

WCO Diary by WCO Dave Kaneski, Northern Wayne County



General patrols, trout stocking and special details kept us busy. A few unusual incidents also contributed. DWCO J.J. Dunsinger and I were investigating a complaint of after-hours waterskiing on one of the many lakes we patrol. While attempting to find an isolated area from which to view the lake, we happened on a small underage drinking party. With the assistance of the Pennsylvania State Police in Honesdale, we filed several citations. In another incident, DWCOs Osborne and Dunsinger and I took two men into custody for possession of illegal narcotics and paraphernalia while they were fishing, and again the state police assisted.

Another aspect of a WCO's job also came into play—environmental crimes investigation, primarily pollution of waters and disturbance of waterways and watersheds. The reports that we receive include complaints mostly on toxic chemicals, petroleum products or the most common pollutant in northern Wayne County, sediment entering the waters. Disturbance of waterways and watershed violations usually include someone engaging in earth-moving activities without the proper permit, which may result in damage to fish.

There is a procedure that follows after receiving a complaint. The first call I make is to inform the Wayne County Conservation District and see if they have knowledge of the reported activities. If the report relates to wetlands, a call to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also follows. A site inspection is the next step. The inspection determines if a crime is about to occur or if a crime has been committed, and if so, we gather evidence. We process still photographs, video and water samples, and we conduct interviews. We often request the assistance of the Fish & Boat Commission's Environmental Services Division for cases in which a severe pollution occurs or when fish are killed. Their expertise helps us interpret water sample analysis results, conduct fin fish surveys, and conduct what is called a "benthic macroinvertebrate survey," or a study of the waterway to determine if the aquatic insects have been harmed. These investigations usually begin with a single call or complaint from a citizen. An investigation may not be completely closed for several years.

Environmental Services Division biologist Ron Tibbott and I had recently concluded our involvement in a major sediment pollution case that began in 1997. We testified as witnesses for the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in an Environmental Hearing Board case in Harrisburg.

Shortly thereafter, a report concluded that a sediment pollution was occurring from another large construction

site. The process started again. We gathered hundreds of photographs, dozens of water samples, and a few hours of video tape from this site. We requested assistance from the Pennsylvania State Police, and from a helicopter the pollution was followed like a dirt road for more than 30 miles. At the site, the sediment entered a small, unnamed stream. Then it entered a larger private stream, and 13 miles later flowed into the Lackawaxen River and ultimately to the Delaware River another 15 miles to the east.

The water samples were sent to the DEP laboratory in Harrisburg for analysis. The results, along with detailed maps, were sent to Ron Tibbott for interpretation and official confirmation of what was sure to be another sediment pollution.

There were four separate incidents in June, all of which required the same time-consuming attention to detail. Communication with the conservation district was vital. Their expertise was crucial, including the thorough site inspections and documentation of violations at the site.

While working together, we have resolved dozens of environmental problems over the past three years. Most of them were small, and a few weren't so small.

In the shadow of these investigations, we observed the statewide Fish-for-Free Day, and the regular bass season opened. With dozens of tournaments scheduled and every gamefish species in season, boating came into full swing. This required general patrols to continue, to provide protection to the fishermen, boaters and the resource. Deputy waterways conservation officers, along with assistance from the local Game Commission officers, saw to it that these patrols continued.

Several incidents were a result of members of the general public taking the time and making an effort to inform someone of a fishing or boating violation. The events that occurred in May and June show how WCOs work with many different agencies in a variety of capacities and that there is never really a "routine" patrol.

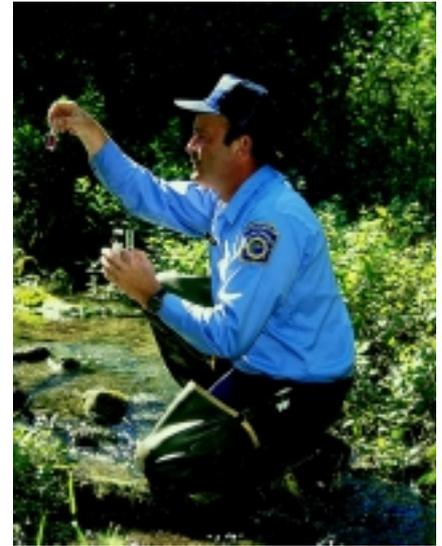


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