



# *The Susquehanna Ripples*

*The Newsletter of the Susquehanna Chapter of Trout Unlimited #044*

## **A Watershed Journey to be Featured at Trout Unlimited Susquehanna Chapter Meeting**

The public is invited to a meeting of the Trout Unlimited Susquehanna Chapter featuring local underwater and nature photographer Michael Kinney. Mr. Kinney will use a combination of visuals, sounds and stories to take us on a journey from mountain headwaters, down through the watershed into the West Branch of the Susquehanna River and beyond.

The meeting will be held on **Wednesday, January 14th at 7:00 pm at the Covenant Central Presbyterian Church**, 807 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Williamsport. Parking and entrance to the Church is at the rear of the building with access off of Campbell Street.

For more information, please see our website at <https://susquehannatu.com>.

## **BEGINNERS FLY TYING COURSE OFFERED BY SUSQUEHANNA CHAPTER TROUT UNLIMITED**

The Susquehanna Chapter of Trout Unlimited is pleased to announce that it will be offering a beginners fly tying course on Tuesday evenings starting on January 20, 2026 and running through February 24, 2026. The course will be taught by Rick Kintzer. The cost will be \$25 for adults and \$15 for youth under 18 years of age, who must be at least 12 years old to participate and must be accompanied by a parent or responsible adult throughout each session. Tools and materials will be provided. The classes will be held weekly from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm at the Covenant Central Presbyterian Church, 807 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street in Williamsport (entrance and parking is at the rear of the church - enter off of Campbell Street). Registration will be limited to 15 students, so register early to secure your spot. You can register by sending an email to [susquehannatu@gmail.com](mailto:susquehannatu@gmail.com) or by call or text to Walt Nicholson at 570-447-3600. Please list the names of everyone you are registering, and contact information (email and phone number).

## Presidents Message...

It's cold and snowing outside, so today I've decided to work on cleaning up the photos on my phone; something I've been avoiding for years. Like most people, I have way too many pictures and they are not very well organized. I need to pare down the number, create some organization, and transfer many to my computer as back-up. I know this will be difficult.

One particular photo takes me back to an early May morning and a second-chance Brown Trout. A nice place to visit on this cold, frozen January day.

I know a place on a local stream where after a long, flat stretch of shallow riffles, the stream gradient drops sharply, the water picks up velocity and flows into a deep green riffle against the far bank, but it also forms a deep pool on my side of the creek. Right at the head, where the deep, green riffle begins, and along the seam with the pool, I will always catch fish. Mostly Trout, but also an occasional Smallmouth Bass. What makes this place special is that since it is miles downstream from stocked Trout water and is well back from the road, it is not a popular fishing spot. In fact, I have never seen another fisherman while I was there and only once heard someone talk about this stretch of water. Accordingly, my hopes are always high for some good fish and it generally doesn't disappoint.



One evening I decide to head out and give this spot a try, but I get off to a late start. By the time I arrive there is maybe only an hour of daylight left. I take a few moments to survey the water for any feeding fish, but surprisingly, I see none despite a decent number of Caddis flies in the air. I decide to fish a Caddis nymph and I move in a slow, low-profile manner into my favorite casting position. My first cast drops perfect, into the shallow riffles upstream, riding the current down into the seam between the deep green riffles and the slower water of the pool. Almost immediately I feel a violent strike that nearly pulls the rod from my hand, but just as quickly, my line goes limp and all is calm. There is a big difference between the strike of an aggressive, medium sized fish that darts quickly to grab your fly before his stream

mates can get it and the strike of a big, heavy fish just doing his thing. This was definitely the latter. I didn't know why I missed the fish, or if I had stung him with the hook, so I decided to back out and let things settle down. In fact, I decided to head home. I knew the fish's location and I'd come back at dawn.

With a sense of excitement, I arrived early and was rigged up with a completely different and larger nymph. After sneaking into the same location as last evening, I made my first cast to the exact, same spot. No sooner had my nymph reached the deep-water seam, my line went tight and a good fish shot into the deep riffles and downstream, peeling off line! Trying to get control of the situation and avoid a break-off, I quickly found myself trying to recover line and keep it tight as the fish turned and began swimming directly towards me. In a surprisingly short period of time the fish tired, began to slow and swelled at the surface, giving me my first look at a gorgeous, twenty-two inch Brown Trout that was gliding toward my undersized net. With my rod held high and line tight, I gently coaxed the front end of the fish into the net and toward the shore. After a quick picture, I gently picked up the beautifully colored Brownie and slid it back into the water.

Watching the fish glide off into the deep, I actually felt glad that I had missed this fish the prior evening, as it made the morning's success that much sweeter. Guess I'd better get back to work!

May you have many tight lines this new year!

Steve Martin  
President – Susquehanna Chapter of Trout Unlimited

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Joe Radley (2025)  
Bill Worobec (2026)  
Bob Baker (2026)  
John Kolb (2027)  
Open (2027)

### Director Emeritus and Chapter Adviser

Dave Craig

### Chapter Advisor

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### Past President / Financial Reviewer

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## Chapter Elections

The Board of Directors of the Susquehanna Chapter of Trout Unlimited have released the proposed Slate of Officers and Board of Directors for the Upcoming Election.

The election will be held at our annual meeting on January 14, 2026. Nominations will be accepted from now until the election on January 14.

All individuals nominated must be a member in good standing of Trout Unlimited. Please consider nominating someone or consider yourself for any of these positions. If you have any questions, please let us know at [susquehannatu@gmail.com](mailto:susquehannatu@gmail.com).

**President** (1 year term) - Stephen Martin

**Vice President** (1 year term) - Jim Latini

**Secretary** (1 year term) - Kevin McJunkin

**Treasurer** (1 year term) - Dave Walters

### **Board of Directors**

Mike Di Domenico (fill unfilled term from last election – 2 years)

Mike Ditchfield (3 year term)

Dennis Dusza (3 year term)

Please consider running for any of the above positions. Even if you decide not to run for an elected position, there are many other ways that you can help YOUR Chapter: volunteer to help with events, becoming a Committee Chair or serving on any number of committees, or in any way that you are able to do so. Please let us know that you want to help and we will find a way that best suits you!

