



## Ouch! That hurts!

While on patrol at one of the boat ramps in Philadelphia with Sergeant Jeffrey Sabo, we watched two individuals, one male and one female, get on their personal watercraft at the boat dock and take off at what looked like full throttle, throwing rooster-tails and caution to the wind. This is a violation of the law, because an operator is required to operate a boat at slow, no-wake speed within 100 feet of the shoreline, docks, launch ramps, swimmers or downed skiers, persons wading in the water, anchored, moored or drifting boats or floats. We had noted the registration numbers of the two personal watercraft. When they returned 20 minutes later, Sergeant Sabo and I approached them. We told them what we had observed and then conducted a safety boarding to make sure they had all the required equipment, which they did. The operator of a personal watercraft is required to have a Boating Safety Education Certificate to operate a boat with greater than 25 horsepower if they were born after January 1, 1982, or to operate a personal watercraft. The young man had the required certificate, but the young lady did not. I explained to them that they would be issued citations, so we returned to the patrol truck and began writing the tickets. Sergeant Sabo was writing the young man's citation, and I was writing the young lady's citation. When I began writing the lady's second citation, she looked at me and said "Hey! Why do I get two citations, and he only gets one?" "Because you are both being charged with violating the no-wake speed within 100 feet of a dock," I said to her, "but you are also being charged with operating a

personal watercraft without a Boating Safety Education Certificate." The young lady glared at me and reached up and pinched my upper left arm just below my sleeve, hard! "Ouch!" I said. "What was that for?" Then, she pinched me a second time. Actually amused by the suddenness of her actions, I said to Sergeant Sabo, "Isn't that assault on an officer?" The young lady, all 90 or so pounds of her, frowned and apologized.

The next morning my wife noticed the bruises and asked me, "What happened to your arm?" I gave her the short answer. "Some young lady was pinching me." Sometimes, though, the longer answer is better, and this was one of those times.—*WCO Thomas E. Benevento, Southern Chester County.*

## Fish sticks

While speaking to a Cub Scout group recently, I discovered a few interesting facts about fish in Pennsylvania. A young man explained to me that bass were from the lake, trout were from the creek and "fish sticks" were from the cafeteria.—*WCO Patrick W. Ferko, Northern Somerset County.*

## Third time's the charm

I've experienced both urban and rural districts in my time as a WCO, and each has its own rhythm and peculiarities. Long ago, I learned from a now-retired Wildlife Conservation Officer (WCO) that rural districts, given their small and non-transient populations, afford an officer the opportunity to teach by the boomerang effect. That means if you feel as though a warning is appropriate, then give one; if they truly deserve a ticket, sooner or later they'll get one. Often it's simply a matter of addressing the lesser of encountered evils. In the past, we have encountered several individuals committing various violations. We addressed some, gave

warnings to others and advised all that if caught again there would be no quarter given. Each individual stated they understood, and we parted ways.

One month later, in an opposite part of the county, we came upon one of our previously encountered individuals, along with some new friends, committing violations once again. I asked this person to explain to me what the rules were, and he did. As before, violations were addressed, warnings were given, and we parted ways. One week later, in yet another part of the county, we came across an individual from our second incident committing violations again. Following as had previously been done by his friend, our 'veteran' explained the rules of engagement. He acknowledged the goodwill he squandered, and he received no warning this time. It's been two years since this last encounter. We still patrol the same locales, both day and night, and I've yet to find any of these individuals in violation since.

There's some good advice in the ramblings of those older wardens. Thanks, Len.—*WCO Mark T. Kerr, Venango County.*

## Picture this

Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer (DWCO) Jeremy Ney and I were on boat patrol on the Susquehanna River, when we noticed something amiss. As we approached an individual's watercraft, we began a standard boat boarding, checking license, creel and boating safety equipment. During a check for licenses, one of the anglers handed me his phone. Momentarily confused, I asked again for his fishing license. He said, "Isn't it there?" His voice was brimming with confidence as he pointed to the screen of his phone. Sure enough, on the phone was a

picture of his license. The man explained that he had purchased the license online the night before but ran out of paper for his printer. Since he couldn't print out a copy of the license, he snapped a picture of the license on the computer screen for his phone. I explained I would give him the opportunity to prove the license was valid by having him send me the actual license. The man did as I requested, and I received it several days later. Perhaps, as a penalty for not having his license while fishing, we should have requested he display his phone on his fishing vest.—WCO Mark A. Sweppenhiser, Northern Dauphin and Northumberland counties.

