

The River News

The Official Newsletter of the Delaware River Fishermen's Association

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January-February 2022

Multiple Changes In The Works For A New And Improved DRFA 2022 Season

This Is Your Last DRFA Newsletter Until 2022 Dues Renewal

Based on votes taken at our November meeting, the Club will be going to all-digital newsletters in order to save print and postage costs that can be better utilized toward the cost of tournament cash prizes and paid speakers at Club meetings.

If you have not yet done so, please use the [membership form](#) available on the DRFA website to renew your membership and ensure that you do not miss a single opportunity to improve your fishing success in 2022. You can also print out added copies to recruit new members to keep our Club going strong.

Introducing A 'New Look' DRFA For 2022

The DRFA is preparing to bounce back with a full slate of fishing opportunities after two years of

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COVID-disrupted tournament and meeting schedules. The inclusion of Club-funded tournament prizes, a more robust schedule of informative speakers, password-protected web-forum access, six newsletters, and additional activities – a Youth Fishing Derby, Upper Delaware raft trip, qualification for the SJBCA Bass Bowl event, etc. – are all reasons to renew your dues (*and to encourage other family members and friends to capitalize on the newly enhanced benefits of family-friendly DRFA membership and fishing contests*). All of those benefits are available to new and existing DRFA members for the low cost of a \$25 individual membership or a \$30 family membership.

The first big change is the reinstatement of Club-funded tournament payouts – including \$50 for first place, \$30 for second, and \$20 for third. That means that any individual could practically earn back their membership cost with just one third-place finish out of our nine tournaments targeting four different Delaware River species.

Of course, interested tournament participants can still also enter the voluntary \$10 lunger pool for each tournament (*except the shad tournament*). That voluntary-participation pool yields a 100% payout at each tournament weigh-

in, based on a 60%, 30%, 10% split across the top three finishers.

Every member will also have the opportunity to accumulate points in the 2022 Angler of the Year standings, where year-end prizes of \$150, \$100, and \$75 await the top three finishers in that annual competition.

Finally, existing and prospective members will also have the opportunity to gain new insights by sharing in presentations and discussions on a variety of fishing topics held at our monthly meetings. (*See separate article on our current speaker schedule.*)

Important Dates

Wednesday, January 26, 7 pm Monthly Meeting: Silver Lake Nature Center. Come discuss fishing opportunities for the coming season. Bucks County COVID rules require all in the building to wear properly fitting masks.

Wednesday, February 23, 7 pm Monthly Meeting: Silver Lake Nature Center. Our guest speaker, Dr. Anna Roebuck, will discuss PFAS pollution effects on fish in the Delaware River based on her research with fish samples provided by DRFA members.

President's Message

I'd like to start off by saying I appreciate everyone's hard work and patience this past year. As we have experienced, 2021 was a little crazy – to put it mildly – and challenged us in many ways.

Thanks to all for your involvement and commitment and I look forward to working with everyone in 2022. With any luck the fish will bite, and the bugs won't as much. We still have some trying times ahead, but as a club I'm sure we will persevere. In closing, I wish everyone a healthy and prosperous new year with lots of bites.

Bob Jack

Minutes Of The November Meeting

Club Secretary Pete Antoniewicz opened the meeting at 7:08 pm with 14 members in attendance. Minutes from the October meeting were read and approved.

Treasury Report: Treasurer Eileen Kicinski reported a balance of \$8,933.83 as of the meeting date. By comparison the October balance for 2020 was \$8,919.19.

Membership: Membership Secretary Rick Mawson reported that membership was still at 73 paid members.

Youth Activities: There was nothing to report.

Tournaments: Bob Jack reviewed the results of the final bass tournament at the Bulls Island ramp and announced the final Angler of the Year standings. Bob was assigned to order the AOTY plaque in time for the Holiday Party.

Old Business: Several new elections took place to update officer positions since the

October elections. Bob Jack had volunteered to assume the role of president as a primary point of coordination for all Club-related business. He was nominated and elected unanimously. Scott McDonough was elected to the role of Vice President and Tournament Coordinator to fill the vacancy left by Bob Jack's elevation to the presidency. Gregg Southrey was nominated and elected to fill the Trustee position vacated by Scott. At that point in the meeting, newly elected President Bob Jack assumed control of the meeting.

