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A nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization working to enhance and preserve the Lake Erie Steelhead fishery in Northwestern PA
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THE Bucket

VOLUME 23 • ISSUE 9
SEPTEMBER 2026

S.O.N.S. PHONE NUMBER 814-453-2270 (ALSO FAX NUMBER)
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FISHING REPORT:

As we start into fall and look back at the summer fishing season all we can say is WOW! Reports and photos of anglers showing off great catches of walleye on social media left us with evidence of a great year in spite of some accidents that occurred on the Lake. Perhaps a few photos will confirm these observations.



Winners of the North East Community first annual tournament and celebration "Walleye and Wailing Guitars" held 8-16-26. Team Willie, first place. There also was a kids tournament, live music, food trucks and even a sky diver.



2026 Fin & Fur raffle winner Linda Critzer with three friends holding their limit of walleye caught aboard the charter boat Waterbok, captained by Steve Skrypzak and Tom Mascharka on August 2nd, 2026



Walleye Bash #2 winning team Eye Crazy, Pose with a facsimile of a \$3360 check trophy as well as other prizes for winning the tournament.

PFBC ACQUIRES NEW PATROL BOAT

The PFBC purchased this new patrol boat through a USCG Port Security Grant. The \$400,000 vessel only cost the Commission \$100,000 because it was a 25%/75% matching grant. The boat was built by Lake Assault Boats the same company that is building the new Lake Erie research vessel. She's 27 feet with a 31 foot LOA and powered by twin 300 hp mercury outboards.



UPCOMING EVENTS:

Note: you can sign up to volunteer via email at sonslakeri@aol.com

Sat. Sept. 26th 11-1
East Waterworks Pond
Edison School Vol.needed

Sat. Sept. 26th 2-6
Pleasant Ridge Park Pavilion
PSA Fall Run Banquet

Wed. Oct. 14th 9-12
Niagara Boat Launch PISP
Habitat building Vol needed

Sat. Oct. 17th Time TBA
Fishing pier East Canal basin
(Next to Smugglers) Family
Fishing part of Bicentennial
tower celebration



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

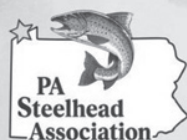
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2026 Fall Run Picnic

Hosted by the PA Steelhead Association

Recognizing the anniversary years for:
PSA, 3-CU, Wesleyville Conservation Club,
NW Pa Chapter of TU, and the S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie



Date: Saturday, September 26 | **Time:** 2 – 6 PM

Location:

Pleasant Ridge Park Pavilion,
8271 Barker Rd, Girard, PA 16417

Activities: Catered dinner at
4:30 PM | Music & Games |
Fly casting demonstration |
Magnetic Fishpond for Kids | BYOB

Tickets: Adults \$20 / Children 12 and under \$5
Purchase in-person at September PSA General Mtg
online at www.pasteelhead.com
at FishUSA

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PA STEELHEAD ASSOCIATION'S

Fall Run Banquet will be held on Saturday September 26 from 2-6 PM at the Pleasant Ridge Pavillion 8271 Barker Rd, Girard, PA 16417. PA Steelhead Association, 3-CU, Wesleyville Conservation Club, NW Chapter Trout Unlimited and the SONS of Lake Erie will be recognized for their longevity of service.

TIP OF THE HAT TO

Mary and Lee Simmons for their sponsorship of our Family Fishing event this year at 8 Great Tuesdays on August 25.



NEWS SHORTS:

STUDY SHOWS that Sheephead AKA Freshwater Drum

are consuming huge amounts of Zebra and Quagga mussels. The 2013-2023 study by researchers showed that on average, drum consumed over 512,602 pounds of mussels per square mile in western Lake Erie. Consumption was highest in 2013, the first year of the study, at 1.2 million pounds per square mile. This equated to 1.31 trillion mussels consumed by drum in the West Basin alone in 2013. Other studies have shown a steady decline in invasive mussel biomass in the West Basin, dropping from 125,619 lbs/mi² in 2004 to as low as 6,852 lbs/mi² in 2019. This suggests that drum predation has been able to exert considerable influence on mussel populations in Lake Erie, outdoing Traditionally.

