



**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission  
Annual Report to the Game and Fisheries Committee  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Timothy D. Schaeffer, Executive Director  
March 19, 2024**

Good morning, 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 (Commission). On behalf of the Board of Commissioners, Boating Advisory Board, and staff, we are pleased to present our 2023 Annual Report (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](http://www.fishandboat.com).

The Commission is a relatively small state agency, yet our work and impact extend throughout Pennsylvania all the way down to the local and community scale. In 2023, 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.

The theme of this year's Annual Report is public access. As one of the priorities of our strategic plan, public access remains a vital component to getting the public in and on their local waters to enjoy fishing and boating opportunities. Public access can take many forms, whether it

be stream easements, boat accesses, or education experiences offered by the agency and our partners throughout the state. Speaking of partners, we could not accomplish this without strong relationships with municipalities, other agencies, non-governmental groups, businesses, and the General Assembly. With continued momentum focused on public access, we are confident 2024 will be just as productive as 2023 with expanding opportunities across Pennsylvania.

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

As a reminder, Pennsylvania has a cold-water life jacket wear requirement from November 30-April 1 on all canoes, kayaks, and boats under 16 feet. 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.

If you remember two things from this Annual Report, hopefully it will be our collaborative focus on increasing public access for fishing and boating, and a commitment to boating safely 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.

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**

- Trout Stocking Continues
- Mentored Youth Trout Day – March 30
- Opening Day of Trout Season – April 6
- Sportsmen’s and Sportswomen’s Day on the Hill – April 9
- National Safe Boating Week – May 18-24
- Fish for Free Days – May 26 and July 4
- Operation Dry Water – July 4-6

### **Summary of Notable 2023 Topics**

#### **2023 Fishing and Boating Participation**

- Fishing
  - Over 848,000 Licensed Anglers
    - Up 3% since 2019
  - Nearly 465,000 Trout Permits
    - Up 1% since 2019
- Boating
  - More than 241,000 Unpowered Launch Permits
    - Up 19 % since 2019
  - Slightly more than 288,000 Boat Registrations
    - Down nearly 4% since 2019

### Customer Focus

- Implementation of Calendar Year Boat Registration
- Continued Investments for Anglers and Boaters
  - Infrastructure (e.g., hazardous dams, state fish hatcheries)
  - Equipment (e.g., law enforcement boats, hatchery trucks)

### Public Access Special Section

- Access Areas
- Shoreline and Streamside Access
- Education Experiences

### Addressing Aquatic Invasive Species

- Notice of Stocking
- Watercraft Inspection Requirements

### Examples from Commissioner Districts

- Habitat Projects
- Access Areas
- Fisheries Management and Aquatic Resource Restoration
- Educational Programs
- Grants
  - Boating Facilities Grant Program
  - Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation (R3) Education Program
  - Cooperative Nurseries

### Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Recruitment

- 25<sup>th</sup> Class Graduated in June 2023
- 26<sup>th</sup> Class to Start Summer 2024