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CHANGES FOR THE BETTER

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Change is rarely easy, but it can make things better. Two changes highlighted in this edition of *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* illustrate how this can happen.

In 2011, our Board of Commissioners listened to the data and followed the advice of agency staff and the Boating Advisory Board to require that life jackets be worn on all boats less than 16 feet long and all canoes, kayaks and paddleboards from November 1 to April 30. This was in response to a disproportionate number of boating fatalities happening during the cold weather months. If you fall in the water at that time of year, there is a good chance you may not come out alive.

Ten years later, boating fatalities during these months have been nearly cut in half. At the same time, we are experiencing longer boating seasons and seeing more people than ever using unpowered watercrafts. This requirement is making it safer to be on the water.

This change did not come easy—there was a lot of debate leading up to its formal adoption—but it was worth it. Indeed, that change is still

happening as we work diligently to educate people about the rule and the need to follow it.

The new Notice of Stocking regulation generated even more public interest than the cold weather life jacket requirement and will also be worth it. Until now, there was no system in place to ensure the health of the fish being stocked into Pennsylvania waters. In addition, our agency's talented and dedicated fisheries management staff had no idea what was being stocked into waters of the Commonwealth other than the fish that came from state fish hatcheries and cooperative nurseries.

With the Notice of Stocking requirement now in place, we are in a better position than ever to more comprehensively protect, conserve and enhance aquatic resources.

A special word of thanks to those in the commercial aquaculture industry, private fishing clubs and cooperative nursery volunteers—all of whom provided valuable feedback to collaboratively get to where we are today. Thanks also goes to our staff and Commissioners who took the time to listen and come up with a final regulation that worked. In this case, change was certainly not easy, but it showed how partners can come together to achieve a goal.

We still have a long way to go to achieve full compliance with wearing life jackets, and there will undoubtedly be growing pains as anglers implement the Notice of Stocking. Change will be for the better in the form of lives saved and healthy fish. ☐



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