

# WCO Diary

by WCO  
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Over the course of this past year, I was fortunate to see some great sights throughout Northampton County. I saw osprey dive into Minsi Lake and leave with trout, I watched hundreds of sea lampreys on their spawning migration pass through the fish ladder at the Chain Dam on the Lehigh River, and I even witnessed a wild turkey in a storm drain along Bushkill Creek (more about this in a later issue). However, the sight that put a smile on my face more than any other throughout the year was watching children fishing and boating along the waterways of Northampton County.

Unfortunately, I did not get to see this sight as often as I would have liked due to the fact that the number of youth fishing and boating across the state is declining. As per the last survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, in 1995, 41 percent of youth participated in fishing, hunting and wildlife recreation. However, in 2001, this percentage had dropped to 35 percent.

As many of you have read in this publication over the past few years, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) is dedicated to increasing youth participation in fishing and boating activities across the state. Based upon our level of interaction with the public, Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs) play an important role in helping the PFBC work towards this goal.

One of the most fundamental ways WCOs work to increase youth involvement in the outdoors is to make their first encounter with fishing and boating as positive

as possible. A child that enjoys such an experience is more likely to be interested in a second trip, so we go out of our way to interact with children while on patrol. We ask how many fish they caught or how much fun they had spending an afternoon out on a boat. We offer them literature to educate them about fishing and boating, bait hooks and even untangle a few lines along the way.

We speak in school classrooms about the responsibilities of the PFBC and how we manage fishing, boating, amphibians and reptiles across the state. We even bring in a few live critters for the kids to see and teach them where such critters are found. During the stocking season, we provide children the opportunity to go up on our stocking trucks to see the fish and always try to stock an extra couple of fish in the vicinity of a young angler.

Time is one of the main factors that limit youth participation in fishing and boating. WCOs also reach out to parents and inform them of fishing locations that offer easy access for children. We give parents information on the most recent hot spots and let them know where safe boating pools are located, so they can take their children out to do some water-skiing or tubing.

We make an impact individually. When we partner with other groups, we are able to have a greater influence. In Northampton County last year, I was fortunate to have the chance to work with the Northampton County Federation of Sportsman's Clubs and the Delaware River Shad Fisherman's Association to hold youth days. These events provided children with the opportunity to participate in activities such as fishing, canoeing and reptile and amphibian identification. These two events introduced over 200 youth to the benefits of fishing and boating. Similar events are held in numerous counties across the state and are a terrific way to expose children to fishing and boating. ☐



Photo-Curt Haenschel