

OUTDOORS

# Raystown Lake receives national acclaim for protecting fish

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Raystown Lake in Central Pennsylvania is receiving national attention for its conservation efforts.

The National Fish Habitat Partnership named it one of 10 “Waters to Watch” for 2022, and it's the only waterway in Pennsylvania to be selected this year. The annual list represents a collection of strategic conservation efforts implemented on rivers, streams, estuaries, and lakes to protect, restore, or enhance fish habitat.

Raystown Lake is an 8,300-acre reservoir owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Huntingdon County. It is the largest lake located entirely within Pennsylvania, and it's a hot recreation spot. More than 1.5 million people visited the waterway this past year.

To make it on the Waters to Watch list, the National Fish Habitat Partnership looks for efforts like habitat planting, stream bank restoration, lake shore restoration, according to Ryan Roberts, National Fish Habitat Partnership program manager.



“What attracted the Raystown application and why I think it was important to have it featured on this list is that it is a huge recreation destination in Pennsylvania. There’s a lot of boaters, a lot of jet skiers and a lot of people who go there. More importantly there’s high angling usage,” Roberts said. And preserving the habitat for fishing made it a "super attractive project" to select.

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission has been leading the projects.

“We’ve been working hard to execute a fish habitat improvement plan there, specifically shoreline erosion. If you are familiar with Raystown Lake, it gets a lot of boat traffic, and that creates a lot of waves,” said Ben Page, lake habitat section chief for the commission.

The waves erode the shoreline and degrade fish habitat, so the partners involved in the project stabilized the shores with rock material that breaks the waves and creates a habitat for baitfish and gamefish.

In addition, the commission worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Juniata College to build wooden structures and place them in deeper waters.

“A lot of flats are completely bare and don’t have any habitat features, so you’re creating an artificial stump field where fish will utilize those wood structures,” Page said.

The work included a new fishing pier, part of a plan to improve access from the shore for people to fish.

## Funding



The Friends of Raystown Lake received a \$24,000 grant from the PA Lake Management Society and a \$75,000 grant from the Reservoir Fisheries Habitat Partnership that is be used to stabilize the eroding shoreline, construct fish habitat and help fund volunteer scale projects including fish

structure building and tree felling. Roberts said the National Fish Habitat Partnership provided roughly \$200,000 on this project.

The work also includes \$1.15 million from a consent order between the Department of Environmental Protection and Sunoco and administered by Friends of Reservoirs, Page said.

The Pennsylvania Striped Bass Association received \$58,000 of the \$1.15 million award to make hatchery improvements to help it raise striped bass for Raystown Lake.

A variety of partners played a part, including the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Friends of Raystown Lake, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Juniata College, Student Conservation Association, Huntington Visitors Bureau, and the Pennsylvania Striped Bass Association.

## **'Crown jewel of Pennsylvania'**



Jenna Conner, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers park ranger, said the lake has a "little bit of everything for everyone."

The Corps has done shoreline stabilization projects at some of the peninsulas on the lake, "so we have a vested interested in trying to protect areas like that," she said.

"It's a very special recognition, something that we are very appreciative of," she said. "I know we've been dubbed the crown jewel of Pennsylvania before."

In the Twin Hollows area in Seven Points, there are shoreline deflectors in the main travel corridor of the area. There's also a new fishing pier and facilities for those who use wheelchairs to access shorelines.

"More fish habitat is a good thing because it increases fishing opportunities and the availability of the fish as well by giving them more spaces to thrive. We look forward to anglers continuing to see an increase in the populations of fish," she said.

## **Waters to Watch**

The 2022 Waters to Watch list includes:

- Deshka River, Alaska – Mat-Su Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership
- Grandpa's Farm Road Bridge, Alaska – SE Alaska FHP
- Huzzah, Courtis, Shoal Creek Wetlands, Missouri – Fishers and Farmers Partnership
- Neskowin Fish Passage Improvement Project, Oregon – Pacific Marine and Estuarine Partnership
- Raystown Lake, Pennsylvania - Reservoir Fish Habitat Partnership
- Susitna River, Alaska – Pacific Lamprey Conservation Initiative
- Tin Cup Creek, Idaho – Western Native Trout Initiative/Desert Fish Habitat Partnership (Retrospective)



- White River, Vermont – Eastern Brook Trout Joint Venture (Retrospective)
- Wildcat Creek, California – California Fish Passage Forum
- Williamsburg off-channel wetland, Ohio – Reservoir Fish Habitat Partnership



For more information and descriptions of the “Waters to Watch” list for 2022 as well as a project map point, Visit: <https://www.fishhabitat.org/waters-to-watch/>

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