

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission Report

John A. Arway, Executive Director

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Just Because Everyone Else Does It That Way, Should We?

House Resolution No. 40 (1945) directed “the Joint State Government Commission to make a thorough investigation of the Game Commission and the Fish Commission of the Commonwealth and of their manner of restocking the game and fish life and of the establishment of a closed season and to study and make a comparison of the conduct of similar commissions or departments in other states.”

The Joint Commission convened meetings and conferred with “.. the President of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs, and with representatives of the Southern, Southeastern, North Central, Southwestern, Northeastern, South Central, and North Western Divisions of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs. Letters and communications received from rod and gun clubs and other interested organizations were given consideration by the committee.”

As part of the study’s findings, conclusions and recommendations, it is reported that “It was the consensus of those appearing before the committee that the Fish Commission and the Game Commission should not be consolidated.”

The agency merger issue was studied again in 1962, 1972, 1987 and 2003.

The 1987 Senate Majority Policy Development and Research Office cautioned against merger and indicated that “a merger of Pennsylvania’s game and fish commissions may not yield any tangible benefits.”

Most recently, in 2003, the Legislative Budget and Finance Com-

mittee were directed by HR 15 to “explore a broad range of options with regard to how to structure our wildlife agencies to best manage the wildlife resources of this Commonwealth and to investigate funding options...”

Their report concluded that “a merger of the PFBC and PGC and the combined management of Pennsylvania fish and wildlife resources is clearly feasible.” Furthermore, they actually presented a proposed organizational structure that would save about \$5M/year in personnel costs.

The primary driving force behind this recommendation was that 49 other states and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manage their fish and wildlife in a combined agency format so why not change Pennsylvania?

I represent the PA Fish and Boat Commission at the national meeting of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) where the Directors of fish and wildlife agencies from all 50 states get together, compare notes at a national scale and make decisions about the nation’s fish and wildlife policies.

I am also on AFWA’s Executive Board. Although the 2003 report does acknowledge that “there is no doubt regarding the accomplishments and proud traditions of Pennsylvania’s separate Game and Fish and Boat Commissions”, it further explains that times have changed and we need to change with the times.

I do admit times have changed since the merger idea was first studied in 1945, but I believe in the old

axiom “If it ain’t broke, don’t try to fix it.”

The theories championed by our conservation heroes like Leopold, Muir, Pinchot, Roosevelt, Carson, Abele and Goddard have not changed with time and we continue to learn from their teachings even today.

I am proud to attend the national meetings with Carl Roe to my left and represent our Commonwealth in those national discussions. In fact, at my very first meeting, I observed that there were 51 seats at the Board of Director’s table and I affirmed that Pennsylvania was there to change the nation and not have the nation change us.

Many other state Directors would love for their home states to go back to the days of separate agencies since they realize that they would be more effective and yes, even more efficient in serving the interests of anglers, boaters, hunters, trappers and the fish and wildlife that benefit from our public service.

Our House Game and Fisheries Committee recently passed House Resolution 129 which again directs “the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to investigate the financial feasibility, impact, costs and savings potential of eliminating duplicated duties and services by combining the Pennsylvania Game Commission and the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to create a new independent agency responsible for managing the fish and wildlife resources of this Commonwealth.”

The study will conclude if merg-

er is a good or bad idea based upon some quantitative evaluation of a variety of factors. However, I submit that there is only one factor that will determine whether we retain our history and tradition that many of us proudly defend or yield to the changing of the guard and become one of them so that there are now only 50 seats at the national voting table. That one driving factor is the public will.

We saw the importance of the PFSC and the sportsmen's voices in 1945 and I can guarantee that the public will continues to be the driving force for the political will.

Our Board of Commissioners and their predecessors have been steadfast in their resolve to protect our agency's independence. They have now taken formal positions on possible merger of the Commission with other agencies on at least four occasions: March 1972, July 1988, April 2003, and recently at

their April 2013 meeting. At the meeting this past April, the Board unanimously passed the following resolution leaving no doubt about our position on the topic:

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's independent status is critical to fulfilling its unique mission. Its independence provides the flexibility to act upon the substantial challenges and opportunities it faces. The Board of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission opposes any action that will threaten or compromise the agency's independence.

I am in full support of the Board in our defense of our agency's independent status and firmly believe, as many of you do who previously testified in 2003 in opposition to the merger, that "Pennsylvania's separate commissions make the state the envy of the nation".

Your Director,
>>(John{(°>

PFBC



Saturday, March 30, marked more than the opening day of trout in 18 southeastern counties. It was also the reopening of Opossum Lake, Cumberland County. An opening ceremony was held at the main pavilion with a ceremonial cast at 8:00 a.m. Participating in the ceremonial cast were PFBC Executive Director John A. Arway; State Representative Stephen Bloom; PFBC Commissioner G. Warren Elliott; Cumberland County Commissioner Barbara Cross; State Senator Richard Alloway; Stephanie Williams, Cumberland County Greenway & Open Space Coordinator; and Edward Franco, Friends of Opossum Lake Conservancy President.

Photo-Spring Gearhart

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**To All Those Who
Continue to Support
PFSC
Through Donations
& Membership!**

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Roy Kenneth Hess

**Daisytown Sportsmen's Club
\$165 to Legal Fund
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\$4000**

**PFBC Sets 2013 Daily Creel
Limits for Lake Erie Yellow
Perch and Walleye**

HARRISBURG, Pa. (April 4) – The PFBC today announced that the 2013 creel limit for Lake Erie yellow perch will remain at 30 per day and the creel limit for walleye will stay at six per day.

“This year’s assessment showed that both yellow perch and walleye populations remain stable,” said Chuck Murray, the PFBC’s Lake Erie biologist. “Based on this, the creel limits are being held at the 2012 limits.”

The PFBC adopted a new regulation last year which established adaptive creel limits for walleye and yellow perch based on the annual quotas established by the Lake Erie Committee, which consists of fisheries managers from Pa., Ohio, N.Y., Mich., and Ontario, Canada.

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