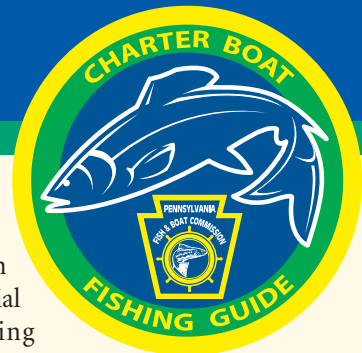


# New Fishing Guide/Charter Licensing Program

by Linda Steiner  
photos by Bob Steiner



Several years ago, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission began offering voluntary official recognition for fishing guides and charter operators.

The Commission has now taken the next step by requiring fishing guides and charter captains working in the state to be permitted. The requirement went into effect January 1, 2006.

Why a licensing system for fishing guides and charter operators, and how will that help the businesses, the Fish & Boat Commission, and the anglers they serve?

The Fish & Boat Commission has jurisdiction over recreational and commercial fishing, says Fish & Boat Commission press secretary Dan Tredinnick. Guides and charter boat operators “straddle this line” by assisting sport angling on a commercial basis. “The Fish & Boat Commission didn’t have a good handle on how many folks are in this business,” says Tredinnick. The guides and their clients are an untapped information resource on fisheries and recreation use, he says, another part of the equation of what’s happening on the state’s waterways.

“We don’t know what they see on the water, the number of people they’re taking out, and the implications in terms of how the resource is affected,” says Tredinnick. “Unless you have some mechanism where they are required to be registered with you, you don’t know who they are.” Before, the Fish & Boat Commission was seeing just the tip of the Pennsylvania fishing guide and charter business and “we needed to get our hands around that universe,” says Tredinnick. He adds that the Fish & Boat Commission “envisions the

**Guide licensing requirements include CPR certification, boating safety provisions and minimum insurance coverage.**

Visit the Commission’s web site for more information on the new fishing guide/charter licensing program at: [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us)



permit system opening up a chain of communication” to those who guide or run charters.

In its guide/charter licensing, the Fish & Boat Commission will not test fish-catching ability. Tredinnick says the market will determine that, as in any business. However, those seeking a permit will have to meet minimum standards of another kind. “Our main concern as a regulatory agency is to protect the customer,” he says. “The guides and charter captains must have adequate insurance, boating safety education, or boat operator certification, and know basic first aid for the clients’ protection.”

Before the guide and charter permitting requirements went into effect, in Pennsylvania “the only requirement to be a guide was that someone paid you,” says Tredinnick. “Now they have to demonstrate they have competency in some basic service expectations.” Whether those guided are taken to a mountain stream or vast Lake Erie, the ability to deal with emergencies and provide a safe outing increases the professional reputation of the guides or charter operators. The bottom line is professionalism.

Tom Kamerzel, director of the Fish & Boat Commission’s Bureau of Law Enforcement, echoes that notion. He says that when the Fish & Boat Commission began looking into licensing guides and charters, the Fish & Boat Commission surveyed other states that had fishing/hunting guide permit systems. The final Pennsylvania permit fees, \$100 for a resident and \$400 for a nonresident, were set by the Legislature and included in the fishing license increase bill enacted in 2004. Implementation of the guide and charter licensing was deferred a year while regulations were developed.

To do that, the Commission convened a working group of about two dozen fishing guides and charter captains represent-

ing the activity statewide. Kamerzel says the group included Delaware River shad guides; Lake Erie yellow perch charter operators; Susquehanna River small-mouth bass guides; and striped bass, steelhead, Spring Creek trout, and musky guides.

The group looked at other states’ standards while determining what was needed in Pennsylvania. “We dismissed some things,” says Kamerzel, “like the testing requirement because of the diversity of the types of guided fishing here.” What remained were the cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) requirement, the Boating Safety Education Certificate or U.S. Coast Guard operator’s license if a vessel were used, and a minimum insurance coverage while conducting a guiding operation.

“The guides themselves wanted to make sure this group was the professionals,” says Kamerzel. “They wanted to eliminate the ‘fly-by-nights,’ who go into guiding with no requirements or insurance.” The new licensing gives the client certain guarantees about the person hired. “Customers can then say about a guide or charter, ‘He’s operating in Pennsylvania, so he meets the requirements,’” says Kamerzel.

The permitting system is a “big win-win,” for the Fish & Boat Commission and the guides and charters, says Kamerzel. “We provide them with the opportunity for free advertising, if they choose,” he says, “by listing their businesses on the Fish & Boat Commission’s web site, [www.fish.state.pa.us](http://www.fish.state.pa.us).” With that addition, the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission web site becomes an even more useful first stop for getting into fishing in the state.

Clicking the “Fishing” tab on the home page takes visitors to choices that include Commercial Information. Under that heading is a list of licensed fishing guides and charters. There, anglers can find guides and charters by county, waters on which they operate, and fish specialties. Using that information, anglers can contact the businesses directly to book trips. The Fish & Boat Commission is also giving guides and charters an opportunity to link directly from their web sites to the agency’s web site.

The application for a charter boat/fishing guide permit is available from the Fish & Boat Commission and may be printed from its web site in the Commercial Information section. Applicants must be age 16 or older and have a Pennsylvania fishing license, and meet the other requirements. The permit is renewable each year, and the license number remains the same. □

