

Official Publication of the S.O.N.S.

THE Bucket

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GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

MONDAY, JAN. 26, 2026 7:00 PM

POLISH FALCONS CLUB

431 E. 3rd Street, Erie

PROGRAM: Expert Angler Jeremy Scott will talk about his recent trip of a lifetime to Guatemala catching Sailfish and Mahi.

REMINDER: Bring your membership applications and benefit tickets to our January 26th meeting. There will be a drawing of these tickets in which ten \$100 cash prizes will be awarded. Your donation for the tickets helps defray the cost of printing and mailing the membership packet.

FISHING REPORT

You name it, it happened, weather wise here in Erie early this winter. Temperatures dropped and ice formed, then it thawed, rained, and the gales hit and broke up the ice, then the ice on the bay reformed, only to be rendered unsafe by higher temperatures and more rain. Hopefully the ice will return by the time you get this newsletter. There was a brief window where a few brave souls ventured onto Horseshoe and Misery Bay.



This photo of the lone hut on Misery Bay was taken on January 4th. There were six other fishermen out on Misery Bay at that time.

THEY PUT THEIR FISHING RODS DOWN AND WENT HUNTING

We pride ourselves with having a membership of experienced outdoorsmen. Our club was a brainchild of a group of NW PA Duck Hunters Association members back in 1981. They brought with them a love of the outdoors and the environment. Even now a good portion of our members hunt and fish. Many of them also have hunting camps. Below are some examples of a few of our members who are successful at both hunting and fishing.



SONS Director Don Tombaugh and Sons volunteer Mike Kabasinski pose with the deer they both bagged in Spring Creek Township in Warren County.



Left: SONS member and PFBC WCO Matt Visosky shows off the buck he got near Marshburg, PA. Right: Tony Sobina took time out from fishing and landed this nice buck near his home in Venango County. Tony is well known as having fished for 2110 consecutive days until today. He also went fishing the day he bagged this deer but not with a fly rod. He also got some nice buck tail for tying flies.

SONS 2026 MEMBERSHIP BUTTON

is a smallmouth bass this year. This is in keeping with featuring a native species fish on the button. You can pick up the 2026 pin at anyone of our events or meetings or you can get one by sending \$3.00 to SONS of Lake Erie, 3411 Peach St Box 233 Erie, PA 16508



JOIN A FRIEND TODAY!

MAIL TO: S.O.N.S., 3411 Peach St Box 233 Erie, PA 16508

RECORD OF MEMBERSHIP

2026

Name _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____
Phone _____ Date _____

Renew New \$5.00 ADULT \$4.00 SENIOR CITIZEN (over 65) \$4.00 JUNIOR (under 16)

2026 FLAGSHIP ICE OPEN

FishUSA and the Western PA Team Bass Series are teaming up to host the annual Flagship Ice Open on Presque Isle Bay on January 24th, 2026.

Registration will cost \$100 per team and will be open from 5:30-7:00 a.m. The first 100 teams to register will receive 2 FishUSA Flagship Ice Rods free. Anglers will be fishing in Misery Bay, as all other areas within Presque Isle will be off-limits. A map outlining the fishable areas and restricted zones can be found here: 2026 Flagship Ice Open.

The tournament will begin at 7:00 a.m. and conclude at 2:00 p.m. There will be an 8-fish limit consisting of any combination of crappie, perch, and/or bluegill. Additional information and the official rules can also be found at this link: <https://www.wptbs.net/2026-flagship-ice-open>

Ice Out Party set for March 29th

The SONS of Lake Erie Annual Ice Out Party will be held on Sunday March 29th from 1-5 at the Erie Shrine Club located at West 38 and Zuck Rd. The admission to the party will be \$15 for adults and \$5 for kids 15 & under. With much reluctance it was necessary to raise the cost of admission for adults in order to be in line with our costs.

CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON LIBERTY PIER

We were notified by the Erie Western PA Port Authority that construction of new sewer lines has begun at Liberty Pier therefore possibly closing the driveway on the East side of the pier. Liberty pier will still be open for public access however you will have to enter via the west sidewalk. Parking will be limited to outside the fence.

NOTE: IF YOU NOT RENEWED YOUR SONS 2026 MEMBERSHIP, THIS WILL BE YOUR LAST ISSUE OF THE SONS NEWSLETTER THAT WILL BE MAILED TO YOU. PLEASE REJOIN NOW!

PFBC+PGC CONTEMPLATING COMBINING SERVICES

According to a December 23, 2025 article in *Erie Times News*, written by Brian Whipkey, a Pennsylvania Outdoors Columnist, a study is being conducted by independent Wildlife Management Institute. It was commissioned by the PA Game Commission and the PA Fish and Boat Commission at a cost of \$49,000, which is being split between the agencies to identify ways to consolidate services provided to the sportsmen. Potential changes include a combined hunting and fishing license and a unified law enforcement dispatch center.

The agencies' independent, non-political boards will remain separate to make resource-based decisions.

