

PA Fish and Boat Commission Bureau of Law Enforcement



2016 Annual Report

The mission of the Bureau of Law Enforcement is to protect, conserve, and enhance the aquatic resources of this Commonwealth through public education and fair enforcement by dedicated professionals.

Highlights of 2016

It is hard to believe that another year has passed and we are putting together the third BLE Annual Report. 2016 was a very busy year with the 150th Anniversary and the various activities that the Bureau took part in. These events were nice and to be remembered but for many created more work on top of an already busy and thin force. But as we always do, we got it done. I would like to thank all of those officers and staff that took part.

We started 2016 off with 25 vacancies across the Commonwealth. I can't remember any time in at least my history with the agency where we had as many. SGT Tom Tarkowski (NW Region) was the first to leave in February followed by WCO's Terrence "Ted" Kane (Bedford 6060), Robert "Pete" Mader (McKean 5025) and Richard "Rick" Valazak (Jefferson 5026). SGT David Keller (SC Region) hung it up in December to round out the retirements for 2016. With those retirements we lost a wealth of knowledge and experience. But relief was in sight with the 21st WCO Class and the 18 soon to be WCO's that were due to graduate in June. Those officers successfully completed their training at Stackhouse and were assigned to districts throughout the state. Unfortunately the churn continues and with several retirements the Bureau is looking at 15 vacancies at the start of 2017. With a large number of vacancies I am again campaigning for a new class and Executive Director Arway has assured me that as soon as we have a license increase in place that will be his first priority.

As I write this the command staff is making their yearly trip around the state for the DWCO/WCO meetings. During these meetings we are reviewing many of our statistics from last year so I will not bore you with that again. I will tell you that we continue to move forward and get the job done even with the vacancies. This is a testament to your hard work and dedication to the Fish and Boat Commission and I cannot thank you enough for that commitment.

In 2016 we continued to recognize Officers that excelled with Top Gun, NECLECA Officer of the Year, and NASBLA Boating Officer of the Year. WCO Emmett Kyler (Lycoming 5053) was recognized as Top

Gun for apprehending 10 BUI suspects in the NC Region. WCO Corey Girt (N. Huntingdon/Mifflin 6063) was awarded the NECLECA Officer of the Year for his overall performance in several areas as a WCO. As of this writing the NASBLA Boating Officer of the Year has not been announced yet.

The SWERT program continues to grow as several officers tested late in 2016 and will join the team officially in early 2017. These five officers will join the other 15 dedicated officers that have gone above and beyond to serve the citizens of the Commonwealth in the area of water rescue. The team was most recently deployed this past fall to assist with flooding in the NC and NE Regions. PAHART also continues to train and prepare. Several members of HART were deployed to South Carolina to assist with the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew.

I could go on and on about all the good work we did in 2016. My hope is that we just keep this pace moving into 2017. You have proven to me time and time again that there is no challenge too big and that we will get the mission at hand completed. Work safe in 2017 and remain vigilant at all times. SEMPER ANTICUS!

COL Corey L. Britcher

2016 Statistics

Court cases prosecuted.....	6,981
Crimes Codes	76
Warnings for violations	34,798
On board safety evaluations ..	30,532
Pollutions investigated	107
Boating Under the Influence...	87
Investigations	433
Snake permits.....	1,262
Turtle permits.....	34
Special Activity permits.....	2,580
Lake Erie Seine Net permits....	34
Water Rescue Certificates	2,705

Below: The 21st WCO Class taking their Oath of Office.





Left: Illegally netted Steelhead. Above: Local Firemen collecting evidence on unnamed trib to Hickory Run, Lawrence County. Below: WCO's Visosky & Soety at Erie Tall Ship event and triple fatal accident.

NORTHWEST REGION

Region Highlights

WCO James Smolko and WCO Brook Tolbert were promoted to the NW region Sergeant positions.

