

# Straight TALK

by *John A. Arway*

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## Fish Taste Best



photo-Executive Director John A. Arway

**Fish Taste Best...**when they swim three times, in water, in butter and in wine. Although I would like to take personal credit for this saying, I cannot since it is an old Polish proverb that

I found while searching the Web one day. It is actually my favorite proverb, and I have used it for over 20 years in presentations that I have given on fish and fishing. Since my family is not of Polish descent, I must give credit to the ancestors of some of my friends and fishing buddies like Greg Grabowicz, Big Ed Wierzbowski, Greg Grabowski, Don Benczkowski, the late Stan Wiesniewski and many others. The proverb tells me that fish and fishing can be enjoyed in a number of different ways. We all know, and the research supports, that the primary reason we go fishing is to relax and spend time with family and friends in the great outdoors. However, we also go to great effort and spend a lot of money to assemble our gear, catch our bait, buy our lures and tie our flies to feel the tug of a fish at the end of our line. Anglers and boaters spend \$3.4 billion a year in Pennsylvania.

If we are successful and are fortunate to catch a trophy walleye or brown trout or perhaps a stringer of panfish, we are then faced with the question about what to do with our catch. Our current research shows that more of us are practicing catch and release, whether with wild trout, stocked trout or trophy walleye, bass or muskies. The Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) staff angler use and harvest surveys conducted in 2005 and 2006 on wild trout (April 17 through September 3) and stocked trout streams (first 8 weeks) throughout the Commonwealth showed that anglers released 92.7 percent of the wild trout and 60.1 percent of the stocked trout



photo-Michael Webb

that they caught. Unfortunately, we don't have similar data from the past, but I can personally testify that it was extremely rare to see an angler release a stocked trout or even a wild trout when I was young. I know I have changed my personal harvest preference from trout to panfish, because my family and I prefer the crispy fillets of freshly caught perch, crappies and bluegills over trout since panfish are prolific and can often reproduce two or three times in the same year. No PFBC stocking program is necessary, and the harvest of panfish is often needed to keep a fishery in balance. Panfish are truly a renewable resource. However, my family also enjoys an occasional trout dinner too.

Many of us in the Baby Boomer Generation (1946 to 1964) were taught how to fish by family members and friends who grew up in the Great Depression. Our mentors were members of the Greatest Generation or G.I. generation (1900 to 1924) and the Silent Generation (1925 to 1942) and had to consume everything from the pig but the squeal. However, our current generations (X, Y and Z) are now accustomed to buying their fish from the glass case in a grocery store.

Another change that has occurred with time is that after landing a fish, we can snap a photo and paste it immediately to Facebook or Twitter to share with family and friends who aren't lucky enough to be with us at that moment in time. We can also take some basic length, weight and girth measurements and send along with our photo and take these to a taxidermist who can then create a replica of our catch that looks exactly like the fish we released to swim again.



photo-Carl Haensel

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This change in the practice of catch and release got me thinking about how many trout we are now recycling or re-stocking back into our streams and lakes. I did some quick math and found that if 30 percent of the 3.2 million trout that are stocked are harvested and 70 percent of the stocked trout are caught and released two times each in a season, this would amount to an angler re-stocking program of 3.8 million trout every year. Does it really matter if the PFBC or the angler does the stocking? The same trout then become available to be caught again. If we could compare these numbers to when harvest was greater than catch and release rates and licensed anglers numbered over 1.2 million (850,000 today), we would most likely find that there are more trout per licensed angler available today than perhaps any time in our history. Think about it, and let me know if you agree.

Your Director,  
><(John{(<



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.

2013 Fishing License & Permit Types	
As of June 30, 2013	Units Sold
1-Day Resident	933
1-Day Tourist	1,737
3-Day Tourist	11,716
3-Year Non-Resident	550
3-Year Resident	19,330
3-Year Senior	382
5-Year Non-Resident	148
5-Year Resident	10,239
5-Year Senior	70
7-Day Tourist	3,223
PA Resident National Guard/Reserve	388
Senior Lifetime	14,642
Non-Resident	32,692
Resident	634,939
Senior Resident	15,143
3-Year Combination Lake Erie & Trout/Salmon Stamp Permit	3,744
3-Year Lake Erie Permit	197
3-Year Trout/Salmon Stamp Permit	13,026
5-Year Combination Lake Erie & Trout/Salmon Stamp Permit	2,608
5-Year Lake Erie Permit	87
5-Year Trout/Salmon Stamp Permit	6,483
Combination Lake Erie & Trout/Salmon Stamp Permit	73,906
Lake Erie Permit	10,315
Trout/Salmon Stamp Permit	452,450
<b>Total Licenses &amp; Permits</b>	<b>1,308,948</b>



photo-Jeff Decker

PFBC volunteers stock trout in Stony Creek, Dauphin County.