Everything is on the table in a study of Pennsylvania's two wildlife agencies. 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.

Tim Schaeffer, executive director of the PFBC, and Steve Smith, executive director of the PGC, worked together to have the study performed. 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.

"We recognize that we share similar missions. We have overlap as far as 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.

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.

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.

Let's wait and see what happens.

60 TO 70 MPH WINDS BATTER THE GREAT LAKES

When we published a piece about high winds creating a 'SEICHE' in late November which caused the water level on the Western end of the lake to fall and for the water in the Eastern part of the lake to rise, we didn't expect that it would happen again so soon, but it did during the last week of 2025. Sixty to seventy mph winds created another Seiche event, not only affecting the water levels but causing havoc along our shores. The high winds blew away the ice cover in the bay. The spray created by the winds and waves created ice sculptures along our waterfront. The event attracted National attention. The Weather Channel sent a crew to Erie to cover the storm.

Right, partially submerged Tug Hawaii surrounded by an oil boom alongside Don Jon Shipbuilding. Top of cabin and antennas above water.



Weather Channel crew filming at Dobbins Landing.



On December 31, 2025 the Great Lakes Towing Co. tug the Hawaii was moored at Holland St Pier alongside the Don Jon Shipbuilding Co. The vessel sunk (below on left) while moored there causing speculation that the high winds pounded it into the dock causing a leak and the eventual sinking.

The Hawaii, shown below, was built in 1911 as the Indiana and later it was refitted and named the Hawaii. It is a frequent visitor while working.



IN CASE THERE IS ENOUGH ICE TO GO FISHING

ICE SAFETY TIPS

Here are a few basic ice safety tips to remember:

- Never fish alone.
- Carry a cell phone, and let people know where you are going and when you'll return home.
- Wear proper clothing and equipment, including a life jacket or a float coat, to help you stay afloat and to help maintain body heat.
- Wear ice creepers attached to boots to prevent slipping on clear ice.
- Carry a spud bar to check the ice while walking to new areas.
- Carry a few spikes and a length of light rope in an easily accessible pocket to help pull yourself – or others – out of the ice.
- Be aware of changing conditions (ex- High winds can move ice from shore)

- Fish away from structures. Sun light can heat up water close to them.
- If you fall in, remain as calm as possible. While attempting to get out of the water, call for help. Anyone who attempts to rescue you should use a rope or something similar to avoid falling through the ice themselves.
- Do not travel in unfamiliar areas or at night.
- Have a plan in place noting where you will be and when you plan to return. Along with leaving a written note of your plans.

There's more at the PFBC web site go to-<https://www.fishandboat.com/Transact/AnglerBoater/AnglerBoater2013/JanuaryFebruary/Documents/05tips10.pdf>for creating ice claws and what to do if you fall through ice.

ICE AFFECTED HATCHERY OPERATION

High winds during the storm caused some of the ice from the Bay to be blown into the slip alongside our hatchery plugging our water intake. This caused the pipes to freeze shutting off our water supply. In spite of the high winds and cold our hatchery crew consisting of Jack Bock, Joe Springer, Don Tombaugh, John Krupinski and Ron Morrow responded by setting up an alternate water source and went out into the slip and heated, pounded and finally thawed the pipes returning the flow of water. Their hard work and diligence saved the 1600 brown trout under our care at our hatchery. Great Job Guys!



SONS Hatchery crew used spud bars, shovels, and a torch to free water intake into the hatchery of ice. They wrapped heat tape around the pipes in order to hopefully prevent further freezing.

Reminder: Yellow Perch caught in Presque Isle Bay or the inland waters of Presque Isle must be at least 7 inches long. The regulation is in effect from December 1 to April 30.

PFBC MAY INCREASE SIZE LIMIT FOR TROUT BY 2 INCHES

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 is to protect wild brook trout. The PFBC has been discussing since June 2023 as part of its strategic plan.



ICE THICKNESS SUPPORT

ice thickness	can safely support	
4 inches	200 pounds	(one person and gear)
5 inches	800 pounds	(one snowmobile)
7 inches	1,500 pounds	(group of people)
8 inches	2,000 pounds	(one car)

Note: There are many factors that influence ice strength including water chemistry, wind, currents and sunlight. The above table notes general ice thickness guidelines so carefully check conditions before venturing onto the ice.

WEB CAMS – YOUR EYES ON THE LAKE

The SONS of Lake Erie has partnered with FishUSA, PA Steelhead Assoc. Fairview Township, PFBC and the Erie Western PA Port Authority at Avonia Beach, Walnut Creek and Lampe Marina by installing and maintaining live web cams that afford you the opportunity to preview Lake and weather conditions as well as fishing and boating activity. They have been in operation for nearly three years now and have drawn hundreds of thousands of viewers. They are online 24/7 and 365 days/year.

Recently North East Township added a nice web cam at Freeport Beach and Harborcreek Township added two cameras at Shade's Beach. Both cameras are high quality. This gives us a pretty good picture of current Lake and weather conditions across our lake front.. In addition to those our WICU/WSEE and WJET/Fox 66 has WX cameras spread throughout the county including cameras with views of Presque Isle Bay.