In other old business, a vote was taken on a recommendation to add language specific to culling of dead fish from a livewell. The approved new rule reads as follows: *"Once a fish is placed in a livewell and dies, there is no culling of a dead fish. Any fish brought to the scale dead will not be disqualified, but will receive an 8-ounce penalty at the weigh-in. This rule applies to all Bass and Catfish Tournaments, but not the Shad Tournament."*

Plans for the DRFA Holiday Party on December 15 were announced, based on the indicated level of participation among Club members.

Members discussed the list of potential guest speakers for the 2022 slate of meetings. All members are encouraged to suggest potential speakers on fishing tackle, fishing tactics, fisheries management, environmental topics, etc.

New Business: Even though no one had stepped forward to fill the role of Outdoor Shows coordinator, members discussed potential attendance at shows planned for the start of the 2022 season. The Surf Anglers Flea Market in January and the Hemlock Rod and Gun Club

event in March were selected because they were one-day events that would require minimum expense and manpower. Because of tight timelines and a desire to reserve our traditional table, Scott had already put in our reservation for the Surf Anglers Flea Market.

The Oaks Show in February was discussed but thought to be impractical based on the higher out-of-pocket costs and the need for three days of manpower and travel to run the booth. Club members favored offering a single tackle bag to raffle if we would be able to attend at least two shows. Pete Marcolina volunteered to run the Tackle Bag Raffle.

Members in attendance voted on recommendations proposed by the Board of Directors to make membership more attractive to existing and potentially new members. They approved the switch to all-digital newsletters to save roughly \$900 per year to be used to fund other efforts.

Members approved two expenditures to build the value of Club membership to existing and potential new members. That included funding Club-tournament payouts of \$50 for first place, \$30 for second place, and \$20 for third place. They also approved the expenditure of \$150 to \$200 per speaker to attract new and more valued presenters at Club meetings – individuals who can inform existing members on topics of interest and who we can promote to attract potential new members.

Members also approved the offering of free club memberships for boat-retailer sponsoring business members to offer to their customers who purchase a new boat. The goal is to capture the attention and interest of new boat owners who might need to learn

more about fishing the river. In addition, the club approved the offering of small tackle gifts (<\$10) for youth family members who participate in DRFA tournaments.

Club members also discussed other efforts that could be made to promote new membership. Ideas included making up one-page flyers to be offered at tackle shops and renewing our Facebook publicity efforts. Webmaster/Membership Secretary Rick Mawson and Newsletter Editor Pete Antoniewicz will work on those communication efforts.

A suggestion was also made to survey club members to see where interests were in terms of speaker topic preferences and what motivated people to renew their memberships from year to year.

Environmental Reports: There were no environmental reports from members.

Fishing Reports: Joe Newton and Pete Antoniewicz reported a relatively slow day on the water the weekend before the meeting, with four smallmouth bass landed in 43- to 44-degree water while fishing around the Frenchtown area. Joe landed the lunker at 16”.

Joe Newton and Frank Beck fished the Susquehanna River north of Harrisburg a week earlier with guide Chris Gorsuch and landed 40 smallmouth ranging between 16” and 19-7/8” on Hula Stik, Megabass, and Keitech lures.

Scott McDonough reported an active day at Tullytown Cove the Saturday before the meeting with 5 pickerel, 30 panfish, and a dozen bass.

At the end of the meeting, Scott McDonough spoke about cold-

water walleye fishing on the upper river and Pete Antoniewicz addressed cold-water smallmouth fishing.

The 50/50 drawing rewarded Mike Nucero with a \$33 prize. The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

Don't Forget To Renew Your Dues For 2022!

This is your last newsletter on your 2021 dues. Renew today to maintain your access to the DRFA website forum, as well.

Minutes Of The December Meeting

In the absence of President Bob Jack, VP Scott McDonough opened a short business session at the DRFA Holiday Party held at Georgine’s Restaurant on December 15 with 24 members and guests in attendance.

Outdoor Shows: Scott called for volunteers to man the booth at the Surf Angler’s Flea Market at the VE Club on Saturday, January 15.

Because the Hemlock Show has been cancelled due to COVID-related capacity issues at the

2022 Tournament Schedule

All DRFA Club tournaments are free and open to dues-paying DRFA members, with club-funded payouts of \$50, \$30, and \$20 to the top three places. (There are no entry fees, however, ramp, launch, and/or parking fees may apply.) There will also be a voluntary \$10.00 lunker pool with a 100% payout to pool participants for the three heaviest pool fish – 60%, 30%, and 10% – at tournament’s end.)

