

# Straight TALK

by **John A. Arway**

Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

## Wild Trout

Pennsylvania is a trout state. It is our heritage and motivated 68 percent of our 866,166 licensed anglers to buy a Trout Stamp to fish for trout in 2016. The importance of protecting our wild trout first became evident when our predecessors called for a convention to be held in Harrisburg in 1866 to discuss the degradation being caused by the indiscriminant logging of our forests that was filling in our mountain lakes and streams with sediment. The soils from our land were no longer protected by Penns Woods and the sediment was killing our trout in Penns Waters. The legislature and the administration knew something had to be done to protect our native Brook Trout, so they created the Pennsylvania Fish Commission (PFC). Governor Andrew Curtin signed the law, Act of March 30, 1866 (P.L. 370, No. 336), and hired James Worrall as Pennsylvania's first Commissioner of Fisheries. I cannot imagine the challenges and frustrations Mr. Worrall faced since he was literally a one-man operation with no staff and a limited budget provided by the general fund. Although the PFC is the second oldest fish or wildlife agency in the nation (New Hampshire Fish and Game Commission was created in 1855), a conservation movement was underway, organized by our nation's hunters and anglers in the mid-19th century. It began in the Northeast and spread quickly across the country. Principles of this movement are now known as the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation having two basic principles: fish and wildlife are for the non-commercial use of citizens; and fish and wildlife should be managed such that they are sustained at optimum population levels forever.<sup>1</sup>

Let's fast forward to the present and discuss some of the things that have changed and some of the things that have not. The Commission began selling fishing licenses

***"There can be no greater issue than that of conservation in this country."***  
- Theodore Roosevelt



Photo: Terry Malloy

*Pennsylvania's State Fish, Brook Trout (Salvelinus fontinalis)*

in 1919 and licensing boats in 1931. These actions provided the necessary funds for the Commission to become self-sufficient as an independent administrative commission of state government. By using angler and boater funds, not general fund revenues, to fulfill the mission, the Commission became better able to meet the expectations of Pennsylvania's anglers and boaters.

Pennsylvania has over 86,000 miles of streams and rivers, second only to the state of Alaska.<sup>2</sup> Given that the mapping that the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP) uses to identify streams is only at 1:24,000 scale, it is likely that we have well over 100,000 miles of flowing water. What a tremendous resource for PFBC to protect, manage and conserve. Just thinking about the fishing opportunities that our streams and rivers offer makes me want to go fishing.

I began this article discussing wild trout and obviously wild trout streams are just a subset of all of our streams. Our wild trout streams support native Brook Trout or naturalized populations of Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout. Commission staff have been diligent in efforts to assess and inventory our wild trout waters. We developed a classification system in the 1980s as part of OPERATION FUTURE to rank streams based upon trout biomass (weight of fish per area of stream) that PA DEP now uses to regulate and protect them. For example, if the Commission designates a stream as a Class A Wild Trout Stream and PA DEP accepts Commission data, then PA DEP is required by regulation to protect the water quality of that stream as a High-Quality Coldwater Fishery. This means that anyone who applies for a permit to degrade the stream must comply with the regulatory standards to insure that the wild trout are protected. Fortunately, our Commonwealth recognizes that our Class A wild trout streams, the best of our best, deserve this special regulatory protection. In addition, the wetlands in or along the floodplains of all of our wild trout streams are protected as Exceptional Value (EV) wetlands. EV wetlands can't be disturbed because of their value in storing and gradually releasing water to streams in order to maintain base flows to protect the survival and maintain wild trout populations through periods of floods and droughts.

Now that we have protection criteria in place, the current challenge is to identify how many of our 86,000 miles of streams

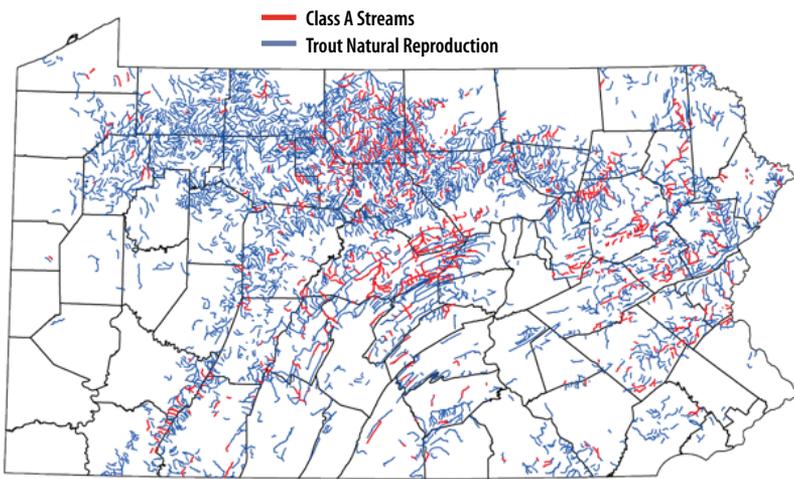


Figure 1. Map of Pennsylvania's Wild Trout Streams and Class A Wild Trout Streams as of 2015.

support wild trout. We can't protect or manage what we don't know. Although our biologists have been surveying wild trout streams for well over 50 years, we picked up the pace when we began our Unassessed Waters Initiative in 2010. Our staff have trained a variety of partners in our survey methods who continue to assist us with our efforts in identifying wild trout streams. Together, we have made significant progress but much work remains to be done. Since 2010, over 5,000 streams (12,793 miles) have been sampled and 1,134 new stream sections (4,262 miles) have been added to the wild trout stream list. In total, Commission staff and partners have identified over 4,295 wild trout stream sections (14,412 miles), which include 713 (1,958 miles) of Class A wild trout stream sections (Figure 1). When all upstream tributary waters are added to this total, 34,170 miles of streams are

designated by PFBC and protected by PA DEP as wild trout streams. When considering the number and quality of Pennsylvania's wild trout resources when compared to other states from around the nation, as shown in Table 1, it is easy to see that Pennsylvania truly deserves to be recognized as a destination state for wild trout fishing.

