Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer Training

District waterways conservation officers are always looking for a few good people interested in becoming deputy waterways conservation officers (DWCO) to assist them in their mission to protect our aquatic resources and their users. Becoming a DWCO begins with a very thorough application process and completion of more than 40 hours of Act 235 (Lethal Weapons Training Act) training, or equivalent, before the applicant can be accepted for formal training at the PA Fish & Boat Commission’s H.R. Stackhouse School of Fishery Conservation and Watercraft Safety, near Bellefonte. The interested individual may then participate in “ride-alongs” with their district waterways conservation officer before the training class begins, during which time a DWCO prospect can observe the activities performed and ask questions regarding the duties of a WCO.

The formal training consists of four sessions, each starting on a Thursday evening and ending Monday evening. Areas covered in this aspect of the training include topics from constitutional law to handling venomous snakes. After graduation from the academy, the DWCO is on probationary status and must adequately complete a minimum of 150 hours of tutelage with his or her district WCO within one year to attain full deputy status.

Self-defense training is an integral part of any law enforcement program, and it is particularly important to conservation officers. We often work alone, normally quite a distance from the nearest assistance if the need for help arises. Various armed (less than lethal force—the highlight of which is a full facial dose of pepper spray) and unarmed self-defense courses taught at the DWCO school have recertifications held as required.

Each year, every DWCO must qualify with the duty sidearm, both in daylight and dim light. Tactical firearms (survival-oriented police shooting) training is also mandated. Added to this training are annual CPR and first aid recertifications. Annual regional DWCO meetings include training topics such as hazardous materials, prevention of sexual harassment in the workplace, traffic control, defensive driving, and other subjects. Quarterly district DWCO meetings are also held. These subjects were mandated topics for the first scheduled meeting after May 6, 2005: Boat accident response/investigation protocol, patrol boat/trailer use and maintenance, and a recent State Supreme Court ruling regarding Title 34 PA C.S. (the PA Game Code) and its possible impact on Title 30 PA C.S. (the PA Fish and Boat Code).

Optional training courses are also provided throughout the year. These courses include ice rescue, water rescue, advanced field sobriety test training, advanced boating-under-the-influence training, boat accident investigation and PA Basic Boating Course instructor certification.

Training doesn’t end when you leave the classroom or firing range. Every day brings the opportunity to learn something new…you don’t always need a trainer to be trained.

WCO William C. Carey’s current assignment includes Tioga County. He has served as administrative training assistant at the Commission’s H.R. Stackhouse School of Fishery Conservation and Watercraft Safety.
Becoming a DWCO

DWCOs come to work with the Commission’s Bureau of Law Enforcement from a variety of backgrounds and for a variety of reasons. All share a common commitment to saving lives on our waterways and to protecting, conserving, and enhancing our state’s valuable aquatic resources and environment for future generations. Many DWCOs use their training and experience to move on to other law enforcement occupations.

Anyone interested in learning more about DWCO positions should contact his or her nearest Commission regional headquarters. Statewide the Commission has 199 DWCOs.

Self-defense training, armed and unarmed, is a vital part of the DWCO training program.

DWCOs are trained in boat accident response and investigation, and a variety of rescue techniques for different kinds of boats.

DWCOs receive training in a wealth of topics concerning amphibians and reptiles.

DWCOs learn land-based rescue techniques for use near water. A deputy in training (above) practices throwing a rescue bag.