



To  
PROTECT,  
CONSERVE  
and  
ENHANCE

***Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission***  
***Strategic Plan***

*To provide fishing and boating opportunities through  
the protection and management of aquatic resources.*

There are more than 83,000 miles of rivers and streams in the Commonwealth and 3,956 lakes, reservoirs and ponds covering 161,445 acres. There are also 470,400 acres of Lake Erie in Pennsylvania and 393,000 acres of wetlands.



**The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission has fisheries management jurisdiction over all of these waters.**



## **Dear Friend of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission:**

This document represents the outcome of a great deal of hard work and effort by the Commissioners, leadership and staff of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC). Over the last year, we have followed a thorough process of examining where we are as an agency and determining where we want to go from here. Anyone who has participated in strategic planning can attest that the process is not easy. For it to be effective, the leaders of the organization must be open to candid self-evaluation that is equal parts constructive criticism and acclaim.

At the time I was appointed the Commission's ninth Executive Director, this process had already begun. It would have been easy to put long-term planning on hold during the time of transition. Instead, we used the strategic planning initiative as an opportunity to educate me on the operational history of the PFBC while incorporating my perspectives as one coming from outside the agency. The result, I think, was both a successful orientation and an ambitious goal-setting exercise.

I wish to thank the Commissioners for recognizing the value of strategic planning and for providing the necessary resources. Likewise, I am grateful to the line staff, program managers, unit leaders and senior staff for their contributions shaping ideas into actionable strategies. A special thank you to Jim Drager of the Drager Group for his role in this development effort.

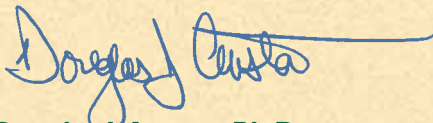


While this document is a summary of the key aspects of the strategic plan, by no means does it symbolize the end of the effort. Planning has provided the road map, and the overall focus it will provide is essential for the Commission to continue to fulfill its mission and serve all Pennsylvanians. As challenging as planning can be, however, the real work comes in implementation.

New ways of operating are constantly emerging, and the demand on the Commission has never been greater. At the same time, demands placed upon our revenue continue to increase as well. A focused approach to operating the Commission will help us to continue to be a leading agency while protecting natural resources and serving the needs of the fishing and boating public.

As you read these pages, I ask that you focus on how the efforts contained in this document support our mission “*to provide fishing and boating opportunities through the protection and management of aquatic resources.*” With your support, and everyone’s focus and efforts, we can achieve our goals.

On behalf of the Strategic Planning Team,



**Douglas J. Austen, Ph.D.**  
Executive Director



# INTRODUCTION

## *History and Mission*

The Pennsylvania Fish Commission was established in 1866 in response to declining shad runs. Over the years, the Commission's structure, mandates and responsibilities have evolved and expanded. Today, now known as the Fish & Boat Commission, it is the agency with the mandate to ensure the protection, propagation and distribution of gamefish, fishbait, baitfish, amphibians, reptiles and aquatic organisms.

Since 1931, the Commission has been charged with managing recreational boating in the Commonwealth. Like all government agencies, the Fish & Boat Commission's broad mission, powers and duties are defined by the General Assembly. The Commission's current legal status is that of an independent administrative commission.

The agency must necessarily focus on its statutory missions:

- The encouragement, promotion and development of fishery interests.
- The protection, propagation and distribution of fish.
- The management of boating and operation of boats.
- The encouragement, promotion and development of recreational boating interests.

The agency has broad regulatory power to develop regulations concerning fishing, to aid in the better protection, preservation and management of fish. The Commission also manages recreational boating and the safe operation of boats.

A board of 10 commissioners, appointed by the Governor and con-



firmed by the Senate, currently provides policy and board-level direction to the agency. As stewards of Pennsylvania's waters and the opportunities they afford, the Commission's mission is: *"To provide fishing and boating opportunities through the protection and management of aquatic resources."*

## Funding

The Commission receives no General Fund tax revenue to fund its programs. The agency is entirely user-funded through fishing license revenue, boat registration fees and reimbursement of federal user fees (excise taxes) assessed on fishing equipment and motorboat fuels. In the past, the Commission has received augmenting funding from conservation bond issues. The independent status and the user-based funding that support the agency have helped the Commission be focused, responsive and effective in addressing the conservation of the resource while meeting the demands of resource users.

