



REEL CHANGE

State fish commission debuts useful fishing app

When I first moved to Chapman Lake back in the '90s, it was easy to keep track of seasonal fishing changes. The stocking truck would come in early April and discharge its shimmering, squirming load of trout into the cold, gray water. The few bright orange palominos in the batch always were easy to pick out among the dark rainbows and brooks.

When opening day of trout season arrived later in the month, the lake's population swelled many times over. The fishermen on shore were so numerous they could ring the lake if they all held hands. And there were so many vessels on the water, it seemed as if you could cross the lake by jumping from boat to boat without getting your feet wet.

As spring turned to summer, the crowds thinned. A handful of regulars would go out during the day when most people were at work, and a surge happened in the nights and on weekends. As they fished out the stocked trout, they would start pulling out sunnies, bass, bluegills and the occasional pickerel. When the lake froze in the winter, the anglers would move onto the ice. We knew then it was safe to go ice skating.

I got to know some of the regulars over the years. They were mostly middle-aged and older guys who always were happy to bend your ear with a fish tale.

Changing rhythms

Eventually, public access to the lake was eliminated, and the state stopped stocking it. On this year's opening day, I didn't see a single fisherman on or around the lake. I don't miss picking up discarded bait containers, beer bottles or fish hooks from the shoreline, but I do miss the seasonal rhythm of the transient fishing population. Some regulars still fish from boats and docks in the

warmer weather and on the ice in the winter, but it's nothing like it was.

I'm sure throngs of anglers still descend on other lakes and streams around the state, but I've been disconnected from the ritual. Now, however, thanks to the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, I can become connected again — this time virtually. The commission has a free app, **FishBoatPA**, available for iOS and Android mobile devices, stocked with useful information for fishing enthusiasts.

Follow the fish

The app mainly functions to give fishermen information on when, where and with what kind of fish the commission stocks waters around the state. The most popular page on the commission's website by far is the stocking page — with more than 1.2 million visits a year — so it decided to make that information more mobile-friendly.

The home page features a drop-down list of all the state's counties. Select the county where you want to fish, and a list of stocking locations and dates appears. The app uses your mobile device's location to list just the closest stocking sites, but you can choose to view the complete county list for the entire season if you like.

Tap on one of the listings, and it takes you to a page with a Google map, longitude and latitude coordinates, the species being stocked, the time of the stocking and the hatchery from which the fish come.

The app also provides information on obtaining a fishing license. A link lists places where you can get one, and tapping on a location gives you an address, phone number



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