### **Our Official Newsletter**

The [Susquehanna Ripples](#) is the official newsletter of the Susquehanna Chapter of Trout Unlimited. It is published 8 times a year: January, February, March, April, June/July, September, October, and November. Please consider submitting something of interest to our readers; a story, stream report, recipe, photograph, gear review, etc. Submissions received will be placed in the next available issue. All submissions can be sent to [susquehannatu@gmail.com](mailto:susquehannatu@gmail.com) / [boblaker@comcast.net](mailto:boblaker@comcast.net).

**Chapter meetings** are held on the 2nd Wednesday of each month (unless otherwise noted) and are always free and open to the public and begin at 7:00 pm. Meetings are held at the **Covenant Central Presbyterian Church, 807 W 4th St, Williamsport, PA 17701**, in the Fellowship Hall (unless otherwise noted). Parking is at the rear of the Church and enter off of Campbell Street.

No meetings are held in May, June, July, August or December







Army Veteran Mike Deaver putting the finishing touches on an 8 1/2 foot, 6 weight fly rod compliments of TU's Veteran's Service Partnership. Mike spent 21 years in the Army and 24 years as a guard in the PA State Prison System. Thank you Mike for your service

Photo and information by Charles Knowlden

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## **Pa. study examines improvements for hunters, anglers, wildlife**

Brian Whipkey  
Pennsylvania Outdoors Columnist  
Dec. 23, 2025,

Everything is on the table in a study of Pennsylvania's two wildlife agencies right down to the possibility of a combination hunting and fishing license.

Hunters and anglers will be seeing more cooperative efforts between the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) in the future.

In addition to their existing partnerships, the two agencies are participating in a study to evaluate opportunities for cooperation, shared services and potential consolidation of select functions.

Wildlife Management Institute, a non-profit organization that provides expert advice, research and advoca-

cy for sound wildlife management policies, is conducting a \$49,000 study of the PFBC and PGC. Both agencies are splitting the cost.

Tim Schaeffer, executive director of the PFBC, and Steve Smith, executive director of the PGC, worked together to have the study performed. They also participated in a joint interview to discuss the goals.

Schaeffer pointed out the two organizations already are sharing their resources. For example, this winter the PFBC is conducting ice rescue training events and the Game Commission's staff is attending the programs.

"There's lot of cross training like that already taking place where boat operator training for game wardens, the ice rescue training and water rescue training. That cross training on law enforcement has certainly happened in the past and continues to happen," Schaeffer said. "The assistance that each of the officers for each agency provide to each other, that has been a mainstay of both agencies for decades."

Smith agreed. "It starts with Tim and I and it goes all the way down through our ranks. We are in constant communication," Smith said.

Smith said the two executive directors, deputy executive directors and their legislative teams regularly discuss what each other is seeing.

"We recognize that we share similar missions. We have overlap as far our resources and our customers, and as you would expect, and would want to see in government, and with good government, we have open lines of communications wherever necessary to help fulfill our missions," Smith said.

He said the state legislature back in 2014 looked at how the two agencies could work together and conversations have been going on in the background since them.

"Certainly, a lot has changed between how we operate, but a lot has also stayed the same in the past decade," he said.

During one of Smith and Schaeffer's regulator conversations they landed on the idea of a study. "Why don't we get an independent entity to get a fresh look at our operations and see if there's even greater opportunities for us to collaborate together," Smith said.

Schaeffer agreed about the common cause. "We both want to make sure that every nickel of every license dollar is going to its highest and best use for the customers, resource and the staff. Is there a more efficient way that we can deliver on our complementary missions, and WMI is the foremost respected expert on natural resource governance and policy in the country," he said.

"In the past the legislature has studied this. We thought, let's bring in someone who really is well versed in natural resources policy and governance and take a look. An unbiased really unfiltered look at what we're doing here," Schaeffer said.

Pennsylvania is the only state that has two separate agencies and boards of commissioners to govern both wild animals and aquatic life. Schaeffer explained that both agencies' boards were made aware of the plan. "With the blessing of the boards of commissioners, we've embarked on this," he said.

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*PA study continued*

Schaeffer pointed out that staffing reductions with federal agencies in 2025 including with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service convey the need for Pennsylvania entities to step up. "They don't have the same number of staff doing the same things they did before," he said.

"If there is work that needs to be done on behalf of the resources that we're entrusted to serve and our federal partners aren't in the position to deliver on their end of this federalism structure that we have, well that work still needs to be done. And if there's a way that we could reprogram redundancies between the agencies into that missing piece for conservation, it's only responsible for us to take a look at where those opportunities are," Schaeffer said.

When it comes to law enforcement duties, Schaeffer said the wardens and waterway conservation officers are working together. "In most counties, it's their closest partner that they work with," he said.

Smith agreed. "Just about every warden has a story of a case that overlapped with our sister agency and had that officer on speed dial and worked together. I think that happens constantly," Smith said.

The study will look at all aspects of their operations including sharing staffing during unique busy times with openings of various hunting and fishing seasons.

"The way Tim and I look at it is everything's on the table. We're not coming into this with preconceived notions of where this should go and here's things we can't do. It's more so of coming in, an unbiased, third party and putting all the options on the table and saying what's in the best interest of our resource, customers and staff, and certainly law enforcement is an area that we recognize the potential for overlap, and we recognize that there's potential ways that we could expand our law enforcement presence in the state through working together," Smith said.

He also pointed to nationwide challenges in recruiting people to into law enforcement careers. "So, as we look to the future, if there's a way that, again, all options on the table, if a unified consolidated law enforcement force would help us better recruit and retain that critical law enforcement staff, then I think that's something that's worth looking into," Smith said.

The Game Commission operates a 24-hour a day dispatch center for the public to report incidents, concerns and to ask questions.

That level of service isn't available regarding the Fish and Boat Commission. "I would love that, and my hat's off to Steve and the Game Commission for, an incredibly significant investment that they've made to provide that service to the Commonwealth. It'll knock your socks off," Schaeffer said.

He took the PFBC's board to see the Game Commission's dispatch center that works to keep the game wardens safe, that provides resource protection and customer service. "We don't have that and couldn't afford to do that our own," Schaeffer said. "That's being honest about this."