## Resource Management Responsibilities

There are more than 83,000 miles of rivers and streams in the Commonwealth and 3,956 lakes, reservoirs and ponds covering 161,445 acres. There are also 470,400 acres of Lake Erie in Pennsylvania and 393,000 acres of wetlands. The Commission has fisheries management jurisdiction over all of these waters.

According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *2001 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation*, nearly 1.3 million individuals 16 years of age and older take some 18 million fishing trips in Pennsylvania annually. Another 578,000 children aged 6-15 are estimated to fish in Pennsylvania each year as well.

Pennsylvania is home to more than 350,000 registered watercraft. An estimated 2.5 million Pennsylvanians take to the water in boats every year.



## Planning Process

This document outlines some of the challenges and opportunities that the Commission faces. It also outlines strategies and future directions the Commission will use to capitalize on these opportunities. This document is the culmination of a lengthy development process. The planning process began with a facilitated strategy session with the Commissioners to broadly identify future direction. Similar facilitated meetings involving key management staff followed this session. The staff was charged with taking the key areas outlined by the Commissioners and establishing a road map for the agency.

Through this process, the leadership of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission has identified six overriding strategies it will implement in its efforts to fulfill its mission.

- **PFBC will position itself as an organization known for serving the fishing and boating public and the resources it protects.**
- **PFBC will invest in activities, resources and programs in order to increase boating and fishing participation in the Commonwealth.**
- **PFBC will explore and implement methods to increase traditional and non-user fee-based sources of revenue.**
- **PFBC will enhance relationships, leading to partnership opportunities with stakeholder groups, corporations, natural resource agencies, non-government organizations and others.**
- **PFBC will develop the internal structure and processes needed to effectively protect and manage aquatic resources and fishing and boating activities.**
- **PFBC will develop a coordinated, agency-wide approach to aquatic resource management, protection and conservation.**



## Strategy I:

**PFBC will position itself as an organization known for serving the fishing and boating public and the resources it protects.**

---

The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is one of the oldest natural resource agencies in the nation. Residents and visitors combine to take some 40 million fishing and boating trips in the Commonwealth annually. Fishing and boating are keys to the quality of life of Pennsylvanians. In addition, they have major positive economic impacts. Fishing and boating activity contributes more than \$2 billion per year to Pennsylvania's economy. Sportfishing in Pennsylvania supports 14,000 jobs and generates \$53 million in annual revenue for the state's general fund through sales and income.

Simply put, recreational fishing and boating programs and the natural resource management and protection contributions provided by the PFBC benefit all Pennsylvanians. To be most effective in influencing public policy, maintaining and improving visibility and support for the broad spectrum of PFBC programs is critical. Angler and boater support for the agency is generally very good. Generating wider public and political support for un-funded or underfunded programmatic areas such as non-game management is a greater challenge. To meet these challenges, the PFBC will need to highlight its success, using them as models of what more could be done.

Commission facilities provide recreational opportunities well beyond their primary purpose. State fish hatcheries under the Commission's management not only produce fish, but also are tourist destinations and educational venues. Lakes under the PFBC's management provide open spaces for communities and provide recreation and leisure opportunities besides the intended uses of fishing and boating. The agency will work through focused efforts to ensure understanding of the agency mission and role in providing quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.



## Strategy 2:

**PFBC will invest in activities, resources and programs in order to increase boating and fishing participation in the Commonwealth.**

---

The water resources of Pennsylvania enhance the quality of life for its citizens and provide both active and passive recreational opportunities. The Commonwealth's water resources provide benefits to all Pennsylvanians. They are home to fish, aquatic organisms and wildlife, and they are a critical link in sustaining Pennsylvania's biological integrity. Our waters enhance the quality of life by providing recreational opportunities that contribute more than \$2 billion annually to the Commonwealth's economy.

Connecting the Commonwealth's citizens to the resource is imperative for the long-term stewardship of the resource. The PFBC's primary funding base is user fees in the form of fishing licenses and boat registrations. Increasing participation in fishing and boating therefore not only fosters widespread public support for resource stewardship but it is also the keystone for funding agency management.

