

**Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Executive Director's Report
October 1, 2024, to December 31, 2024**

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (Commission) strategic plan contains priorities involving workforce, access, engagement, non-game species and habitat, infrastructure, and sport fish and habitat. This quarterly report provides examples of the Commission's progress toward those priorities from October 1, 2024, through December 31, 2024.

WORKFORCE

Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Class

The 26TH Waterways Conservation Officer Trainee class successfully completed their curriculum at Mansfield University and graduated from this portion of the training program on December 23, 2024. The class reported to the HR Stackhouse Training School on January 6, 2025, where they will receive additional training in areas such as: fish identification, boat operation, boating under the Influence detection, and pollution investigation. The class will graduate July 18, 2025.

Sunscreen Dispensers

The Department of Health and the Commission signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for the Sun Safety Program on October 24, 2024. The Commission, under this MOU, will install, maintain, and replace sunscreen dispensers and sun safety signs in designated areas and promote sun safety in the workplace among its employees and consider workplace policies to reduce UV exposure.

New Boats

Building upon boat training, undertaken by staff this summer, the Commission secured three custom electrofishing boats this quarter and has a contract to procure an additional 12 boats for the Bureau of Fisheries over the next four years. Furthermore, a new custom lake habitat barge was secured to increase staff safety and capabilities.

Recruitment

Multiple recruitment events were attended by Commission staff across Pennsylvania to advertise and promote current and future job opportunities.

ACCESS

Boating Facilities Grant Program (BFGP)

The Commission accepted 22 applications for the 2025 round of the Boating Facility Grant Program (BFGP) and one application for the Erie Access Improvement Program (EAIP). Staff are in the process of evaluating these access opportunities. The following BFGP projects were completed this quarter.

- Siebert Park access area on the Conodoguinet Creek in Cumberland County. This provides an excellent addition to the Conodoguinet Water Trail.

- Sycamore Point access area on the Lackawaxen River in Wayne County. This launch is an important piece to the Lackawaxen River securing official water trail status.
- Heishman’s Mill portage area on the Conodoguinet Creek in Cumberland County. Not only does this project provide a portage around the Heishman’s Mill dam, but its location also significantly increases the length of the current water trail.
- Snyder County’s east side of Faylor Lake. This project included the construction of a new restroom facility and greater parking area.
- Fayette County Dunlap Creek Lake dock replacement. The deteriorated wooden boat dock was replaced with a new EZ-Dock which included an ADA compliant kayak launch.

Riparian Restoration

The Commission partnered with the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay to reforest five acres of riparian at three Commission boat launch access sites in the northcentral region.

ENGAGEMENT

Sport Fish Restoration Funding

The Commission hosted the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s (USFWS) Office of Conservation Investment staff to discuss shared objectives, federal grants management, and regulatory changes. USFWS’s Sport Fish Restoration Funding accounts for roughly 25% of the Commission’s annual budget.

Customer Enhancements

Improvements to the Commission’s call center, website, and customer email led to an increase in online renewals and reduced phone call volume. The reduction in phone call time, by approximately 18%, has increased staff efficiency on registration renewals by approximately 9% per day. Additionally, the call center wait time has been reduced by approximately 14%.

New Office

Fisheries Management Area 5 has moved to a new location in Swiftwater, Monroe County. The office space is shared with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection and provides long-term stability for staff.

Fall Fishing Campaign

The Fall Fishing Campaign concluded having reached audiences through digital advertising with 1.4 million impressions resulting in nearly 6,000 direct license buying conversions. The Commission continues to look for additional avenues to reach our constituents.

Women’s Weekend

A dynamic program facilitated by Commission educators expanded women’s opportunities in the outdoors. This excursion weekend was two days of camping, hiking, biking, fishing, and was partnered with the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

Juvenile Justice

Commission educators (working with county probation units, juvenile justice professionals and university scholars) expanded opportunities for fishing and boating programs that serve as therapy to at-risk populations. Staff presented at a statewide juvenile justice conference where they offered fishing skills instructor training to professionals in the field.

Career Fair

Commission staff participated in a career fair at the Tidioute Charter School where they displayed equipment used in fisheries management and answered questions students had about educational requirements, standard job duties, and other aspects of fisheries biologist jobs.

Water Festival

Commission staff from the Corry State Fish Hatchery participated in the Asbury Woods Children's Water Festival in October 2024.

Steelhead Spawning

Commission staff hosted two high school groups, one college student group, and several state representatives and or their staff for steelhead spawning activities at the mouth of Trout Run, Erie County, in November and December 2024.

Benner Spring Hatchery in the Community

Commission staff from the Benner Spring Hatchery hosted a tour and spawning demonstration for approximately 30 students and four adult advisors of the Bald Eagle Area School District Fishing Club. In addition, staff participated in a touch-a-truck event for WPSU's annual "Eventapalooza" at Penn State's Innovation Park. The event drew 353 guests.

2025 License Button

The collectible fishing license button for 2025 was available beginning December 1, 2024, and features a classic keystone design familiar from many vintage fishing license buttons, highlighted by a vibrant conservation green and navy-blue color scheme.

Additional Boating Course Options

The Commission established agreements with online boating course providers, Aceboater and BoatUS Foundation, to provide options for individuals to secure their boating safety education certificate online.

New Volunteer Instructors

The Commission certified volunteer instructors in The Advanced Line Systems Rescue Course at the Montgomery County Fire Academy.

Website Migration

The Commission completed a full website migration of FishandBoat.com to Pa.gov. Staff collaborated with the various divisions of the agency to ensure information important to the function of the agency and to customers was clearly articulated in the web pages. Additionally, staff developed the Commission's presence on the Commonwealth's services directory.

