

PFBC ANNOUNCES CHANGES TO 2021 TROUT SEASON AND STOCKING OPERATIONS DURING QUARTERLY MEETING

HARRISBURG, Pa. (January 25) – During its quarterly business meeting held on January 25, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) announced several changes to the upcoming 2021 trout season, including opening day dates and stocking operations.

These changes, effective immediately, include consolidating the 2021 season into a single, statewide schedule for all Pennsylvania counties; beginning trout stocking operations earlier than usual; reinstating limited volunteer opportunities for trout stocking operations; and releasing a schedule of trout stocking dates and locations. All changes were made by the PFBC in consultation with the Office of the Governor, Pennsylvania Department of Health, and Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources to address ongoing public health concerns related to the COVID-19 pandemic while preserving the opportunity to enjoy the fun and recreational health benefits of fishing.

For the 2021 trout season, the PFBC will operate under a consolidated statewide schedule for all counties. Under this revised plan, **a single Statewide Mentored Youth Trout Day will occur on Saturday, March 27, and a single Statewide Opening Day of trout season will take place on Saturday, April 3.** As a result of this consolidation, separate regional mentored youth and opening days will not occur. Anglers are also reminded that because the mentored youth days were cancelled in 2020, all Voluntary Youth Fishing Licenses purchased last season remain valid and will be honored during the 2021 season.

“Thank you to the anglers and boaters of Pennsylvania for their understanding as we continue to experience these changes together and get back on the water in 2021,” said Tim Schaeffer, PFBC Executive Director. “The move to an earlier statewide schedule for trout season ensures that we can preserve our cherished fishing traditions while reducing the amount of travel across multiple opening days. We wanted to give anglers as much time and information as possible to plan ahead, and we think they will especially like having the stocking dates and locations available at their fingertips again this year on our FishBoatPA mobile app and website (www.fishandboat.com). Starting two weeks earlier gives trout anglers statewide two more weeks to enjoy everything that comes with this special time of year. We appreciate the cooperation of the anglers as we prepare for the safest season possible and encourage them to enjoy their local waters.”

To prepare for the consolidated statewide trout season schedule, **the PFBC will begin pre-season trout stocking operations on February 15, 2021,** approximately two weeks earlier than in previous seasons. This change will allow hatchery staff to deliver trout to many waters ahead of the Statewide Mentored Youth Trout Day and, weather permitting, all waters prior to the Statewide Opening Day. Due to this change, all streams that **are designated as [Stocked Trout Waters](#) will be closed to angling when**

stocking begins on February 15. To provide for additional angling opportunities during this time, trout which are stocked in lakes, reservoirs, and ponds during the pre-season will be open to catch-and-release angling but may not be harvested until Statewide Mentored Youth Day and Statewide Opening Day.

In addition, fishing will be closed on the Lake Erie Tributaries and Presque Isle Bay from 12:01 a.m. on April 2 until 8:00 a.m. on April 3. This temporary modification to the trout season, size, and creel limits will mirror regulation changes that occur annually in the Lake Erie region prior to the regular Statewide Opening Day and are designed to protect against the overharvest of steelhead.

To achieve the highest quality stocking operations, the PFBC will be reintroducing limited volunteer opportunities in 2021. However, to protect the safety of PFBC staff and the public, volunteer opportunities will not be available to the general public. Instead, volunteers will be recruited from an existing pool of individuals who have traditionally assisted with float stocking and bucket carrying organized through local conservation organizations, schools, and other groups. All volunteers selected will be required to wear personal protective gear, including masks and gloves, and practice social distancing while participating in stocking operations.

“We appreciate the feedback we received from many anglers who were disappointed last season because we suspended volunteer stocking help due to pandemic. While we welcome the day when we can all return to normal, we think that offering these limited volunteer opportunities this season is a big step in the right direction,” said Richard Lewis, President of the PFBC Board of Commissioners. “With the help of these experienced volunteers, we will be able to most effectively spread the trout out throughout the streams to provide the best opening day experience for all anglers as well as sustained fishing throughout the spring.”