## Nature's way

While on patrol in a rural part of my district, I was passing along an open field when some movement caught my eye. I pulled off the roadway and looked for what caught my attention. Standing in the middle of the field was a coyote. In a split second, the coyote jumped into the air and pounced on something. The coyote popped up and started to trot away from me with a groundhog in its mouth. As the coyote moved farther away with its catch, it kept looking over its shoulder at me. He stopped at the crest of the hill, gave me one last look and disappeared.—WCO Emmett M. Kyler III, Lycoming County.

## Saved by the life jacket

An angler fishing for muskellunge credits his inflatable life jacket with saving his life. While fishing from his boat in the Allegheny River last winter, he leaned over the gunwale to grab a fishing rod that had fallen overboard. He lost his balance and fell into the 39-degree F water. The auto-inflate mechanism worked and within seconds he was bobbing on the surface. With some difficulty, because of waterlog-heavy clothing, he was eventually able to climb back into his boat. I asked him what would have been the outcome had he not been wearing a life jacket.



He replied, "I don't even want to think about it."—WCO Bruce A. Gundlach, Western Armstrong County.

## Dedicated angler

I received a call from Lieutenant Colonel Lawrence P. Furlong telling me that he had received a telephone call from a known violator that both he and I had cited several times over the past five years. This violator had his fishing privileges suspended for failing to complete his time payments. It seems that the violator, who I'll call Ronald, had finally taken care of his citations and wanted to know if he was allowed to fish again. When Lieutenant Colonel Furlong asked Ronald if he had finished payments, Ronald replied that he had, that he was getting out of jail that day and wanted to go fishing. Lieutenant Colonel Furlong told Ronald that he would have me check with the court to confirm completion of his citations, which I did, and Ronald's fishing privileges were restored.



Since beginning my career with the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, I have heard strange stories and excuses from suspects and violators. Until that day, I had never heard of someone using their phone time at the county jail to call to ask for permission to fish.—WCO Michael P. Walsh, Eastern Allegheny County.

## Reservoir fishing

For the past two years, I've worked hard to open five public drinking water reservoirs to public fishing. Part of the agreement was not to allow ice fishing.

In order to continue the goodwill between the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission and the Pennsylvania American Water Company, and to insure the reservoirs remain open to the public, I've made a decision to step up patrols in these areas.

During the last ice fishing season, Sergeant Bryan Bendock and I were on routine patrol when we observed what appeared to be four individuals fishing on the ice at Elmhurst Reservoir, Lackawanna County. We pulled to the side of the road, retrieved our binoculars and verified that four individuals were utilizing jigging rods and fishing. Now, we needed to figure out how to access that part of the reservoir.

I drove to a location to gain better access to the reservoir. Sergeant Bendock and I were able to climb down a steep embankment, over railroad tracks and down another embankment, only to find that the four individuals were gone. Within a moment, I spotted the four under a hemlock tree about 700 yards away. With the aide of binoculars, it appeared the four were scanning the area for us. They must have spotted us or had been tipped off. Our only hope of catching the four individuals was to have Sergeant Bendock and I split up.

Sergeant Bendock went back to the railroad tracks to sneak up behind them. I stayed where I was, observing near the frozen lake edge. It didn't take too long before the four decided that remaining still was no longer an option. As they began to move, I took out my cell phone and called Sergeant Bendock. I relayed their every move to him as he approached their location. Within five minutes, Sergeant Bendock was able to corral the four individuals and herd them my way. Our investigation showed that two of the four did not have a current fishing license. Both were cited for the violation, while all four received citations for unlawfully ice fishing on a domestic water supply reservoir.—WCO Walter A. Buckman, Lackawanna, Wayne and Susquehanna counties.