We often hear wild trout advocates say that we don't do enough for wild trout in Pennsylvania and need to do more. We fully recognize the importance of wild trout not only as a barometer of clean water but as a Commonwealth asset. Our Board of Commissioners, under the leadership of former President William R. Worobec, recognizes as set forth in their Policy Manual that "Resource First is a philosophy that describes the first priority of the Commission's mission..." and "the Commonwealth's aquatic resources are the valuable collateral that secures all fishing and boating activities." Wild trout streams are a critical component of that collateral.

The 3.2 million stocked trout produced at eight state fish hatcheries generate approximately \$500 million in economic activity each year. According to Greene et al. 2005, an estimated total of 80,098 angler trips, contributing over \$16 million to Pennsylvania's economy, were made on Pennsylvania's wild trout streams during the regular trout season in 2004<sup>3</sup>.

As we learn more about our wild trout assets, I believe it is time to come together and discuss the future of wild trout protection, management and conservation. Therefore, I have asked our Bureau of Fisheries staff to begin

Table 1. Trout per Mile

Water	Trout Species	# Adults/Mile	# Age 1+ Fish/Acre
Spring Creek (PA)	Brown	4,503	760
Monocacy Creek (PA)	Brown	3,230	647
Little Juniata River (PA)	Brown	3,036	327
Little Lehigh Creek (PA)	Brown	2,517	499
Fishing Creek (PA)	Brown	1,739	336
Penns Creek (PA)	Brown	1,315	112
Big Spring Creek (PA)	Brook and Rainbow	955	168
Bushkill Creek (PA)	Brown	493	74
Missouri River (MT)	Brown and Rainbow	5,939	
Bighorn River (MT)	Brown and Rainbow	4,200	
Middle Fork Powder River (WY)	Brown and Rainbow	4,000*	
Gunnison River (CO)	Brown and Rainbow	2,934	
Colorado River (CO)	Brown and Rainbow	2,725	
Missouri River (MT)	Brown and Rainbow	2,707	
Gunnison River (CO)	Brown and Rainbow	2,704	
Gunpowder Falls Tailwaters (MD)	Brown	2,038	
Upper North Platte River (WY)	Brown and Rainbow	2,000*	
South Platte River (CO)	Brown and Rainbow	1,486	
Arkansas River (CO)	Rainbow	1,300	
Savage River (MD)	Brook and Brown	1,000	
Au Sable River (MI)	Brown and Rainbow		230
Manistee River (MI)	Brown		226
Henrys Fork River (ID)	All species		202
Silver Creek (ID)	All species		162
Big Wood River (ID)	All species		121
North Fork Boise River (ID)	All species		40

\* may include all ages of fish



Commissioner Eric C. Hussar with a wild Brown Trout from Penns Creek, Centre, Mifflin, Snyder and Union counties.

planning a Wild Trout Summit for 2017 where we can focus on wild trout issues much like our forefathers did in 1866. Our streams continue to adapt to the legacy sediments that remain deposited from the uncontrolled erosion in the early 19th century. These remain difficult challenges, but we have made steady progress since we have more waters to fish today than when I was a child.

I hope to see you at the Summit.

Your Director,  
><(John{(°>

- <sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North\\_American\\_Model\\_of\\_Wildlife\\_Conservation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_American_Model_of_Wildlife_Conservation)
- <sup>2</sup> 2016 Draft PA DEP Pennsylvania Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report
- <sup>3</sup> Greene R., R. Weber, R. Carline, D. Diefenbach, M. Shields, M. Kaufmann, R. Moase and B. Hollender. 2005. Angler Use, Harvest and Economic Assessment on Wild Trout Streams in Pennsylvania, PFBC Open File Report.



*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.*

## 2017 MENTORED YOUTH TROUT DAYS

### March 25 (regional) and April 8 (statewide)

Take part in the Commission's Mentored Youth Trout Days. Youth under the age of 16 can join a mentor (adult) angler who has a current fishing license and trout permit to fish on Saturday, March 25, on stocked trout waters within the 18 southeastern regional counties for regional trout season and to fish stocked trout waters in the other counties on Saturday, April 8. Youth (less than 16 years



of age) must obtain a Mentored Youth Fishing Permit or Voluntary Youth Fishing License from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission. Youth are permitted to keep 2 trout, 7 inches or larger on these dates, while mentors (adults) must practice catch and release.

<http://fishandboat.com/MentoredYouth.htm>



## 2017 TROUT SEASON • 2 OPENING DAYS

### April 1 (18 Southeastern Counties) and April 15 (Regular Opening Day for Trout Statewide)



To obtain Mentored Youth Trout Days permits, Voluntary Youth Fishing Licenses and other fishing licenses online:

[www.GoneFishingPa.com](http://www.GoneFishingPa.com)

**Archive of  
Straight Talk articles**

**CLICK HERE**