

# Straight TALK

by John A. Arway

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## Fish and Boats Don't Vote!

I have had a bumper sticker pinned to my office wall for almost 30 years that reads "I Fish and I Vote." When I moved to my new office in Harrisburg two years ago, it moved with me. It is a more relevant reminder to me as Executive Director than it was when I was a staff biologist fighting to protect the aquatic resources in our Commonwealth streams, lakes, rivers and wetlands. I now deal directly with the legislature both proactively on issues that the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) wants to pursue to fulfill our Resource First mission as well as reactively when a legislator needs something from us to answer a constituent complaint or fill an information request.

We have many champions in the Pennsylvania House and Senate who get it. By that, I mean that they understand that the quality of our aquatic resources and water reflects the quality of our life and society as a whole. You don't have to fish or boat to understand that concept. It is quite simple since we all need water to live and, as I explained in my "Highway Robbery" article (January/February 2011), our water belongs to all of the people of our Commonwealth. It is our duty as public servants working for state government to protect it. That also holds true for the fish that swim in those waters, the turtles and salamanders that live along our stream banks and wetlands, and the timber rattlesnakes that live on our mountaintops. They are your animals, and the government, which includes PFBC and other Executive Branch agencies, the Legislature and the Judicial Branch, has the trust and responsibility for protecting and managing those resources for you and our future generations.

However, some members of the legislature need to be reminded about our trustee responsibilities from time to time, since they are told stories about how our natural



Photo-Dave Putnam

resources are interfering with things that others want to do. Coal mining, oil and natural gas development, urbanization, water withdrawals and a variety of other activities have the potential to impact our natural resources. In fact, fish never win in these debates, and it is our job to make sure that we minimize how much they lose. You see, fish don't vote but depend upon us to defend their interests. The PFBC manages fish, fishing and boating, and our staff does a great job assessing our resources so that the laws and regulations that other branches of government pass can protect what we have left. Over twenty years ago, I was called into a legislator's office, because he had a complaint about a timber rattlesnake den standing in the way of a residual waste landfill. After he explained his case about why the timber rattlesnake was at fault for interfering with this landfill, I politely explained that the timber rattlesnakes' views were just the opposite since the landfill was encroaching upon their habitat and not the other way around. It is a matter of perspective.

I attended a Pittsburgh Safe Boating Council meeting last December and met Captain George Boyle who is Executive Director of a group called "Boaters are Voters." Well, anglers are voters too, and we must work together to defend the interests of fish and water, because we all know that fish and boats don't vote. We have over 850,000 licensed anglers and over 330,000 registered boaters who spend over \$3.4 billion dollars every year in our Commonwealth. What a tremendous voice we can use to make sure that those in positions of power understand our issues. Get to know your local state senator and representative, and make sure they understand the importance of clean water and the value of our aquatic resources. Who says fish and boats don't vote?

See you on the water.

Your Director

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

*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.*

