



Fishing in Pennsylvania during the COVID-19 Pandemic

March 25, 2020—The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) knows that our anglers and boaters are ethically minded, passionate outdoor enthusiasts who might have some questions about fishing this spring. We are here to help. Below are answers to several Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) we have been receiving. Still have questions? We welcome your call at 717-705-7800 or email at RA-BE@pa.gov and will get back to you as soon as possible.

Travel restrictions, business and facility closures, and the need to follow local, state, and federal government orders to ensure public health and safety have changed the way trout season in Pennsylvania is unfolding this year. The PFBC knows how important spring trout fishing traditions are to many Pennsylvanians and visitors. We are doing our best to ensure that waters will be stocked with trout when the season opens, and anglers are able to get back on the water. There have been multiple challenges, but we will continue to adapt.

These changes have required the PFBC to alter our traditional stocking approaches and enact a single Statewide Opening Day of trout season for 2020. Please spread the word to your fellow anglers that the Regional Opener (18 southeast counties) has been consolidated into one single Statewide Trout Opener on April 18, 2020. This approach will help to reduce crowding, allow more time for travel and other restrictions to be lifted before Opening Day arrives, provide additional time for our stocking trucks to make their runs, and increases our chances of delivering the fish and the fishing opportunities we have all come to expect.

Again, a big thanks to all anglers and boaters, whether novice or avid, for remaining patient and helping us spread the word about the FAQs below. We are a team and we will get through this unprecedented time together.

FAQs:

May I still fish?

Yes! In Pennsylvania, fishing is a year-round activity with many species of fish to enjoy, including bass, panfish, musky, walleye, catfish, trout in select waters, and many more. Fishing is often a solitary activity and is currently acceptable per the guidelines issued by the Pennsylvania Department of Health as long as social distancing guidelines are followed.

If you plan to fish for stocked trout, be aware that the PFBC is operating under a consolidated statewide schedule for all counties during the 2020 trout season. Under this revised plan, **a single Mentored Youth Trout Day will occur on Saturday, April 11, and a single Statewide Opening Day of trout season will take place on Saturday, April 18.**

As a result of these changes, separate, earlier regional mentored youth and opening days will not occur this year in the 18 southeastern counties, including: Adams, Berks, Bucks, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Delaware, Franklin, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lehigh, Montgomery, Northampton, Perry, Philadelphia, Schuylkill, and York. Anglers in these areas should revise their plans as necessary to adjust to the statewide schedule.

What should I do to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus while fishing?

- When bank fishing or wading, please keep a distance of at least 6 feet between you and the nearest angler. A good rule of thumb is that if you can turn your rod perpendicular on all sides of you without hitting anyone, that is a safe distance.
- If fishing with a child or children, advise them to not wander into the personal space of other anglers.
- Refrain from carpooling. Sharing a vehicle with others could put you at risk.
- Avoid crowds. If you arrive at your fishing spot and it's crowded, find another location.
- Avoid sharing fishing gear with anyone. Each angler is advised to have their own fishing gear (bait, bait container, waders, gloves, hand towels, clippers, pliers, or other personal items).
- Remember to avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth; to clean your gear well after using it; and to wash your hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water after fishing.
- If you are fishing at a state or local park, the restrooms may be closed to protect staff and visitors. Use the bathroom before you visit or dispose of waste properly. Carry out any trash, since there are limited staff at these facilities.
- Purchase your fishing license online at www.fishandboat.com.
- Continue to follow the guidance from the CDC below:
 - Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds or use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
 - Cover any coughs or sneezes with your elbow, not your hands.
 - Clean surfaces frequently.
 - Stay home to avoid spreading COVID-19, especially if you are unwell.

Is the Regional Trout Opener still happening?

No. The PFBC is operating under a consolidated statewide schedule for all counties during the 2020 trout season. Under this revised plan, a single Statewide Opening Day of trout season will take place on Saturday, April 18, 2020.

Why did we consolidate the Regional Opening Day and Statewide Opening Day?

To best protect the public and our staff from the spread of COVID-19, we consolidated the Regional and Statewide Opening Days. Opening days are the busiest fishing days of the year. We made the decision to consolidate the openers to the later date in order to provide more time and space to reduce the chance of anglers spreading or coming into contact with COVID-19.

Is Mentored Youth Trout Day still happening?