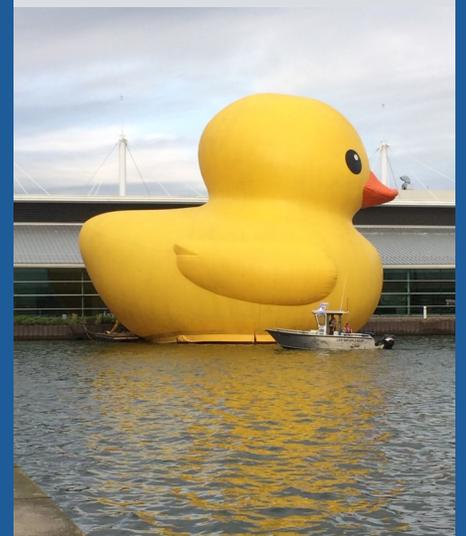
The NW region saw an increase in BUI arrests in 2016. 15 defendants were charged for Boating Under the Influence, arrests were made in Erie, Warren, Crawford, Mercer and Clarion Counties.

Special enforcement details were conducted on the Allegheny Reservoir in Warren County, Shenango Reservoir in Mercer County, Presque Isle Bay/Lake Erie in Erie County, and Conneaut Lake in Crawford County.

Steelhead season in Erie County saw a late start due to the extended warm weather. Numerous WCO's from the NW region and other regions from across the state worked the fall run. Prosecutions during these details resulted in excess of 100 citations being issued in the field for fish and boat code violations. Two individuals from the Greensburg area were apprehended over the Thanksgiving holiday illegally netting Steelhead from Walnut Creek at 0130 hours in an area which closes to fishing at 2200 hours. Defendants had netted five Steelhead before being apprehended.

Triple Fatal Boat Accident

On Saturday August 20th, at approximately 01:30 a boat accident occurred on the Allegheny River near the village of Phillipston, Clarion County. Sometime during the early morning hours the vessel had struck the shoreline and overturned. There were four males onboard the boat at the time of the incident and three were killed. A fourth male on the boat was trapped for several hours until the accident was discovered. This gentleman was then life flighted to a Pittsburgh trauma center. Speed and alcohol were contributing factors in this accident. WCO Greg Pochron, along with a number of other WCO's investigated this boat accident.





SOUTHWEST REGION

Fish Tale

WCO Matt Kauffman initiated an investigation into the claims/reporting of a new "State Record" catch of a Flathead Catfish from Donegal Lake in Westmoreland County. He received information that the person claiming to have caught the fish was not the angler who truly caught it. The individual claiming to have caught the fish posted photos to Facebook, had the fish officially weighed (52 lbs. 5 oz.) and filled out a PFBC State Record Application, which included having an alleged witness to the catch sign the application. He also contacted the PFBC for positive identification of the fish as a Flathead Catfish. A female brought the fish to the Southwest Region Office where Area 8 AFM Lorson positively identified it as a Flathead Catfish. In the meantime, WCO Kauffman interviewed actual witnesses to the catch and the angler who truly caught the fish. Witness statements were collected and upon confirmation that the fish was not caught legally by the applicant, the application was seized and charges for false application and false statements were filed against the applicant and witness. Both pled guilty on all charges.

Bentonite Discharge

WCO Al Colian settled an ongoing case against EQT Corporation for pollution of waters. WCO Colian initially opened the investigation in November 2015 for a discharge of bentonite into an unnamed tributary and Laurel Run in Cambria County which resulted from EQT drilling operations. EQT entered into an agreement and agreed to pay the PFBC, the sum of \$18,000.00

