

**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Executive Director's Report
October 1, 2023, to December 31, 2023**

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) strategic plan contains strategic priorities involving workforce, access, engagement, non-game species and habitat, infrastructure, and sport fish and habitat. This quarterly report provides examples of the PFBC's progress toward those priorities from October 1, 2023, through December 31, 2023.

WORKFORCE

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO), Harassment and Discrimination Training

To ensure a welcoming workplace environment that allows the PFBC to attract and retain highly qualified staff and volunteers, the PFBC's Chief Counsel and Human Resources staff developed and delivered EEO, Harassment, and Discrimination training to staff in Erie, Harrisburg, and Bellefonte. Approximately 330 employees were trained in this round of training.

ACCESS

Boating Facilities Grant (BFG) Program

- White Mills Access, Wayne County – Wayne County completed this facility on the Lackawaxen River to increase access and further support the designation as an official water trail.
- Riverfront Park Access, Lackawanna County – Dickson City Borough completed this facility on the Lackawaxen River in Lackawanna County. The facility is the first boat access in the mid-valley section of the river. This access also provides improved and enhanced access to fishing opportunities.

Erie Access Improvement Program

- Avonia Beach, Fairview Township, Erie County – Fairview Township partnered with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Coastal Zone Management Program, the Lake Erie Region Conservancy, and the SONS of Lake Erie to complete a revetment system to protect the shoreline and bluff area at Avonia Beach.

Access Improvements

The PFBC received dirt and gravel road grant monies through the Washington County Conservation District to perform drainage and surface maintenance at the Dutch Fork Lake Access area. New stone surface was placed and graded on the existing parking area, ditches along the access road to the ramp and parking area were re-established, and failed corrugated metal pipes were replaced with inlet and outlet treatments.

ENGAGEMENT

Summer Marketing Campaign

An internal analysis of a summer marketing campaign aimed at driving traffic to the PFBC's new microsite to recruit new customers to fishing and paddling showed positive results. The campaign elicited nearly eight million impressions to audiences' digital platforms.

Lake Erie Boat Angler Survey

A total of 525 interviews of anglers who fished Lake Erie using boats were conducted from May 1 through October 31, 2023. The information provided by cooperative anglers and counts of launching and landing boats was used to estimate effort, catch, harvest, angler success, and catch and harvest rates. Most of the open lake boat effort was directed at walleye (87%), followed by smallmouth bass (8%), lake trout (2%), yellow perch (1%), and steelhead (1%). Complete findings from the survey will be included in the 2023 Lake Erie annual report.

NON-GAME SPECIES AND HABITAT

Cussewago Creek Dam Removal

The Cussewago Dam on Cussewago Creek, Crawford County, was removed in October 2023 with the help of a broad partner network including French Creek Valley Conservancy, American Rivers, the PFBC, DEP, and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Using surveys completed during the planning phase, PFBC staff developed avoidance and minimization measures that were incorporated into the project's permit to limit the impacts to listed species. Furthermore, to assess the effectiveness of the dam removal, fish and mussel surveys were conducted upstream and downstream of the dam to document the current status of the aquatic community. With help from the local community, PFBC staff also led multiple mussel salvage efforts from 2021 to 2023. These efforts resulted in the relocation of more than 3,000 mussels representing 19 species, including state and federally protected individuals.

Mussel Restoration Grant

The PFBC is a member of a conservation partnership that was awarded a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Chesapeake Watershed Investment for Landscape Defense grant to restore freshwater mussels to the West Branch Susquehanna River (West Branch). The grant was awarded to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, who in conjunction with the project partners, will take a comprehensive approach to mussel and river restoration through research, education, and community outreach. For this project, the team will collect mussels to serve as broodstock for hatchery operations. This project is a component of a larger investment in mussel restoration in the Chesapeake watershed.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Calendar Year Boat Registrations

On October 1, 2023, the PFBC began issuing calendar year boat registrations. Boat registrations or renewals issued after October 1, 2023, will receive a registration with a December 31, 2025, expiration date. This effort was a result of a change in Pennsylvania law (Act 28 of 2022), which changed the boat registration year to a calendar year to improve efficiency and reduce confusion arising from the prior boating registration year, which used to run from April 1 to March 31.

Monsanto Agreement

The PFBC received \$7.6 million, the first of two payments from the Monsanto Company as part of a consent agreement involving a settlement regarding polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination. The payment was part of a larger settlement finalized earlier in 2023 between Monsanto and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania on behalf of the PFBC, the Game Commission, DCNR, and DEP. A second payment is due in early 2024. As part of the settlement, payments received by the PFBC may be used to improve public access and infrastructure and benefit non-game species.

SPORT FISH AND HABITAT

Notice of Stocking

Staff continued work on the Notice of Stocking (NOS) program related to the recent Chapter 71a rulemaking. In-person and virtual meetings were held to help educate stakeholders about the new NOS process. Staff developed multiple external and internal communication tools and resources including web content, FAQs, program contacts, a PFBC staff briefing sheet, and an IntranetApps NOS module navigation guide. In addition, finalized hardcopies and a HuntFishPA online version of the NOS form and corresponding instructions have been published. Staff also developed and implemented an internal review protocol. Customers already have successfully submitted both hardcopy and online NOS forms.

Steelhead Enforcement Detail

Waterways Conservation Officers (WCOs) conducted law enforcement patrols on Lake Erie tributaries as part of the 2023 Steelhead enforcement detail, which ran from September 15 to December 15. A total of 18 WCOs from outside the Northwest Region helped in the effort. WCOs initiated 60 enforcement actions and issued 258 citations and 245 warnings stemming from the detail. While the most common warning was failure to have a license on person, snagging (58) and being over the limit of steelhead (26) were the two most common violations WCOs encountered.

McMichaels Creek Habitat Project

The PFBC partnered with the Brodhead Chapter of Trout Unlimited and Pocono Heritage Land Trust to improve 3,680 feet of the Keystone Select Stocked Trout Water section of McMichaels Creek, Monroe County, in the first phase of a multi-year plan. Work completed in the fall improved 1,300 feet of stream by installing six log-framed stone deflectors, one log-framed cross vane with a rock throat, and approximately 20 random boulders. Funding was provided by the Brodhead Chapter of Trout Unlimited and the PFBC's Cooperative Habitat Improvement Program. The Brodhead Chapter of Trout Unlimited plans to return to the site to improve the riparian zone with tree and shrub plantings in future phases.

Pennsylvania Fisheries Management Project

Bureau of Fisheries staff finalized and submitted to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service the five-year F-57-R Sport Fish Restoration Act (Pennsylvania's Fisheries Management Project) proposal for 2024-2028. State wildlife agencies are required to have this planning document to receive federal Sport Fish Restoration funds, which have averaged \$9 million annually for the PFBC in recent years. This plan will guide fisheries management activities over the next five years. The Fisheries Management Project is designed to define needs and identify opportunities to deliver angling experiences based on concise knowledge and limits of exploited fisheries.

Fall, Winter Hatchery Trout Stocking

PFBC hatcheries distributed approximately 84,000 adult rainbow, brown, and brook trout as part of their fall and winter stocking efforts from October to December 2023. Throughout Pennsylvania, the adult trout were introduced to 93 locations, including 53 lakes and 40 stream sections.