

Pennsylvania's Fishing and Boating Access Strategy

Chapter 1: Purpose, Introduction and Background

Purpose

The purpose of *Pennsylvania's Fishing and Boating Access Strategy* (Strategy) is to provide Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and their partners such as local governments and conservation organizations with the tools necessary to make better decisions relating to fishing and boating access planning, development, and funding.

Introduction

Pennsylvania has more than 85,000 miles of rivers and streams. There are 3,956 lakes, reservoirs and ponds covering 161,445 acres and an additional 470,400 acres of Lake Erie in Pennsylvania. With this incredible bounty come amazing recreational opportunities for individuals participating in water-based activities such as boating and fishing. In the Commonwealth, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (Commission) and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) partner to provide increased public access to these waters.

The Commission and DCNR use a variety of funding and acquisition tools to enhance fishing, boating and other water-oriented recreational opportunities in the Commonwealth. These agencies desired a coordinated and strategic approach for acquiring and enhancing recreational access in the Commonwealth. To develop that approach, the Commission, DCNR, and the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC) undertook a planning process to formulate a state-wide access strategy (the entire planning process for this strategy is described in Chapter 2). Because the Commission has jurisdictional responsibility over recreational fishing and boating, the partners decided the Commission would take the leadership role in the development and implementation of the strategy. PEC would take a leadership role in conducting public meetings to reach stakeholders during the planning process. DCNR took a leadership role in establishing access on their properties, provided input during the stakeholder process, and provided information to link this plan to the priorities described in the Commonwealth's new Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) titled *Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone for Healthy Living*. The SCORP includes "a statewide assessment of outdoor recreation needs and supplies, as well as an action plan for further steps to help enhance outdoor recreation."¹

¹ Pennsylvania Outdoors: The Keystone for Healthy Living, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, September 2009, page 4.

The Commission undertakes strategic planning every five years to create a road map for the agency to address its mission and fulfill its statutory responsibilities. The Commission's mission is to "to provide fishing and boating opportunities through the protection and management of aquatic resources." In the last five-year strategic plan (2005-2009), fishing and boating were identified in the plan as "keys to the quality of life of Pennsylvanians."² Six strategies were described to implement elements of the Commission's mission. Strategy 2 of that plan stated the Commission "will invest in activities, resources, and programs in order to increase boating and fishing participation in the Commonwealth."³ Some of those activities included the launching of the Erie Access Improvement Program and the Boating Facility Grant Program described later in this document. This Strategy is being integrated into the Commission's next five year strategic plan (2010-2015). This five year plan indicates that access for boating and fishing will continue to be an important priority of the Commission.

For the purpose of this Strategy, access is being defined in the following manner:

- **Boating access** provides access to waterways for powered and/or unpowered boats with some level of facilities including parking. Boating access is typically at a designated point of entry along a waterway. Fishing can also occur at these sites; however, the primary purpose is boating.
- **Walk-in fishing access** provides a way for anglers to reach the waterway and walk for some distance along the stream bank or in the stream bed. These types of access areas are typically linear with few amenities and do not have boat launch ramps.

The components of this Strategy are organized as follows:

- Chapter 1 provides a background on fishing and boating in Pennsylvania.
- Chapter 2 outlines the planning process related to this project.
- Chapter 3 describes strategies for investing in access.
- Chapter 4 outlines a review process for improving individual access sites.
- Chapter 5 discusses funding.
- Chapter 6 provides a list of strategies.
- Appendices A – F provide background materials.

Background on fishing and boating in Pennsylvania

Fishing and boating are popular recreational activities in the Commonwealth. A total of 1,424,636 fishing licenses and permits were sold in 2008. As of October 2009, resident license sales were up 5 percent. The Commonwealth remains a destination for out of state anglers with over 77,958 individuals purchasing non-resident and tourist licenses in 2008.

² Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Strategic Plan, April 2005, page 6.

³ Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Strategic Plan, April 2005, page 7.

Anglers in the *Pennsylvania Trout Fishing Survey* (2008) prepared by Responsive Management indicated that 64 percent of Pennsylvania trout anglers fish for trout on mostly public land. The Commission's very active fish stocking program enhances the anglers' experience. For example, over 5,000 miles of stream and 130 lakes were stocked with more than three million adult trout in the past year.

An estimated 2.5 million people boat in Pennsylvania each year. In 2008, there were 338,556 registered boats in the Commonwealth. Powered boat registrations remained fairly constant since 2001 based on the annual US Coast Guard Report. In fact, 2009 boating registration renewals were up 5 percent from the same period in 2008.

The Commission owns or controls over three hundred boating access sites. These sites include both primitive sites with no facilities, as well as, fully developed sites with boat ramps and parking lots. More than six hundred additional boating access sites are held under various ownerships and are open to the public.

The Commonwealth and local communities receive tremendous economic benefits from fishing and boating. Fishing generates an economic impact of more than \$1.6 billion while the economic impact of boating is slightly higher at \$1.7 billion in Pennsylvania. These economic impacts result from the direct expenditures of fishing and boating equipment and expenditures on recreational trips.

Statewide Geographic Information System (GIS) maps indicating current access sites, trout stocking, boating registrations, fishing licenses and other factors used in the development of this Strategy are found in the chapters that follow.