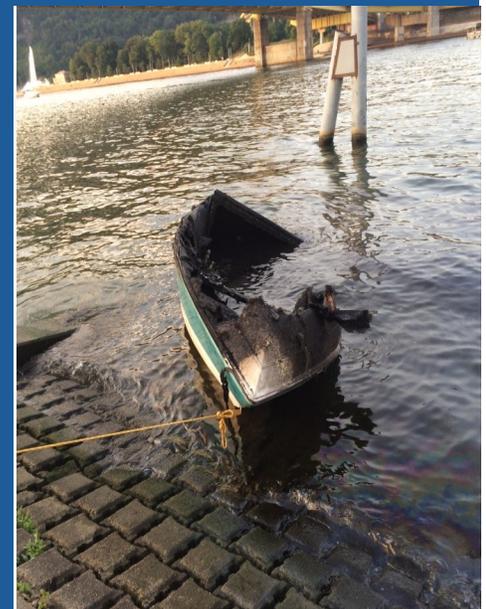
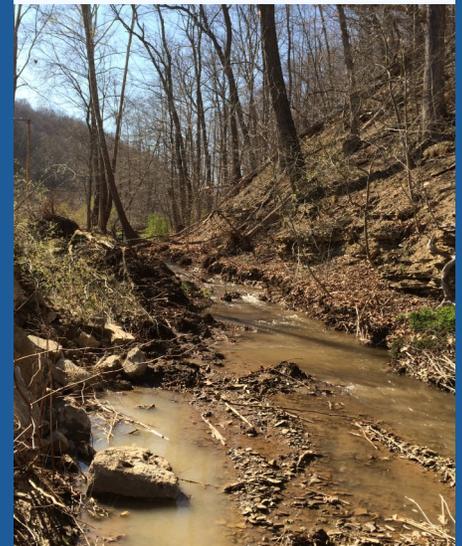
River Rescue

WCO's Matt Kauffman, Mike Johnson, Dan Wilson, Dave Raulfs, Tom Kline (Game) and Commissioner Ali Rocco were participating in a Special Enforcement Boating Detail on the Three Rivers in Pittsburgh during the Kenny Chesney concert. The officers were assisting in securing a boat to the River Walk of a person who had been arrested for Boating Under the Influence. At this time a person walking nearby began yelling obscenities and threats to the officers. Officers Wilson, Raulfs and Kline attempted to make contact with the person as he was headed for a large crowd on the River Walk. At this time Johnson was notified the person had jumped into the water. Johnson, Kauffman and Commissioner Ali traveled by patrol boat and found the subject in the middle of the channel of the Allegheny River in distress. Kauffman threw the subject a ring buoy, however, the subject was unable to self-rescue and appeared to be going under the water. Kauffman jumped off the patrol boat and was able to rescue the subject. Johnson and Commissioner Ali assisted in getting the subject on the patrol boat. WCO's Kauffman and Johnson received Life Saving Awards for their actions.

KABOOM!

WCO Johnson investigated a boat fire on the Allegheny where the operator shut off the engine after smelling fuel. He then engaged the blower in an attempt to vent, restarted the engine and shortly thereafter, an explosion occurred. Everyone on board jumped into the river.

Above left: Flathead Catfish. Above: Bentonite discharge into Laurel Run. Below: Earth disturbance in Boggs Run and fire damaged boat on the Allegheny.





NORTHCENTRAL REGION

2016 was a year of personnel changes in the NC Region. WCO's Rick Valazak and WCO Robert Mader retired, WCO Anthony Beers transferred to the SW Region, and one new officer resigned after a mere two months in the field. Those negatives, however, were offset by the addition of three new officers from the 21st class who have hit the ground running and have been doing great things in the region.

Slate Run

WCO Justin Boatwright was patrolling with fellow classmate WCO Chad Lauer when they discovered two subjects behaving suspiciously on Pine Creek in the area of Slate Run. Their suspicions were confirmed when the subjects retrieved goggles and a spear gun that they had hidden in the brush. In short order the two were apprehended having illegally speared two walleye, one of which exceeded 30 inches.