Balances must be struck in the promotion of wise and safe use and sustaining the resource that people enjoy. In many cases, providing public access will help the Commission meet the public demand for fishing and boating opportunities. This may not be easy, because the number of waters open for public use is slowly declining. The agency must continue its efforts to provide public access for public recreation.

Increasing participation in fishing and boating has practical ramifications as well. Currently, the Commission derives the bulk of its operating expenditures from user fees in the form of boat registrations and fishing licenses. Increasing the ranks of active paying customers is a necessity for agency survival. The agency will develop and implement new and innovative approaches to promoting fishing and boating to ensure adequate resources for management and to ensure quality of life for all Pennsylvanians.





### Strategy 3:

**PFBC will explore and implement methods in order to increase traditional and non-user fee-based sources of revenue.**

---

As measured in constant dollars, the amount of money available for Commission operations from traditional sources will remain relatively stable for the foreseeable future. Basic costs for routine operations, however, are ever-increasing due to economic factors (fuel prices, wage/benefit packages, etc.) beyond the Commission's direct control. Of equal concern is the existing—and growing—backlog of high-priority capital projects on state-owned properties under the Commission's jurisdiction.

Projects needed to improve compliance with environmental laws and those that relate to resource and user protection are priorities. However, the Commission cannot fund its infrastructure improvement needs out of operating revenue without severely negatively impacting other core programs. The combination of the operating budget constraints and infrastructure improvement needs dictates that the Commission must actively work to expand its funding sources.

The Commission's mandates and obligations extend statewide. The Commission's work to protect, conserve and enhance the resource greatly benefits all residents of Pennsylvania. With a declining fishing license base, the anglers and boaters of Pennsylvania alone cannot and should not be expected to shoulder the complete responsibility for management and protection of the state's aquatic resources. The Commission will actively seek the support of all who benefit from its work—that is, all Pennsylvanians—to ensure that the quality of life of all Pennsylvanians is protected and enhanced. The agency will work with traditional and non-traditional partners to implement methods to increase funding.



## Strategy 4:

**PFBC will enhance relationships, leading to partnership opportunities with stakeholder groups, corporations, natural resource agencies, non-government organizations and others.**

---

The use of volunteers and partnerships is crucial to accomplishing the Commission's mission. The Commission currently relies on partnerships to help protect the waterways and waterway users, provide educational outreach services, restore and enhance water quality, and to produce and distribute trout, to name just a few tasks. Recognizing that no one entity or organization can accomplish these tasks on its own, the Commission will promote and carry out meaningful involvement in these efforts consistent with its jurisdiction and its resources. The Commission will continue to expand the scope and the capacity of partnership programs. The grass-roots nature of many of these efforts ensures long-term local support for the protection and enhancement of the resource.

Commission involvement with watershed organizations and other entities that are working to restore and enhance aquatic resources and recreation opportunities is a crucial component of the agency's future direction. Demands for resource information, fisheries management expertise, and habitat enhancement and protection are increasing. These demands present the Commission with a tremendous opportunity to be involved with and promote local watershed efforts, the conservation of aquatic resources and the enjoyment of them.

One of the Commission's primary roles is to facilitate access to the resource. The Commission provides direct access to the Commonwealth's resources at about 250 water access sites and through fee ownership or easement on 34,000 acres of land. In an inventory of boating access, it was identified that the Commission provides roughly one-third of the total public boating access in the Commonwealth. Other federal, state and local entities provide the majority of access to the resource. In terms of gross acreage owned and accessible, the Commission pales in comparison to other state entities that manage large areas of the state's natural resources. The Commission has been very successful over the years in

providing access to fishing and boating opportunities through partnerships with these other agencies and individual landowners.

The Commission's independent status and current mandates enable the agency to work to protect the resource. The input of anglers and boaters is an important element in these efforts, and indeed, user input is consistent with the resource-based approach followed by the Commission. The Commission will continue to work with users, partners and agency stakeholders to implement programs and projects consistent with the agency mission. Leveraging partner resources and working closely with other entities is key to the success of the agency.

