

Chapter 5: Funding

It is beyond the scope of this Strategy to discuss all the issues related to increasing funding for fishing and boating access. The Commission's new five year plan has a strategy that addresses future funding for access and other Commission priorities. However, this chapter will provide background information for the Commission's major source of funding and other information to give perspective to the issue of funding fishing and boating access.

Background

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is a user-funded agency, meaning it receives no Pennsylvania General Fund tax revenue to support its programs. The Commission operates out of two special funds: the Fish Fund and the Boat Fund. The principal sources of revenue for the Fish Fund are fishing licenses and fees (about 66 percent) and federal funds (about 22 percent) obtained from taxes on fishing-related items. For the Boat Fund, boat registration/titling fees, refunds of liquid fuels taxes on gas used by motorboats and federal aid are the top revenue categories.¹

The Commission uses the Lake Erie permit revenues and settlement funds to improve access for fishing and boating in eligible areas. The Commission also serves as a pass through to counties and municipalities for federal Clean Vessel Act and Boating Infrastructure Grants funds. Finally, the partnerships described in Chapter 2 provide matching funds to expand both boating and fishing access.

Like Pennsylvania, other states use a variety of methods to fund their boating and fishing access programs. In general, registration and license fees are used to support boating and fishing access programs. Some states have special funds to improve access through fee simple acquisitions, easement acquisitions for fishing and grants to other organizations and governments. Minnesota's fishing access easement program is funded by state lottery funds and state bond funds. In New York, a voluntary habitat/access stamp can be purchased. These funds are required by law to be deposited in the New York's Conservation Fund Habitat Account to help improve and conserve fish and wildlife habitat and increase public access to public and private lands. New York also has a Conservation Legacy license that includes the habitat/access stamp. Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is used to acquire land for fishing and other outdoor recreation activities. Funding for Wisconsin's program comes from general tax revenues and state bonds.

Stakeholder Input

Funding was an important topic to many participants at the regional stakeholder meetings. Participants expressed a need for more funding for access and support finding new revenue streams dedicated to improving access. The following potential revenue sources and ideas were suggested at the regional meetings:

- Hotel tax often known as a head tax enacted by Counties and collected by visitor bureaus in the Commonwealth. Some visitor bureaus collect these funds and redistribute them to other organizations for projects.

¹ "Funding", Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, 2009, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, 29 September 2009, <<http://www.fish.state.pa.us>>.

- Check off on licenses or registrations that would allow the angler or boater to direct a portion of their fee goes to access.
- A voluntary access donation that could be paid when a fishing license or registration fee is paid.
- Expansion of the registration of canoes or kayaks.
- Bond issue for access.
- Donations or grants from community foundations.
- Tax credits for landowners granting access.
- Increase in fishing license fees.
- Special license plate.

Current Funding Needs

Funding to respond to requests to improve fishing and boating access throughout the Commonwealth continues to be insufficient. Opportunities referred to the Commission to purchase properties or easements to improve access have not been pursued because of the absence of a dedicated source of funding. All of the DCNR Conservation Landscape Initiatives (CLI) point to the need for additional recreational access along the rivers and streams within these landscapes. Boating Facility Grant application requests have consistently been greater than the funds available. For example, in the 2009 application round more than \$2.9 million in requests were received for \$1 million in available funding. As indicated earlier, 47 percent of the anglers indicated that private land posting is a problem. The Commission does not have a grant program to provide partners with funds to improve fishing access other than the dedicated funding sources in Erie County, the Sinnemahoning Creek Watershed, and Upper Juniata Watershed. The cost of improving fishing access by the Commission purchasing fishing easements is costing on average ten to twelve dollars per linear foot. Although this is a less expensive alternative to purchasing the entire property, the Commission's current funding sources do not provide the opportunity to implement a fishing easement program across the entire Commonwealth.