

# Straight TALK

by John A. Arway

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Photo: Andrew L. Shires

## Opening Day

In April 1973, former Executive Director Ralph Abele wrote his Straight Talk column and titled it “Trout Madness.” The article discussed the Opening Day of trout season and compared it to the Opening Day of buck season here in Pennsylvania. I can still remember lying awake at night as a child thinking about the pressures of the following day where there would be a competition between my buddies and I over who would catch the most and biggest trout. The winner would earn bragging rights until the following year when we would do it all over again. There was just something special about the first day of trout season despite the fact that we would fish together for almost the next 364 days of the year. Well, for me, the opener is still special since I continue to get together with friends and fish for stocked trout with bait since the stream flows are typically high and water temperatures are cold. Furthermore, that’s how I grew up fishing for stocked trout. We now have two Opening Days.

I have since expanded my angling methods to include fishing with spinners, flies (wet, dry and nymphs) and tip-ups when the conditions require different techniques. I don’t harvest as many fish as I used to harvest (panfish don’t count), and based upon our surveys, neither do you. We are all changing and learning to appreciate the value of stocked trout much like many of us understand the value and beauty of wild trout. Ralph Abele’s article continued to explain the effort and expense it takes to get stocked trout from our hatcheries to your local streams, and that is still the case. However, in 1973, a fishing license cost \$5.20 compared to today’s \$22.70 (plus \$9.70 for a trout stamp). Then again, the costs of a loaf of bread or gallon of gasoline were much less too. The intent of Ralph’s article was a plea for public support for a fishing license increase. As I have previously told you, I

will do all that I can to find alternative funding, so I don’t have to ask our legislature to increase license fees. My point is that hatchery trout are expensive. Our fish production staff estimates that it costs \$2.73 to produce an adult trout, and we are now working on a cost to creel study that would reflect the actual agency costs to put a trout in your creel. Costs for staff salaries, electricity, transportation and many other expenses keep increasing, and we need to continue to adjust our programs to make sure that costs justify the benefits for the trout that we stock.

Now what about wild trout? Well, we all know that Mother Nature provides the hatchery that grows our wild trout resources and that our public investment is in our protection, management and restoration programs that we fund to help Mother Nature grow more wild trout. So, why do some believe that there is a competition between wild trout and stocked trout? In 1981, the agency passed a policy known as Operation Future, which shifted the mission of the agency from a recreation first philosophy to a resource first philosophy. Our current Board of Commissioners renewed that commitment in 2009. We have made tremendous progress over the last 30 years on how we deal with hatchery and stocked trout. I firmly believe that it is not an either/or question, but more about how we develop programs to sustain both. In a previous Straight Talk column called the “Right Track,” I discussed the fact that we have more fishable waters today than we have had in the last century. I now suggest that we have more opportunities and flexibility today than we ever have had before, and we need to work together to benefit both our stocked trout and wild trout fisheries. We have plenty of water for both.



*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.*

Your Director

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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "John Arway".