Stop snagging fish!
This is an official reminder for anglers—stop snagging fish. I’m just covering myself in writing for future snagging cases.
During the steelhead run in Erie County, I observed an angler who already had his limit on a stringer. Unfortunately, I didn’t see how he caught those fish. As I watched him, I could see him subtly jerking and dragging his lure through the water. I got closer so I could clearly see him cast over the fish, line up his lure and then jerk into the side of the steelhead. At this point, I could definitely testify that he was repeatedly attempting to snag fish. He finally snagged a fish and fought it for quite a while, which stirred up the fishing hole for everyone else. I was a little surprised that he didn’t keep the fish or pass the fish to one of his friends; he released the fish. I watched a little longer. He did the same thing again; snagged a fish, then released it. He repeated this over and over. It was obvious that he wasn’t going to keep any of the snagged fish. He was just snagging fish for the fun of it.
At this point, I put a stop to this before he injured more fish. I advised him that purposely snagging fish was illegal, even for the fun of it, even if he planned on releasing it. Additionally, I advised him that he was stirring up the hole every time he snagged, making fishing harder for everyone else, and it was noticeable that other anglers were getting angry. He acknowledged what he was doing but said he didn’t realize the harm he was causing. Of course, he thought he should get a warning. Apparently, he thought that it was also partly my fault. He stated to me at least twice that he should have just yelled to him to stop doing that, and he would have quit. I politely told him that he should have stopped on his own from the very beginning, and no, he was not getting a warning.—WCO Terry J. Crecraft, Eastern Crawford and Warren counties.

Unwelcome visitor
As law enforcement officers, some people may see us as unwelcome visitors when we approach them. I understand that, and people are entitled to their own opinions. However, this story is about an unwelcome visitor that really got everyone’s blood pumping.
While I was patrolling Geneva Swamp under Interstate 79, there were several individuals fishing in two boats that were tied to a steel barrier. The top of the steel wall was approximately 3- to 4-feet above the water. I was approaching their location and had to walk through swamp grass that was about 5-feet tall. As I neared their location, I broke out of the grass and was approximately 3 feet away from the wall. At the exact moment I emerged from the grass, I must have driven a water snake out, because a snake jumped from the wall, struck one of the men in the shoulder, then fell to the bottom of the boat.
Two of the three men climbed the wall and were standing beside me, panting with excitement. The third man was huddled in the front of the boat with his knees to his chest, screaming. The water snake was approximately 4-feet long and was slithering around in the bottom of the boat. While the lone man was stuck in the boat with the water snake, his buddies, while laughing hysterically at him, helped him remove the water snake by using an oar to push the snake in the water.
Unfortunately, the men were not wearing life jackets, so a citation was issued, but they sure did have fun picking on their buddy for his scream while huddled in the front of the boat with his knees to his chest.
I guess the moral of the story is, as much as people see us as unwelcome, it could always be worse.—WCO Chad E. Doyle, Southcentral Crawford and Eastern Mercer counties.

Chief of the boat
I started the day on the patrol boat with Captain Nestor and United States Border Patrol (USBP) Agent Mooney. We were checking anglers and boaters fishing in Lake Erie. Very quickly, the wave conditions changed and 4 to 6 foot waves covered Lake Erie. After putting our boat away for the day, I received a phone call from the Northwest Region Office indicating that there was a capsized boat with two people somewhere in the water by the Ohio and Pennsylvania state line in Lake Erie. After putting our boat away for the day, I received a phone call from the Northwest Region Office indicating that there was a capsized boat with two people somewhere in the water by the Ohio and Pennsylvania state line in Lake Erie.
After talking with Ohio Division of Watercraft and United States Coast Guard (USCG), WCO Smolko, USBP Agent Mooney and myself decided to get underway and assist in the search and rescue effort. Immediately exiting Walnut Creek Marina and entering into the Lake we encountered now 6 to 8 foot waves. The waves were crashing...
over the bow and cabin of the boat as we would come out of the wave troughs. It wasn’t going to be a pleasant ride.

Thankfully, the USCG helicopter out of Detroit, Michigan, arrived on scene and was able to locate and recover the two boaters safely from the water. Their location was within the limits of Ohio, but they were transported to Erie by the helicopter for medical attention.

