

Report Highlights

A Performance Audit of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Act 2004-159, which amended the Fish and Boat Code to implement a new license fee structure, requires the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee (LB&FC) to conduct a performance audit of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) every three years.

Summary of Findings: (See pp. S-1 to S-18.)

1. Strategic Plan Implementation: The PFBC adopted a well-defined Strategic Plan in 2005 and has made substantial progress in implementing the plan's nine "prioritized objectives" (related, for example, to marketing, resource management, trout fishing, and boating and waterways access).
2. Strategic Plan Deficiencies: Despite the progress made in achieving Strategic Plan "prioritized objectives," some shortcomings are apparent in both the plan and the planning process. For example, the Plan does not have a specifically defined time frame and needs to be updated; there is no formal internal tracking of output and outcome measures; there is no direct link between the Strategic Plan and the Executive Director's Annual Plan of Work; and the PFBC does not have a full-time strategic planner.
3. Strategic Direction/Agency Leadership: Focus groups conducted as part of the audit found that there is substantial optimism and confidence among both PFBC employees and stakeholders concerning the current direction and leadership of the agency.
4. Preserving Waterways Access: Many prime fishing locations in the state are becoming difficult or impossible to access due to the posting of private properties, often due to liability concerns. The PFBC has intensified its efforts to acquire properties and easements to preserve and expand access, and has initiated the Erie Access Development Program (to be expanded statewide) and the Boating Access Improvement Program.
5. Angler Retention and Promotion: Between 2001 and 2006, the 20% decline in the number of active anglers in PA exceeded the 12% decline registered nationally during the same period. The PFBC has taken steps to retain and expand the existing angler-base, including a proposed youth fishing license, to generate revenues for expanded youth education and recruitment efforts.
6. Trout Production: The PFBC's trout production system is currently at capacity, with no indication that system increases will be feasible. In

FY 2006-07, the PFBC propagated a total of 3.4 million trout, a 35% decline from mid-1990s level.

7. Infrastructure Needs: Despite the recent funding from Growing Greener II, the PFBC has more than \$150 million in remaining unfunded infrastructure improvement and upgrade projects at state-owned hatcheries, dams, and boat access areas.

8. Other Performance Areas: We found that: the PFBC's 14 state fish hatcheries are currently in compliance with federal water quality and discharge requirements; PA's overall boating safety record is good, with the state's boating fatality rate consistently below the national average; PFBC license revenues currently fund an effective statewide water rescue training program; the PFBC has successfully implemented an automated fishing license sales system; and the PFBC has either completed or partially implemented nearly two-thirds of the recommendations made by the LB&FC in our 1998 report.

9. Financial Condition: During FY 2006-07, both the Fish Fund and the Boat Fund had operating surpluses. However, like the PA Game Commission, the PFBC is facing a funding dilemma as its licensee base erodes while expenses continue to increase. Based on current projections, by FY 2012-13, balances in both the Fish Fund and Boat Fund are expected to drop below the required minimum amounts needed to operate.

Recommendations (See pp. S-19 to S-21.)

The report recommends that: the PFBC take a series of steps to update and strengthen its strategic planning process; report to pertinent standing committees on experience to date with purchasing trout from a private hatchery; develop a state hatchery production and cost-tracking system; and work with PEMA to enhance the water rescue training program. Also, the Legislature should consider amending state law to clarify the scope of legal protection for private landowners who wish to make their property available for fishing and boating.