A single Mentored Youth Trout Day will occur on Saturday, April 11, 2020. The earlier Regional Mentored Youth Trout Day will not occur this year.

Are you still stocking fish? May I help?

The PFBC is still stocking fish! But to help slow the spread of COVID-19, the **public is not permitted to help stock fish** at this time. For the sake of your and our staff's health, we respectfully ask that you not attend stockings this year.

The 2020 trout stocking is being conducted on an accelerated schedule. These changes will not result in any reduction in the approximately 3.2 million trout scheduled to be stocked statewide in 2020.

To complete trout stocking operations without the assistance of the public, the PFBC has modified stocking methods for this year. Many PFBC staff are being reassigned from their normal work duties to assist with stocking fish into lakes and streams. In some cases, pre-season and in-season allocations of trout will be combined into single stocking events to increase the efficiency of stocking trips.

Why aren't we updating the stocking schedule online immediately after stocking?

Our focus is on stocking the fish as quickly and efficiently as we can. We will update the online stocking schedule in advance of the April 11 Mentored Youth Trout Day and April 18 Opening Day.

Where may I fish?

Some trout waters managed under special regulations are open to year-round fishing. For instance, the PFBC's Keystone Select Stocked Trout Waters are managed under Artificial Lures Only and Catch-and-Release regulations, and feature high concentrations of trophy-sized trout.

You can also fish for other species like bass, panfish, or catfish at a creek or lake that is not stocked with trout. There are lots of great options out there! Check out the PFBC's online list of [Pennsylvania's Best Fishing Waters](#) by navigating to www.fishandboat.com, clicking on the "Locate" tab in the upper right hand corner of the screen, then clicking on "Best Fishing Waters" in the drop-down list.

Pennsylvania state park waterbodies are also still open to fishing, as long as the waterbody is not stocked with trout. If the state park waterbody is designated as Open to Year-Round Fishing per the PFBC Fishing Regulations and is stocked with trout, anglers may fish it, but must immediately release any trout caught. Remember that the facilities at the 121 state parks and 20 state forests will be closed until April 30. The public will continue to be able to access trails, lakes, forests, roads, and parking areas at state parks for passive and dispersed recreation.

Please be sure to adhere to the latest travel guidance from the Governor's Office and the Pennsylvania Department of Health.

Please refer to the [Regulations Summary Book](#) on www.fishandboat.com for more information on creels and other regulations.

Wear your lifejacket!

If you fish from a boat or go boating without fishing, please remember to wear your life jacket! Everyone is required to wear a Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD or life jacket) during the cold weather months from November 1st through April 30th while underway or at anchor on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak.

The store where I buy my fishing license is closed. How do I get a fishing license?

Buy it online using the FishBoatPA smartphone app or on a computer at www.fishandboat.com.

Do I still need a fishing license?

Yes. During this unprecedented time, anglers and boaters will be able to display their fishing license digitally on a phone or other mobile device, and they will be able to provide electronic receipts for the purchases of launch permits, fishing licenses, and boat registrations as proof of purchase.

Fishing licenses and permits, launch permits, and boat registration renewals can be purchased online by using the FishBoatPA app or at www.fishandboat.com.

If approached by a Waterways Conservation Officer in the field, an angler or boater can provide a digital image or receipt of their fishing license, and a digital receipt from their launch permit or boat registration as proof of purchase. Of course, you may display your fishing license on your hat or vest as you always have. We expect many anglers will continue to display their licenses and encourage them to do so.

How are fishing license dollars reinvested in Pennsylvania?

The PFBC is a user-funded agency and relies on fishing license revenues to fund the services and programs it provides to anglers – like the hatchery-raised trout that are being stocked across Pennsylvania at an unprecedented rate this spring. Thank you for expressing your support for fishing in the Commonwealth through the purchase of a license that is your ticket to fun and relaxation all year long.

How do I report suspected fishing violations, including poaching before trout season starts?

Call the tip line at 1-855-FISH-KIL (1-855-347-4545).

Still have questions? Again, we welcome your call at 717-705-7800 or email at RA-BE@pa.gov and will get back to you as soon as possible.

Your cooperation is essential in helping the PFBC provide safe and memorable fishing experiences in the midst of many unexpected events happening this spring. By following the guidelines listed above, which are meant to optimize public health and safety while fishing, we hope that you are able to get out along a stream or lake this spring and enjoy the many benefits of fishing and being outdoors.