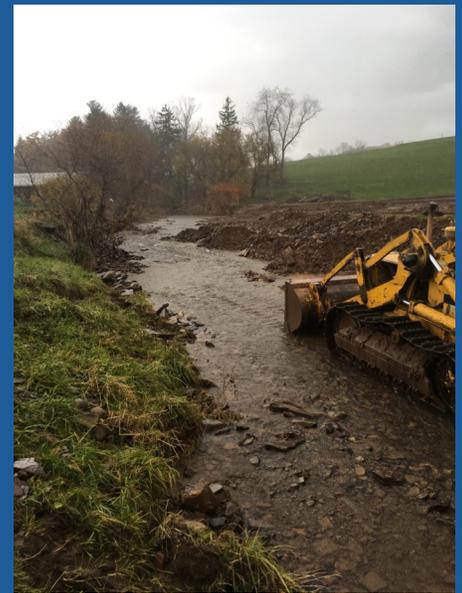
"Correcting" Storm Damage

WCO Chad Lauer on his return to Tioga County stumbled upon a farmer in the process of "correcting" storm damage with a bulldozer. Unfortunately for him he had failed to obtain the necessary permits or even contact anyone before starting the work. The farmer cooperated and was granted the necessary permits and settled the matter with the PFBC civilly. This wasn't a benchmark case, but there is always something satisfying about being in the right place at the right time.

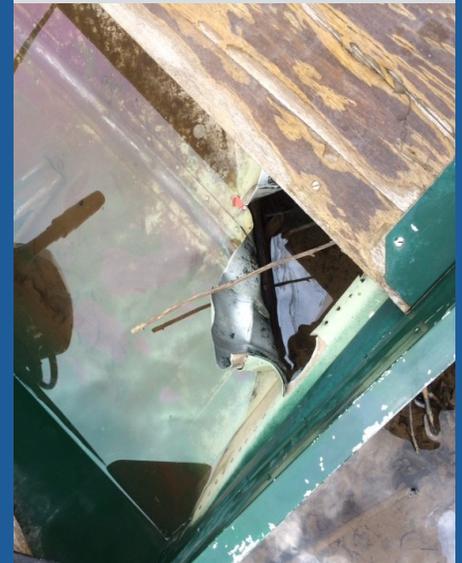
4th Of July

WCO Jacob Bennett began his career investigating a most unique boat accident. Over the 4th of July holiday two individuals decided to celebrate by taking their small aluminum boat onto the West Branch of the Susquehanna River and using it as a platform to launch illegal fireworks. The observers on shore got a once in a lifetime show when a lit firecracker floated down the river next to the boat and exploded. The blast blew a hole through the boat and ruptured the fuel tank. Both of the occupants quickly jumped overboard. Their luck was multiplied as they escaped injury in the explosion and happened to be in a shallow portion of the river. WCO Bennett conducted a detailed and thorough investigation and both the boat owner and his friend were charged with various crimes including Felony Causing or Risking a Catastrophe.

The remaining veteran officers and office staff of the region also deserve mention as they spent considerable effort covering 4 vacant districts during the spring stocking season prior to the arrival of the new officers. WCO Emmett Kyler also had a banner year prosecuting 10 BUI cases, 3 DUI cases and numerous drug possession cases in turn being awarded the PFBC Top Gun for 2016.



Left: Illegally taken Walleye from Pine Creek. Above: Bulldozer in stream. Below: Boat damage from exploded fireworks.





SOUTHCENTRAL REGION

Fishing Prohibited

WCO Jeremy Ney utilized a trail cam to apprehend three individuals fishing for monster Brown Trout in the Nursery waters of Mercersburg Sportsmen Club. He showed his trail cam photos to club members, and a member who went to the same high school identified the individuals.

Late Night Misconduct

WCO David Hurst arrested a man at the PFBC Lone Pine Access with heroin and drug paraphernalia. He was committed to Adams county prison and charged with controlled substances, drug paraphernalia, public drunkenness, disorderly conduct, litter, and other than intended use of state property. Controlled substance tested positive for heroin and methamphetamines. He now faces deportation proceedings through ICE.

Dock Street Dam

WCO Doug Deppen and WCO David Hurst investigated a boating accident on the Susquehanna River where a 14 foot open motorboat encroached too closely to the downstream boil of the Dock Street Dam and was drawn into the hydrolic. The vessel was swamped and capsized, with its operator being thrown overboard. He hung on the transom for 45 minutes until a passing freight train saw him and called 911. Fortunately this victim survived after being rescued and treated for hypothermia and trauma at a local hospital. Charges were filed for the exclusion zone violation.

