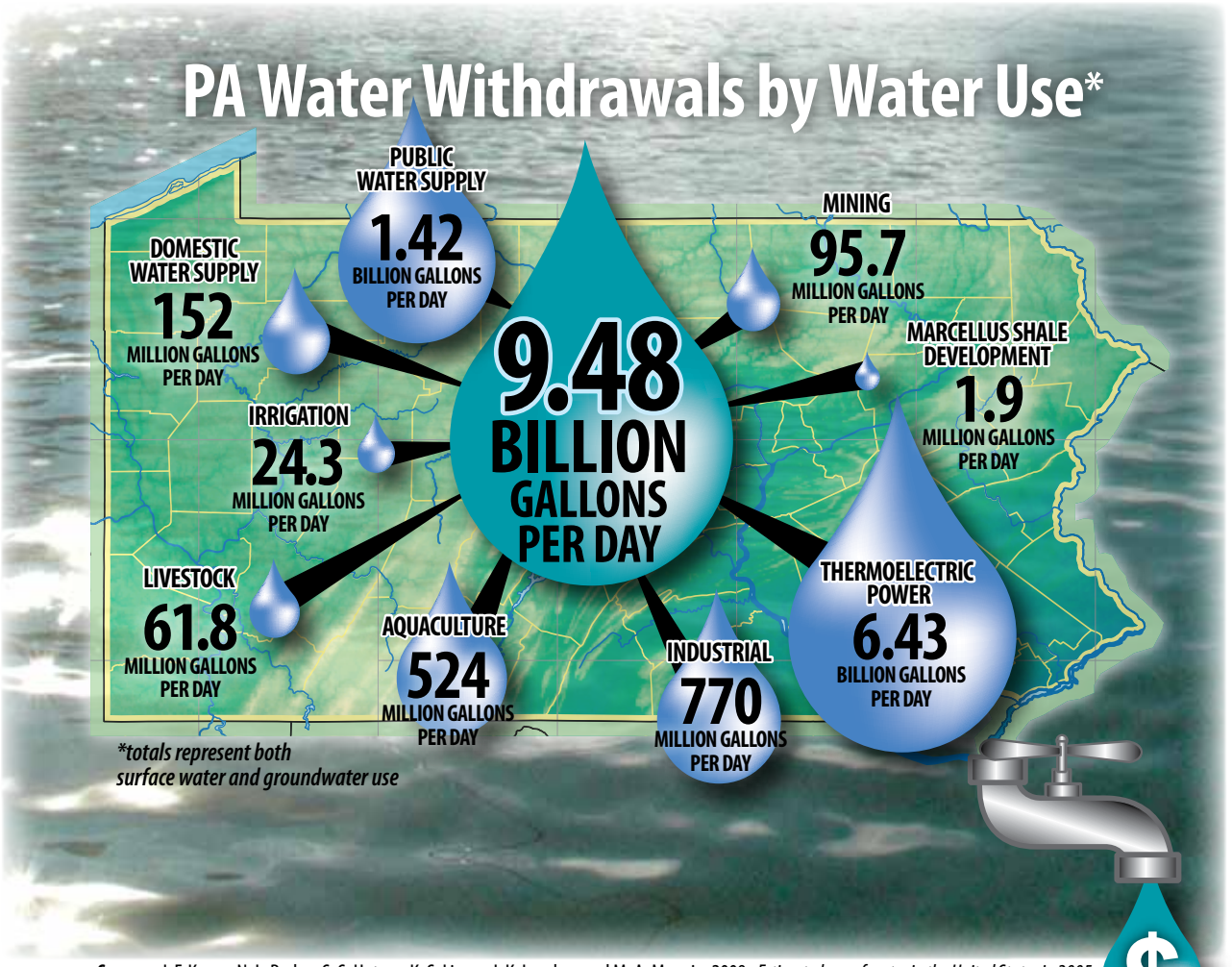
Straight TALK

by John A. Arway
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

Highway Robbery

My dad always taught me that if you borrowed something, you should always return it in a better condition than when you received it. Unfortunately, this isn't the case for some of our Commonwealth property that is being borrowed and, in some cases, outright stolen without compensation. The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) is a Commonwealth agency with the responsibility of protecting, conserving and enhancing our Commonwealth's fish and aquatic resources and providing fishing and boating opportunities. Consistent with our State Constitution, we hold our resources in public trust for you, our anglers, boaters and conservationists, as well as other members of the general public. We are fortunate that we have always been water rich in Pennsylvania, and therefore, as a society, we haven't paid much attention to those using our water resources, because they are so abundant.

In fact, it has been estimated that we have more than 83,000 miles of streams, nearly 4,000 lakes and 80 trillion gallons of groundwater. However, the demand for our water continues to grow. In 2003, it was estimated that over 10 billion gallons per day were being withdrawn from surface and ground waters. Activities such as power plant use, bottled water withdrawals, Marcellus



Sources: J. F. Kenny, N. L. Barber, S. S. Hutson, K. S. Linsey, J. K. Lovelace and M. A. Maupin. 2009. *Estimated use of water in the United States in 2005.* U. S. Geological Survey Circular 1344. 52 p.

