



I wasn't fishing

Fishing without a valid fishing license is one of our agencies most common violations. As Waterways Conservation Officers, we are always hearing "I wasn't fishing," even after we catch them in the act. One evening, I observed four individuals bow fishing on the Juniata River. When I asked to see their fishing licenses, they all said, "I wasn't fishing." They stated they were bow fishing. I wanted to make sure I heard them right, and I asked each of them "Bow what?" Each replied, "Fishing." If the word fishing is in the activity you are doing, a fishing license would be required. The four individuals understood and the appropriate paperwork was issued.

—WCO Richard D. Morder, Perry and Juniata counties.

First catch

My daughter Lindsey and her friend Alia brought to my attention that Alia had never been fishing. Of course, I was now obligated to correct this injustice by taking the girls fishing that very evening. When we arrived at one of my favorite spots on the Monongahela River, I went over the basics with Alia, showing her how to cast and set the hook. I also explained to her how the drag worked by pulling a couple feet of line from the reel, so she could hear what it sounded like to hook a big fish. Thirty minutes later, Alia started yelling that her reel was making "the big fish sound." Sure enough, her rod was bent in half and the reel was screaming as a big fish was ripping line from it. After an exciting fight, she got the fish close enough to the boat for Lindsey to net it. This was Alia's first fish, a 7½-pound freshwater drum. It wasn't a state

record, but it was big enough to earn her an angler award. Not a bad first catch! If you get a chance this year, take a kid fishing. You may come home with some great memories.—WCO Scott D. Opfer, Fayette County.

Cops like donuts

Fishing and boating access areas are popular destinations in winter months. Some people ice fish, some take photographs and some practice daredevil driving. One winter night, while patrolling an access area, I encountered one such driver. A fresh inch of snow had fallen and the full moon had made visibility similar to daylight conditions. The car entered our access area and began doing donuts and emergency brake-assisted slides. I maneuvered my patrol vehicle and prepared to make a vehicle stop near the entrance of the access area. Much to my delight, the driver of the car pulled his emergency brake, causing the vehicle to spin 180 degrees and came to a complete stop right in front of my front bumper. I turned on my headlights and emergency lighting. The sheer look of surprise on the operator's face was priceless. As I issued the citation, the young driver said he thought that cops liked donuts. I thanked him for his comment and confirmed his donut suspicion with a yellow copy of paper with a fine amount outlined in red.—WCO Chad A. Woleslagle, Franklin and Eastern Fulton counties.

Winter duties

On a cold December day, I was in my office going over my open citations from the previous year. I was checking a citation I wrote to a boat operator in downtown Pittsburgh and noticed that he had not paid or made a plea to the citation. I gave him a call and explained

his options for taking care of the citation. He asked me, "So what do you guys do this time of the year?" "Track down people who don't pay their tickets," I answered. "Ahhh, good answer," he replied. Two days later the citation was paid in full.—WCO Jeremiah D. Allen, Beaver County.

Thankful

I was patrolling an area in the remote portions of Greene County with Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer (DWCO) Ernest Bedillion. We encountered three individuals who had conflicting stories as to what they were doing out so late. When attempting to identify one of the individuals, I spotted a concealed pistol under a seat in his vehicle. Upon further inspection, I discovered multiple illegal firearms with no serial numbers, drug paraphernalia, suspected drugs and other prohibited weapons.

I have lots to be thankful for in this job. I work in the outdoors, meet new and interesting people every day, help preserve our aquatic resources for future generations and ensure the public safety of those using our resources. I'm also thankful for having DWCO Bedillion with me that night. Had I been alone, the chain of events could have played out differently. One of the firearms, a .45 semi automatic pistol, had no serial number and was concealed in such a manner as to provide immediate access for the driver of the vehicle. I'm also thankful for the assistance that was provided by the Pennsylvania State Police after the first concealed weapon was recovered, and for the

training provided to us as Waterways Conservation Officers. And more than anything, I'm thankful that DWCO Bedillion and I were able to return home to our families that night without harm to anyone.—*WCO Eric B. Davis, Greene and Southern Washington counties.*



illustration - Jeff Decker

A no-brainer

I was recently checking an area posted against entry when I noticed a couple standing nearby but outside the posted area. As I drove away, I looked in the rear-view mirror and observed them walking past one of the main posters and entering the area. I immediately turned around and returned to their location, where I questioned them concerning their actions. Their response was “We weren’t sure what that meant,” as they pointed to the sign. While I often receive such a response when faced with some of the more complex posters describing Special Regulation Areas, this poster simply said “Keep Out.” I informed these two visitors that I was only aware of one definition for “Keep Out.” I later decided to check and make sure that a new meaning had not been added since my time in school. According to the Macmillan Dictionary, keep out - used on signs to tell people not to go into a place. It seems pretty simple to me.—*Thomas J. Burrell, Assistant Regional Supervisor, Southeast Region.*

Eight is enough

I was part of an all-night striped bass detail that was organized by Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Michael Johnson, originally in



response to reports of poaching along the Delaware River in Bucks County. The other officers involved were WCO Erin R. Czech, WCO Brendan J. Ryan and Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer (DWCO) William F. Muller, all from the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC); and Wildlife Conservation Officer (WCO) Jerrold Czech and WCO Richard Macklem II, both from the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC). On that particular night, we found no anglers in the location we were watching. It was past midnight when WCO Johnson conceded that nothing was happening, so I suggested we all relocate to Delaware County. I had received reports of some high-level poaching behind the Philadelphia Airport in my district. Deputy Wildlife Conservation Officer (DWCO) George Hinkle was at the airport that evening observing anglers and reporting large numbers of vehicles in the area. Every officer was up for the change in venue, and we headed to Hog Island Road to join DWCO Hinkle.