PSP Trooper Landon Weaver

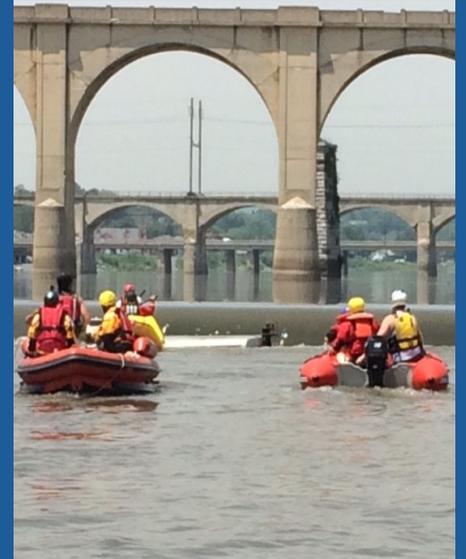
Waterways Conservation Officers and command staff within the Southcentral Region assisted the Pennsylvania State Police with the subsequent manhunt of PSP Trooper Landon Weaver's assailant throughout the night of December 30th and morning of December 31st, 2016. Our Officers were the first non-PSP units to arrive on scene and establish a perimeter immediately post-engagement of the suspect.

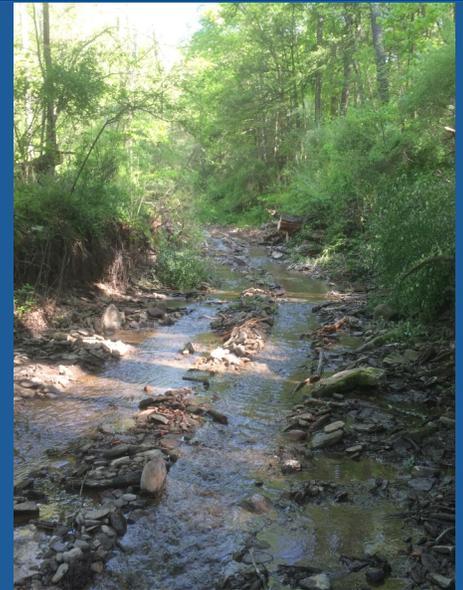
Rattlesnake Removal

SGT Craig Garman removing a rattlesnake from a local residence.



Left: Trail cam photo. Above: Lone Pine Access. Below: Dock Street Dam boat rescue and SGT Craig Garman.





NORTHEAST REGION

Lake Wallenpaupack

On Lake Wallenpaupack, two persons, a mother and son, sustained serious injuries when their personal watercraft (jet ski) exploded upon the starting of the craft. The family had been out riding the personal watercraft for an extended time. After a rest the woman and her son got on one personal watercraft while the husband got on another craft. The woman's PWC started and then quit running. When she restarted the PWC, it exploded throwing both the woman and her son off the PWC. Witnesses said the two had been thrown as high as twenty feet into the air. Both sustained major injuries. The woman had broken vertebrae and ribs, along with other bumps and bruises. Her son had a severe head injury. Both are recovering at this time. WCO Robert Plumb's investigation found a faulty ventilation system and wiring issue may have contributed to the accident.

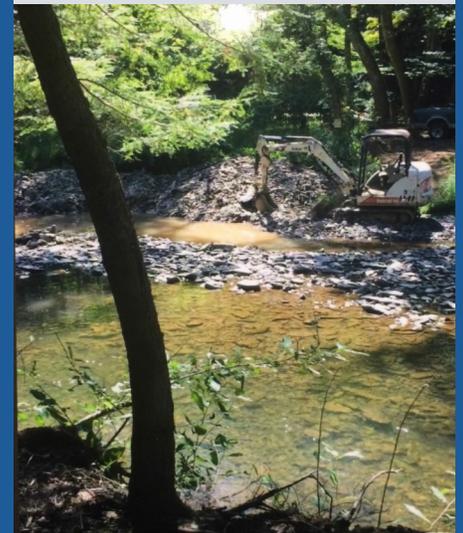
able to learn of the identity of the fisherman and he was charged with Unauthorized Use of a Vehicle, Resisting Inspection and Fishing without a license. The defendant was later arrested by the PA State Police on another matter and also had outstanding warrants for his arrest.