Members also accrue points for the Angler of the Year competition based on their top six finishes among the nine regular Club events. Except for the Shad Tournament, new members may register on the morning of an event before check-in time. Weigh-in is at the time specified. Late entries will not count.

Always check the DRFA website or the Tournament Hotline (267-934-2148) the night before the event to learn about potential rescheduling or relocation due to water or weather conditions.

Date	Event	Time	Location
Sat. 3/26.....	Bass	.....7 am–1 pm	Neshaminy Marina, PA
Sat. 4/23.....	Shad	.....2 pm weigh-in....	Yardley Park & Ride Lot
Sat. 5/14.....	Catfish	.6 am–12 pm	Gloucester City Marina, NJ
Sat. 6/25.....	Bass	.....6 am–12 pm	Gloucester City Marina, NJ
Sat. 7/16.....	Catfish	.6 am–12 pm	Neshaminy Marina, PA
Sun. 8/7	Bass	.....6 am–12 pm	Neshaminy Marina, PA
Sat. 8/20.....	Catfish	.6 am–12 pm	Neshaminy Marina, PA
Sun. 9/18	Bass	.....7 am–1 pm	Byram Ramp, NJ
Sun. 10/9	Bass	.....7:30am–1:30pm	Bulls Island Ramp, NJ
TBD	Youth Derby..	8 am–2 pm	Pennsylvania Yacht Club, PA

venue, the likelihood of being able to sell enough raffle tickets to pay for itself was discussed.

The Club is still looking for guest speakers to fill the slate for our 2022 meetings. If anyone has a connection or an idea on a potential speaker, please contact Bob Jack or another board member.

Angler Of The Year: Scott presented the awards to the top three finishers in the 2021 Angler of the Year competition. Third-place finisher Rich Hoffman earned the \$75 third prize with 582 points. Scott earned the \$100 second-place prize thanks to his strong finishes in the last two bass tournaments, which pushed his yearly total to 588 points.

The top prize of \$150 and a personal plaque went to George Hoffman who earned an amazing 594 points across his top six tournament finishes.

Treasury Report: Although it was not reported at the December event, the balance in the treasury for month's end was \$8,690.59, as compared to a balance of \$9,014.56 in December 2020.

The winner of \$63 in the 50/50 drawing was Bryan Malkiewicz.

Club Positioned For More Learning Experiences In 2022

At the **February** meeting, Dr. Anna Robuck will share with the Club the results of her research using Delaware River fish contributed by DRFA members. Dr. Robuck is an environmental chemist studying chemical and plastic pollution. She earned a Ph.D. in Chemical Oceanography in 2020 from the University of Rhode Island Graduate School of Oceanography, during which she studied per- and polyfluoroalkyl

substances (PFAS) in water and wildlife. Her work on PFAS accumulations in fish can also shed some light on the recent "Do Not Eat" fish-consumption advisory for the Neshaminy Creek.

In **March**, Rusty Held – a shad-fishing guide from the Easton area – will be providing insights on shad fishing that can be used anywhere along the Delaware River.

In **April**, learn what's needed to try your hand at targeting muskies in rivers and lakes, based on experience shared by two members of the NJ chapter of Muskies Inc. – the world's largest fishing and conservation organization dedicated to the conservation of muskellunge.

Our **May meeting** speaker, Chris Gosruch, a fishing guide based out of the Harrisburg area, will be accompanied by Mike Kiermaier, a Delaware River Guide from Bronzeback Outfitters, to speak on smallmouth fishing topics relative to the Delaware and Susquehanna Rivers. They will address insights that can be used in our Club bass tournaments on the non-tidal river. They will also address other topics related to seasonal fishing, trophy fishing, etc. as determined by a member survey at an upcoming meeting.

How To Become The Angler Of The Year; (It's Not As Easy As You Might Think)

For anyone who remembers the old joke "How do you get to Carnegie Hall?" "Practice." the experience of DRFA 2021 Angler of the Year George Hoffman will have special meaning. Earning his way back into the top spot was not as easy as some club members might think. According

to George, things did not always go as planned for him and his boating partner, brother Rich Hoffman. On more than one occasion, their original plans did not pay off on tournament day as they had during previous days of practice. Yet, despite the hiccups along the way, George was able to squeeze out two first-place finishes (catfish) two second-place finishes (bass, catfish) and two third-place finishes (bass, shad) to earn 594 points in his top six tournament finishes.



