

# Outdoors

**Outdoors in the West End** *By Bruce Schneck*

## Pheasant stamp likely; general license hike might not fly

**H**UNTING MAY start costing you more. There is a proposed increase in hunting license fees and the possibility of a pheasant hunting tag or stamp.

First, let's look at the pheasant tag or stamp because that seems to be a much more readily acceptable idea. I liken it to the trout and Lake Erie stamps we have been purchasing to go with a fishing license for quite a few years. The stamp program seems to be working well overall although there is room for improvement in the trout stamp. The Lake Erie program has produced visible results, the most apparent being the access areas to streams coming from Lake Erie.

**Offsetting expenses**

The current cost of operating a put-and-take pheasant

program is a huge burden to the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Having those who want to do some pheasant hunting pay an additional fee should provide funds for this program. Money derived from a pheasant stamp should be designated only for the pheasant program, not juggled around by some pencil pushers.

One thing that should be strongly looked at is purchasing birds raised by private contractors instead of by Game Commission employees. Years ago, our Rotary Club ran a very successful pheasant stocking program. Fundraisers designated for purchase of birds went entirely toward purchase of birds. All other costs, such as transportation to stock birds, was done by volunteers with no cost to the programs.

The price we paid per bird compared more than favorably to the announced cost per bird raised by the Game Commission.

**A comparison of birds**

I got to handle many of the birds our club stocked and was lucky enough to bag some birds stocked by the Game Commission. Using my own judgement to compare quality of birds, the birds purchased from game farms seemed heavier in almost every case. For two years I weighed some of the birds our club stocked as well as Game Commission birds. An average difference was darn near one pound per bird in favor of those our club purchased. We paid less to purchase these birds than the Game Commission paid to raise its product. Perhaps it

was my imagination, but club birds seemed to fly better and have better plumage, too.

For a few years as my dad was getting older, he, my brother and I hunted at a pheasant club in the Lehigh Valley. Our cost per bird as members was on a par with that of the Game Commission birds. Again, this was for a better quality bird. I am certain a decent profit remained for the commercial venture.

I have no problem with — actually I support — the pheasant stamp but feel strongly that the program must be efficiently run to get maximum results for the money hunters will be asked to spend. Bird hunters who devote effort to keeping and training dogs would most likely enjoy results of the pheasant stamp.

**License fee controversy**

Now let's look at a more controversial topic: an increase in the general hunting license. It is difficult for anyone to say that the current cost of a hunting license is not a superbargain. The recreation value alone of a few days afield compares well with a night out at a club, restaurant or movie. Add to that the potential of a few meals of healthy game and maybe selling some fur-bearers that have been trapped, and it seems a no-brainer to support a hunting license increase.

But it's not so simple.

Most hunters, especially those a bit older, remember the antlerless deer permit (bonus license) wars. Many hunters, in disgust with these permits and the negative results it had on our deer herd,

contacted politicians to oppose a license fee increase as long as these tactics remained in place. Our political representatives responded and to date have not voted for any increase.

We can argue results of this tactic, but a walk on public land shows lack of deer signs. If this is a good or bad thing can be debated. As long as there is no movement on this situation, it will be very difficult to achieve a hunting license increase.

I believe the pheasant stamp will be in our future, but unless something can be done to reconcile the deer situation, a general license increase is not in the immediate future.

**Bruce Schneck's Outdoors in the West End** appears every other week in South Schuylkill News. Contact Bruce at [news@southschuylkillnews.com](mailto:news@southschuylkillnews.com).

**Naturally Speaking** *By 'Porcupine Pat' McKinney*

## New year of walking with Schuylkill County on the Move

**S**TART THE new year with a choice to be a more healthy you.

Walking with Schuylkill On the Move is a great way to take control of your body, mind and spirit. You get the opportunity to enjoy the company of other like-minded folks of all ages and you can better appreciate Schuylkill County, too.

Schuylkill On the Move is a project of Schuylkill County's VISION and is co-sponsored by the Schuylkill County Conservancy, Schuylkill County Visitors Bureau, Schuylkill County Historical Society and the Schuylkill Conservation District. These partners want you to become more aware of your county's natural and cultural history and care about your health and wellness.

The 2017 schedule is now available and offers a host of walks at locations throughout our county for each month. The first walk is called the Landingville Launch and will be held on Sunday, Jan. 22 from 1-3 p.m. Participants will meet in the parking lot on Tunnel Road and will walk a flat, 2 miles of beautiful winter scenery on the Bartram Trail just outside Landingville. This walk features the site of America's first transportation tunnel from the 1820s.

These walks are made possible because of volunteers

who care about our county. One hike volunteer is Mike Centeleghe who hails from Schuylkill Haven. Mike is slated to lead a spring wildflower walk at Frog Hollow, near Friedensburg, in early May and another walk this November to the famous Boxcar Rocks above Tower City.

Last year, he led folks to the old water dam for Schuylkill Haven. Mike has also taken participants on a walk around the borough to visit the historical markers.

All walks are free and open to the public. Of special note, the walks are for all ages and have included youngsters of 4 years to oldsters in their 90s.

Each volunteer hike leader chooses a meeting location and then leads the walk with the intention of enjoyment while raising awareness and appreciation of Schuylkill County. The hike can involve

interpreting nature and history along the way, too.

Southern Schuylkill County offers a number of hikes this year. Sites in this year's schedule include the historic Tow Path Trail in Port Clinton, the Orwigsburg Odyssey beginning at Albright's Woods, Swatara State Park and, of course, Sweet Arrow Lake County Park. Each site offers a variety of conditions for the average to more advanced hiker.

Schuylkill County's VISION promotes health and wellness and recommends walking as a good way to take back your health. According to [mayoclinic.org](http://mayoclinic.org), physical activity doesn't need to be complicated. Something as simple as a daily, brisk walk has many benefits. For example, walking can help you:

- Maintain a healthy weight
- Prevent or manage various conditions, including

heart disease, high blood pressure and type 2 diabetes

- Strengthen your bones and muscles
- Improve your mood
- Improve your balance and coordination

The faster, farther and more frequently you walk, the greater the benefits.

To get your free schedule,

email [porcupinepat@yahoo.com](mailto:porcupinepat@yahoo.com) or call 570-622-4124 ext. 113.

Schuylkill On the Move is an easy-going organization, meaning you don't pay dues and are not obligated to participate every month. This relaxed approach has worked for the last 23 years. We are seeing the children of hikers

from a generation ago now attending these walks.

Have a good and healthy new year and hope to see you on the trail.

**'Porcupine Pat' McKinney** is the environmental education coordinator for the Schuylkill Conservation District. His column appears monthly in South Schuylkill News. Contact him at [porcupinepat@yahoo.com](mailto:porcupinepat@yahoo.com).

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