



Pennsylvania's BEST Fishing Waters

Pennsylvania's waters provide outstanding fishing opportunities for a wide variety of popular fish species. While fish species are distributed and available throughout the Commonwealth, some waters are superior to others with respect to their ability to provide a better fishing experience. In the past, when anglers had more free time to investigate individual waters, they discovered through trial and error those waters that provided better fishing. With free time being at a premium, seasoned anglers, anglers new to the sport and non-resident anglers have less time to weed out the less productive waters and search for ways to increase their success and enjoyment out of their time spent fishing. "Pennsylvania's Best Fishing Waters" is a program established by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) to serve as a valued resource to address these anglers' needs and to increase the accessibility of proven waters with the result of a more successful fishing trip.

I. Goal

- a. This program highlights Pennsylvania's best fishing waters across a wide range of popular sport fish and types of locations. The program serves to provide anglers with a convenient connection to these waters and increase their awareness of opportunities provided through the expertise of PFBC Fisheries staff. For residents and non-residents alike, this has added benefits to provide a better forecast about their fishing destinations.

II. Program Framework

a. “Pennsylvania’s Best Fishing Waters” is a criteria-based program with subject experts evaluating waters: PFBC Area Fisheries Managers have identified waters within their management regions that meet a set of program criteria. The criteria used and location amenities are designed to ensure that anglers are fishing a high-quality fishery, that the fish population is capable of supporting the expected user increase, that the physical location is capable of supporting the anticipated increased use so as to avoid damage to the environment and landowner conflicts.

i. **Basic criteria:** To help ensure angler success and the water’s continuance in the program, the following criteria are the first considerations with all waters considered for program inclusion:

1. All waters selected must be able to withstand increased angling pressure through the program’s raised awareness and marketing, both by PFBC and its partners, so as not to have a detrimental effect on the location and fishery.
2. All waters selected must offer the best angling opportunities through a combination of more catchable experiences, larger fish, greater fish populations, targeted fish species availability, and desired location amenities.

ii. **Species categories:** Since types of anglers are as varied as the fish they target, multiple species categories have been established to not only attract a larger number of PFBC customers, but to also offer a variety of water locations and a more extended marketing profile and timeline as in-season fishing opportunities span throughout the year.

1. Bass
 - a. Largemouth Bass
 - b. Smallmouth Bass
2. Catfish
 - a. Bullhead Catfish
 - b. Channel Catfish
 - c. Flathead Catfish
3. Common Carp
4. Muskellunge and Tiger Muskellunge¹
5. Panfish
 - a. Yellow Perch
 - b. Crappie
 - c. Bluegill and Pumpkinseed
6. Striped Bass
7. Trout
 - a. Wild Trout
 - b. Stocked Trout
8. Walleye

- iii. ***Amenities:*** It is the combined assessment of the water’s rated amenities that both establishes and retains it within the program and provides additional guidance for ultimate selection by anglers.
 - 1. **Public access:** defined as the water’s accessibility for public use. At least 50% of the water’s access must be public through shoreline access or boat access or combination of both.
 - 2. **Water quality and quality:** defined as water quality/quantity suitable for fishing the target species sustained throughout the year.
 - 3. **Quality of the fishery:** based upon biologist’s reports and catch rates.
 - a. **Natural reproduction:** defined as a sustainable quality level of naturally occurring fish species.
 - b. **Managed as stocked water:** defined as a sustainable quality level of stocked fish managed by PFBC.
- iv. ***Geographic distribution:*** “Pennsylvania’s Best Fishing Waters” have species-specific fish populations that are near or exceed the top 5% in the state, based upon PFBC-standardized sampling or Area Fisheries Management’s knowledge of angler catch-rates. While the overall state distribution of waters in all categories may have a consistent occurrence in all PFBC Regions, the type and density of fish species (whether naturally occurring or stocked) may not provide equal distribution in all regions within a single category.
- v. ***Periodic review of waters:*** The Division of Fisheries Management will conduct an annual review of waters in this program to the extent that recommendations for addition and removal from the program will be considered. This does not preempt results from fish surveys, as they occur, from affecting the listing of program waters. In addition, as adverse conditions occur, such as a reduction in public access or pollution events, a water may be immediately delisted as warranted by the Commission.