George Hoffman (left) receives his 2021 Angler of the Year plaque and \$150 prize from Vice President Scott McDonough (right) at the Club Holiday Party.

George admits that he was more of a lake fisherman before joining the Club but attributes his growing success on the river to participating in Club activities, sharing insights with other Club members, and practicing regularly between tournaments, to learn more and more over his 20+ years of membership.

George attributed his cold-water bass success in the early-April tournament to watching "a lot of Mike Iaconelli videos" on cold-water bass fishing techniques. He credits that for expanding his techniques beyond his go-to spinnerbait pattern.

When it comes to shad fishing, George remains a creature of habit in fishing his latest 'home

turf' once his old hot spot at the now-defunct Trenton power plant cooled down. While he claims that a lot of his shad success has been 'luck' related to the weather and water conditions ("they're either there and biting or they're not"), he does practice throughout the Spring, using downriggers plus deep running plugs – both with leaders connected to shad spoons – to experiment with different water depths.

In the tidal river, George likes the outgoing tide for both bass and catfish although that logic was not the ticket for his winning fish in the May catfish tournament out of Neshaminy. That event saw George and Rich practicing both near the launch area and farther upstream in their home waters below Trenton – neither with great success. One day later, on the day of the tournament, they fell back on their most familiar spots based on years of fishing experience. The difference was like night and day as "we could not keep the fish off our poles." George brought the winning fish to the scales that day based not on his most recent practice but on confidence from years of previous fishing experience.

For the Gloucester City catfish tournament George claims that he had spots to catch "a lot of catfish, but not necessarily big catfish." Still, simply by playing the numbers game that day, he was able to bring a third-place fish to the scales.

While his favored spinnerbait pattern did not pan out for the July bass tournament, George's backup plan of using a Senko in deeper water did. Fortunately, George's third-place fish caught in later in the tournament saved the day for brother Rich, after an early keeper was lost due to a 'netting delay.'

Practicing around the Neshaminy ramp before the early August catfish tournament was producing 5-lb. fish, but not big enough in George's mind to take the tournament. So, on tournament day he headed back upstream to his home turf to bag an 8.01-lb. winning fish. Ironically, as he and Rich worked their way back south, trying spots along the way, Rich did catch a 6.37-lb. fish closer to the Neshaminy ramp.

After taking third place in the first bass tournament in the non-tidal river, George had a banner day in practice with his spinnerbait-to-the-shoreline strategy while pre-fishing the week before the last bass tournament was scheduled. But come the day of the tournament, that pattern disappeared as both he and Rich struggled to get a keeper – one of the few times he's gone fishless in a tournament.

Overall, however, it seemed that when his pre-tournament practice trips did not provide confidence on the day of the event, an historic hotspot from previous fishing experience bailed him out, more often than not. And even if George never makes it to Carnegie Hall, he has enough mental notes from previous practice fishing to keep him in contention in the annual Angler of the Year race.

When asked for tips that he has picked up from being a part of the Club, he cited a comment from another Club angler he met on the water with former president John Strada. When asked what kind of bait he used to catch his frequently tournament-winning catfish, that angler replied, "John, you guys use chicken livers, I use the whole chicken!" But in general, George says he keeps his ears open at tournaments and

trades experiences with other Club anglers, and over the years that has given him plenty of added insight.

And while George does come to bass tournaments prepared with nearly a dozen rods, he does admit that he often falls back to his top three bass lures – spinnerbait, Ned rig, and Senko. He says that he usually sticks to his game plan for the tournament – based on recent practice and past experience – with just a handful of lures, until late in the day when he'll start throwing Hail-Mary passes if he has not had success up to that point.

As for when George plans to retire from the DRFA tournament scene, he says "I'm going to try to do it for as long as I can" which should serve as a warning to other DRFA anglers to practice as much as they can, and to make mental notes of what works over time, so they can have back-up plans to execute if tournament day deals them a cold hand in their primary spot.

Where Have All The Smallies Gone, Long Time Passing...

