



PROTECT CONSERVE ENHANCE

Managing
Varied
Resources,
Providing
Diverse Angling
Opportunities



I've been taking a lot a grief lately about my fishing or, more accurately, my lack of ability to catch fish when I supposedly should be successful. This friendly heckling is coming from several fronts, sometimes even from my own staff. Part of the heckling, though, is quite well-deserved.

For example, there was the time when I was standing just downstream from a colleague and he was catching about three fish to my every one. Another time I was given flies, told where to fish on Spring Creek, and even instructed, yet somehow failed to coax even one fish into taking my presentation. Then there was the guided trip on the Susquehanna where even the guides said that although we caught a few fish, it was still a poor day of fishing. I'm having a hard time believing that this is just me, but the evidence is starting to become overwhelming.

There are also expectations to be met. When people ask about my fishing trip, they expect that the executive director will, of course, be more successful than most. Hardly! I certainly would like to be catching more fish, but I may not have developed the knack of being efficient at it quite yet.

Does this make me despondent? Should I go back to mowing the lawn on a weekend morning instead of wading into a stream? I hope not. Think for a minute about what takes you out fishing. Of course, there are many reasons and among them will be catching fish, or maybe taking a meal home for dinner, possibly admiring the fish before releasing it, or even comparing competitively with a friend.

Probably among the top reasons on many lists will be the time spent in a scenic location, possibly with a good friend or maybe with children or other family members. I admit that this is where I feel a little more comfortable. You see, I would rather fish in a setting that lifts my soul and catch fewer fish than be in a place where fish are plentiful but the scenery is lacking. To see my kids catch fish has got to be one of the highlights of any trip.

The point is that we all have our motivations and needs from fishing, and they all are different but equally valid. They even change over time as we collect experiences as anglers, boaters and conservationists. One motivation is not necessarily superior to any other. Different motivations simply reflect a different set of life circumstances. You can see, then, that the challenge to the Fish & Boat Commission as resource managers is to figure out how to provide angling (and boating) opportunities that meet as many of these needs as possible while being responsible to the resource.

Think for a minute about what takes you out fishing.





This challenge was at the forefront of the summer Fish & Boat Commission meeting where the discussion focused on fishing regulations, particularly the Delayed-Harvest program. Like many of our regulations, the purpose is to provide a quality fishing opportunity that meets a social need but that also is biologically reasonable. Both of these components, biological and societal, are critical aspects of fisheries management; one cannot exist without the other.

In many of our fisheries, we strive to optimize the human component. The goal of such fisheries is to provide a recreational opportunity, whether it's from stocked trout or walleyes, smallmouth bass or returning steelhead. People do want to catch and often keep fish. I know firsthand that a child's interest is quickly lost if there is no action at the other end of the line.

Reasonably so, there is also a demand for wild fish and the experience of catching these products of natural reproduction and hard-won survival. The challenge and attraction of such fishing may be for a smaller audience, yet waters should be managed to provide for that interest. Finding the balance will require constant examination of our resources and constituent needs. Waters will change designation over time and programs will develop, evolve and be replaced in due time.

It is said that in decisions like these, when you make everyone equally mad, you have found the correct conclusion. I'd much rather take the approach that all anglers should have a reasonable assurance of the opportunity to practice their particular form of fishing recreation. Many diverse opportunities make for a healthy program and allow anglers to experience the many kinds of fishing that the Commonwealth offers.

The Commission's Division of Fisheries Management includes warmwater and coldwater units and eight area fisheries management offices. The staff surveys the Commonwealth's varied fisheries and provides the foundation on which our diverse fishing opportunities are based.

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