

# A Sense of Responsibility

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## StraightTALK



Photo: Jim Gallagher

A week after my appointment as Executive Director, I attended an American Fisheries Society Governing Board meeting in Nashville, TN. I was obligated to attend since I am the President-Elect of the Northeast Division, and I'm responsible for representing the interests of the division members. This article has nothing to do with the meeting, but is about what happened on my trip home.

My flight took me through Philadelphia to Pittsburgh. As the airplane left the Philadelphia airport, I looked out my window and noticed that the airport

bordered a vast section of wetlands along the Delaware River. These wetlands are connected to John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge, which is operated by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I started thinking about how Pennsylvania's landscape has changed over time and began imagining what the river and its floodplain would have looked like when President Washington crossed the Delaware in 1776. Flying westward, I noticed how the rooftops and streets of urban Philly changed to a mosaic of farmlands interspersed with small woodlots and stream corridors. Then, came a familiar sight—the Susquehanna River. It seemed slightly different, more of a lake in some places due to a series of high-head dams. These dams were one of the primary reasons that our agency was created in 1866. The General Assembly, at the time, created the Pennsylvania Fish Commission to restore American shad to the river since the dams blocked their migration from the sea and prevented them from returning to their native spawning grounds.

The next change in terrain became even more apparent, because of the relief provided by the Appalachian Plateau. I could envision myself walking up one of those tiny steep-sided valleys in pursuit of our state fish—the brook trout. The sunny south side of the mountains provides a home to another one of our trust species—the timber rattlesnake. The timber rattlesnake is currently a subject of status studies. Has it declined over time or is it secure in its range?

Then, I saw an unnatural color on the landscape. It appeared to be a stream of bright orange water bleeding from the mountainside into a major river—the Monongahela. We recognize it as acid mine drainage when we see it up close on the ground, but it appeared even more shocking from 10,000 feet as we began our descent into Pittsburgh.

I hadn't taken my eyes off of the landscape the entire trip and began to understand why. My new position as Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission comes with tremendous responsibilities. I am now responsible for 432 permanent staff and 120 seasonal employees. I am also responsible for the well being of the aquatic resources that live in our Commonwealth's waters as well as the herptiles on our land. And, there is the additional responsibility of insuring the health and safety of our anglers and boaters. I now sense that I have a large duty to fulfill, and I am prepared to take on the challenge. See you on the water.

Your Director  
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