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Trout Stocking and Fish Culture Stations

On March 30, 2001, the Fish & Boat Commission celebrates its 135th birthday. In the early spring of 1866, just after the end of the Civil War, Governor Andrew Curtin signed legislation into law that provided for appointment of a Commissioner of Fisheries. Governor Curtin named James J. Worrall as Pennsylvania's first Commissioner. He faced many challenges, including restoration of migratory fish runs in the Susquehanna River Basin, pollution, and bad conditions in mountain lakes and streams.

Today, 135 years after Pennsylvania made a unique commitment to recognizing the importance of fish and fishing and protecting our aquatic resources, we face many similar challenges. Even as we've made great progress, we continue to face major challenges.

With the coming of March 1 each year, a lot of attention turns to trout stocking. The 2001 Inseason Trout Stocking Schedule appears elsewhere in this issue, and trout stocking information is the most popular item downloaded from our web site (www.fish.state.pa.us). Each spring, hundreds of anglers give their time to help us stock trout. This year, we are initiating extra efforts to make sure that both our staff and our stocking helpers put safety first along our highways and our streams as they carry buckets of trout from the "Great White Fleet" of stocking trucks and place fish in our approved trout waters.

For the past 15 years, the Commission has stocked just over 5 million adult legal-sized trout each year, mostly from March 1 until the end of May. We've also stocked millions of warmwater/coolwater fishes to provide even more fishing opportunities. Elsewhere in this issue you will find information on our stocking goals for 2002 and beyond. The Fish & Boat Commission will be placing limits on the production of adult trout at several of our fish culture stations, and starting in 2002, we will be stocking about 800,000 fewer adult trout than we did in the last few years.

The number sounds like a lot of fish, and it is. But the effects on an individual Pennsylvania trout angler should be relatively small. The change will average less than one trout per trout angler per year. Adult trout are stocked in nearly 800 different streams comprising 5,000 stream miles and about 22,000 acres. They are stocked in 120 lakes with nearly 8,000 acres. Given the extent of the waters stocked with Commission hatchery trout, the change in stocking rates will be spread over a very wide area.

Why is the Commission imposing trout production limits now? In a word, the answer is "water." We are concerned about water quality and water quantity as they relate to our hatchery operations. Hatcheries discharge wastes pursuant to permit limits established to protect water quality. Pennsylvania's fish hatcheries have a superb record of meeting goals designed to be protective of water quality, and we've made a firm commitment to make

further improvements by reducing solids and chemicals in the waste stream. The success of our efforts to reduce the effects of hatchery discharges is related to the available quantity of water that flows through a hatchery and its treatment systems. Some of our hatcheries need to reduce the flows through the hatchery to allow more water to flow directly into the receiving stream without going through hatchery raceways. And several hatcheries have experienced unexpected reductions in water flow and changes in the quality of the water flowing into the hatchery, probably as the result of chronic groundwater depletion and development in various watersheds. All this adds up to less water, and even though we have made real progress with oxygenation and other steps to deal with these problems, less water generally means fewer fish.

Pennsylvania has made a renewed commitment to "keep Pennsylvania fishing and boating" by investing funds to address the infrastructure needs at our hatcheries and our dams. We are grateful to Governor Ridge and the Administration for including our highest priority hatchery projects in the capital budget released with his Budget Address on February 6, 2001. Hatchery upgrades will take some time to accomplish, and the rehabilitation work itself may affect hatchery operations. We are optimistic that we can meet our effluent reduction goals by upgrading the backbone of hatcheries that plays such an important part in providing fishing opportunities. However, we must remain realistic in assessing the number of adult trout that we can produce while addressing very real water quality and water quantity concerns. It is unlikely in the near term that we will be able to produce more than 5 million adult trout in any one year.

The staff of our fish culture stations does a tremendous job in providing fishing opportunities for Pennsylvania anglers. They often work under difficult conditions. We owe a vote of thanks to the fish culturists and fisheries managers who make our stocking program a success. All of our hatcheries welcome visitors during normal operating hours. Each year, the Commission sponsors a "Day at the Hatchery" at our Linesville Fish Culture Station in Crawford County. This year's event will be held from 1 p.m. until 5 p.m. on Sunday, April 1, 2001. A visit to our Linesville hatchery provides a fascinating glimpse into how we raise fish. At our largest warmwater/coolwater facility it will give you a chance to see how hatcheries work. I hope that many readers will be able to take the time to visit this year's "Day at the Hatchery" at Linesville. See our web page (www.fish.state.pa.us) for more details.

