

## **SENATE BILL 1168**

### **Testimony of the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited Pennsylvania House of Representatives Game & Fisheries Committee**

*April 7, 2016*

Majority Chairman Gillespie, Democratic Chairman Harhai and distinguished members of the House Game and Fisheries Committee, my name is Charlie Charlesworth and I am the President of the Pennsylvania Council of Trout Unlimited (PATU). On behalf of Trout Unlimited and PATU, I hereby submit this testimony on Senate Bill 1168, *Authority to Establish Fees—Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC)*, and offer the following comments and organizational position. Thank you for considering this important legislation and for the opportunity to submit testimony to this committee.

Trout Unlimited is the nation's largest coldwater conservation organization working to conserve, protect and restore North America's trout and salmon fisheries and their watersheds. In Pennsylvania, we have over 13,000 members organized into 48 chapters who spend significant amounts of time restoring aquatic habitat in streams, monitoring streams, planting streamside plants and trees, teaching kids how to fish and helping veterans recover from the wounds of war by way of angling. Last year, PATU members donated 71,632 hours to these efforts, complementing the work that is being done by eight professional TU staff to restore streams damaged by abandoned mine drainage, assess and remove barriers to fish passage, educate youth, train citizens to conduct watershed monitoring and provide technical services to watershed partners. Our primary goal is to improve Pennsylvania's trout habitat and as a result, make fishing better for today's anglers and for future generations.

In addition to hours and dollars donated to native and wild trout habitat restoration and education, PATU members contribute to Pennsylvania's fishing economy and support the PFBC each year by paying fishing license and permit fees. We do so knowing that, in order for the PFBC to fulfill its mission of protecting, conserving and enhancing aquatic resources and the habitats on which game and non-game

fish species rely and providing fishing and boating opportunities, the agency needs consistent and adequate funding to operate. Importantly, the PFBC currently receives no General Fund revenue and 70 percent of the agency's annual Fish Fund revenue is generated from license fees and permits—paid for by Pennsylvania's anglers.

Unfortunately, fees for fishing licenses, the trout/salmon permit and various combination permits have not been raised since 2005 and have not kept with the pace of inflation, affecting the PFBC's current and future ability to fulfill its mission. As you know, presently, each time the PFBC proposes an increase to the fishing license or trout permit fee, the agency must receive approval, via legislation, from the General Assembly. This structure has resulted in fewer, but much larger, fee increases, hitting anglers and boaters with significant hikes in fees every few decades to make up for lost time. Senate Bill 1168 would allow the PFBC to ensure that revenue matches operating expenses on an annual basis, by allowing for smaller, incremental fee increases as needed. Fee increases would be proposed through the agency's rulemaking procedures, affording TU members and other anglers an opportunity to provide comment for agency consideration prior to enactment.

PATU believes that sufficient checks and balances currently exist with current General Assembly procedures without the need to require legislative approval to increase license/permit fees, including annual reports to this committee, a fiscal performance audit every three years, and Senate approval of commission members.

In recent years, revenue generated from the trout/salmon permit has not been sufficient to cover the cost of operating the state's hatchery operations and revenue from license sales have been used to fill the funding gap, leaving other agency programs without adequate funding and staff resources to fully operate. Yet, there is a new awareness and increased attention on the need for native and wild trout conservation and enhancement in Pennsylvania. For example:

- PFBC has developed a new trout management plan, and has incorporated goals and objectives outlined in the Pennsylvania Brook Trout Conservation Strategies as measurable outcomes in the new plan.
- One of the goals of the 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement is to restore and sustain naturally reproducing brook trout populations in Chesapeake headwater streams with an eight percent increase in occupied habitat by 2025.
- Trout Unlimited's science team released a *State of Trout* report in June 2015, describing the many and varied threats facing native and wild trout in this country and in particular Pennsylvania's coldwater fisheries. Threats have evolved over time, from agriculture and mining practices of the past to a new suite of problems related to four primary issues: energy development, introduction of non-native species, increasing water use and demand, and climate change. Legacy problems remain in many areas and their impacts are compounded by these emerging challenges. Increased resources are needed to conserve and sustain the Pennsylvania's coldwater fisheries and habitat.

It is abundantly clear that additional revenue is needed to fulfill the PFBC's new and current goals for native and wild trout conservation and enhancement while maintaining other programs. PATU recognizes the need for the PFBC to generate additional revenue to keep up with the costs of inflation, to support all of its programs, to ensure a robust staff complement, and to advance new and existing programs focused on native and wild trout enhancement and conservation.

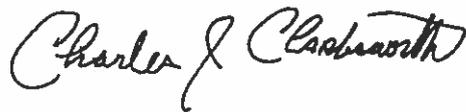
### *Conclusion*

Pennsylvania has a long history of fishing. Over the last century, the state's trout streams have attracted anglers from across the East, bringing in economic revenue for local sporting shops, restaurants, hotels, and travel-related businesses. Today, 1.1 million anglers flock to Pennsylvania's waterways each year, spending \$485 million on fishing-related activities in the commonwealth, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's biennial survey. Trout fishing accounts for approximately 47 percent of all fishing done in Pennsylvania, with more than 4.5 million fishing days each year. Specifically, on wild trout

streams, it is estimated that \$7.16 million dollars was contributed to the state's economy during the 2004 trout season, the last season for which this data is available; calculated for inflation, that impact would be \$9 million this year. To preserve Pennsylvania's fishing heritage and to ensure that fishing continues to support the state and local economies, the PFBC must be able to determine its own license and permit fees, to make sure it has the necessary resources on an annual basis to fulfill its mission and provide abundant, world-class fishing opportunities.

In conclusion, PATU supports Senate Bill 1168, which would allow the PFBC to set its own license and permit fees, as outlined in the legislation, through the agency's rulemaking procedures with opportunities for public input. PATU generally supports increases in fees for licenses, the trout permit and various combination permits with the understanding that the PFBC will direct an adequate part of the funding generated from the license fee/permit increases into native and wild trout enhancement and conservation.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charlie Charlesworth". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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