The dispatch center highlights the benefit other states have with one combined agency.

"We are absolutely missing an opportunity to creatively identify how anglers and boaters and aquatic resources could be garnering the same benefits from the Game Commission's wonderful structure that they put in place, but her hands are tied right now," Schaeffer said.

"Everything's on the table, but at the end of the day, one of the things motivating me is to make sure that the officers who are out there protecting the aquatic side of the natural resource equation have the same benefits and the same tools at their disposal as our partners of the Game Commission does. And at this point, they don't," Schaeffer said.

He said it would better for the customers if there was one phone number to call for a fish or game questions. "Make it easier the customer, make it easier for the person who's reporting the violation, make it easier and more efficient for the dispatcher, and then, ultimately, make sure that whoever's responding to those calls has the tools to respond as safely as possible. That's what this is all about it," Schaeffer said. "One phone number does probably make a lot of sense."

Looking ahead to the future, one benefit of two agencies collaborating their efforts, Schaeffer said would be in keeping hunting and fishing license costs down.

"It's the same electronic license system that they work with," Schaeffer said.

Smith suggested the option of a combo fishing and hunting license option similarly to what some other states offer. "Just on the convenience factor for our customers, as well as potential cost savings for them, and an opportunity for our agencies to get as many buying customers as potentially as possible," Smith said.

"A lot of other states have that one stop shop. You get your combo license; you're set for the year. In Pennsylvania, we don't have that. And it might seem like a minor thing, but for some individuals that might be all the obstacle that they need to not participate in either of our activities for that year," Smith said.

The two agencies are collaborating on habitat improvement projects on state game lands, including areas with stream crossings, especially in areas with wild trout. "Those kinds of examples exist all across our game land system where both agencies see the need to work together, to build upon what we offer and keeping those projects in mind," Smith said.

Schaeffer is optimistic that there could be more partnerships between the agencies and private landowners who allow the public to hunt or fish. "We stock more trout on private land than we do on public land," he said. "If someone is gracious enough to open their property to public hunting, or allow public fishing there with trout stocking, what a great opportunity to perhaps, expand the recreation, to the other discipline," he said.

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*PA study continued*

"Similarly, if I'd been a game land cooperator that's allowed people onto my property, what a great opportunity to maybe talk to that person about stream restoration," Schaeffer said.

Smith points out that it's the agencies which are voluntarily and willingly starting these conversations. "It's not being forced on the agencies or threatened on the agencies as a punitive measure. None of that is involved in this instance. It's a proactive step by the agencies who are trying to do the right thing for the future," he said.

"We'll look at the analysis, present it to our boards, and the facts of the analysis drive where we go from there. A key point that I would emphasize is that this is the leadership of the agencies in cooperation with their boards initiating this step," Smith said.

Smith pointed out the value of each agency having its own board of volunteer commissioners.

"That's one thing that's unique about Pennsylvania and special as well. Independent, non-political boards that can make decisions that are in the best interests of the resources we've been entrusted with," he said.

"And as we approach this analysis and think about what may come down the road, there are certain things that we've considered to be non-negotiables and maintaining that independent board status for those kind of decisions regarding the resource is certainly at the top of that list. It's something that has benefited Pennsylvania's sportsmen and women for over a century now, and we want to make sure it continues," Smith said.

Schaeffer pointed out that the boards are policy making boards and do not decide on regular operational matters.

He said the boards are the ones who vote on topics like wild trout streams and the opening day of deer season. "You want those resource-based decision vested in an independent board of commissioners," Schaeffer said.

The boards are not involved in operational decisions such as what sort of trucks to buy or what sort of fire-arms law enforcement should be carrying.

Both agencies have sent an email to their staff members to explain what's being proposed with the study. "I think we've been very clear right from the bat that this isn't about looking to eliminate positions or evaluating individual job performance," Smith said. "It's about how we're structured and how we operate for years to come," Smith said.

WMI is now conducting confidential surveys with employees to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. "We really want honest feedback. I'm past being nervous about this. I'm energized by this," Schaeffer said. "This is exciting," he said about writing the next chapter for fish and wildlife in Pennsylvania.

"If we do this right, it leads to better, more thorough and integrated fish and wildlife conservation," Schaeffer said.

Smith added, "If we can do this correctly and maintain that robust law enforcement presence that we need to protect the resource, then I think that's what Tim and

I would consider to be a success, and that's what we're trying to achieve."

The recommendations of the study are expected by June and will be shared with the public.

Brian Whipkey is the outdoors columnist for USA TODAY Network sites in Pennsylvania. Contact him at [bwhipkey@gannett.com](mailto:bwhipkey@gannett.com) and sign up for our weekly Go Outdoors PA newsletter email on this website's homepage under your login name. Follow him on Facebook at [whipkeyoutdoors](https://www.facebook.com/whipkeyoutdoors).

## The 'toxic cocktail' brewing in Pennsylvania's waterways

Taken from The Allegheny Front website and published on December 21, 2025

[://www.alleghenyfront.org/pennsylvania-frack-waste-water-radioactivity/?fbclid=IwY2xjawPLRjdleHRuA2FlbQlXMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjlwMzkyNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeOq6sMz2TQtk5uBXJCfexjrDaSB8ZkF1NeP9tAc8EYDSJZ\\_dDHruQjyS3Kzs\\_aem\\_hhu8235mgh65HTGtcKqajg](http://www.alleghenyfront.org/pennsylvania-frack-waste-water-radioactivity/?fbclid=IwY2xjawPLRjdleHRuA2FlbQlXMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjlwMzkyNzg4MjAwODkyAAEeOq6sMz2TQtk5uBXJCfexjrDaSB8ZkF1NeP9tAc8EYDSJZ_dDHruQjyS3Kzs_aem_hhu8235mgh65HTGtcKqajg)

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By [Kiley Bense](#), photos by Scott Goldsmith | Inside Climate News

***This is part of a [series](#) tracking waste from the fracking industry.***

Off a back road in the hilly country south of Pittsburgh, a tributary to the Monongahela River runs through overgrown vegetation and beneath an abandoned railroad trestle, downstream from the Westmoreland Sanitary Landfill. On a cool day in late July, it was swollen with rain. Tire tracks through the dense brush were puddled with muddy water.