This suggests that drum are consuming enough mussels to not only keep up with their high annual production, but also to reduce their standing biomass. While other factors like low oxygen levels and high temperatures may also have had a role in the decline of invasive mussels in Lake Erie's West Basin, the evidence points to our native freshwater drum as an unlikely hero in the fight against Great Lakes invaders.

PFBC COMMITTEE BRIEFED ON LAKE ERIE'S FISHERY

*(Excerpt from article posted in
Erie Times News by Brian Whipkey)*

Mark Haffley, Lake Erie Research Unit leader for the PFBC, addressed the members of the House Fish and Game Committee during their meeting here on September 3. He spoke about the number of people fishing. He spoke about a creel survey of those fishing from four of the most popular boat launches for Lake Erie, including two in the city, one on the west side and one in Northeast. The survey team interviewed anglers in 2025 and found that they spent 341,190 hours of directed fishing effort on Lake Erie, just here in Pennsylvania.

"Lake Erie has always been the walleye capital, and we have an incredible walleye fishery. Of that 341,400 hours, 300,501 of those hours were dedicated just at fishing for walleye here in Lake Erie," Haffley said.

The survey reported 21,759 individual boats launched during the summer months in Erie.

"All of those were dedicated towards fishing," Haffley said. "Another 3,264 of those boats were just recreational boaters. So almost 25,000 boats launch out of Erie in the very short boating season that we have in the area."



SONS HOLD 44TH ANNUAL FISH FRY

After terrible night time storms, SONS of Lake Erie volunteers set up in the rain its 44th annual Partner Appreciation Fish Fry on September 2nd at the Bayshore East Marina. Miraculously, the weather cleared up by 10:30, just in time for the arrival of our guests. The remainder of the day was sunny, hot, and humid.

There were 184 guests that were served a delicious walleye lunch. The fish fry was a great success thanks to the hard work of 25 volunteers who cleaned and prepared over 135 lbs of walleye filets, covered tables, put up tents, manned the food line, mixed batter, manned the fish fryers, emptied the trash, and

cleaned up. We would especially like to mention SONS director Chuck Miller and his Frying Crew, who worked in the heat operating our two fryers, and then after the event cleaned up, loaded our equipment, and waited around for hours while the cooking oil cooled so the fry equipment could be transported. Our guest register team signed up 104 new SONS members and we sold many Fin & Fur Raffle tickets as well as SONS merchandise.

The guests at the fish fry included members of various agencies, authorities, businesses, governmental entities and individuals that have

interacted and provided services to us throughout the year. The event has become our way for our partners to get to know who we are and what we do. Coincidentally the Pennsylvania State Legislator's Fish and Game Committee held its quarterly meeting in Erie and afterwards they were all invited to attend the fish fry. It was a real honor to have them join us and it was a pleasure to meet them.

Finally we would like to thank all those anglers who donated their fish to us and another thank you to Mr. Tim Schmidt, Manager of the Bayharbor Marinas for letting us use this fine facility.

TROUT MSL CHANGED FROM 7 TO 9 INCHES

At the PFBC July Quarterly Meeting Commissioners voted to give final approval to a rulemaking pertaining to the minimum size limit (MSL) for harvesting trout. Under this change, 58 Pa. Code § 61.1 (Commonwealth Inland Waters), 58 Pa. Code § 65.19 (Stocked Trout Waters Open to Year-Round Fishing), 58 Pa. Code § 65.24 (Miscellaneous Special Regulations), and 58 Pa. Code § 65.26 (Extended Trout Season) will be amended to increase the MSL for trout from seven to nine inches.

The MSL for trout was last amended in 1983, when it was increased from six to seven inches, to provide additional protection to wild Brook Trout populations

It should be noted that the increase in MSL from seven to nine inches will have little or no impact on anglers' ability to harvest stocked trout. The average size of a standard trout produced at a PFBC state fish hatchery and stocked into the waters of the Commonwealth is 11 inches, with most cooperative nurseries also producing similar sized trout for stocking in public waterways.

