

Pennsylvania's Fishing and Boating Access Strategy



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Executive Summary
Pennsylvania's Fishing and Boating Access Strategy

Pennsylvania's Fishing and Boating Access Strategy (Strategy) provides the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (Commission), the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), and many important partners, such as local governments and conservation organizations with the necessary tools to make sound decisions on the discovery and selection of priority access points, acquisitions of key properties, and the design and development of new or improvements to existing facilities, and on the identification and allocation of financial resources for fishing and boating access.

For this Strategy, public fishing and boating access is defined as follows:

- **Boating access** provides access to waterways for powered and/or unpowered boats with some level of facilities including parking. Boating access is typically at a designated point of entry along a waterway. Fishing can also occur at these sites; however, the primary purpose is boating.
- **Walk-in fishing access** provides a way for anglers to reach the waterway and walk for some distance along the stream bank or in the stream bed. These types of access areas are typically linear with few amenities and do not have boat launch ramps.

Planning Process

A partnership between the Commission and DCNR was formed to provide a strategy to increase public fishing and boating access opportunities to Pennsylvania's 85,000 miles of rivers and streams, 3,956 lakes, reservoirs and ponds, and 470,400 acres of Lake Erie. The Commission and DCNR, with support from the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC), undertook a one-year planning process in preparing a state-wide public access strategy to enhance fishing, boating and other water-oriented recreational opportunities in Pennsylvania.

Some examples of key questions that were asked to identify major components of this Strategy:

- Are current fishing and boating access points adequate to meet public demand?
- What funding sources are available for acquisition, development and maintenance of access?
- Where are current fishing and boating access points in relationship to population centers, fishing license purchasers, and boat registrants?
- What are the criteria for identifying good walk-in fishing and boating access sites?
- Why are private landowners increasingly "posting" their property and eliminating access for the public?
- Where do people live and where do they want access?

A variety of resources were used to answer these questions:

- Existing documents such as the *State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (SCORP), PALS data, and angler surveys were studied to understand recreational user preferences and needs.
- Commission GIS (Geographic Information Systems) professionals mapped a wide variety of data and resources at the state and Hydrologic Unit Code 8 (HUC 8) watershed levels.¹
- Ten stakeholder meetings were held throughout Pennsylvania to gather public input.
- Commission grant programs and partnerships were reviewed to assess the various financial and other resources currently available to improve access.
- Current issues related to fishing and boating access such as changes in landowner perceptions, impact of development and damaged waterways, were reviewed to understand the challenges to providing access.

Results

Criteria to evaluate individual fishing and boating access sites were identified through stakeholder input and Commission experience and expertise, and will be used as a guide to determine walk-in fishing and boating access site locations and appropriate amenities. Implementation of this Strategy allows the Commission to thoroughly analyze the need for access throughout the Commonwealth and provides for local community involvement in addressing access issues, concerns and opportunities.

To guide the Strategy and investment in access, a two-tiered approach is used to evaluate existing access and future opportunities for access. The first tier evaluation occurs at the HUC 8 watershed level, which is designed to bring the scale of the Commonwealth down to a manageable size. Fifty-two HUC 8 watersheds greater than fifty square miles in size were evaluated against nineteen criteria. First tier evaluations resulted in a prioritized list of the watersheds that will be used to guide the Commission’s annual work plans for the development of access plans and the creation of GIS maps and resource descriptions for each watershed. Evaluation of waterways within each HUC 8 watershed makes up the second tier of the evaluation process, and detailed access plans for up to five HUC 8 watersheds will be developed each year by the Commission.

Providing fishing and boating access in the Commonwealth requires funding, planning and partnerships between state agencies, local governments, private landowners, and non-profit organizations. The Commission’s analysis of the HUC 8 watersheds presented in this Strategy provides valuable information and guidance for expanding recreational fishing and boating opportunities. GIS maps and evaluation criteria are available in CD/DVD format and at the Commission’s website at www.fishandboat.com for each watershed.

¹ “A watershed is a geographic area of land, water and biota within the confines of a drainage divide. Watershed boundaries define the aerial extent of surface water drainage to a point. Watersheds are delineated by the U.S. Geological Survey using a national standard hierarchical system based on surface hydrologic features and are classified into four types of hydrologic units. HUC 8 watersheds are the fourth level, the lowest level classification.” *Watersheds, Hydrologic Units, Hydrologic Unit Codes, Watershed Approach, and Rapid Watershed Assessments*, NRCS, USDA, June 18, 2007, p.1