

Straight TALK

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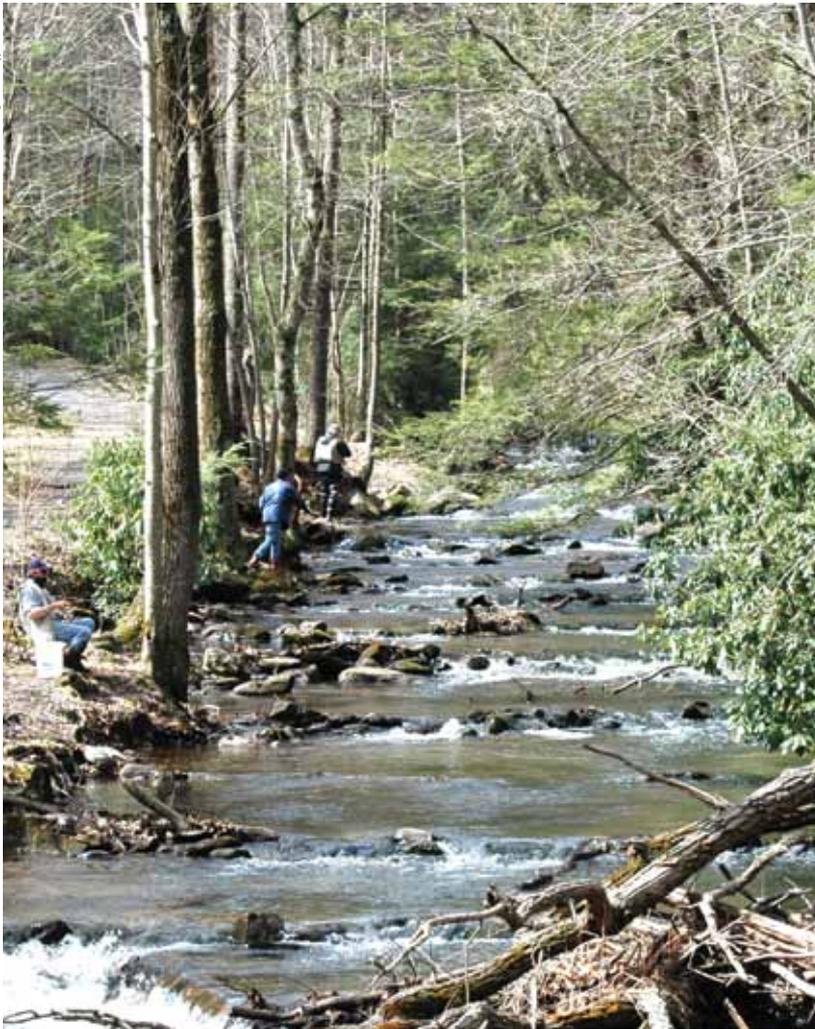


One of the major backlashes of our decision to save money to pay our pension and medical bills is the General Assembly's renewed interest in studying the idea to merge our agency with the Pennsylvania Game Commission.

Backlash

When I was a child, I grew up fishing off a small boat dock on Cranberry Glade Lake, Somerset County. Life seemed complicated at the time, because I had to make decisions about what to do every day to keep occupied until my Aunt Annie would call me back to camp for lunch and dinner. There were so many choices including bluegill fishing, launching the rowboat on the lake to set jugs to catch snapping turtles or taking a hike to the back lakes to explore the hills and valleys and the critters that lived in them. On many days, my friends and I would stretch out in a field somewhere and watch the sky to see what animals or shapes the clouds resembled. Those were complicated times compared to today. However, there is one commonality between the past, present and future. Our day still provides only 24 hours to make our daily decisions. And, we must remember that it is our decision how we use this time to do the things that are important to us.

Some of my time on that dock, probably hundreds of hours in total, was spent untangling backlashes on my casting reel, which was spooled with black cotton-braided line that was mounted on a steel fishing pole. Tied to the end of the line were a size 8 hook baited with a red worm and a fluorescent orange wooden egg bobber. That was my weapon of choice to outwit the wily bluegill, which was my primary target. The backlashes that commonly occurred when I was young were the result of poor casting, and they taught me a number of important lessons that have followed me through life. One is never give up. I can honestly say that I was always able to overcome the tangled line by staying persistent and focusing on my mission—to get back to fishing as quickly as possible. I admit that there were times when I became frustrated and instead of walking back to camp, I would break out my penknife and cut the line to undo the mess.



Mauch Chunk Creek, Carbon County

Then, I would mend the line by tying a couple of overhand knots, the only knot I knew how to tie at the time, and trim the knot, so it would not catch on the rod guides the next time I casted. The lessons that I learned early in life still help me with my decisions today.

My last two "Straight Talk" articles dealt with fiscal challenges and opportunities. These are the challenges that I face sitting on my small dock in Harrisburg. The challenges are real; the opportunities are possibilities but not certainties. Much like that cotton-braided line on my casting reel, things often get tangled here in the state's capital city. One of the major backlashes of our decision to save money to pay our pension and medical bills is the General Assembly's renewed interest in studying the idea to merge our agency with the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC). On May 13, the House of Representatives adopted a

resolution directing the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee to study the idea again and report its findings within 180 days. This isn't a new concept but tends to surface as a cost savings idea every time inflation catches up to us. Fortunately, every time that this merger idea has been studied, both inside and outside of government, it has been found to be a bad idea.

The reason that those conclusions have been consistent and similar over our history is because the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) and the PGC are responsible agencies that do a good job in fulfilling our missions and living within our means by balancing our budgets every year. Instead of the criticism, we should be looked at as the model for government service. How many agencies do you see that are preparing for a crisis that will occur in four years?

Our Board of Commissioners and their predecessors have been steadfast in their resolve to protect the 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 at their April 2013 meeting a few months ago. At the meeting this past April, the Board unanimously passed the following resolution, leaving no doubt about our position on the topic.

"The PFBC'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 PFBC opposes any action that will threaten or compromise the agency's independence."

Just like I never gave up as a child on untangling my line so I could keep fishing, it is not the time to give up on Pennsylvania's unique and time-tested model of separate and independent Game and Fish & Boat Commissions.

Your Director,

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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.