Here are internet links to this network of cameras.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXjaSaPEwxk> North East Freeport Beach

<https://www.harborcreek.org/shades-cam/> Shades Beach

<https://www.fishusa.com/avonia-webcam> Avonia Beach

<https://www.fishusa.com/walnut-webcam/> Walnut Creek

<https://www.fishusa.com/lampe-webcam/> Lampe Marina

<https://www.yourerie.com/erie-bayfront-wxcam/> Wjet 24/66 Bayfront Web Cam

<https://www.yourerie.com/erie-land-lighthouse-wxcam/> WJET 24/66 Land Lighthouse Web Cam

https://www.erieneWSnow.com/weather/cameras/#google_vignette Wicu 12. WSEE Skyview Cams

THE PI BAY ANGLERS GROUP

held their 5th Annual Sam Tomlin Memorial Tackle for Tots Christmas Tackle drive during which they collected nearly \$3,000 worth of fishing tackle and donated it to the Crime Victim Center of Erie County today. Thank you to the members who donated and shared the message! Thank you to East End Angler, NECM Bait & Tackle, Tudor Hook-n-Nook, Fishermen's Haven Bait & Tackle Shop, Sportsman's Warehouse Erie, Manatau Charters, 12 Mile Charters, Keystone Fly Girl LLC, and Stone Perfection for their generosity.



UPCOMING EVENTS:

Saturday February 7
10-5 Folly's End Campground
Steelhead Kickoff Party

BAYFRONT CONVENTION CENTER SHOWS

We have been invited by Erie Events to participate in the upcoming shows at the Bayfront Convention Center:

Jan 29- Feb 1
Erie Auto Show

Feb 12-15 Erie RV and
Outdoor Adventure

Feb 27- Mar 1
Erie Boat & Fishing Expo

We will need volunteers to help out at these shows and signup sheets and schedules will be available at our general meetings prior to the dates.

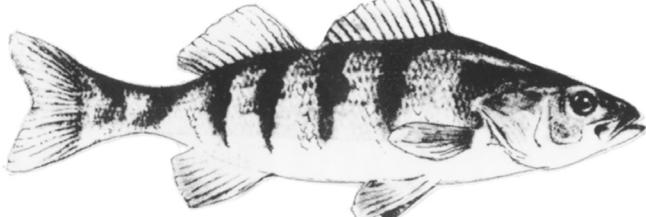


S.O.N.S. of LAKE ERIE,
SAVE OUR NATIVE SPECIES, INC.
3411 PEACH ST BOX 233 ERIE, PA 16508

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"A REPLENISHING SPECIES"

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WOULD YOU LIKE TO GET YOUR SONS NEWS LETTER BY EMAIL?

If you would like to get your newsletter by email rather than regular mail please send us an email to sonslakeri@aol.com list your name, address and note that you would like to change to the electronic version. In 2026 there were 872 members who have requested the change so far. You can always read the current and past issues of the Bucket at our web site, sonsoflakeerie.org at any time.

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2025 LANDOWNER THANK YOU'S

by Chris Larson Pres. PA Steelhead Assoc.

Every December volunteers from the PA Steelhead Association, 3-CU, Northwest PA Chapter of Trout Unlimited, S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie, and the Gem City Fly Tyers/Outdoorsmen Club get together on a Saturday morning and distribute holiday fruit baskets to local landowners as a way of saying "Thank you". Many of these landowners have property on one of our tributary streams and either have entered into an easement agreement or have allowed continued public stream access on their property. Some of the fruit basket recipients are people who have allowed 3-CU raceways on their property for the purpose of raising steelhead or brown trout.

On Saturday, December 6th and 13th, 2025, 17 volunteers distributed 99 fruit baskets to local landowners. The fruit baskets were picked up at Mason Farms on Peninsula Drive and delivered to Crooked Creek properties in western Erie County all the way to 20 Mile Creek properties near the New York-PA State line. The weather was blustery, but fun was enjoyed by all as the volunteers got to meet and

speak with many of the landowners. It is amazing to hear how grateful the fruit basket recipients are to receive this small token of our appreciation.

Thank you to Ryan Novatnack for organizing this event this year.

Thank you to the following organizations for their generous support of this program:

S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie, Northwest PA Chapter of Trout Unlimited, 3-CU Trout Association, Gem City Outdoorsmen and the PA Steelhead Association.

Thank you to Mason Farms for putting the baskets together.

Thank you to the following people who gave up a Saturday morning in December to deliver fruit baskets: Ryan & Melissa Novatnack, Nick & Connie Rybak, Mike & Donna Felege, Chris Fatica, Skip Simmons, Roger Latimer, Jack Klapthor, Don Tombaugh, Jim Simonelli, Mark Signorino, Robbie Pietsch, John Bellotti, Don Clayton and Chris Larson

