

Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund: A Cycle of Success



photo-Timothy Schaeffer

Congressman Jason Altmire, Waterways Conservation Officer Jeremy Allen, Southwest Assistant Regional Supervisor Larry Furlong and President of the Beaver County Corporation for Economic Development Jim Palmer visited a project funded by the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund in the Borough of Bridgewater.

The Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund serves as the backbone for fisheries conservation funding in the United States. It is a critical funding pool for a diverse set of important state and national recreational fishing and boating programs.

Taxes on fishing tackle and equipment, motorboat fuel, small engines and imported boats and fishing equipment are pooled together to create this fund of about \$650 million a year. In turn, the money is allocated to federal and state programs for recreational boating safety, fisheries management, habitat conservation, vessel pump-out stations, water and boating access infrastructure programs and aquatic resource education programs.

A brief history

The Sport Fish Restoration Fund was established in 1950. At its inception, it used a 10 percent federal manufacturers' excise tax on certain fishing equipment to fund projects designed to enhance sportfishing in all 50 states. Established in 1971, the Recreational Boating Safety Program was created to fund education programs on boating safety. The program was later amended in 1980 to draw its funding from taxes on motorboat fuel sales. These programs were combined in 1984 under the Wallop-Breaux amendment to the Act.

The Wallop-Breaux Act expanded the 10 percent excise tax to nearly all sportfishing products and captured the federal motorboat fuel taxes that were paid by boaters and anglers. This combination substantially increased the funds collected by the federal government to be returned to the states for fishing and boating-related projects.

In 2005, the Wallop-Breaux Act was reauthorized and the fund was renamed the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund (SFRBTF).

Incredible return on investment

Described as a "cycle of success" in a recent report by Andrew Loftus Consulting and Southwick Associates entitled *The Financial Returns and Benefits of Hunting*

and Fishing Excise Taxes, this user pays/user benefits model of fish and wildlife conservation yields huge dividends. On a basic level, the formula for the excise tax-funded SFRBTF program is simple. Abundant, sustainable fish populations and safe, accessible boating facilities yield diverse fishing and boating opportunities. Anglers and boaters respond to these opportunities by purchasing fishing and boating equipment manufactured by the companies that pay the tax.

To a large extent, everybody wins. Populations of fish and other aquatic resources benefit from the ongoing and improved management this funding makes possible. Anglers and boaters benefit from the continuation and improvement of opportunities to fish and boat. Related industries benefit from continued and often increased sales. Non-game species benefit as a result of improved habitat and other environmental enhancements. These relationships are often so direct that the excise monies paid by industry can be viewed not as taxes, but as purposeful business investments that generate measurable returns. Excise tax collections and import duties averaged \$110 million annually between 1955 and 2006. At the same time, wholesale-adjusted purchase of taxable fishing equipment by anglers averaged \$2.3 billion per year, resulting in an average annual return on investment of 2,157 percent.

In the Commonwealth, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission relies on the program for about one-fourth of the annual revenue used to implement its mission to protect, conserve and enhance aquatic resource and provide fishing and boating opportunities. In fiscal year 2009-2010, the Commission received over \$13 million in support from the program, totaling 26 percent of agency revenues that directly benefit anglers, boaters and the species it is entrusted to serve. The amount of funding Pennsylvania receives each year is based upon formulas that include fishing license sales and motorboat fuel usage. So, the more fishing and boating activity there is in Pennsylvania, the more our anglers and boaters benefit. Thus, emphasizing the user pays/user benefits model.

Pennsylvania would not be able to sustain its annual \$3.4 billion fishing and boating economy without the SFRBTF.



Your purchase of fishing equipment and motor boat fuels supports Sport Fish Restoration and boating access facilities



Improvements made at Columbia Borough due to the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.

The need for Congress to act by September 30

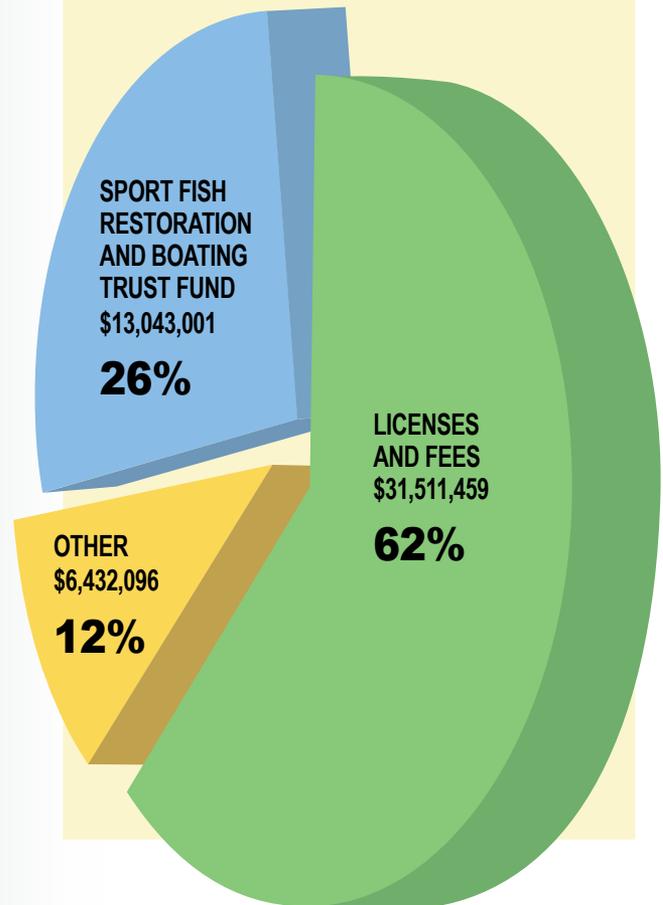
Over 60 percent of SFRBTF funds are derived from the gas excise tax attributable to outboard motors and small engines. On a regular basis, Congress has to reauthorize the transfer of the federal gasoline excise taxes collected into the federal treasury to the Highway Trust Fund and subsequent step-down distribution to the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. Congress accomplishes this through reauthorization of the Surface Transportation Act.

Along with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, the Angling and Boating Alliance and other partners, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is asking Congress to continue the full transfer of excise taxes attributable to motorboats from the Highway Trust Fund to the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund. To maintain the program and direct the funds for their intended purpose, Congress must act by September 30.

To learn more or to contact your member of Congress, please visit www.asafishing.org/government/wallop_breaux2.html. ☐

References: Andrew Loftus Consulting and Southwick Associates. "The Financial Returns and Benefits of Hunting and Fishing Excise Taxes." Produced on behalf of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Washington, D. C. February, 2011.

Fish and Boat Fund Actual Revenue Fiscal Year 2009-2010



Improvements made in Harborcreek Township as a benefit of the Sport Fish Restoration and Boating Trust Fund.

