



# PROTECT • CONSERVE • ENHANCE

## Pennsylvania's First Trout Summit

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

Pennsylvania's first "Trout Summit" was a resounding success. The Trout Summit was held on September 27-28, 2002, at the Fish & Boat Commission's headquarters in Harrisburg. The session held on Friday, September 27, was a symposium in which state and federal officials discussed issues regarding trout management, trout propagation and funding. Seventeen state fish and wildlife agencies were represented at the Summit, as well as three federal agencies, five Pennsylvania state agencies, and members of the House and Senate Game and Fisheries Committees and their staffs.

We learned a lot from the presentations made by our colleagues from other states. Many of the issues that we're facing here in Pennsylvania are common to many of our sister states. When it comes to water quality issues related to state hatchery operations, fish disease and therapeutic chemicals, and trout stocking issues and funding, the challenges we face in Pennsylvania are not unique by any means. One fact came through loudly and clearly: The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is a leader among states in taking proactive steps to upgrade and improve its hatcheries and deal with water quality concerns. In briefing the assembled officials, Tom Johnson of FishPro Consulting Engineers and Scientists summarized the consulting firm's findings about the Pennsylvania state hatchery system:

- Pennsylvania's state hatcheries are managed and operated well.
- Pennsylvania's state hatcheries generally employ modern aquaculture technology.
- The current effluent treatment technology at Pennsylvania's state hatcheries produces results better than proposed US EPA guidelines.
- Effluent treatment improvements at all Commission fish culture stations

are the "number one" priority.

- Implementation of system-wide improvements is a major funding challenge.

The Friday session closed with a panel discussion on funding. Based on the discussion, it appears that many states are confronting funding issues similar to those that challenge us in Pennsylvania. License sales are relatively flat, and license revenue (and



matching federal funds) alone are simply insufficient to pay for major infrastructure projects. A representative of the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission outlined a solution to this problem that worked there and in several other states. A small percentage of state sales tax revenue is devoted to fish, wildlife and conservation programs. This provides a dedicated funding stream to supplement license dollars. A long-term effort to secure similar funding for Pennsylvania's fish and wildlife pro-

grams deserves strong consideration by Pennsylvania sportsmen and the General Assembly.

The Saturday session of the Trout Summit had two main purposes: To give the Commission's fisheries staff the chance to brief representatives of trout fishing groups and interested anglers on various aspects of Pennsylvania's trout fishing programs, and to give anglers and angler groups the chance to share their vision of the future of trout fishing in Pennsylvania. More than 90 invited anglers and group representatives joined members of the Commission and the staff in participating in large- and small-group meetings.

Just as we learned a lot from our colleagues from other agencies during the Friday meeting, we learned a great deal from our customers during the Saturday sessions. The facilitated breakout groups addressed vital questions on the trout programs of the future. One theme was part of just about everyone's comments: Trout fishing in Pennsylvania is a keystone of outdoor recreation in our Commonwealth. Even though anglers have widely divergent viewpoints on various aspects of our programs, they care deeply about protecting, conserving and enhancing trout and trout fishing in Pennsylvania.

Briefings and discussions about wild trout filled the morning session of Saturday's Trout Summit. Wild trout excite passions among our anglers, and many anglers want Pennsylvania to sharpen its focus on wild trout management. Our customers don't share a common viewpoint on which specific management steps will enhance wild trout, but they share a vision that wild trout should remain a key element of Pennsylvania's trout fisheries.

On the stocked trout front, it was somewhat surprising that many of those present at the Summit want the state to

maintain stocking levels, and many stated a preference for stocking fewer and larger trout instead of more, smaller fish. Finally, the afternoon sessions showed that Pennsylvania anglers care about habitat and want the state (not just the Fish & Boat Commission) to devote strong efforts to our waterways and watersheds.

Where do we go from here? Staff is pulling together all the comments submitted at the Trout Summit and the slides from all the briefings into a report to Pennsylvania anglers, which will be posted on our web site and made available to Summit participants. The next two issues of *PA&B* will also include Trout Summit information. The discussions and input received at the Summit will help staff fashion future trout programs for Pennsylvania. We asked participants to look five or even 10 years into the future and describe what they wanted to see in our trout programs. Although their visions differed on many issues, it's safe to say that trout fishing is, and will remain, a highlight of Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation experience.

Many Fish & Boat Commission staff devoted countless hours to planning, researching, preparing for and presenting the Trout Summit. Under the leadership of Rick Hoopes, the Director of the Bureau of Fisheries, Dennis Guise, Deputy Executive Director, and Dick Snyder, Chief of Fisheries Management, a dedicated team of professionals from across the agency helped make the Trout Summit an outstanding event. The Trout Summit once again demonstrated the strength of our trout programs and our willingness to work together with our sister states, other state and federal agencies, and, most importantly, our customers, to provide high-quality trout fishing opportunities for present and future generations of Pennsylvania anglers. ☐

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## On the cover

Justin Torok, Hershey, shows the 30-inch steelhead he caught in December 2001 on Elk Creek. The fish took a dead-drifted peach egg pattern. Depending on water levels and temperature, steelhead fishing on Lake Erie tributary streams can be good from fall through the entire winter until late spring. Aquatic Resources Program Specialist Carl Haensel took the photograph.

