



THERAPEUTIC RECREATION

photo-courtesy of Pennsylvania Senate Democrats

by Timothy D. Schaeffer
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

↑ (Left to right) Senator Jim Brewster, Governor Josh Shapiro, Executive Director Tim Schaeffer and Senator Greg Rothman celebrate the signing of Act 1 of 2024, benefitting participants in programs that use the healing power of fishing as therapeutic recreation.

Act 1 of 2024—that has a nice ring to it. Senator Jim Brewster first sponsored the bill in March 2019, and it was considered in each of the last three legislative sessions. Along the way, the various senate bills saw identical companion legislation in the House of Representatives. With each introduction, there were multiple bipartisan co-sponsors. Each time it came up for a vote in committee or on the floor, it received unanimous support. It was a bill that everyone liked, but the clock just ran out before it crossed the finish line.

Now, the wait is over. Thank you to Senator Brewster for his persistence, his fellow Game and Fisheries Chairs Senator Greg Rothman and Representatives Anita Kulik and David Maloney, the entire Pennsylvania Senate and House of Representatives, and Governor Josh Shapiro for coming together to make it possible for the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to permit participants in programs that use fishing as therapy to not have to possess a fishing license.

There are about 60 such events across the Commonwealth each year, and they really do deserve the courtesy and dignity of having their participants be able

to fish for the day without a license. Programs include, but are not limited to, those that benefit the mental and physical recovery of veterans who sustained injuries in battle, women who are recovering from breast cancer, and individuals suffering from various other forms of developmental, traumatic and physical ailments.

As you enjoy Pennsylvania's waters this summer, consider how you may use the soothing benefits of fishing, boating or simply enjoying a view from a bench along a lake, stream or river to help you or a friend recharge your batteries or take a long-overdue deep breath. We all seem to be busier than ever and often feel like we cannot escape the constant bombardment of our cell phones and other devices.

The water is there to help you cope, heal and reconnect with nature in a way that few other things can. So, do everything you can to find time for your own water-based therapeutic recreation this summer. You will be glad you did.

And, if you do so from a boat, please wear your life jacket. ☐