When I was interviewing both boaters, they said they were fishing and the lake just kicked up very quickly. They took a wave over their bow, then a second one and capsized before they knew it. Luckily, one of the boaters was able to make a call to 911 before his cell phone died. Thankfully, they were already wearing their life jackets, and they stayed with their boat—holding on to it for almost an hour in very rough seas.

During my interview with the boat owner and operator, he indicated that this is not the first boat he has sunk. I looked at him funny, and he said that he was a retired Chief of the Boat (COB) with the United States Navy’s Submarine Service. Well done Master Chief.—WCO Brook R. Tolbert, Western Erie County.

The good father

It had been raining all day, heavy at times. The hours on patrol seemed to pass by slowly, as most anglers and boaters had opted for the dry conditions of home. I had encountered no one afield until I noticed a young boy, maybe 10-years-old, fishing alone at a public pond. This pond was adjacent to a country road and had a small pull-off nearby where anglers could park.

Dressed in a t-shirt, shorts and a pair of sneakers, this youngster was holding a short fishing pole with a simple closed-faced reel. He didn’t move and appeared to be concentrating intently at a point in the pond where his line disappeared beneath the water’s surface. It was raining steadily, and he was soaking wet but not deterred.

There was a car in the parking lot with its windshield wiper blades moving back and forth. It was positioned in such a way that the operator was facing the boy.

As I drove alongside the vehicle, I noticed a man behind the wheel, who was the boy’s father. Clearly, fishing in the rain was not a passion shared by Dad! As we chuckled about that, the father told me that his son was passionate about fishing. “He thinks about nothing else, he just loves it.”

In a flash, my memory transported me back to my own childhood. As a 12-year-old, I was passionate about deer hunting, an interest I acquired early on from friends in the fourth grade. My dad spent countless weekend hours in the freezing cold and snow to accompany me in those early years. For four years, until I turned 16 and could legally hunt alone, he braved the cold sitting next to me, wrapped in blankets.

However, in order to fully appreciate my dad’s sacrifice, you must understand his background. My dad grew up in Brooklyn, New York. He had never been hunting, never had an interest in hunting, would never eat wild game or even try it, and besides a two year stint in the Navy, he had never fired a gun. What I did not appreciate then was that my dad’s true passion was not the game, the gun or the hours spent, it was me.

Thirty-four years later, I find myself in my dad’s shoes, a husband and father of two young children. My dad, who has since passed away, had given me the gift of his time. I am still a passionate deer hunter but cannot think about it without heart-felt memories of my dad and the time he spent with me, trying to stay warm in the woods.

I turned my attention back to that father in his car, watching his son fishing in the rain. I told him what my father had done for me years ago and how much I cherish those memories. Although his son may not appreciate it now, he will grow up with fond memories of this rainy day. I pointed to him and said, “It might seem insignificant now, but you are doing a great thing for your son, and he will never forget it. This is what great dads do for their children.”

The man smiled with a look of pride and satisfaction on his face, and said, “Thank you.” I thanked him for reminding me of my own dad and the things he did for me so many years ago.—WCO Jonathan R. Kay, Butler County.

Catch of a lifetime?

While patrolling the Monongahela River on a summer night, I came upon a group of guys fishing from one of the lock walls, where a lock and dam used to be. I parked my patrol vehicle. As I approached on foot, I noticed that one of the anglers appeared to be fighting a large fish. The angler was very excited as his rod was bent significantly, with what seemed to be a fairly heavy fish. I stood by and watched as he would heave up on the rod and then reel down, with the drag on his reel doing what it was intended to do. This went on for what seemed like an eternity, with him resting occasionally and trying to be careful not to break the fish from the line. After nearly a 20 minute struggle, he shouted, “It’s coming to the surface, get the net!” As one of his buddies grabbed a net, the next words out of his mouth were, “You’ve got to be kidding me!” Then, his buddies erupted into laughter.

It was not a fish but a huge section of lock rope about 8 inches in diameter. Amongst the large amounts of roaring laughter, one of his fishing buddies turned to him and remarked, “I guess you don’t have to worry about measuring that one to make sure it’s legal.”

The potential catch of a lifetime turned into a story that will be told over and over, never forgotten, and probably never lived down.—Captain Thomas J. Crist, Southwest Region.