Marcellus Shale Gas Development Water Use: June 1, 2008 - May 21, 2010 Susquehanna River Basin Commission basin-wide reported daily use of 0.99 MGD expanded to statewide estimate. Water sources: 29% Public water supplies/71% Surface water withdrawals
1 MGD daily use in Susq. Basin ÷ wells drilled in Susq. Basin/wells drilled statewide=1 MGD ÷ (765/1428)

natural gas well drilling and other industrial activities take water directly from our streams, lakes and rivers, and it is not returned. These water uses are called consumptive uses. Water is evaporated out of large smokestacks, shipped away in plastic bottles or left deep underground to possibly never be seen again

Water is literally being taken without compensation, and it makes me mad. It should also make you mad, because it is your property, too. It has an impact on our aquatic resources and your quality of life. We currently share revenue with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for the sand and gravel extracted from the riverbeds of the Allegheny and Ohio Rivers, because that material is also Commonwealth property. It is submerged lands under navigable water, and the Commonwealth gets compensated for its value through a royalty fee. We have a law that requires it. We use that money to fund programs consistent with our mission. Shouldn't we have a similar law and the same hold true for the water that we all own?

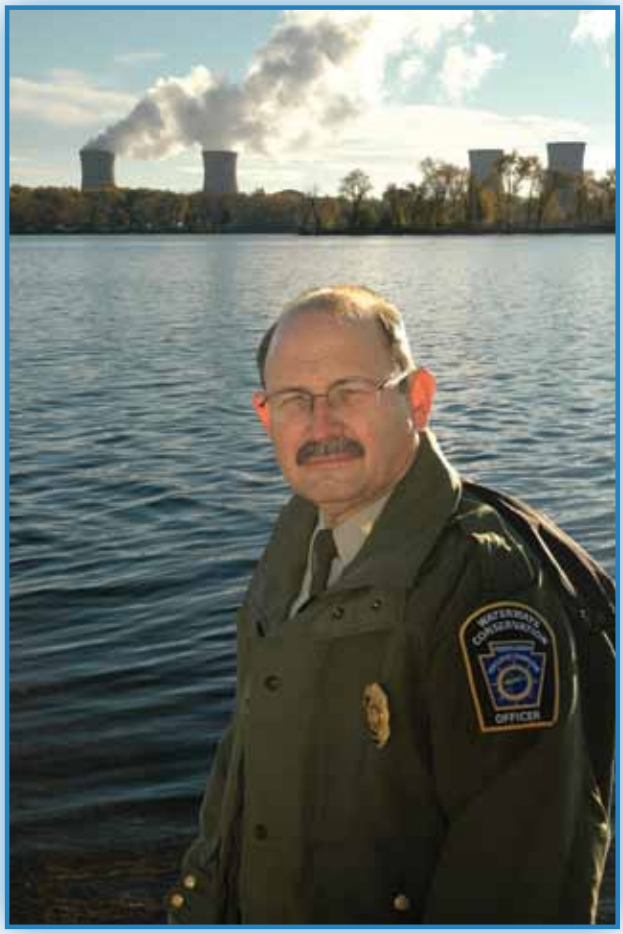


photo-Spring Gearhart

The second part of this story applies to the billions of gallons of water that is being borrowed by industry every day for industrial processes and is returned to our streams in a degraded condition. This has occurred for centuries in Pennsylvania and around our country. It is legal to do this and industries receive a permit called a National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit from DEP, which protects our water resources against pollution and allows degradation. Now, this may not seem like a big deal to some, but how would you feel if someone borrowed your car and then returned it with a dented fender? The car would still be functional, but it would be damaged. You would certainly expect the person who borrowed it to pay for the damage.

This is exactly what I expect industry to do for the water we allow them to use, but they degrade. Our streams, rivers and lakes are being taken advantage of, and we should demand just compensation. Some of this cost is currently being born by many of us when we pay our water bills. When this degraded water flows downstream and enters the pipe of a public water supply, the additional treatment that is necessary to treat the water to drinking water standards is passed on to the public that pays to drink it. I agree with my dad, and I will fight to find a way to get compensated for the damage being caused to our water resources. This is one of my ideas that I told you about to generate alternative funding for conservation programs and perhaps lower the cost of your fishing license, but I need your help. Speak out, and let your elected officials know that you are mad too and expect to be compensated for the damages I have discussed in this article. The fish are depending on it.

Your Director
><(John{(°>

"The law locks up the man or woman, who steals the goose from off the common; but the greater villain the law lets loose, who steals the commons from the goose."
Anonymous, 17th Century

PENNSYLVANIA FISH & BOAT COMMISSION
RESOURCE FIRST
PROTECT • CONSERVE • ENHANCE

The mission of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities.