

THE COLLECTION OF AQUATIC ORGANISMS: LICENSE AND PERMIT INFORMATION FOR EDUCATORS AND SCIENTISTS

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is charged under Commonwealth law with the protection and management of aquatic organisms and the places they live. A large part of this protection role is developing and enforcing laws and regulations. These regulations vary, but they include setting seasons, establishing minimum sizes and limits, regulating equipment use, and establishing licenses and permits.

Pennsylvania law defines "fishing" as *the act of angling, or to catch, take, kill or remove or the attempt to catch, take, kill or remove from any waters or other areas within or bordering the Commonwealth any fish by any means or method for any purpose at all*. That means you are fishing if you collect or catch any aquatic organism, because under the law, fishes include aquatic macroinvertebrates. For regulatory purposes, there are three major groups: Fish (gamefish, panfish, etc.), baitfish (minnows, darters, sculpins, madtoms, etc.), and fishbait (aquatic insects and other macroinvertebrates). Therefore, you are fishing if you collect organisms that we include in these categories.

What this means for educators, water quality monitors, and scientists is that if those collecting aquatic organisms for any reason are 16 years of age or older, they must have a valid fishing license. In addition, these activities must follow current Fish and Boat Commission regulations. Regulations protecting these organisms can be found in the *Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws* booklet available from the Fish and Boat Commission. You should get one of these booklets when you purchase a fishing license. Extra copies are also available by mail from the PFBC.

However, high school and undergraduate college students are exempt from the license requirement **if** their teacher/educator applies for and is issued an **Educational Aquatic Field Study Permit**. The teacher leading the field study group must complete and submit a permit registration form to the PFBC. **There is no charge.** The leader(s) of the field study group must possess a valid PA fishing license. In addition, if sampling occurs in approved trout streams from the opening day of trout season to the first Saturday of May, the leader must also possess a valid trout & salmon stamp. Approved trout streams are closed to sampling from March 1 to the opening day of trout season.

The Commission will review the application, and if approved, issue a permit for specific areas. The PFBC reserves the right to place further restrictions on the permit issued. The holders of the permit must always carry the Educational Aquatic Field Study Permit during the field study. Each instructor must produce this for a Waterways Conservation Officer on request. Permit holders and students must follow regulations governing sampling gear, seasons, sizes, and limits as stated in the *Summary of Fishing Regulations and Laws*.

Other questions to consider before applying for this permit include: Are my students 16 and older? Do you use nets less than four feet square? Do you keep fewer than 50 combined species per student? Do you collect and possess only during the "open seasons" for those species? If you answered "yes" to these questions, then it's for you! Permit applications are available from the PFBC.

If you answered "no" to any of the previous questions, then you need a Scientific Collector's Permit.

Scientific Collector's Permits. The Commission recognizes that the methods of collection, normally permissible under statewide rules and regulations for fishing, and the Aquatic Field Study Permit are sometimes inadequate for technical and scientific studies. In recognition of this need, the PFBC issues Scientific Collector's Permits to *qualified persons* engaged in research, higher education, or scientific studies in which collecting specimens is necessary. These permits are valid only for the locations and equipment specifically authorized on the permit. **Scientific collector's permit holders and their assistants must possess valid fishing licenses in addition to the collector's permit.** The permit holder must give 24-hour notice of any collecting activities to the appropriate Regional Law Enforcement Manager, and the permit holder (not an assistant) must be present on-site when any collecting takes place. These permits *may* allow for collecting and possession during closed seasons and without regard to minimum sizes and daily limits. In addition, the Commission may permit you to use nets larger than four feet square and electrofishing gear.

Type I (Nonprofit and Education). We normally issue these permits to museums, universities, and other nonprofit organizations. They cover the permit holder and no more than five assistants. All assistants must have a valid Pennsylvania fishing license. A Type I permit is normally limited to a specific area (that is, a county or specific water area). There is a \$10 fee for a Type I Scientific Collector's Permit.

Type II (Governmental). A Type II permit is a free permit issued to state and federal employees engaged in scientific collecting as a part of their required duties. This type of permit may be statewide or regional depending on the individual application. All applicants must have a valid Pennsylvania fishing license.

Type III (Consulting). We issue a Type III permit to individuals engaged in private consulting for profit, that is, a commercial venture. The fee for this permit is \$50. A Type III permit is limited to coverage of the permit holder and five assistants. All applicants and assistants must have a valid Pennsylvania fishing license. We issue this permit to individuals deemed by the PFBC to be qualified to engage in scientific collecting. We will not issue the permit in the name of a company or corporation. Collecting under a Type III permit is limited to a specific area, or sites, as described on the permit conditions.

For more information, contact:



Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission
P.O. Box 67000
Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000
(717) 705-7900
www.fish.state.pa.us