The amendments will go into effect on January 1, 2027.

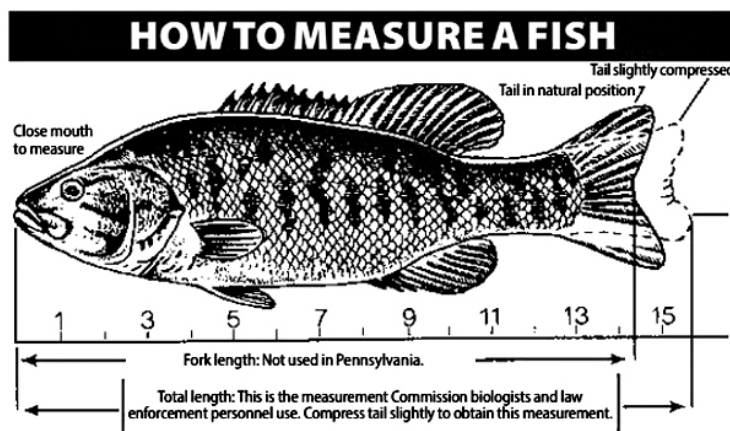
Other Business

The Board voted to give final approval to a rulemaking pertaining to General Fishing Regulations. Under this change, 58 Pa. Code Chapter 63 will be amended to establish a formal definition for how to measure fish length. The PFBC advises anglers how to measure fish in the Pennsylvania Fishing Summary book; however, no formal definition is present in Title 58. Per Addendum III to Amendment 7 of the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Striped Bass, the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) requires that states define total length for the purposes of measuring Atlantic Striped Bass to determine compliance with size limits associated with both commercial and recreational fisheries. Adding a formal definition, as follows, will meet the ASMFC requirement while applying to all other species of fish across the Commonwealth.

"Total length is defined as the greatest straight-line length as measured on a fish while laid flat on its side with its mouth closed from the most forward tip of the jaw or snout to the farthest extent of the tail with the upper and lower tail lobes compressed or squeezed together."

This amendment will go into effect upon publication of a second notice in the Pennsylvania Bulletin

Illustration from 2026 Summary Book



Public Access

Commissioners voted to authorize three easement acquisitions along Walnut Creek, Erie County, using funds from the Lake Erie restricted account. The descriptions of each easement are below:

The PFBC will pay \$14,000 to Asbury Woods Partnership (AWP) for a public access and aquatic resource management easement on both sides of a 730-foot section of Walnut Creek in Fairview Township, Erie County. This area of the creek is accessible through an established trail network that begins at AWP's main parking area

The PFBC will pay \$5,750 to Judith M. Schroeck for a public access and aquatic resource management easement on the west side of a 312-foot section of Walnut Creek in Fairview Township, Erie County. Although this easement does not include parking and does not provide easy access, the location is important because the property is just north of the "tubes" area of Dutch Road.

Under the terms of a previously awarded Erie Access Improvement Grant from the PFBC to Millcreek Township, Erie County, the Township is providing the PFBC with an easement on an approximately 3,600-foot section of Walnut Creek. In May 2013, the Township received an Erie Access Improvement grant in the amount of \$97,000 to assist in the development of public fishing access at Bridger Park along Walnut Creek. The project, which included stream habitat improvements, a paved access road, ADA compliant parking area, fishing pier, and trail from the parking area to the fishing pier, has now been completed. The agreement includes easements for public access, aquatic resource management, parking, and a footpath to access Walnut Creek. The cost of the easement was included in the original grant, so no additional funds will be exchanged.

Board Elects New Officers

The Board elected Donald K. Anderson of Meyersdale, Somerset County, as President. Anderson, who serves as District 4 Commissioner, replaces John Mahn, Jr., of Charleroi, Washington County. William Gibney was elected as Vice President. Gibney, who serves as District 7 Commissioner, replaces Anderson as Vice President. Both Anderson and Gibney will serve one-year terms through July 2027. Mahn will remain on the Board and continue to serve as District 2 Commissioner.

