

Straight TALK

by *John A. Arway*

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S.O.S.

You have probably seen the image of this Smallmouth Bass by now since it went viral soon after I discussed it at our Board of Commissioner's meeting in May. In November 2014, I was Smallmouth Bass fishing with a friend on Election Day when he caught this fish with a cancerous tumor. I have always believed that there are reasons to explain most things that happen in life and can only attribute my witness to this event as fate. When the fish surfaced, we were both amazed at its appearance and thought it was a sucker since the tumored jaw closely resembled the terminal mouth of many sucker species that live in the river. When we realized that it was a Smallmouth Bass with a tumor on its lower jaw, I was quickly reminded of my sense of responsibility (*Pennsylvania Angler & Boater*, May/June 2010, "Straight Talk") as Director. I knew immediately that we had to get the fish to trained fish pathologists who could provide us with a diagnosis.

The story was reported by most of the major media outlets and reminded me that the river is calling for our help with yet another sign of abnormality. Lesions and sores on young-of-year bass continue to appear annually in our collections since 2005, blotchy bass syndrome appearing and now spreading throughout the basin, high rates of intersex in bass caused by exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals (EDCs) coming from sewage treatment plant outfalls and other anthropogenic sources, unprecedented algae blooms fueled by dissolved phosphorus, and low dissolved oxygen and high pH conditions exceeding protection limits for warmwater fish.

We assembled a team of scientists from a variety of state and federal agencies as well as academic institutions to analyze the data that we collected with an Environmental Protection Agency tool called CADDIS (Causal Analysis/Diagnosis Decision Information System). These results will be reported to the Pennsylvania Department of Protection (PA DEP) in September. PA DEP staff will use this information to make a decision about whether the river is sick (impaired) or not sometime in early 2016.

I have been a staunch advocate for fish my entire career. First, as a fisheries biologist reviewing permit applications and investigating pollutions, and now, as Director taking on public policy issues that address our public rights for clean air, pure



photo- PFBC Executive Director John A. Arway

This Smallmouth Bass was confirmed to have a malignant tumor. The fish was caught in the Susquehanna River near Duncannon, Dauphin County, on November 3, 2014.

water and the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of our environment guaranteed to all of us by our state Constitution. When I took my oath of office, I welcomed my professional responsibility to uphold the Constitution and fulfill my duty as trustee of our public natural resources and to conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people. They are, after all, the common property of all the people including generations yet to come. As an advocate for the Smallmouth Bass that continue to be impacted by a variety of environmental stressors, I thought that, as an agency, we did all that we could do when our Board enacted the catch and release regulations and closed bass season from May 1 through June 12 to protect the adult bass and their developing fry. I was wrong.

We can and should do more as the agency responsible for "protecting, conserving and enhancing our Commonwealth's aquatic resources and providing fishing and boating opportunities." So, what more can we do? Bass season has just begun, and we have kicked off our Save Our Susquehanna (SOS) campaign. The campaign asks all Pennsylvanians to buy a fishing license to help begin fixing the river's problems. Fishing licenses have always been regarded as the way to purchase the privilege to fish. However, license dollars are used for much more than just providing recreational opportunities.

We use license dollars for everything we do. Our Waterways Conservation Officers patrol our streams and rivers to find water pollution and arrest polluters, our staff scientists review thousands of permit applications and conduct stream and river surveys, and we monitor reptiles and amphibians that live on land and water

The purchase of an Alternate "S.O.S." - Save Our Susquehanna Fishing License Button is available to anglers who possess a valid Pennsylvania fishing license. All proceeds help fund the campaign. See page 41 for details.



since they are excellent indicators of our environmental health. All of this work comes at a cost, and we have been able to balance our revenues with our expenses, so we can provide all of these public services to meet the expectations defined by the Constitution. I am proud to say that we do this better than any other state fish and wildlife agency in the country according to an analysis conducted by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (Legislative Budget and Finance Committee, January 2014. An Update on the Feasibility of a Combined Fish and Wildlife Commission for Pennsylvania, Conducted Pursuant to HR 2013-129).

The appearance of a single tumor on a Smallmouth Bass has taken this story from a fishing and science story to a public interest story. You can imagine the questions that were being posed on discussion boards all across the country about what caused this tumor to occur and what other problems, both aquatic and human



photo-Geoff Smith

Since 2005, lesions and sores on young-of-year bass continue to appear annually in our collections.



photo-Dr. William Vingling

Blotchy bass syndrome is appearing and spreading throughout the Susquehanna River Basin.

health, it may indicate?

We need you, your friends, family and others who care about fixing our river to help us begin taking action. If you encourage others who don't fish to buy a Pennsylvania fishing license, I promise to invest these funds in programs designed to reduce pollution in the impacted zone of the Susquehanna River. If you live in Maryland, buy a Pennsylvania fishing license to help the Chesapeake Bay. The more licenses we sell, the more work we can do. Whether we plant one tree in a riparian buffer on a farm, fence one cow out of a small tributary stream, work with physicians and hospitals to collect and properly dispose of pharmaceutical chemicals or team up with college and university scientists to work with farmers in the basin to test their soils before applying manure; one cow, one tree, one bottle of drugs, one farm with a nutrient management plan are all actions that we can begin taking to help the bass.

I'll finish with a quote from "The Lorax" by Dr. Seuss. I encourage you to read it with a child, and pay close attention to the message that the Lorax leaves to Once-ler inscribed on the rock at the end of the story. The word is 'unless' and the meaning is "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

Hope to see you on the water.

Your Director,
><(John){(°)

A handwritten signature in green ink that reads "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.



photo-Geoff Smith

Unprecedented algae blooms fueled by dissolved phosphorus create low dissolved oxygen and high pH conditions in the Susquehanna River and its tributaries.

Get questions answered.
Share your ideas.



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