Environmental scientist Yvonne Sorovac and local watershed advocate Hannah Hohman, her glasses spattered with raindrops, stood together under an umbrella, watching the tumble of the stream. Both women visit the landfill site regularly to collect water samples and record signs of contamination. The water here, which flows downhill from the landfill's discharge point, is often coated with stiff globs of foam, Sorovac said. The water upstream of the outfall is clear.

Over the course of more than a decade, as Pennsylvania's fracking industry took off, the Westmoreland landfill accepted hundreds of thousands of tons of oil and gas waste and wastewater, toxic and often radioactive byproducts that contain elements and heavy metals from deep inside the earth and synthetic chemicals used in the drilling process. That melange can include radionuclides like radium, uranium and thorium as well as harmful substances like arsenic, lead and benzene.

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*Toxic cocktail continued*

After years of violations at Westmoreland, scientists and residents are keeping a close watch on the landfill, monitoring for any signs that runoff has made its way into public waterways. But oil and gas waste is going to landfills across the state, often with far less scrutiny. At least twenty-two other landfills currently take Pennsylvania oil and gas waste, and some also accept it from other states.

Oil and gas companies operating in Pennsylvania reported creating nearly 8.8 million tons of solid waste between 2017 and 2024, an Inside Climate News analysis of state records found. That works out to an annual average that tops the waste produced by every resident and commercial enterprise in Allegheny County, where Pittsburgh is located.

According to Pennsylvania oil and gas operators, about 6.3 million tons of this waste went to landfills in the state. But the true amount of oil and gas waste reaching the state's landfills is likely much larger, an Inside Climate News investigation found.

And mounting evidence suggests that this ever-increasing volume is harming the streams, creeks and rivers where Pennsylvanians fish, swim, kayak and source drinking water.

In one case, at Max Environmental Technologies Bulger in southwestern Pennsylvania, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has identified the radioactive element radium, a common contaminant in oil and gas waste, as one of the likely causes of the pollution in nearby creeks. In a 2023 study, scientists from the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University found elevated levels of radium in the sediment downstream of the outfall at five of the landfills taking the industry's waste. Scientists have also discovered radium build-up in freshwater mussels' bodies and shells downstream of facilities that have treated oil and gas waste.

Four of the landfills taking oil and gas waste are out of compliance with their permits, an Inside Climate News review found.

Another seven have been out of compliance with the Clean Water Act for six months or more in the last five years.

Thirteen are discharging wastewater or stormwater into waterways the EPA classified as "impaired," too polluted or otherwise degraded to meet water-quality standards.

State regulators have been aware of these issues for years, but little has changed in the way the waste is handled, transported or disposed of. In 2020, then Attorney General Josh Shapiro announced the publication of a grand jury investigation into fracking, which concluded that Pennsylvania had failed in its responsibility to protect the public from the environmental and health impacts of the industry. One of the grand jury's eight recommendations for the state government called for clearer labeling of fracking waste during transport.

"Our government and the shale gas industry currently have no long-term sustainable solution to managing

the toxic waste generated by fracking operations," the panel wrote. "At the very least, the industry should be required to more safely and responsibly transport this waste around the Commonwealth."

In Pennsylvania, contamination from fracking is layered on top of earlier waves of pollution from coal mining, manufacturing and oil drilling. One of the most prevalent sources of contamination is abandoned mine drainage, a type of pollution that comes from coal mines; like a number of other landfills in Pennsylvania, Westmoreland was built on top of a shuttered mining operation. Despite decades of clean-up efforts, more than 5,500 miles of streams in Pennsylvania are still affected by abandoned mine drainage, with devastating consequences for aquatic wildlife. Acid mine drainage, a type of abandoned mine pollution, is the second leading cause of stream pollution in Pennsylvania.

There's been little research into what this jumble of pollutants might mean for the environment.

"When you're mixing these things together into some kind of toxic cocktail, what are the impacts going to be on Pennsylvania's waters?" said John Quigley, who previously served as the head of both the state Department of Environmental Protection and the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. "The cumulative impacts of this could be horrendous."

Westmoreland did not respond to requests for comment. Max Environmental Technologies, which owns two landfills, said in a statement that its Bulger location is currently closed and its Yukon location is not accepting oil and gas waste right now.

When reached for comment about threats to the environment posed by fracking waste, the Marcellus Shale Coalition, a gas industry trade group, said that existing state and federal laws as well as companies' safety practices "have proven to be protective of public health and the environment, and our members remain committed to operating safely, transparently, and responsibly."

Sorovac and Hohman saw that one side of the stream near Westmoreland was a reddish color on the July day they were collecting samples. "You can see the historic acid mine drainage here," said Sorovac, who works for Protect PT, a local grassroots environmental group that has been monitoring the landfill for years.

"All of our waterways are impacted by legacy [pollution], but this stream does have drainage from the landfill, so it's one that we're concerned about," she said. "It's never only one thing."

As if to emphasize her point, the other side of the stream was a chalky white as it poured from a culvert on the opposite bank. Aluminum-heavy drainage from the coal mine beneath the landfill was a likely culprit, she said. The color acted almost like a visual calling card for water coming from the landfill.

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Hohman is an environmental steward at Three Rivers Waterkeeper, a nonprofit that works to protect the watersheds of the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio rivers. She lives locally and responds when residents call the waterkeeper about potential contamination.

"People are on alert about this facility, and they're concerned about what's coming into their waterways," she said. She hopes that more of them are starting to understand that the more the gas industry grows, the more waste it generates, and that waste has to go somewhere. "It's all connected," she said.

Legacy pollution like acid mine drainage, meanwhile, can complicate efforts to prove the source of contamination. "It's really convenient for operators to point to a company that doesn't exist anymore, and say it's because of that. Then there's nobody to be held accountable," Sorovac said.

"That's all we want, is accountability," Hohman said. "And honestly, just to get down to the answers of what's happening to our waterways. What impact does this have? What don't we know?"

The Westmoreland landfill is part of a cluster in southwestern Pennsylvania that has accepted large volumes of oil and gas waste and is also situated on top of former coal mines. Arden Landfill in Washington and Max Environmental's facilities in Yukon and Bulger are all part of that group.