Discussions at DRFA monthly meetings about the apparent deterioration of smallmouth bass fishing on the non-tidal river spurred John Pedrick to reach out to some of his PFBC contacts for any insights on recent trends. The bottom line after several phone calls and a nine-page PFBC report is that the 15-year overview of smallie populations over the past few years confirms that the past few years have seen some disappointing trends – depending on the size of fish.

So, what does that mean – in English – to us as anglers? Well, that depends on how much

credence you give to the famous quip, “There are three types of lies: Lies. Damned lies. And statistics.” In an effort to sort that out, here is a synopsis of the PFBC report.

The backbone of the report was based on a series of surveys taken at consistent locations over the past 15 years. They include summer young-of-the-year (YOY) electrofishing surveys conducted in the shallow shoreline areas followed by fall nighttime electrofishing surveys conducted from shore to shore. Survey results are categorized by three sections of the non-tidal river:

- **The lower river** is defined as the area from Easton to Morrisville.
- **The middle river** is defined as the area from Matamoras to Easton.
- **The upper river** is defined as the area from Damascus to Lackawaxen.

Sampling is conducted at the same locations year after year and includes multiple sampling locations per section. The overall results provide mixed reviews.

The good news is summertime shoreline backpack electrofishing surveys used to assess reproductive success shows that recent YOY combined results have kept pace with the long-term average (*although that average was skewed by several extremely successful years in 2005, 2007, and 2008*). Also, the results for bass of 15”+ size were at or better than average in the upper two thirds of the river.

The bad news is that the two most recent surveys show overall numbers for all sizes of smallies are well below the long-term average.

Two factors that “could have played a role” in the drop-off of the 2020 survey numbers (*according to the PFBC report*) were that high water from Tropical Storm Isaias in August of that year could have redistributed fish from their normal spots and that low water during the fall electrofishing period could have affected results by forcing fish into deeper holes beyond the reach of the electrofishing equipment.

The fall electrofishing of bass at 12”+ size fell slightly below average in all three sections of the river for 2020 (*despite being well above average in most sections during 2019*). Bass of 15”+ size were down slightly in the lower section of the non-tidal river but were at or above average in the other two other sections. Considering those two statistics, it means that bass in the size window between YOY and 12” had to represent a big chunk of the dip in the overall catch rates for 2019 and 2020, which does not bode well for fishing

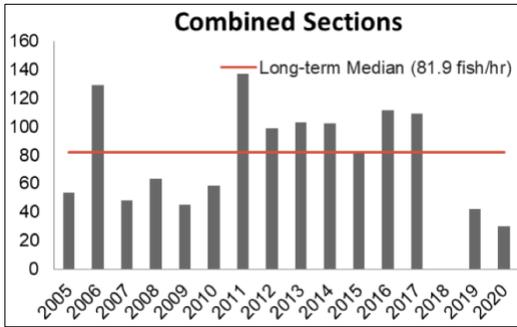
productivity in the coming years as the larger fish die off or are harvested. Why such a big drop in that size slot? Could it be that flathead catfish prefer to eat bass between 4” and 12”?

Despite those concerning trends, there are some advantages that DRFA anglers can glean from the data presented in the report:

- If you want to catch a ton of dinks, fish above Matamoras
- If you want to catch the most fish across all sizes, consider fishing above the Easton area.
- If you want to have the best chance for catching larger fish (12”+ and 15”+ fish) between Easton and Matamoras.

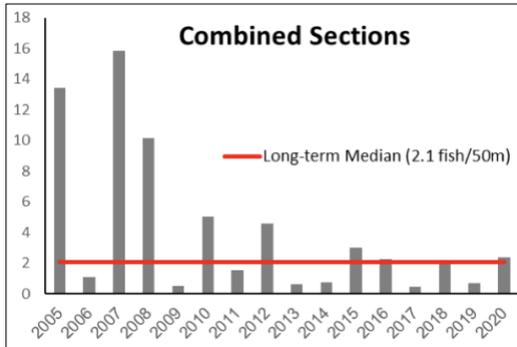
The full [PDF report](#) is available from the PFBC website, complete with detailed 15-year-trend charts for all sections of the river, as demonstrated by the combined results shown on the following page.

