trenton Falls or in the Delaware Estuary. Anglers do not need to register if we met one of a

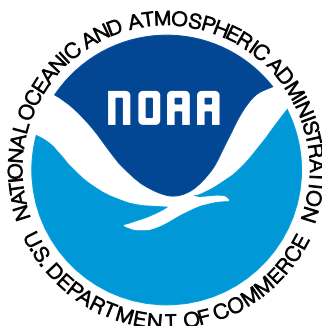
number of exemptions including possessing a valid marine license or registration from another state where marine fish are pursued. And, it was free to register in 2010.

The fisheries biologist in me quickly realized that what appeared to be a negative was actually a positive. The registry is a tool to help anglers and federal policymakers work together to better account for the contributions and impacts of saltwater fishing to ocean ecosystems and coastal economies. Reliable, universally trusted data will in turn aid anglers, fisheries managers and others in our combined efforts to effectively and fairly set the rules that will ensure the long-term sustainability of our ocean and coastal fisheries, including those species that spend parts of their lives in Pennsylvania waters.

When it became clear that the registry was not going to be free after 2010, staff at the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) quickly started working with the NOAA to strike an agreement to exempt Pennsylvania residents from the federal registration requirement and the associated fees.

This brings us to last January and then to the July 12, 2011 meeting of the PFBC's Board of Commissioners. In January, the PFBC entered into a memorandum of agreement with NOAA exempting Pennsylvania anglers from the registration requirement and \$15 fee while we worked to establish our own free registration system for applicable anglers.

At the July 12 meeting of our Board of Commissioners, we adopted a new rule that allows anglers to continue to avoid having to register with the national system by registering with the PFBC instead. With support from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, we are in the process of building an online tool that will enable anglers to register



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Delaware River

with us for free, effective January 1, 2012, after which we will share relevant data with NOAA for their survey purposes. Anglers may still register with NOAA, but you will have to pay the federal fee. Again, our system will be free.

As an angler, I don't like buying a license anymore than you do but realize that our license dollars support our conservation programs in Pennsylvania and in other states across the country. In fact, I continue to promote the need for alternative revenue for the agency with the ultimate goal to reduce the cost of your annual fishing license.

But as Director, I now understand that fishing license revenues are part of the incredibly successful North American Model of Wildlife Conservation in which the user pays and receives the benefits of his or her license dollars in the form of improved fisheries management and access to our waterways. The article entitled "A Cycle of Success" in the last issue of *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* explained the incredible track record of this system and the fact that fishing and boating expenditures leverage about 25 percent of the agency's budget from excise and motorboat fuel taxes levied under the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund each year. This is very significant for us, since we receive no money from the Commonwealth's General Fund. We rely on your hard-earned fishing license and boat registration dollars and the federal funds related to fishing and boating for just about everything we do.

As of our July 12 Commission meeting, nearly 65,000 Pennsylvania saltwater anglers had registered with NOAA. This includes anglers who registered in advance of the busy Fourth of July holiday weekend before heading to their favorite vacation spot at the shore. We hope our new online system makes life a little easier for you and lets you focus more on fishing. I know that's what I would rather be doing. Hope to see you on the water.

Your Director

><(John{°>



Your purchase of fishing equipment and motor boat fuels supports Sport Fish Restoration and boating access facilities



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



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