Chapman Lake

Injuries were sustained by two children at Chapman Lake in Lackawanna County. WCO Walter Buckman responded to a call where a personal watercraft (jet-ski) had hit a dock and two children were hurt. Further investigation revealed the operator of the personal watercraft was splashing the dock throwing water at the children on the dock. Two of the children were knocked off their feet, one receiving a severe head injury while another had both arms broken. Charges are pending.

Left: Submerged exploded jet-ski. Above: Stone removal from King's Creek, Bradford County.

Below: Unpermitted excavation work in Roaring Creek, Columbia County and bottom of exploded jet-ski.



You can run, but you can't hide

While checking trout fishermen along Mauch Chunk Creek, WCO Scott Christman and WCO Cadet Csuri, found a man who was fishing without a fishing license displayed. The man claimed to have a fishing license but did not have it with him. The man gave the officers a fictitious name during the encounter. As a car pulled up, the man said the car was driven by his girlfriend and his fishing license was in the car. When the woman got out of the car, the defendant hopped in the driver's seat and drove away, even with two passengers in the backseat. He abandoned the car a few miles away leaving the passengers with the car. Through interviews and investigation the officers were





SOUTHEAST REGION

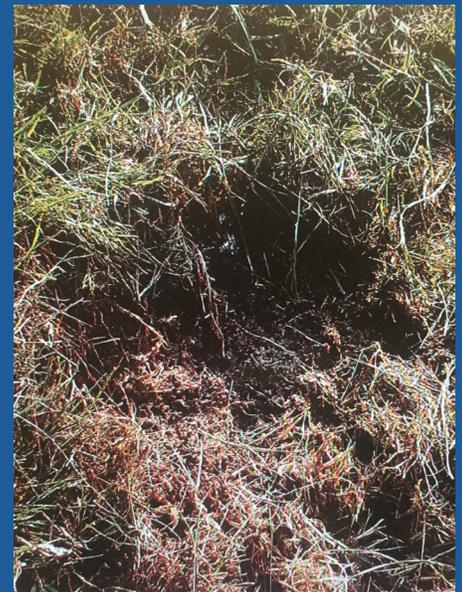
Snapping Turtle Exploded

An unusual incident occurred in Penn Township, Lancaster County that generated a substantial amount of media coverage. Two adult males and a seventeen year old juvenile male, all from Manheim, PA, were involved in the incident in which a snapping turtle was blown up after they affixed two large M-80 firecrackers to it and ignited them. The investigation began on August 3, 2016, when the Northern Lancaster County Regional Police Department received a report of an explosion in the area of Pleasant View Road. The responding officer discovered a crater in the ground and a dead snapping turtle that was extensively damaged from what appeared to have been some sort of explosion. Witnesses provided the police officer with a description and license number of a pick up truck that was seen fleeing the area after the explosion. Through investigation and interviews conducted by both WCO Jeff Schmidt and officers from the Northern Lancaster County Regional Police, as well as a representative of the Lancaster County District Attorney's Office, the three subjects involved were identified, and discussions ensued regarding which agency would prosecute the responsible individuals, and what charges would be brought. Initially, the police filed charges under the Crimes Code for the use of a Prohibited Offensive Weapon, because the M-80s were used. This case became quite an internet item, and literally spread around the world. The case also resulted in a substantial amount of public comment, the vast majority of it quite angry, that was directed at the three individuals, as well as an online petition drive regarding the desire by some members of the public to add wildlife to the Commonwealth's Cruelty to Animals law. Ultimately, the police department and the District Attorney's Office deter-

mined that a prosecution for the Prohibited Offensive Weapon offense might not be sustainable, and the police department withdrew the charges they had filed. The responsibility for prosecution then fell to PFBC. At that point WCO Schmidt filed charges against all three. All three subjects were charged with Crimes Codes violations of both Disorderly Conduct as well as Criminal Conspiracy. The subject who originally picked up the turtle was charged with failure to have a valid fishing license, which is required when taking a snapping turtle from land or water within the Commonwealth. The three subjects plead guilty and paid the fines.