NON-GAME SPECIES AND HABITAT

PA Wildlife Action Plan

Training was provided to employees of the Commission, Pennsylvania Game Commission, and Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, on the use of the new PA Wildlife Action Plan database. This database has all the collected information on the species of greatest conservation need.

Habitat Improvement Grant Program

The Commission opened another request for proposed projects under the York and Lancaster Counties Habitat Improvement Grant Program. These proposals are due in January of 2025.

Mussel Monitoring and Updates

Commission staff completed monitoring of tagged mussels propagated and stocked by the Union City Aquatic Conservation Center in 2023 at the Lawrence site on Dunkard Creek. The monitoring was conducted to evaluate the effects of tagging methodology on mussel growth and survival. As part of the Chesapeake Watershed Investment for Landscape Defense (ChesWILD) West Branch Susquehanna River Restoration Grant, Commission staff collected and tagged 70 Yellow Lampmussels from the West Branch Susquehanna River near Williamsport. The mussels were tagged and stocked at six previously identified potential restoration sites upstream of Lock Haven Dam to assess their suitability for future restoration activities.

Union City Upgrades

Earlier this year, the Union City Aquatic Conservation Center was awarded a \$86,000 grant to expand efforts to propagate freshwater mussels for stocking in western Pennsylvania. Recently, work began utilizing the grant funds to reorganize the hatch house and install new overwinter racks at the facility.

Acid Mine Improvements

The Commission partnered with the Cameron County Conservation District to improve the water quality of Finley Run, a tributary in the Driftwood Branch of Sinnemahoning Creek watershed, by installing an acid mine drainage passive treatment facility.

INFRASTRUCTURE

Matamoras Access Ramp Rehabilitation Project, Delaware River, Wayne County

Project included the replacement of an existing boat launch ramp and the construction of a new concrete boat launch ramp for powered and unpowered boat access. This project was completed in partnership with the National Park Service.

Darbytown Access Ramp Rehabilitation Project, Delaware River, Wayne County

The rehabilitation of an existing boat launch ramp using concrete surface restoration treatment and the installation of new pre-cast concrete boat planks for powered and unpowered boat access. The construction was completed by the Commission's construction and maintenance staff.

Mooring Area Rehabilitation Projects, Kyle & Cloe Lake, Jefferson County

The project included the removal of old mooring posts and cables, the placement of stone and the addition of new mooring structures. The site provides summer mooring for both kayak and canoe storage.

Information Technology (IT) Upgrades

A project to upgrade and replace aging IT servers at PFBC field offices was completed, along with upgrades to the Geographic Information System (GIS) and Registration and Titling Systems (RATS). In addition, Wi-Fi access was deployed at the Centre Region Office for employees and visitors.

Bar Codes

The Commission is in the process of placing a bar code on boat registration cards. The bar code can be scanned by WCOs and will provide information on the boat's registration.

SPORT FISH AND HABITAT

Trout Plan

The Strategic Plan for the Management of Trout Fisheries in Pennsylvania 2025-2029 was drafted by staff. The Commissioners and public were provided with an overview of the draft Trout Plan at the October Fisheries and Hatcheries Committee meeting, and the draft plan was posted on the Commission's website for public review. The final draft of the Trout Plan will be presented at the January 2025 Fisheries and Hatcheries Committee meeting.

Notice of Stocking (NOS)

Since January 1, 2024, the Commission has received 1,700 NOS submissions for 3,949 stocking events on 1,527 different waters.

UV Trial

An ultraviolet (UV) light trial is underway at Pleasant Gap. The trial, conducted in cooperation with Atlantium UV, is intended to determine the effects of UV light on New Zealand Mud Snails.

Walleye Assessment

Commission staff completed a Walleye young-of-year (YOY) assessment in Woodcock Creek Lake, Crawford County. The catch rate of YOY Walleyes \leq 250mm (10 inches) was 115 fish/hour. In addition to the YOY, the catch rate of legal-size Walleyes (15 inches) was 15.5 fish/hour. Results indicate that recent stocking efforts by the Commission and United States Army Corps of Engineers have begun to re-establish a quality Walleye fishery in the lake.

American Shad Assessment

Commission staff completed American Shad young-of-year (YOY) sampling. It was completed at three fixed sites on the Delaware River in sections 02 through 05. Total catch (N) for the month was 4,734 American Shad (Phillipsburg N = 781, Water Gap N = 3,203, and Milford N = 750); bringing the total catch for the 2024 season to 24,951 fish, the highest catch for the non-tidal reaches during the period of record from 1988 through 2024. All sites were sampled during average flow for the time of year, so it did not bias seine catches.

Fall Stockings

- Distributed 119,800 adult trout to 38 stream sections and 79 lakes.
- Distributed 111,732 fingerlings to cooperative nurseries.
- Nine different species of warm and coolwater fish were stocked into Commonwealth waters during the fourth quarter of 2024 (Table 1).

Table 1. Fish stocked in the fourth quarter of 2024.

| Species | Stage | Number stocked |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| Black Crappie | Fingerling | 41,250 |
| Blue Catfish | Fingerling | 20,000 |
| Bluegill | Fingerling | 89,400 |
| Channel Catfish | Fingerling | 8,850 |
| Channel Catfish | Yearling | 77,710 |
| Fathead Minnow | Adult | 14,500 |
| Lake Trout | Fingerling | 19,000 |
| Largemouth Bass | Advanced Fingerling | 5,700 |
| Striped Bass Hybrid | Fingerling | 15,000 |
| White Crappie | Fingerling | 29,500 |
| TOTAL | | 320,910 |