

# Straight TALK

by John A. Arway

Executive Director  
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

## First Catch

There are times when we get so distracted by life that we forget about the very roots of our own childhood. I recently reviewed the number of Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) Angler Award applications for First Fish catches for the past two years and discovered that trout (Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout, Brook Trout, golden rainbow trout and steelhead) accounted for 58 percent (53 out of 91) of First Fish certificates presented by PFBC for first catches. Then, I started thinking about why I got hooked on fishing as a child. My first fish was a Bluegill caught from a small, wooden boat dock at Cranberry Glade Lake, Somerset County. I was using a telescoping steel baitcasting rod equipped with a Shakespeare baitcasting reel spooled with black cotton-braided fishing line. It was connected to a wooden fluorescent orange egg bobber tied to a number 8 baitholder hook holding a small redworm, which was grown and cultured in the compost pile next to our cabin. Although I was only 4-years-old when I caught my first fish, I distinctly remember that setup since I used it for the next 10 years to catch sunfish, Black Crappies, Yellow Perch and Largemouth Bass. I have created many memories with family and friends over the years, keeping me an avid angler today. I am not one of the majority of anglers who come and go from the sport of fishing because of the competing demands for my time. I fish because it is part of me. It is a way of life and not something that I can turn on and off depending on how I feel or because I am distracted by other things that prove to be more exciting to others who try to get me to stray. Think golf!

Thinking back to my first catch and the information in PFBC's First Fish table on page 5, I began to wonder if society changed, because the focus of many Pennsylvania anglers seems to be solely on trout and not any other species of fish. I was advised by staff that the information in the table only accounts for applications that are mailed to PFBC to request an official certificate and does not account for certificates issued at field events. I do note that there are many other species of fish in the table that were someone's prized first catch. There are many special events held across Pennsylvania during the spring trout season ranging from kid's fishing derbies to fishing clinics to PFBC's own family fishing events. Some focus on trout, but many others focus on other species of fish when trout are not



photos-courtesy of PFBC Executive Director John A. Arway



*I have created many memories with family and friends over the years, keeping me an avid angler today.*

biting. In fact, PFBC recently sponsored Mentored Youth catfish days in both Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

In 2016 and 2017, over 7,000 people attended the 204 Family Fishing Programs that PFBC hosted at various locations across Pennsylvania. For the first six months in 2018, over 1,500 people attended 46 programs and staff estimate that over 325 First Fish certificates were issued. Most importantly, 67 percent of those certificates were for more common warmwater species like Bluegills, Pumpkinseeds or other species of panfish, which are easy

## PFBC's First Fish

Water	2016	2017	Total (2016 & 2017)
Bass, Largemouth	1	1	2
Bass, Rock	0	1	1
Bass, Smallmouth	2	1	3
Bass, Striped	0	0	0
Bass, White	1	0	1
Bluegill	7	12	19
Carp	0	0	0
Catfish, Bullhead & White	0	0	0
Catfish, Channel	0	3	3
Catfish, Flathead	0	1	1
Crappie	1	0	1
Freshwater Drum	0	0	0
Muskellunge	0	0	0
Perch, White	0	0	0
Perch, Yellow	1	3	4
Pickereel, Chain	0	0	0
Pike, Northern	0	0	0
Sauger	0	0	0
Shad	0	0	0
Suckers	1	1	2
Trout, Brook	4	4	8
Trout, Brown	2	2	4
Trout, Lake	0	0	0
Trout, Golden	1	1	2
Trout, Rainbow	22	13	35
Trout, Steelhead	3	1	4
Walleye	0	1	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>91</b>

Boating & Fishing Foundation (RBFF), BoatU.S. Foundation, The Rest of PA, Bass Pro Shops and Cabela's. Pennsylvania is home to the United States fifth largest city by population, Philadelphia, at more than 1.5 million people—some of whom want to catch their first fish. The mighty Delaware and Schuylkill rivers bisect the City and offer tremendous fishing opportunities. Additionally, the Philadelphia suburbs contain many ponds, lakes and reservoirs with unlimited first catches. Add in the annual wild trout fishing opportunities in Valley Creek, Chester County, which is surrounded by Valley Forge National Historical Park and the spring stocked trout fishing opportunities offered by Wissahickon Creek, Pennypack Creek, Perkiomen Creek, Unami Creek, Skippack Creek, Manatawny Creek and many other regional streams and lakes, it seems like the perfect urban setting for an experiment to get more people fishing.

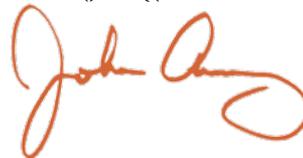
This is an example of the type of excitement we are attempting to create in both Pennsylvania and across the nation as part of RBFF's 60 in 60 campaign. The campaign challenges states to increase participation in fishing to 60 million anglers in 60 months. The clock started for the campaign in 2016 when national participation in fishing was estimated at 35.8 million people (2016 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting & Wildlife-Associated Recreation, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and United States Census Bureau). Each state was challenged to increase participation to reach the national goal using a variety of innovative Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) techniques. Pennsylvania's assigned targeted goal was 39,833 anglers. RBFF actually developed a toolkit for states to use to recruit new anglers, reactivate dormant ones and retain existing ones. States are working together to attempt to understand the problem and develop solutions to reach 60 in 60.

Given the bounty of waters that lie within and around the perimeter of Philadelphia, PFBC staff have worked with our partners in creating the Gaun First Catch Center, which is a mobile platform (vans, trailers and a boat) designed to travel inside and outside of the city to waters that provide the greatest potential for future anglers to experience their first catch.

Will it work? We don't know, but we are certainly going to try to change the trends, get more people fishing in Pennsylvania and meet our goal of participants by 2021!

Your Director,

><(John{°>



to find, catch and do not require the support and expense of a stocking program since they reproduce naturally in ponds, lakes and reservoirs all across Pennsylvania.

Given that Pennsylvania has 86,000 miles of streams and nearly 4,000 lakes, ponds and reservoirs, which support tremendous opportunities for someone to catch their first fish, we developed an idea in partnership with the Recreational



*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.*

**Get questions answered.  
Share your ideas.**



**Archive of  
Straight Talk articles**

**CLICK HERE**