"You can't build anything in southwestern Pennsylvania without building on top of a coal mine," Sorovac said.

It's not just there: Other landfills built on formerly mined land include Keystone Sanitary Landfill, near Scranton, and Phoenix Resources, in the northern part of the state.

Community activists are fighting a proposed expansion at Keystone, which accepted more than 1 million tons of oil and gas waste between 2017 and 2024, DEP records show. The landfill is close to homes, a playground and multiple schools.

In the first half of 2025, Keystone produced an average of 7 million gallons of leachate every month, according to DEP's figures. Leachate—the liquid mixture created when rainwater flows through a landfill's waste, picking up contaminants along the way—is another worry for environmental groups monitoring landfills that accept large volumes of oil and gas waste.

DEP fined Keystone \$15,000 this year for exceeding its leachate storage capacity for several months in 2023 and 2024. At a Pennsylvania Senate hearing in 2021, then deputy attorney general Rebecca Franz acknowledged concerns about landfill leachate and fracking pollution. "There is certainly a long way to go to fix this difficult problem," she said.

Robert Ross, a retired research ecologist who lives near Phoenix Resources in Tioga County, was part of a decades-long fight to clean up acid mine drainage in the area, including in the streams near the property the landfill now occupies. The community

opposed the landfill's construction in the 1990s, worried about water pollution, but residents lost that fight after a national corporation, Waste Management, bought the property, he said.

Waste Management now owns nearly half of the landfills in Pennsylvania that take oil and gas waste. It did not respond to requests for comment.

The Phoenix landfill has accepted more than 1.7 million tons of oil and gas waste over the past eight years, according to DEP records. It is one of the landfills where researchers found elevated radium downstream of the outfall.

Phoenix Resources' leachate testing results from 2024 show elevated levels of the chemical barium, which is often found in drilling waste. For comparison, the test results were almost five times higher than recommended EPA standards for barium in drinking water.

Despite its long extractive past, from clear-cutting forests to extensive mining, rural Tioga County is a popular tourist destination for camping, hiking and hunting. Pine Creek, downstream from Phoenix, is a "cherished trout stream," a place people come from all over the state to fish, Ross said.

Sorovac's test results taken here over the past two years show evidence of mine pollution as well as higher than expected levels of PFOA and PFOS, synthetic "forever chemicals" linked to increased risk of cancer, developmental delays and reproductive problems. Landfills are a significant source of forever chemicals. As the women watched, the gush from the culvert whitened further, like a plume of smoke unfurling underwater.

"Oh my God, I feel like it definitely got cloudier while we were standing here," Sorovac said, her eyes widening.

"It just got even more dramatic," Hohman agreed.

Ross said he rarely goes to the state forest now. What was once a refuge from human interference is dominated by drilling, well pads, pipelines, truck traffic and noise that extends for miles, he said.

"The place is just an industrial zone," he said. "I call it little Texas up there."

As natural gas development has accelerated in Tioga County, Ross is frustrated that years of conservation work to clean up the impacts of coal mining on waterways could be undone by a new source of underregulated pollution.

"It's very distressing," he said. "It's just one thing after another."

Fewer people are paying attention to local environmental impacts than there used to be. "Our watershed group is suffering from a generation gap, where there's fewer and fewer volunteers," Ross said. "So there's only so much we can do. We don't monitor the water anymore."

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Bryn Hammarstrom, a member of the Pine Creek Headwaters Protection Group, said Pine Creek is still one of the anchors of the county's ecotourism economy. But fracking brought huge disruptions, he said, sparking financial jealousy between neighbors over gas leases, driving up rents and creating a local homeless population, and slicing through the sense of peaceful seclusion that draws people to this region. He doesn't think many residents know about the potential harms of the gas wells' waste or that it's being disposed of so close by.

"People say, 'Well, it was natural. It was there anyway,'" he said. "No, it was two miles down, locked in shale. And now we've pulverized it and brought it up to the surface."

At the entrance to the Westmoreland landfill, rainwater sluiced down the steep driveway while a parade of trucks shuttled in and out. Sitting in a car on the narrow shoulder of the road, Sorovac considered the flow of water running off the hill.

"They're gonna have a really hard time managing their leachate with how rainy this season has been," she said.

One of Sorovac's questions about Westmoreland, and other sites that produce massive amounts of leachate every year, is whether they've adapted to the shifting weather patterns created by climate change. With heavier and more frequent rainfall comes more leachate to treat and dispose of, and more opportunities for the leachate to pollute.

In 2021 alone, Westmoreland held more than 10 million gallons of leachate in its storage tanks, according to the landfill's annual operations report. In the fourth quarter of 2024, the landfill reported producing more than 23,000 gallons of leachate per day.

"That landfill right now is probably doing things to control runoff that are OK or have been OK in the past," Sorovac said. "But even if they go by the guidelines that are given to them, will those guidelines be adequate if we keep having these intense rain events?"

The 60-year-old Westmoreland landfill became notorious in 2018, after the Belle Vernon municipal authority's sewage treatment plant turned away its leachate for being toxic to effectively treat. Activists contended that Westmoreland's leachate had changed in composition because the site was accepting so much solid waste and wastewater from fracking.

Ross is an avid birder, and he says fracking is drowning out the sounds of nature. When drilling started about 14 months ago near his house, he wasn't surprised when the company took baseline samples of his water in case it became contaminated. But he wasn't expecting the light and noise pollution.

"There's no peace anymore. I'm ready to move out of my home. I've been here 35 years. I just can't take much of it anymore. It's never-ending noise now," he said. "I don't hear ruffed grouse booming anymore, or deer snorting. Songbirds are harder to hear now."

Phoenix Resources' annual operation reports show that much of the oil and gas waste the site accepts is coming from within Tioga County and neighboring northern counties. The 161,890-acre Tioga State Forest was opened to fracking along with other public lands in 2008 by then Gov. Ed Rendell. Rendell later banned future leases, but existing leases were not canceled.

Activists contended that Westmoreland's leachate had changed in composition because the site was accepting so much solid waste and wastewater from fracking.