## Strategy 5:

**PFBC will develop the internal structure and processes needed to effectively protect and manage aquatic resources and fishing and boating activities.**

The Commission is woefully underfunded, both in terms of operating revenues to address the entire agency's legislative responsibility and for capital projects at state fish hatcheries, dams and lakes. The Commission has management jurisdiction for more than 83,000 miles of rivers and streams and 3,956 lakes, reservoirs and ponds covering 161,445 acres. There are also 470,400 acres of Lake Erie in Pennsylvania and 393,000 acres of wetlands. The Commis-



sion is mandated with responsibilities for all reptiles, amphibians and aquatic invertebrates. In addition, the PFBC has assumed a support role in assisting with homeland security and in training emergency responders in water-based rescue.

The Commission is proud of its efficiency and success. The proven track record of sound fiscal management and the dedication of employ-

ees to go “above and beyond” the call of duty have, however, created some unrealistic expectations. The Commission cannot perpetually achieve more with less. The fact that the Commission has long prided itself on being able routinely to perform the improbable does not mean the agency can take on new or expanded programmatic efforts without resources. The funding needs of the Commission are many and growing. For example, currently there is a backlog of more than \$110 million in capital improvement and resource conservation project needs. These projects cannot be funded from current operating revenue.

While there is widespread recognition of the Commission’s fiscal situation, there is no guarantee of a long-term permanent solution. Therefore, it is imperative that the agency will continue to ensure that it efficiently allocates its limited resources to optimize benefits for anglers and boaters and all Pennsylvanians. This will involve critical reviews of agency programs, structures and processes to make sure the agency is efficient and effective.

## **Strategy 6:**

**PFBC will develop a coordinated, agency-wide approach to aquatic resource management, protection and conservation.**

---

The Commission is the only state agency with a singular focus on the aquatic resource and the organisms that depend on it. As an independent agency, the Commission functions in a unique and valuable role, serving as a voice for and advocate of protection and enhancement of the aquatic resources and recreational interests under its jurisdiction that depend on it.



The Fish & Boat Commission has a philosophy of “Resource First.” This motto recognizes that the Commission cannot fulfill its mission unless it puts the resource first. The protection and management of aquatic resources is the means the Commission uses in providing fishing and boating opportunities. The “Resource First” philosophy does

not diminish the importance of providing fishing and boating opportunities for recreation. The motto simply recognizes that the resource is the basis of these opportunities.

The needs for resource protection and management are increasing. With a field force of about 150+ conservation officers, biologists and other staff, the Commission is proactively involved in water quality and fisheries management issues. Despite efforts on their part, new information shows that many aquatic organisms are now rare or should be classified as extirpated from Pennsylvania.

One of the most effective strategies the Commission uses to protect the aquatic resources of the state is to provide input to the Department of Environmental Protection to help it fulfill its much broader mandate as a trustee for Pennsylvania's water resources. However, the Commission has neither the funding nor the statutory mandate to become the Commonwealth's primary water quality protection and enforcement agency. The Commission will continue to advocate for proper water quality designation and protection of streams. The Commission will also continue to work with partners to develop a comprehensive wildlife conservation strategy as a condition of continuing federal funding for non-game programs. Finally, recognizing the importance of habitat to protecting and enhancing aquatic resources, the Commission is reviewing and will implement programmatic changes to ensure that habitat consideration and efforts are core to our management efforts.





## **Prioritized Objectives**

During the first year of this long-range strategic plan, the leadership of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission has decided that it will begin to implement the following operational objectives. These operational objectives were developed and selected in order to support the long-range strategies previously detailed.

- 1. Develop specific marketing and public relations initiatives targeted at key audiences.**
- 2. Develop and implement a Boating Access Improvement Program.**
- 3. Develop a systematic approach to improve streamside and shoreline angling opportunities.**
- 4. Reengineer trout fishing opportunities to improve the attractiveness to anglers.**
- 5. Increase revenue from “soft” sources (mitigation, habitat, grants, etc.).**
- 6. Seek legislation to capture an equivalent portion of General Fund revenue generated by fishing and boating.**
- 7. Identify and communicate the roles of the commissioners and agency.**
- 8. Develop an agency-wide employee development and succession plan.**

**Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission**  
**P.O. Box 67000**  
**Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000**



April 2005

*printed on recycled paper*