To inform anglers of trout stocking dates and locations, a stocking schedule will be provided on the [PFBC website](#) and [FishBoatPA mobile app](#) beginning on February 1. While anglers are encouraged to reference the schedule to prepare for their fishing adventures throughout the trout season, any unsolicited “walk on” stocking volunteers will not be permitted to assist with stocking. Anglers are reminded that all stocking dates are subject to change due to weather conditions and other factors, and they should check the stocking schedule throughout the season.

Additional Commission Meeting Action

In other action, Commissioners voted to amend fishing regulations at Opossum Lake, Cumberland County. The lake was removed from Miscellaneous Special Regulations which allowed for the harvest of trout under Commonwealth Inland Waters angling regulations but allowed only catch-and-release fishing for all other fish species. Opossum Lake was also added to the [Big Bass](#) program and [Panfish Enhancement](#) program for crappies. All other fish species will be managed under Commonwealth Inland Waters angling regulations. These designations will go into effect upon publication of a second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

In Huntingdon County, the Board voted to amend fishing regulations at Lake Perez. The lake was removed from Miscellaneous Special Regulations which allowed for the harvest of trout under Commonwealth Inland Waters angling regulations but allowed only catch-and-release fishing for all other fish species. Lake Perez was also added to the [Panfish Enhancement](#) program for sunfish and crappies. All other fish species will be managed under Commonwealth Inland Waters angling regulations. These designations will go into effect upon publication of a second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

Commissioners voted to adopt new fishing regulations at Whipple Lake, located within Whipple Dam State Park, Huntingdon County. The lake, which has recently been refilled following a dam rehabilitation and sediment removal project, will be added to waters managed under Miscellaneous Special Regulations that will allow for the harvest of trout under Commonwealth Inland Waters angling regulations, but allow only catch-and-release fishing for all other fish species. As the lake is restocked with fish under a multi-year restocking plan, this approach will allow for the most rapid development of a balanced warm-water and cool-water fish community, while offering acceptable levels of recreational angling opportunities. Once the warm-water fishery is re-established, the lake will be recommended for removal from the miscellaneous special regulation and inclusion in one of the Commission's existing warm-water regulation programs. This designation will go into effect upon publication of a second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

Commissioners adopted an amendment to regulations pertaining to trout stocking in Class A Wild Trout Streams (58 Pa. Code § 57.8a). While stocking is not permitted or advisable in the vast majority of Class A wild trout streams across Pennsylvania, there are 13 stream sections currently stocked by the PFBC that meet internal decision-making criteria to qualify for continued stocking. These stream sections are in proximity to high-density human population centers and are heavily fished streams of a size and character that can support a fishery featuring both stocked and wild trout. Additional criteria will allow for consideration of continued stocking of stream sections that have historically played host to special activities, such as youth fishing derbies that benefit communities socially and economically, prior to being designated as Class A wild trout streams. Under the amendment, prior to seeking Board approval for any exemptions that would allow for continued stocking of newly designated Class A wild trout streams, the Executive Director would consult the PFBC's decision-making criteria set forth in the *Operational Guidelines for the Management of Trout Fisheries in Pennsylvania Waters* scheduled for update in the first quarter of 2021. Consideration will only be given to requests for continued stocking in stream sections within one year of the section being designated as Class A and posted in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*; however, entities that previously received an exemption or a Special Activities Permit for continued stocking from the Commission between 2010 and the effective date of this amendment will be eligible for consideration. Stream sections with wild Brook Trout populations that have not previously been granted an exemption will not be considered.

