

Pennsylvania **ANGLER & BOATER**

The logo of the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission is a blue shield-shaped emblem. It features a yellow fish silhouette in the center, surrounded by a yellow border. The words "PENNSYLVANIA" and "FISH & BOAT COMMISSION" are written in white on the blue background.

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STOCKING MUSSELS

by Sage Storm



Did you know that Pennsylvania is home to a diverse array of native mussels? If not, you're not alone. Our state is home to a staggering 67 different species of native mussels.

◀ A Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation member holds freshwater mussels ready to be stocked in Dunkard Creek, Greene County. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) marked the mussels with green glitter by gluing it to their shells, making it easier to spot them in the future and identify if they were stocked and, if so, what year since every year has a unique color.

When the topic of freshwater mussels in Pennsylvania arises, invasive Zebra Mussels often steal the spotlight. These invaders, originally from Eastern Europe, have been a significant threat to our native mussels, out-competing them for food and space.

My name is Sage Storm, and I'm the president of the Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation. Our council, comprised of 20 high school students from across Pennsylvania, is dedicated to promoting environmental awareness and conservation efforts in Pennsylvania. We also have the unique opportunity to advise on hunting, fishing and conservation legislation.

The council was granted the opportunity to tour the Union City Aquatic Conservation Center, Erie County. Historically, it focused on game fish. Today, it focuses on nongame species including mussels, Blanding's Turtles and Chesapeake Logperch.

Propagating mussels is a fascinating journey and quite different from propagating fish like trout. Instead of hatching eggs like fish, the first step after collecting fertilized female mussels is to infest a host, usually a fish, with their parasitic larvae (glochidia). These larvae attach to the fish's gills or fins and grow until they detach. When they detach, they are about 300 microns, equivalent to 1/3 of a piece of table salt. Once the mussels have become large enough and the outdoor temperatures are suitable for further growth and development, the mussels are moved outside to

the ponds. The PFBC staff have found that mussels grow at an accelerated pace outside using the pond water.

The council assisted with two stockings, one on Dunkard Creek, Greene County, and one on the Kiskiminetas River. The first mussel stocking the council assisted with was held at Dunkard Creek. This creek experienced a large fish kill in 2009, eradicating the Pennsylvania part of the stream of roughly 6,447 mudpuppies, 15,382 mussels and 42,997 fish. After everyone at the stocking was briefed on how to stock mussels, bags of approximately 250 mussels were handed out to each person, requiring careful attention. Stocking mussels is more difficult than stocking fish. For each mussel, you have to find the correct substrate and then carefully push the thinner side of the mussel into the substrate until you have pressed the mussel roughly halfway into the stream bed. This process ensures the mussels have a stable environment to grow and thrive. The PFBC marked the mussels with green glitter by gluing it to their shells, making it easier to spot them in the future and identify if they were stocked and, if so, what year since every year has a unique color. We saw mussels from past stockings, which showed us some of the success at Dunkard Creek. Between Dunkard Creek and Kiskiminetas River, the council stocked more than 1,000 mussels.

Avid anglers may wonder how stocking mussels will impact them. First, mussels filter the water, which is crucial to increasing water quality. The solids they filter out of the water and do not use as food are deposited along the stream bottom, providing a food source for macroinvertebrates. The abundance of macros becomes a food source for forage fish that will become food for popular game fish like Smallmouth Bass and trout. □