Our group met at the north end of the airport along Hog Island Road. While WCO Czech and DWCO Hinkle were watching the southern end, the rest of the group would be ready to stop vehicles leaving to the north, which is the usual direction anglers exit the area. The best way to catch poachers on this evening was to observe them carrying their illegal booty to their vehicles parked out by the main road, so I took up position in a patch of reeds six feet off the shoulder of the road.

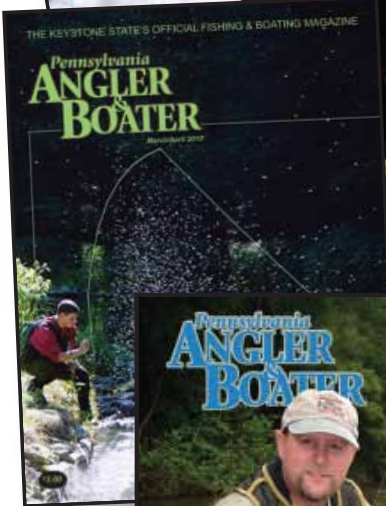
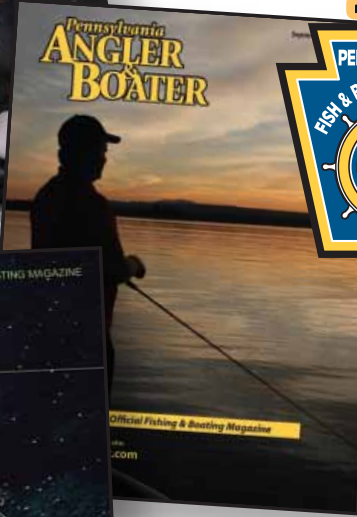
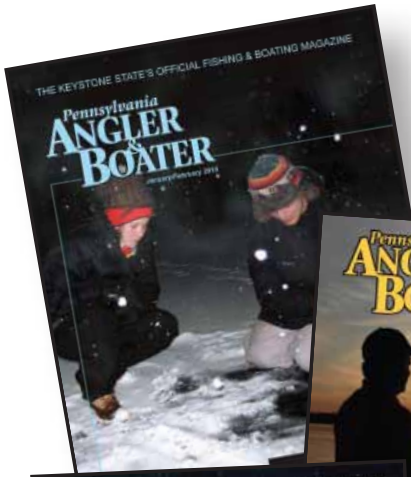
Later, I watched an individual get out of a dark-colored vehicle that had been parked in front of me the whole time. The guy must have been sitting in the vehicle as a lookout but was now heading towards the river. I texted WCO Czech, who was with the group to the north, to give her the information and vehicle description. A few minutes later, four men emerged from the direction of the fishing area. Three of them were carrying fishing gear, and the other individual was carrying a black, plastic garbage bag full of fish. The bag appeared to be heavy as the man hefted

it into the rear driver’s side. I called WCO Czech to give her the details and further identified the vehicle. I could hear WCO Czech on the radio relaying the information to the group at the north end. I learned later that the vehicle had 14 illegal striped bass.

Anglers were bringing bags of fish and hiding them along a set of railroad tracks behind me that ran parallel to the road. It began to rain as they loaded their vehicles with fish and pulled out. My fellow officers to the north were busy issuing citations as the vehicles were exiting. Anglers were still loading illegal fish into their vehicles in front of me. I didn’t want to blow my cover, but I had three vehicles in front of me getting ready to leave with illegal fish. I was the only one left to make the stop. I emerged from my hiding place and stripped off my coat, revealing my badge and uniform. “State Officer, Fish & Boat Commission,” I said. “Step back from the vehicles.” The men looked at me and realized they had been caught. Their faces went from excitement to defeat in an instant. I began issuing citations.

The rain was steady now, and DWCO Hinkle observed several vehicles leaving with illegal fish. More stops, more fish, more adrenaline, more citations. Dozens of people left the river with only their fishing gear. We found several black garbage bags of fresh fish that were hidden in the weeds, possibly to be picked up later.

By 6:00 a.m., we decided to call it a day. We laid the fish out and were amazed at what we had accomplished. In four hours, we had confiscated over 100 illegal striped bass. I would conservatively estimate the average size of a fish at 6 pounds, some smaller but mostly larger fish. In all, 20 citations were issued to individuals ranging from possessing striped bass outside the slot limit to exceeding the daily creel limit of striped bass, and one fishing-without-a-license violation. We believe this one night’s investigation recovered the highest number of illegal striped bass in our agency’s history.—*WCO Ronald Evancho, Delaware County.*



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