

Protecting the Places Where Our Critters Live

It's all about habitat. Habitat is the place where an organism lives. Habitat provides the things it needs to live—food, water, space and shelter. These things must be in the right amount and in the right arrangement. Do you know what happens when those things aren't there or when they're not available in the right amount? Sometimes the organism is no longer found in that location.

How can you as an angler go fishing for something that isn't there? Of course, you can't. For this reason, the Fish & Boat Commission makes sure the habitat is healthy for the fish we all like to catch. Cooperating with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), the Commission works to protect the habitats of fish and other aquatic organisms.

DEP issues permits for activities that might affect aquatic habitats. Activities that require permits include

highway construction, coal mining, building housing developments and logging. The Commission reviews permits to ensure that the activity doesn't change critical habitat and the critters it supports.

Even activities far from water can still have a damaging effect. Steps must be taken, as part of the permit, to prevent pollution from occurring. In this way, Commission biologists and law enforcement officers try to prevent pollution before it happens. The Commission staff reviews more than 1,000 permit applications each year.

Sometimes pollution happens. When it does, Commission waterways conservation officers (WCOs) get involved. Sometimes they investigate and gather evidence to prove fault. Offenders pay fines for the damage they cause.

WCOs investigated nearly 400 reported pollution cases in 2002. They investigated or reviewed nearly twice that many permits.