

Testimony to the House Finance Committee on House Bill 1676

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Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

Good morning Chairman Levdansky and members of the Finance Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. My name is Gary Moore and I am the Legislative Liaison for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. I am here on behalf of Dr. Douglas Austen, the agency's Executive Director, to present testimony in support of HB-1676. Dr. Austen is unable to be with us due to a long standing prior commitment.

The mission of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, an independent state agency of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, is to protect, conserve and enhance the Commonwealth's aquatic resources and provide fishing and boating opportunities. Specifically, the legislative charge includes the promotion of sport fishing, fisheries management, recreational boating and boating safety. Agency funding is highly dependent upon the sale of fishing licenses and permits, boat registrations and titles. A separate fish fund and a separate boat fund are managed by this agency with little or no annual allotment from the Commonwealth's general fund.

Fishing supports more than 14,600 jobs in Pennsylvania. The amount of state income tax and state sales tax paid to the Pennsylvania Department of Revenue exceeds \$53M annually. This very popular outdoor recreational activity is "big business" and provides an economic benefit of \$1.6B to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Funding is one of the top challenges for each and every director and manager of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission. Today, the financial health of the Commission is good but projections for fiscal year 2012 – 2013 indicate that the balances in the Fish Fund and the Boat Fund will be insufficient to meet the needs of our current programs. Fees for fishing licenses, permits and boat registrations were last increased in 2005.

Relatively large fee increases have typically occurred every 6 - 10 years which has immediately caused a reduction in the number of licenses sold. For example, in 2005 the cost of an annual resident license was increased by 29% and an 8.5% decline in sales was experienced that same year. This cyclical pattern results in a detrimental loss in the number fishing licenses and permits purchased.

Anglers and boaters provide funding for several programs that benefit all citizens of this Commonwealth but are not exactly a direct benefit to fishing and boating. These diverse responsibilities have been an integral part of the Commission for decades. Environmental permit application reviews, the development of environmental education and water safety awareness

programs, the training of emergency personnel in water/ice rescue, the conducting of non-game studies and the management of reptiles, amphibians and mollusks are some examples. The Commission annually expends in excess of \$5M on these very important programs that connect children with the outdoors, assist in watershed management, monitor environmental issues, manage non-game species, prevent accidents and save lives.

Synopsis of Related Expenses

Permit application reviews (environmental and threatened and endangered species)	\$2M
Non-game conservation	\$1M
Invasive species	\$25,000
3 Rivers Ecological Research Center	\$300,000
Habitat enhancement and dam removal	\$750,000
Inspection and enforcement of low-head dams	\$20,000
Aquatic resource education	\$742,000
Water safety and rescue training	\$250,000

Should HB-1676 pass the General Assembly and be signed into law by the Governor, a stable long-term funding source will have been identified to allow for some program expansion and to offset the escalating operational costs. The states of Missouri and Arkansas currently enjoy a funding stream where a portion of the state sales tax is dedicated to fish and wildlife programs in addition to funds received through the sale of hunting and fishing licenses

With a supplemental funding source, future fishing license and permit increases may exceed 10 or more years in duration and the dollar amount may be at a much lower average percentage than the past three increases. A fishing license would actually become a better bargain in future years than it is today. Everyone knows that a fishing license has always offered a great deal of opportunity, pleasure and excitement for the money.

Thank you for this opportunity to deliver testimony about HB-1676 before the House Finance Committee. This concludes my testimony and at this time I would be happy to address any questions.