



PROTECT • CONSERVE • ENHANCE

Infrastructure

by Peter A. Colangelo, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

As regular readers know, our state faces serious problems with the infrastructure that supports fishing and boating in Pennsylvania. These problems are not new. More than four years ago, the Fish & Boat Commission identified adequate funding for infrastructure improvements as a top priority. We have sought the help of sportsmen, and the support of the General Assembly, for innovative ways to reduce the backlog of infrastructure needs at Pennsylvania state hatcheries, as well as dams and access areas under the control of the Commission.

Upgrading our state hatcheries is our first infrastructure priority. Water quantity and water quality concerns led to the reduction in trout production for 2002, and upgrading our hatcheries is essential to let them continue to operate within environmental expectations and with reduced water supply. The Commission hired FishPro Consulting Engineers and Scientists, the nation's foremost hatchery experts, to undertake a comprehensive independent review of the state's hatchery system. We have just received copies of the FishPro report, which includes an executive summary and three huge volumes of material, reviewing all aspects of our hatchery system.

While we have expended substantial resources over the years to maintain our state hatcheries, including about \$10 million in the last decade alone, more stringent effluent criteria mean that additional investments are needed to ensure continued compliance with water quality expectations. Much of the hatchery infrastructure (hatch houses, administrative building, etc.) actually dates back to the early 1900s. Wastewater treatment and hatchery technologies have evolved substantially, as have the expectations for our discharges.

The time has come to address the upgrade needs in a comprehensive manner, and that's where the FishPro report will be so valuable as a blueprint for the

future. FishPro projects it will take \$50 million to address the Priority 1 needs at all the hatchery facilities. Of the \$50 million total, FishPro believes we will need about \$28 million for our trout (coldwater) hatcheries alone. Priority 1 needs are defined as those "improvements considered essential to the station's ability to meet assigned fish production goals and compliance with the Commonwealth's operational codes and permits." An additional \$32 million is needed to address what FishPro categorizes as Priority 2 and 3 needs for all the hatcheries.

In the past, infrastructure improvement needs at Fish & Boat Commission-managed hatcheries, dams and access areas were accomplished using a variety of funding mechanisms including General Fund appropriations (early 1900s), Commonwealth conservation bond initiatives (Project 70 and Project 500), capital debt bonds, and operating funds raised from license funds and other revenue. Many facilities managed by the Fish & Boat Commission have also had repairs made with federal Sportfish Restoration Program funding. The last major Commonwealth investment in developing infrastructure for fishing and boating was under Project 500, which was enacted over 30 years ago. At that time, \$25 million (nearly \$100 million in current dollars) was allotted to the Fish & Boat Commission for infrastructure development projects, including hatchery development and upgrades.

The issues we face here in Pennsylvania are national in scope. As I mentioned before, the March and April 2002 issues of *Field and Stream* magazine had articles entitled "Storm Warnings," by Bob Marshall. He observed that "infrastructure, the physical properties that make hunting and fishing possible, has taken a beating in many states." Fish and wildlife agencies across the United States have had to use scarce

revenue from license buyers to do the basics as "maintenance of boat ramps, fish hatcheries, reservoirs, ponds, dams and road systems—as well as land acquisition—has been abandoned."

The Pennsylvania General Assembly is considering an innovative approach to funding fish and wildlife infrastructure need in legislation to extend "tipping fees" and enlarge the purposes for which this money may be spent. Under current law, a tipping fee of \$2 per ton is charged for waste dumped in Pennsylvania landfills. Proposals before the General Assembly would increase the fee and devote some additional revenue to conservation and related purposes. One bill increases the tipping fee to \$6 per ton and allocates the revenue to the Environmental Stewardship Fund for "Growing Greener" purposes, as well as the Conservation Heritage Account for fish and wildlife infrastructure and other purposes.

As I write this, the details of the final version of tipping fee legislation are not yet known. It's important that this bill devotes at least 50¢ per ton of the increased tipping fees to a conservation account to be allocated to the Fish & Boat Commission, Game Commission and Wild Resource Conservation Fund. If just 50¢ per ton were provided for these agencies, the Fish & Boat Commission and Game Commission would each receive several million dollars per year to be used for infrastructure improvements.

The concept of investing 50¢ per ton of increased tipping fees for fish-and-wildlife-related purposes has won broad bipartisan support. Over 60 members of the House are co-sponsoring House Bill 2500, sponsored by State Representatives David Levdansky and Bruce Smith. It is certainly appropriate to invest landfill tipping fees in fish and wildlife and outdoor recreation because of the effects that landfills have on waterways and watersheds, wildlife and

aquatic life. This innovative approach would provide stable, long-term funding for our conservation agencies.

By the time you read this, we should know whether, with your help and the support of the General Assembly, Pennsylvania has taken major strides in funding efforts to “keep Pennsylvania fishing.”



Trout Summit Slated for September 2002

Plans are well underway for the Trout Summit, which will be held in Harrisburg on September 27 and 28, 2002.

The first day of the Summit will be a symposium for state and federal officials from Pennsylvania and other states to discuss issues and approaches to dealing with trout management.

The second day of the Trout Summit will give the Commission staff the opportunity to brief leaders of statewide sportsmen and trout fishing groups, participants in past trout workgroups, and interested anglers on important recent developments. The Summit will invite participation by diverse non-governmental groups and organizations. The Trout Summit will also provide the opportunity in a workgroup/focus group setting for anglers and their representatives to have input on these important issues.

For more information, visit the Commission's web site, www.fish.state.pa.us.