Westmoreland has been the subject of four consent orders from DEP since 2020 for violations of three state laws governing water quality, waste transportation and waste management. The landfill continues to receive large volumes of oil and gas waste, accepting more than 98,000 tons in 2024, according to the landfill's records.

The landfill is currently trucking its leachate off-site for disposal elsewhere, but it has applied for a permit from DEP to treat the waste itself and discharge the wastewater into the Monongahela.

"The landfill can't even function properly as a landfill. Now they're going to add this additional use to the property?" said Gillian Graber, executive director at Protect PT.

"Our view is that the landfill should be shut down, that it needs to be remediated, because it has so much oil and gas waste in it," she said. "It's going to keep producing toxic, radioactive leachate."

Increasing amounts of leachate fueled by climate change would likely pose disposal problems even without the contributions of Pennsylvania's natural gas industry. But fracking, which contributes to climate damage, has further upped the ante. Landfills' leachate now contains elevated levels of chemicals like barium, benzene, ethylbenzene, xylene and toluene, all markers of oil and gas waste.

Testing results for Westmoreland's leachate submitted by the company to DEP this year show elevated levels of barium, benzene, toluene and xylenes. Duquesne University's John Stolz analyzed the data using a method created with his colleague at the University of Pittsburgh, Daniel Bain, to assess whether a water sample has been impacted by oil and gas versus other kinds of pollution. He found Westmoreland's recent results to be consistent with the chemical make-up of fracking waste.

"There's an indication that this landfill leachate continues to have the characteristics of oil and gas waste," said Stolz, an environmental engineering professor who has studied how shale gas extraction impacts water quality for years.

Mixing old and new pollution—oil and gas waste, forever chemicals and acid mine drainage swirling together—makes it harder to treat the water, he and others warn. It's not even clear in some cases what the contamination is, let alone its effects on people, the environment and wildlife.

*Continued on next page*

*Toxic cocktail continue*

“You’re creating a toxic stew,” Stolz said

Outside a strip mall that houses a children’s gymnastics center, you can get a better view of the vast Westmoreland landfill next door, which is so large that it can be hard to tell where it starts and ends.

“When I first saw it from up there, I was like, ‘Where is it?’ And they’re like, ‘right there,’” said Jim Cirilano, a community advocate at Protect PT. “It looks like the landscape. Do you know what I mean? It’s so big, it was unrecognizable.”

A few homes sit just outside the landfill’s border, but two of them are empty now, Cirilano said, after they were purchased by the company. One of the houses shows signs of long abandonment, trees and vines growing through the walls. He stood beside a rusted dumpster that sat alone in the parking lot as rainwater collected on the pockmarked asphalt and trucks roving over the landfill backed up and beeped. Cirilano identified the calls of a red wing blackbird and a cardinal and watched a flock of starlings circling overhead. He speculated that the birds were finding insects to eat on the parts of the landfill where grass had grown over the waste.

“See the vultures on the roof?” he said. Three turkey vultures squatted on top of one of the nearby houses. He sniffed at the foggy air. It had a whiff of something sour. “You can smell it too, can’t you?”

Her clothes and hair sodden from the rain, Hohman pondered the future.

“I worry that we take so long to respond and adapt that by the time we do, it’s already too late,” Hohman said. “We’ve seen it over and over again. We live in this cycle of extraction.” She drew a circle with her finger in the air.

In 2024, DEP estimated that it would need \$5 billion to clean up and restore streams and land damaged by abandoned coal mines. It’s far from fully reckoning with the pollution from that older boom, and now it’s well into a new one.

“As we address legacy pollution ... we have new pollution,” Hohman said. She paused as a beeping truck drove over the landfill behind her. “And now we’re seeing how those things interact. What’s next?”

*Inside Climate News’ Peter Aldhous contributed reporting to this article.*

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## **Here's why few brook trout, Pennsylvania's state fish, are stocked**

*Brian Whipkey  
Pennsylvania Outdoors Columnist  
Dec. 30, 2025, 8:01 p.m. ET*

- Pennsylvania stocks about 3.2 million trout annually, but only 4% are brook trout, the state fish.
- The number of stocked brook trout has been significantly reduced since 2016 to protect wild populations from gill lice and genetic mixing.
- Stocking decisions are based on factors like the presence of wild trout, water quality, and which species provide higher angler catch rates.
- Brook trout are now primarily stocked in waters with low to no existing wild brook trout populations.

Brook trout may be Pennsylvania’s state fish, but there are several reasons why they only make up about 4% of the stocked fish each year.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission stocks about 3.2 million trout in 691 streams and 130 lakes open to public angling each year.

This year, the trout stockings included approximately 2.4 million rainbow trout, 693,000 brown trout and 125,000 brook trout.

The agency’s Fisheries Committee reviewed its brook trout strategy during its Dec. 23 meeting.

Beginning in 2007, the agency decided to stock fewer, but larger, trout based on the data collected from an angler opinion survey.

“This is when we reduced our total number of fish from 4.1 to 3.2 million trout, which is what we’re currently raising today,” Nate Walters, fisheries biologist and coldwater unit leader, said.

From 2008-16, the PFBC’s staff conducted stocked trout residency studies in streams that are part of the Stocked Trout Waters program.

The results of the studies have led to adjustments being made to the various species used in stockings to ensure wild trout protection and provide greater angling success.

In 2016, the staff documented gill lice in a few wild trout populations in northcentral Pennsylvania.

Because of that finding, the agency started lowering the number of brook trout being stocked in watersheds where gill lice are present, and streams and watersheds where wild brook trout are present.

The agency has reduced the number of brook trout stocked statewide from 523,000 to 128,000 since 2016. According to Walters, brook trout now make up only 4% of the total trout being stocked.

In looking at a state map of watersheds containing strong brook trout populations and where streams and lakes are stocked with brookies, Walters said, “You can see that there’s not a lot of overlap with our stockings and these watersheds. In the northcentral portion of the state where we have our stronghold of brook trout populations, we’re not stocking any brook trout. Also, in some of the other regions, like the Laurel Highlands, and even in the northeast, we’re not stocking too many waters within these watersheds.”

*Continued on next page*

*Stocking continued*

The PFBC has adjusted the species composition of the fish offered to the cooperatives to better align with the types of fish stocked by the PFBC.

