



# PROTECT CONSERVE ENHANCE

## Water Challenges Appear on Several Fronts



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“Whiskey is for drinking and water is for fighting” is a quote often ascribed to Mark Twain. The truth of the quote is very real. Although it’s hard to argue that whiskey hasn’t led to altercations, the more significant battles over water will be longer lasting, more complicated, and have a major impact upon the integrity of our resources and the recreation that we derive from them.

We are fighting for water on a number of fronts. First is the issue of navigability. Who has the right to be on a stream or river, fish it and float a boat in it? Water itself is the Commonwealth’s property and the quality is regulated to protect all citizens, but recreational uses of the water are often less clear and subject to ownership. Second is the amount of water that is allowed for use by various groups. We all need water for a variety of purposes, from agriculture to drinking to washing clothes. Water is essential to maintaining a healthy aquatic environment and to providing recreational fishing and boating opportunities. Third is the challenge of global warming. Larger storms, greater variability and higher summer temperatures lead to much greater stress upon our river and stream systems with subsequent negative impacts upon the life that depends upon them.

For a glimpse into the first of these battles, read the history behind the Little Juniata River navigability case ([http://www.fish.state.pa.us/water/public/little\\_juniata/copa\\_brief.pdf](http://www.fish.state.pa.us/water/public/little_juniata/copa_brief.pdf)), where whiskey was one of the main products floated down the Juniata River system. In the end, the most contentious point turned out to be the navigability of the river itself. Our access program has been a direct result of these situations and will continue to expand into the future. Our philosophy is that by getting people onto the water, we will create generations of advocates for our aquatic resources.

The second of the challenges, water quantity, is at the source of many ongoing discussions. This is particularly pressing in the Delaware River system, long known for its wildlife, boating and fishing. A limited amount of water is being divided among many competing users, including four states, N.Y. City and the aquatic life of the Delaware Bay. The complications of the current flexible flow management plan and the history of the Supreme Court decree that defines the current uses have been written about several times in the national press (*January Fly Fisherman Magazine*). Similar situations appear in the Lehigh, with anglers and whitewater enthusiasts competing for water from the F.E. Walter Reservoir. Pennsylvania Fish & Boat staff has been directly involved in many of the situations through developing minimum flow criteria which are used to determine flow needs for fisheries and aquatic health.

The final challenge is climate change and the increased stress it may bring on river and stream systems. Most likely, the first impacts will be on our native brook trout streams that are dependent upon cold, high quality water. Since our systems of streams, rivers and lakes are all connected through their watersheds, degradation on one part will ultimately affect other parts of the system.

Many of the water issues are locally based and can be locally solved. Sound water conservation programs are essential, and we must continue to work at the state level. The \$400 million Clean Water Referendum approved by voters last fall will help to upgrade treatment plants in our aging water infrastructure. The ongoing development of the State Water Plan will also aid in protecting source water areas. At the national level, the Fish & Boat Commission will support important legislation such as the National Fish Habitat Conservation Act (see <http://www.fishhabitat.org/>) and other efforts to better enable us to protect our water resources and habitats.