BOATING ACCIDENTS AND FATALITIES PROMPT ACTION

After a series of boating accidents and two fatalities that occurred this summer PFBC WCO Matt Visosky organized a free raffle that entrants could win an inflatable life jacket hoping to promote Boating Safety band to encourage the wearing of life jackets while boating. Fish USA, Erie Sport Fishing Assoc., Erie Charter Captains Association and the SONS of Lake Erie sponsored the raffle. Local bait shops and boating related businesses were set up as entry stations. The drawing for the winners was held on Monday August 10 at Fish USA. And twelve names were drawn. The winners were: Gregory Peters, Bob Witherow, Rick Makowski, Elijah Kosnik, David Rodgers, Steve Gordon, Adam Finn, Brenda Novakowski, Chris Popp, Tony Lafuria, Sabrina Kosnik and Josh Riesdorph.



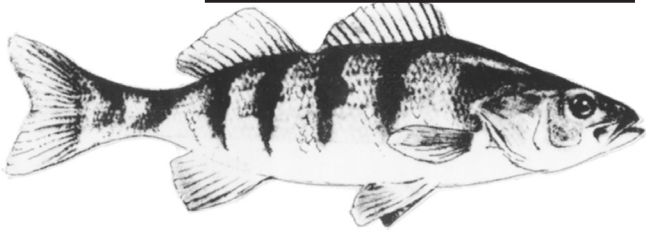
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"The Bucket" published monthly
by the S.O.N.S. of Lake Erie

VOLUME 23 • ISSUE 9
SEPTEMBER 2026



"A REPLENISHING SPECIES"

GENERAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

MONDAY, SEPT 28, 2026 7:00 PM

POLISH FALCONS CLUB

431 E. 3rd Street, Erie

WELCOME BACK!

PROGRAM:

Fish USA Pro Staff Member Nolan Pyle will talk about
early season Steelhead techniques

WOULD YOU RATHER GET YOUR NEWSLETTER 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 938 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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CATCH & RELEASE

As Steelhead Season heats up we thought to recycle an old article that offers hints on how to handle fish with the least harm to them.

The Importance of Catch-and-Release Fishing purely for fun is a significant shift from the attitudes of our Fore fathers, who historically spent their fishing time working to fill limits. In today's world, a growing segment of anglers are more concerned with preserving catchable fish populations than filling a freezer with fillets.

While many anglers can grasp how important it is to release large walleyes, bass, or other gamefish,

panfish are often of major concern. Unfortunately, panfish species like crappies, bluegills, and perch are often looked at as a readily renewable resource. It's not uncommon for fishermen to keep limits of panfish day after day. Furthermore, anglers often underestimate the importance of large panfish, such as bluegills and crappies,

and how their removal can negatively impact a fishery. Most areas of the country do not have size limits that protect larger panfish. It is often up to the discretion of anglers, and as a result can have some adverse effects. The removal of large bluegills or crappies from a population has the potential to be far more detrimental than removing a larger amount of small panfish. Catching trophy panfish is getting more and more difficult with each season.

If catch-and-release is important to you, follow some simple steps to ensure that fish are released unharmed.

1. Use the proper gear for the target species. If you plan to target larger fish, then make sure you're properly equipped. The goal is to land the fish as quickly as possible and not leave them over-exhausted.

2. Keep the fish in the water as much as possible. Rely on nets, livewells, ice wells, or other tools in order to prevent fish from being out of water too long.

3. Wet your hands prior to handling fish. This is a good practice for all fish species, but it's particularly important with species like trout. Handling fish with dry hands or gloves can remove their protective slime coating—and in turn, make them susceptible to harm.

4. If necessary, cut your line. Often, you're better off cutting the line on a deeply hooked fish rather than over handling or causing damage just to get a hook out.

5. If you plan to take pictures, have your camera gear handy. Don't keep it stashed away where you can't access it quickly when you need it. You want o release fish as quickly as possible.

6. Last, but definitely not least, remember to use a gentle release. We've all seen way too many videos of fish being tossed in the air only to come down crashing on the water. Let's change that!