Since 2019, the total number of brook trout distributed to volunteer cooperative nurseries has been reduced by approximately 150,000.

The move aligns the numbers with hatchery operations in the total number of each species being raised, and it aligns with the fisheries management strategies.

The majority of brook trout being stocked by cooperative nurseries, Walters said, happens in the southcentral and southeastern portions of Pennsylvania, mostly in watersheds that don't have strong wild brook trout populations.

The species allocations for stream stockings are based on which species have better stream residency, provide higher angler catch rates and are more tolerant to warmer temperatures.

Walters also said stocking "adjustments are made to eliminate the risks of introgression (transfer of genes), minimize disease concerns and to protect wild trout populations."

Dan Pastore, commissioner from Erie County, asked, "What are the criteria that are present that leads you to decide that a particular stream would be appropriate for stocking brook trout as opposed to some other species? Why are we stocking brook trout in some of these streams instead of some other species?"

Walters said there are two things that mainly go into the decision. "One, staff are evaluating whether or not wild brook trout are present in those streams. And then, also considering the water quality," he said.

In the northeast region, he said, the streams have a lower pH level. "And based off the residency work that we've done, we feel like brook trout have been the most suitable species for the data we have at this point," Walters said.

If there are wild brook trout in a stream, the agency doesn't stock brookies there. "Our goal is to protect wild trout populations there and so to minimize any risks with introgression of genes, disease concerns, we typically look to stock another species in waters where brook trout are present," he said.

Taken from GoErie website at <https://www.goerie.com>

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## **Survey notes differences between wild trout and stocked trout anglers**

Brian Whipkey  
Pennsylvania Outdoors Columnist  
Dec. 30, 2025

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is studying the differences between wild and stocked trout anglers.

A recent survey found 58% of anglers support moving stocked trout away from streams with wild trout populations.

The commission approved 13 exemptions to continue stocking trout on Class A wild trout streams.

The survey revealed wild trout anglers fish more days and travel farther than stocked trout anglers.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is studying the differences between stocked trout anglers and wild trout anglers as it approved 13 stocking exemptions on wild trout streams.

During the Dec. 23 Fisheries Committee meeting, the agency reviewed the findings of a trout angler survey and noted exemptions to its trout stocking program.

The agency partnered with Responsive Management to survey anglers for the 2023 multi-modal trout angler survey.

The results are now being used to address the agency's objectives in its strategic plan for the management of trout fisheries in Pennsylvania. The survey collected 3,383 completed questionnaires.

"I think what was encouraging about the results is that a majority of both wild trout and stocked trout anglers (69%) were satisfied with their trout fishing in 2022. So, overall I'd say that shows we're doing a pretty good job as an agency managing our trout fisheries," Nate Walters, fisheries biologist and coldwater unit leader, said.

### **Stocking trout in wild trout waters**

When it comes to placing stocked trout where there is a quality wild trout population, 58% of anglers support moving those stocked trout to a nearby location with fewer or no wild trout present.

Walters said with this data, "Staff can maximize angling opportunities in more locations by managing our wild trout resources for the year-round opportunities and the self-sustaining populations that are there while utilizing stocked trout to provide the recreational seasonal opportunities where those fisheries wouldn't exist otherwise."

Charlie Charlesworth, chairman of the committee from Lackawanna County, asked that if a stocked trout stream becomes designated as a Class A wild trout water and can no longer accept stocked trout, does the agency find another stream to stock those fish. Walters said in those cases, the agency looks for a replacement waterway that's near to the waterway being removed.

*Continued on next page*

“That’s kind of the best option that we look for first. We do have some other options where if we can’t find a suitable water in close proximity, we could look at increasing the allocation on another water that has been stocked,” he said. “We could add another in-season stocking potentially.”

Charlesworth pointed out, “So what this is saying, is that the fishermen who fish for stocked fish, they want you to keep away from wild trout streams and find other locations or increase in other locations when these other commissioners voted to do exactly the opposite. You’re talking about the social element of it. This is the social element. They don’t want to be stocking in wild trout populations according to them,” Charlesworth said.

Charlesworth was referencing the agency’s October board meeting in which the board approved stocking rainbow trout in section 04 of Freeman Run in Potter County. The run is a wild trout stream.

The agency will be studying the impacts of placing hatchery trout where wild trout are known to thrive on this stream section.

Commissioner John Mahn Jr. from Washington County, asked, “In waters that have both populations, do you think that anglers are aware of the difference, or can they tell the difference between a stocked trout and a wild trout?”

Walters responded, “I would say in most cases they can tell the difference, but every angler is different with their level of experience.”

Mahn said the survey revealed 58% don’t prefer stocking where there’s wild trout. “It’s a majority, but it’s not an overall or an overwhelming majority. It’s closer to being 50-50 than it is anything else.”

Also during the committee meeting, Kris Kuhn, director of the bureau of fisheries, said a review notice of stocking applications has identified four Class A wild trout stream sections that are being stocked by the public five times. He said they meet the criteria for continued stocking and are being exempted from the regulation banning stockings on wild trout streams.

In addition to the five new exemptions that are on four waterways, there are eight additional Class A water trout stocking exemptions for waters that were previously granted an exemption by the board in 2021. Those exemptions were scheduled to expire before the start of the 2026 trout stocking seasons.

The renewals include: Yellow Creek, section 02, in Bedford County; an unnamed tributary of Tulpehocken Creek (Womelsdorf), section 02 in Berks County; Wyomissing Creek, section 03 in Berks County; Beaver Run, sections 01, in Clearfield County; Letort Spring Run, section 03 in Cumberland County; Warriors Mark Run, section 01 in Huntingdon County; Marvin Creek, section 01 in McKean County

New exemptions are being granted to: Clover Creek, section 03 in Blair County; Penns Creek, section 01 in Centre County; Dotters Creek, section 02 in Northamp-

ton County, and Freeman Run, section 04, in Potter County.

Some of the exemptions are for special events like children’s fishing derbies and those who help veterans.

“And so in total, there’s 13 stocking exemptions being granted on 12 waters, 12 Class A streams. Five new exemptions and eight renewals from 2021,” Kuhn said.

The angler survey revealed stocked trout anglers fished 20.6 days on average and wild trout anglers fished 27.7 days.