Lehigh Canal Tire Dumping

WCO Zachary Rudd and the Northampton Borough Police Department investigated an incident involving worn out tires being dumped into the stocked Lehigh Canal on the Tri-Boro Sportsman's Club property. Trail cameras were able to capture on multiple occasions the subject responsible for the on-going dumping. Further investigation led to the identification of a local subject, who had been previously cited for illegal dumping. The subject was involved in the buying and selling of used wheels and tires. Because of the number of times the man had dumped tires, and considering his past record, he was charged with a misdemeanor charge of Scattering Rubbish under the Crimes Code, as well as Littering under the Fish and Boat Code. The man plead guilty and served 2 months in the county prison, in addition to paying over \$1300 dollars in fines and court costs.



Left: Snapping Turtle. Above: Crater in the ground where the Snapping Turtle exploded. Below: Tires dumped in the Lehigh Canal.





SPECIAL INVESTIGATIONS

Year in Review

The BLE Special Investigation Unit continued experienced growth during 2016 including a total of 52 investigations and the final resolution of an 18 month investigation of an intrastate poaching ring in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. These cases resulted in 75 summary charges, 24 misdemeanor charges and 8 felony charges. Additionally, 7 cases were turned over to other local/state/federal agencies in PA and neighboring states.

The number of cases involving the internet continues to grow, especially the use of social media to either facilitate illegal sales or even brag about illegal activities in general. Members of the SI Unit attended several specialized training courses.

Operation Chinatown

2016 saw the completion to an investigation that had originally started in 2014 with a routine vehicle stop by the PA State Police. During that stop the Trooper noticed the vehicle contained 29 snapping turtles. The operator, a New York resident, claimed to have purchased them in the Dallas area. WCO's from the NE region, interviewed the suspect and identified the individual from whom he had purchased the turtles. That individual was interviewed by the SI Unit and local WCO, and it was determined he was in violation of Title 30.

The seller agreed to provide information on the New York resident and a PA partner who were involved in buying illegal fish and wild game for use in the Oriental medical trade. Over the next 18 months undercover officers would complete sales to

include 16 Timber Rattlesnakes, 2 Black Bear, 2 Beavers and 5 Black Bear gallbladders. Charges were filed against 3 people, including 15 summaries, 12 misdemeanors and 1 felony.

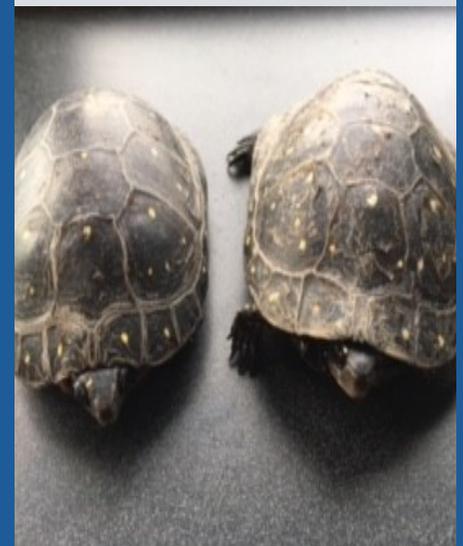
Turtles and Snakes for Sale

A Craig's List ad from the Wilkes Barre area offered numerous native snakes and turtles for sale.

The undercover officer met with the seller, who turned out to be a 14 year old and his uncle. The uncle had provided a false name, due to 3 outstanding warrants.

The pair resisted arrest, adding to their charges. Both were charged and the uncle was incarcerated for up to 3 years.

Left: Timber rattlesnakes sold during Operation China Town and also the bottom picture of Turtles. Above: Trout illegally taken. Below: Spotted Turtles sold on Craig's List.





For more information contact:

PA Fish and Boat Commission
Bureau of Law Enforcement
1601 Elmerton Avenue
Harrisburg, PA 17110
(717) 705-7861