The amendment will go into effect upon publication of a second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

The Board approved 13 exemptions to allow for the continued stocking of trout at 12 Class A stream sections. The exemptions associated with youth fishing derbies include: Beaver Run (Section 01), Clearfield County, Commissioner District 3; Freeman Run (Section 03), Potter County, Commissioner District 3; McElhattan Creek (Section 02), Clinton County, Commissioner District 3; Yellow Creek (Section 02), Bedford County, Commissioner District 4; Letort Spring Run (Section 03), Cumberland County, Commissioner District 6 (two events); Laurel Run (Section 02), Berks County, Commissioner District 8; Unnamed tributary to Tulpehocken Creek (Womelsdorf) (Section 02), Berks County, Commissioner District 8; Wyomissing Creek (Section 03), Berks County, Commissioner District 8. Exemptions associated with general fishing derbies include Kishacoquillas Creek (Section 05), Mifflin County, Commissioner District 4. Exemptions associated with Children/Disabled Fishing Areas include Marvin Creek (Section 01), McKean County, Commissioner District 3. Exemptions associated with waters where previous stocking exemptions have been granted include: Cross Fork (Section 03), Potter County, Commissioner District 3; Warriors Mark Run (Section 01), Huntingdon County, Commissioner District 4.

Commissioners approved the publication of proposed rulemaking pertaining to All-Tackle Trophy Trout (58 Pa. Code § 65.4a) and Trophy Trout Artificial Lures Only (58 Pa. Code § 65.7) fishing regulations. Currently, both regulations allow for the harvest of two trout, per day, greater than or equal to 14 inches in length, from opening day of trout season through Labor Day, with catch-and-release angling for the remainder of the year. Under a proposed amendment to these regulations intended to provide more adequate protection to most large trout in the population, anglers would be able to harvest only one trout per day greater than or equal to 18 inches from opening day of trout season through Labor Day, with catch-and-release angling for the remainder of the year. A total of 11 waters are currently included in the Trophy Trout regulation program and most are destination waters that receive high angler use from resident and non-resident anglers. If approved on final rulemaking at a future meeting, these amendments would go into effect on January 1, 2022.

The Board approved the designation of 25 stream sections to the list of Class A wild trout streams. The board also approved the addition of 26 new waters to the Commission's list of wild trout streams, revised the section limits of eight waters currently listed, and amended the name of one water currently listed. These additions, revisions, and amendments will go into effect upon the publication of a second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*. A list of waters proposed for wild trout stream and Class A Wild Trout Stream designation can be found on the PFBC [website](#).

During today's meeting, the PFBC announced two upcoming events: a Virtual Outdoor Expo, which will take place during the week of February 8-12; and a Virtual Fisheries Summit, scheduled for Saturday, February 20.

The Virtual Outdoor Expo will consist of a series of informative and entertaining discussion sessions with PFBC staff and partners on fishing and boating related topics, which will be viewable throughout the week on the PFBC Facebook page, [Facebook.com/PaFishandBoat](https://www.facebook.com/PaFishandBoat). Some of the sessions will be streamed live and will include an opportunity to submit questions in advance or interact with presenters during the session. A full schedule of expo sessions will be announced next week and will include: *Kayaking 101: What's Behind Pennsylvania's Fastest Growing Boating Trend*; *Conversation with a Waterways Conservation Officer*; and *Let's Talk Muskies*, featuring PFBC Hatcheries and Fisheries staff.

The Virtual Fisheries Summit will consist of presentations from PFBC Fisheries staff that will be made available for online viewing throughout the day on February 20. The summit will highlight the diversity of fisheries available in Pennsylvania, and will include presentations on Black Bass, Catfish, Inland Striped Bass, Panfish, Walleye, and wild and stocked Trout. A full schedule of events and viewing instructions will be announced in the coming weeks.

Today's virtual meeting was streamed live on the PFBC Facebook page and can be viewed here:

Session 1: <https://fb.watch/3eUnhhS9Zv/>

Session 2: <https://fb.watch/3eUoXWWO4C/>

The next meeting of the PFBC Board of Commissioners is scheduled for April 12-13, 2021.