Wild trout anglers fished more individual waters as compared to stocked trout anglers. The data discovered 28% of wild trout anglers fished more than five waters and 22% stocked trout anglers traveled to more than five different waterways.

The top four wild trout fishing counties in Pennsylvania are Carbon, Centre, Clinton and Potter.

“This isn’t surprising as some of our high-profile wild trout streams are located in these counties,” Walters said.

The top four stocked trout fishing counties are Berks, Cumberland, Potter and Westmoreland.

“Again, not very surprising here as Berks and Westmoreland are both urban areas. Cumberland County has the popular Yellow Breeches (Creek) and Potter County has a portion of Kettle Creek, which is a destination trout fishery,” Walters said.

On the topic of traveling, stocked trout anglers tend to travel less per fishing trip compared to wild trout anglers.

The study revealed stocked trout anglers traveled an average of 29.8 miles as compared to 47 miles for those seeking wild trout.

“Both groups did identify that the proximity of fishing location is important to them when it comes to how far they’ll travel from their home. With that being said, it is encouraging to see that both groups are still willing to travel, and it doesn’t mean that a fishery necessarily has to be in their backyard to be well utilized,” Walters said. When it comes to managing wild trout, 73% of the survey participants report catching one or more trout is important to the overall satisfaction of their fishing trip.

About half, 48%, of wild trout anglers consider catching large, trophy-sized trout important.

“It’s important to note that there is a trophy component to angler satisfaction, and as we continue to evaluate our special regulation programs, we need to ensure that those waters in those programs are meeting the social and biological objectives,” Walters said.

“One example of this is our ongoing evaluation currently on our slot limit waters, where we’re trying to understand the effect of that regulation on the size structure of the population,” he said. Under slot limits, anglers are only able to keep fish that fall in a certain size slot for minimum and maximum length.

*Continued on next page*



*Differences between trout continued*

When it comes to fishing more often for wild trout, lack of access was listed as the primary constraint.

The PFBC is looking to provide more access to wild trout streams when properties become available. "We're looking to make sure that we have secured internal resources to be prepared for land acquisitions or easements on high use wild trout streams, when those opportunities become available," Walters said.

The agency is reviewing the survey's data to see where improvements can be made to the stocked trout program.

"All trout anglers, 60% of all trout anglers, stated that they did fish on the opening weekend of trout season. I'm sure if we focused on asking only stocked trout anglers, we would see that that percentage would even be higher, but regardless, that 60% still demonstrates the strong Pennsylvania tradition around opening day," Walters said.

"We also learned that springtime (April through June) remains the peak of angler use for stocked trout fishing," he said. The results are like the findings of an angler survey in 2008.

The stocked trout anglers suggested that trout should be stocked more frequently, have the fish placed in more sections of waterways, improve access and stocking more streams that do not have strong wild trout populations.

Stocked trout anglers report their two primary constraints for fishing were crowding and not liking some aspects of the stocking program. "Whether that was not spreading the fish out enough, or needing improvements to our stocking schedule itself," he said.

"I think what's important and encouraging to know here of these items that have been identified by our stocked trout anglers, is that we have a lot of control over these items, and we can definitely make improvements here in some of these areas, whether that be spreading the fish out more or improving our stocking schedule," Walters said.

In looking at catching stocked trout, 81% of anglers said catching one or more trout is important to the overall satisfaction of their fishing trip.

More than half, 55%, of stocked trout anglers consider catching large, trophy-size trout important.

When it comes to stocking trout in streams and lakes, about three quarters, 71% of anglers surveyed would likely volunteer to assist with stockings if the PFBC provided the information.

"Knowing this, the next step really is to identify ways to get this information to our anglers to increase that participation and identifying the best mechanism to do that, through our website or some other avenue," Walters said.

The agency has the stocking schedule, including the day and time for each stocking event, for the year posted on its website in late winter each year.

"If we can increase participation, we should be able to spread those fish out more," he said.

However, most of the stocked anglers (68%) support changing in-season stocking dates from the exact day being announced to the week of the stocking.

One thing we do need to keep in mind is that if we do this, it may be harder to get those volunteers," he said about carrying buckets of fish to the streams. "This may be something we should try on a subset of waters first and evaluate how it goes, and then take the next steps from there," Walters said.

Walters told the committee the full angler survey report will be posted to the agency's website shortly after the new year begins.

"I would say the major home point from the data collected from the 2023 survey is that improving Pennsylvania's trout fishing depends on properly managing both wild trout and stocked trout fisheries to maximize angling opportunities for all trout anglers. And the good news is, there's plenty of room to do both here in Pennsylvania," Walters said.

## **Pennsylvania may increase size limit for trout two inches. Here's why**

Brian Whipkey, Dec. 24, 2025,

Pennsylvania anglers may have a new minimum length limit to keep trout in 2027.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Fisheries Committee discussed raising the minimum length for trout during its December 23 meeting.

The agency is looking to raise the minimum size for an angler to keep a trout from 7 inches to 9 inches.

"The goal of implementing that size limit is for the protection to wild brook trout," said Dave Nihart, the agency's fisheries management division chief.

It's a topic the agency has been discussing since June 2023 as part of its strategic plan.

"An increase to the minimum size limit will afford additional protection from harvest to wild brook trout," he said.

"Over the last decade, we've sampled about 2,900 streams or roughly 3,000 stream sections. As part of those surveys, staff have captured almost 200,000 wild brook trout over the last 10 years," he said.

The data shows 12,598 of them, less than 7%, were at least seven inches long. "All of them would be or could have been harvested based off the seven-inch minimum size limit," Nihart said.

"If you would go to a nine-inch minimum size limit, you're reducing the number of fish available to harvest from 100% of the ones over seven inches to 14.5% being nine inches. So, what that looks like over all is that's less than 1% of all the fish that we've collected over the last 10 years could have been harvested based off a nine-inch minimum size limit. So, it's a pretty good mechanism to protect wild brook trout from harvest," he said.

The agency conducted a Pennsylvania Trout Angler survey in 2023. About 85% of the respondents supported an increase to nine inches.



**Susquehanna Chapter of Trout Unlimited**  
**PO Box 1132**  
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