

Each year the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission's "Great White Fleet" of stocking trucks set sail, signaling that trout season is just around the corner. Anglers across the Commonwealth look forward to this annual occurrence but give little thought to what is involved in stocking their favorite fishing hole.

BY THE NUMBERS

Stocking is an intricate part of insuring Commonwealth anglers enjoy some of the best, most abundant trout stockings on the East Coast. Each year the Commission stocks approximately 3.2 million trout. An additional million fingerlings are provided to cooperative nurseries across the Commonwealth to be raised and stocked. To get a perspective on how enormous this undertaking is let's look at the numbers for neighboring states.

- ▶ New York 900,000 lbs.
(equal to approx. 1.6 million PA trout)
- ▶ New Jersey 600,000 fish
- ▶ Maryland 300,000 fish
- ▶ Ohio 96,000 fish

Through this program, the Commission maintains over 5000 miles of stocked trout streams and over 125 stocked lakes for public fishing.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

The Commission manages eight Fish Culture Stations (hatcheries) across the Commonwealth. These facilities breed, raise, and transport the trout that anglers enjoy each season. However, it is not a solo process. Many agency personnel are involved in getting the fish to the angler, and it would not be possible without complex cooperation at every level.

Division of Hatcheries

The Division of Hatcheries oversees the operation of Fish Culture Stations, the fleet of stocking trucks, and raising of trout. Fish Culturists also transport and assist in the stocking of trout.

Bureau of Law Enforcement

Waterways Conservation Officers are

Stocking Trout

What does it take to stock your favorite water?

By Lieutenant Colonel Tom Burrell





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responsible for the safe stocking of each stream. This requires WCOs to maintain relationships with property owners, determine the safest locations for stocking, coordinate stocking with Commission personnel and volunteers, and oversee each stocking.

Bureau of Fisheries

Area Fisheries Managers and their staff access streams to determine the number of fish each can handle, what species are best suited for local conditions, and when each stocking should take place.

Bureau of Engineering

The Bureau of Engineering assists in maintaining existing Fish Culture Stations, designing new facilities, and assists with the implementation of new features that will make these hatcheries more efficient and environmentally friendly.

Although not specifically mentioned, almost every Commission employee is involved in making sure that the annual stockings are successful. Those working behind the scenes help ensure stocking lists

Six-year-old Jase Alguire helps WCO Alec Delong stock Hidden Lake in Monroe County while three-year-old brother Axel observes.

are compiled and made available to the public, vehicles are maintained, press releases are prepared, and all the “what ifs” are addressed when they become reality. It is a team effort unlike any other and it happens each and every year.

YEAR-ROUND ENDEAVOR

The outside observer of the Commission’s annual trout stocking invokes thoughts of stoking trucks arriving at their local stream in early March (stocking will start in February beginning in 2022) and continuing until late May. But it is much more than that. Stocking is a year-round process that never ends.

Each year, while the anglers’ focus is when will the stocking trucks arrive, Fish Culturists are not only preparing for the upcoming stockings they are also preparing the next generation of trout. Each hatchery maintains a population of broodstock that are spawned for eggs, which are then incubated and hatched for the next year’s stockings.



Although most stockings take place in the spring, the Commission also stocks select streams in the fall or winter to ensure continued opportunities for anglers. This allows Commonwealth anglers to pursue trout almost year-round even on streams that may not naturally support trout.

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED

Despite all the hard work by Commission employees it would be impossible to stock the over 3 million trout without the assistance of the public. In a time when volunteers are harder and harder to come by for any endeavor, the stocking program cannot survive without them.

Each year thousands of volunteers meet the stocking trucks to assist with carrying buckets, walking floats to more remote locations, and even assisting in getting some of these trucks to their destinations. Deputy Waterways Conservations Officers, an often-forgotten group of volunteers, also assist our Waterways Conservation Officers in not only stocking the waters but also patrol to ensure that anglers are abiding by the regulations, enjoying the resource safely, and protecting the streams from poaching and pollution.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the property owners who

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allow anglers to access the stream. Over 80 percent of stocked streams are on private property. Many people think that they have the “right” to fish at a stocked stream. This is incorrect. Property owners have the right, in most cases, to limit access. It is only through their generosity that the Commission can maintain the amount of public access necessary for such a successful program.

LICENSES AND PERMITS

All anglers over the age of 16 are required to first obtain a valid fishing license and a trout permit. Those anglers in Erie County, who will be fishing on Lake Erie or its tributaries, will also need a Lake Erie permit or combined Trout/Lake Erie permit.

Obtaining your 2022 Fishing License has never been easier. Not only can you make your purchase in person from any one of approximately 700 retail locations, but you can also make your purchase via the Commission's website (www.fishandboat.com) or mobile app (FishBoatPa). Remember, although anglers are no longer required to display the license on an outer garment it must still be on your person and available for inspection by a Waterways

WCO Thurner-Diaz with a young angler.

Conservation Officer or Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer. To make it easier for those who purchased their license electronically, our officer will accept a digital copy saved to a phone or other portable electronic device.

CONCLUSION

Now that you know what is involved in making sure your local stream is stocked and ready to provide an enjoyable opening day, maybe it will make that day a little more special. Now it is time to get your license, prepare your gear, and hit the water. While you are at it consider taking a youngster or other inexperienced angler along so you can introduce them to the joys of Pennsylvania's aquatic resources.

Tom Burrell started with PFBC in 1997, part of the 14th WCO Class. After a year as a Seasonal Officer in the NC Region he was assigned to Delaware County. Following promotion to Sgt. he was assigned to SC Region & later SE Region before moving to HBG HQ. He is now a Lieutenant Colonel and oversees the agency training program.