



# Straight TALK

by **John A. Arway**  
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## A New Year

I am entering my third year as your Director and would like to do a quick review of our accomplishments and the challenges that still lie ahead. In my very first "Straight Talk" column (Back to the Future, March/April 2010), I explained my priorities, which included 1.) finalizing a contract for our Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs), 2.) improving public and staff morale and 3.) securing funding to insure a future for our aquatic resources and our sports of fishing and boating. 1.) We finalized the contract for our WCOs just after my appointment. 2.) We began a Climate Assessment process to identify staff concerns and put together an improvement plan, which includes a Fishing and Boating Employee Appreciation Day. We also hosted legislative and public meetings around the Commonwealth in areas where we could talk one-on-one with individuals about local, regional and statewide concerns. 3.) We made the case for the need for additional funding for Marcellus



photo-PFBC archives

Natural Gas permit reviews with the General Assembly. The administration agreed by including us in Act 13 for \$1 million per year.

I also reorganized our agency into a structure, which will become more effective and efficient. This will depend upon our ability to follow a fiscal management strategy, where we spend no more than we earn. This may seem like a simple and reasonable strategy since most of us follow this model in our own personal lives. However, if we look back in time, we will find that our predecessors typically continued the same or greater rate of spending to keep up with the costs of inflation or increased spending to create new programs while continuing to fund existing programs. They would spend



photo: Spring Gearhart

Take part in the Commission's first Mentored Youth Trout Day on March 23, 2013.

down our savings account (reserve fund) anticipating that when we went broke, the legislature would come to our aid and increase the price of fishing licenses or boat registrations. I have promised you that I will not follow that model. I know that if we raise fees, we lose participation in our sports. We cannot let that happen since the very mission of our agency encourages the protection, conservation and enhancement of our aquatic resources, and we depend upon those resources to provide the very best fishing and boating opportunities that we can offer. That is our duty.

Therefore, we need to either spend less, which means doing less with less, or earn more by diversifying our funding base. My major objective moving forward is to identify and pursue sources of non-traditional funding for our programs. However, this will not occur overnight since we all know that positive change in paradigms takes time. While we are working on making our case for additional funding, we need to be prudent about how we budget and manage the funding we have. We have begun a process to look at all of our programs and identify what we can do to tighten the belt and live within our means. That means you may see some changes in the public services we provide. I believe that it is healthy to periodically evaluate what you do since there are always ways to do it better. These are tough times for all of us and other states are dealing with similar issues. I will continue to advocate for the water use and degradation fee that I discussed in my "Straight Talk" column (Highway Robbery, January/February 2011). We are identifying other possible funding opportunities, so stay tuned. Fishing and boating are big business in our Commonwealth since anglers and boaters spend over \$3.4 billion a year. However, these sales are

often taken for granted. We all need to continue to remind others about the importance of our business to the state's general economy.

I believe that we are at a crossroads for change and my job as your Director is to make sure that we take the right path, so we can continue to fulfill our mission for our benefit and that of future generations. Despite the challenges, I am optimistic about the road that lies ahead. Why? Well, we have been able to work with others over the past three years to build a foundation for a new and improved Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. We had major successes in the legislature in the past year, where five specific laws were passed or amended and signed by Governor Tom Corbett that improved the way we can do our business. These were the Marcellus Shale Impact Fee (Act 13), Multi-year licenses (SB 1049), Assault on an Officer (HB 1417), Title 30 amendments (SB 1402) and Unlawful Take and Lake Erie Permits (HB 2293). We plan to continue to work closely with the legislature and the Governor to find ways to secure funding and lower the cost of a fishing license to get more people fishing and boating.

Funding will be our top priority, and we will continue to look for innovative ways to reduce costs but grow fishing and boating in our Commonwealth. We will do this by reinvesting some of our funding in new marketing initiatives, so we can inform others about who we are and what we do to provide benefits that range far beyond what many perceive. Our challenge continues to be creating excitement in fishing, boating and conservation with opportunities like our Mentored Youth Trout Day that we will pilot in the southeast region on March 23, 2013. See page 57 for details. You will see additional new programs as we experiment with ideas, analyze our demographics and try to reach people that may want to try fishing or boating for the first time. A program that may work in Erie may not be well suited for Philadelphia, Pittsburgh or Scranton. Times are changing, and we need to change too. But, we must not forget about our roots. I am looking forward to a New Year filled with challenges and opportunities—how about you?

Hope to see you on the water.

Your Director,  
><(John{°>

**See Federal Funding In Jeopardy on page 58 for threats to funding.**



*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.*