



**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission
Annual Report to the Game and Fisheries Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Timothy D. Schaeffer, Executive Director
March 28, 2023**

Good afternoon, Chairs Kulik and Maloney and committee members. My name is Tim Schaeffer, and I have the pleasure of serving as the Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). On behalf of the Board of Commissioners, Boating Advisory Board, and staff, we are pleased to present our 2022 Annual Report to the General Assembly. As with past reports, it summarizes major initiatives and progress from the past year and captures highlights and examples from around Pennsylvania. An electronic copy of the report is also available at www.fishandboat.com.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is a relatively small state agency, which, using a boxing metaphor, punches above its weight. In 2022, our nearly 420 full-time and approximately 200 seasonal staff statewide delivered incredible results on behalf of the Commonwealth's anglers, boaters, and aquatic resources. In all corners of Pennsylvania and during every season of the year, we worked daily to implement our mission to protect, conserve, and enhance aquatic resources, and provide fishing and boating opportunities.

Some of this work will be highlighted April 30 through May 2 when Pennsylvania hosts the 78th Annual Northeast Fish and Wildlife Conference in Hershey. The opening plenary of the conference will feature a session entitled *The Power of Partnerships*. That theme also applies to

this annual report and helps explain how the PFBC is able to accomplish so much. We don't do it alone. Just about every page of the report before you celebrates examples of partners we worked with in 2022.

Before offering some highlights from the report, please note the most important point in the whole document. Wear your life jacket.

Perhaps the most compelling statistic from the report is on page 27, showing that the 10-year-old cold weather life jacket regulation is working. Most boating accidents happen in the summer when more people are on the water, but a disproportionate number of fatalities happen when the water is cold and the chances of survival dramatically drop. In response, since 2012, boaters are required to wear a life jacket on boats less than 16 feet in length and on any canoe, kayak, or paddleboard from November 1 through April 30.

While the number of accidents during the cold weather months have remained steady over the past 10 years, fatalities have been cut in half. The regulation is saving lives and is a poignant reminder that life jackets work.

Do not be fooled by a warm day this spring or if you fish from a boat on the opening day of trout season this Saturday, April 1. Despite the air temperature, the water is still dangerously cold. Wearing a life jacket can save your life, and it is the law this time of year.

If you remember two things from this annual report, hopefully it will be an appreciation of the power of partnerships for aquatic resource conservation and a renewed commitment to be our partner in boating safety by wearing your life jacket.

As I noted to the committee last year, one of the best parts of this job is introducing legislators and other partners to our team members who are out there delivering on the investments made possible by the purchase of fishing licenses, unpowered launch permits, and boat registrations.

With so many new members on the committee, please know you have an open invitation to join us in the field to help stock fish; accompany our biologists on a stream, river, or lake survey; install fish habitat structures, restore streambanks, or stabilize eroded shorelines; learn more about efforts on behalf of species such as freshwater mussels listed in the State Wildlife Action Plan; tour a fish hatchery; attend a safe boating, water rescue, or fishing skills training that we conduct during all seasons and in all corners of the state; join an engineer on a visit to a recently rebuilt dam or refurbished access area that is the centerpiece of local fishing and boating; or ride along with a Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) to hear firsthand what it is like to be on the front lines of conservation law enforcement and public safety. You will undoubtedly come away from the experience inspired and energized.

Upcoming Dates

- Opening Day of Trout Season – April 1
- Sportsmen's and Sportswomen's Day on the Hill – April 26
- National Safe Boating Week – May 20-26
- Fish for Free Days – May 28 and July 4

Summary of Notable 2022 Topics

2022 Fishing and Boating Participation

- Fishing
 - Nearly 854,000 Licensed Anglers
 - Up 4% (34,000) since 2019
 - Trout Permits up nearly 7% since 2019
- Boating
 - More than 250,000 Unpowered Launch Permits
 - Up 24% (30,000) since 2019
 - Slightly less than 300,000 Boat Registrations
 - Down about 1% (-2,200) since 2019

Customer Focus

- Calendar Year Boat Registration
 - Thank you for Act 28 of 2022
- Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook
- *Angler and Boater* Magazine
- www.fishandboat.com and FishBoatPA Mobile App
- Single Statewide Opening Day of Trout Season
 - Simple, Easy to Remember, and Predictable
 - Reduced Crowding
 - Hatchery Benefits – Stocking Starts Earlier
 - Longer Trout Season!
- Continued Investments for Anglers and Boaters
 - Thank you for Act 56 of 2020
 - Incremental License Increases When Needed

Special Habitat Section

- Stream
 - Chesapeake Bay Unit
- Lake
- Fish Passage

Examples from Commissioner Districts

- Hazardous Dam Rehabilitation Projects
- Hatchery Upgrades
- Access Areas
- Fisheries Management and Aquatic Resource Restoration
 - Local Fisheries Updates
 - Blue Catfish
 - Mussels
- Educational Programs
- Grants
 - Boating Facilities Grant Program
 - Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) Education Program
 - Cooperative Nurseries

2023 Legislative Priorities

- Therapeutic Recreation
 - HB 365 – Representative Neilson; SB 146 – Senator Brewster