2020 Results	YOY	12”+ Fish	15”+ fish	All Fish
Upper River (Damascus to Lackawaxen)	Slightly above avg. of 1.7 fish per 50m	Slightly below avg. of 5.5 fish per 50m	At avg. of 0.65 fish per 50m	Sharply below avg. of 108.2 fish per 50m
Middle River (Matamoras to Easton)	At avg. of 2.2 fish per 50m	Slightly below avg. of 8.3 fish per 50m	Moderately above avg. of 2.0 fish per 50m	Sharply below avg. of 83.5 fish per 50m
Lower River (Easton to Morrisville)	At avg. of 2.7 fish per 50m	Moderately below avg. of 2.7 fish per 50m	Slightly below avg. of 0.8 fish per 50m	Sharply below avg. of 26.5 fish per 50m
Combined Total (Damascus to Morrisville)	Slightly above avg. of 2.1 fish per 50m	Moderately below avg. of 6.5 fish per 50m	At avg. of 1.4 fish per 50m	Sharply below avg. of 81.9 fish per 50m

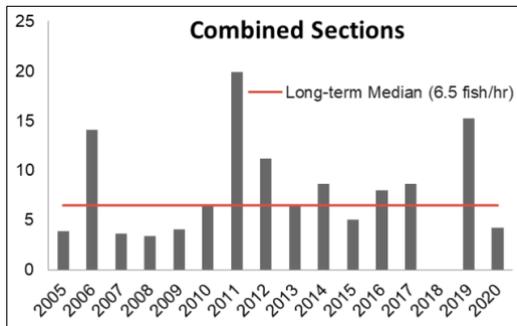


(Chart Sources: [PFBC](#))

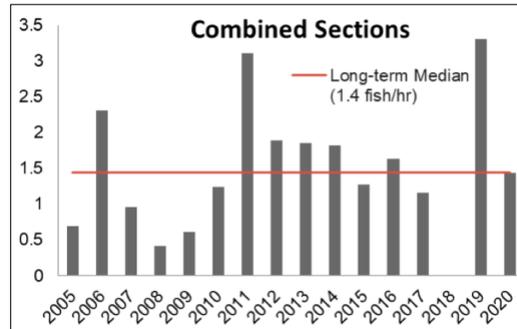
The overall sampling rate for smallmouth bass of any size throughout the river has declined to its lowest in the surveyed period.



YOY results are holding at the 15-year average, but nothing near the peak recruitment seasons in the mid-2000s.



The sampling rate for 12"+ fish in 2020 declined below the long-term average for the entire length of the non-tidal river, although the 2019 season showed favorable results.



The sampling rate for smallmouth bass of 15" or larger is holding at the 15-year average throughout the river, after a favorable spike in 2019. The middle section of the river offers the best opportunities in this size range.

Striped Bass Circle Hook Reminder

The NJ Fish Commission website has been updated to reflect the requirement for recreational anglers to use non-offset circle hooks in all New Jersey waters while using live bait to fish for striped bass, in order to comply with the Striped Bass Interstate Fishery Management Plan.

See the [updated web page](#) on the NJ Fish and Wildlife website.

From A to Z

Where Do We Go From Here?

While the Club bounced back reasonably well from the disrupted 2020 season in terms of meeting and fishing activity, our membership roles have declined to around 70 members as opposed to staying above 100 members in the pre-pandemic years.

Now you might say, "So what? We'll just fish with the guys that really want to belong." That can work, but only for a while, because Father Time never loses. But there is another way to look at it, from the perspective of 'new blood.' New blood to boost the size of tournament lunker pools; to handle club responsibilities (like a newsletter, ahem, Facebook, or website); and to enhance cross-pollination of fishing experiences, strategies tactics, lure suggestions, etc.

We have taken steps in terms of adding tournament payouts and informative speakers, but it's up to all of us to help keep our Club going strong. To that end, consider keeping copies of DRFA membership forms in your truck and talking it up with friends or people you meet at the boat ramp.

Miscellaneous Notes And Notices

Have boat or fishing gear to sell? Have a request for a second-hand item? Have something to give away? Be sure to check out the DRFA [Items For Sale page](#) on our website.

The 2022 [New Jersey Freshwater Fishing Digest](#) is now available online and can be downloaded as a PDF file for convenient reading.

The [Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook](#) is available from the PFBC website.

The Delaware River Fishermen's Association
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JANUARY–FEBRUARY 2022 ISSUE

- NEW 2022 CLUB BENEFITS
- MEETING SPEAKER LINEUP
- MEETING MINUTES
- TOURNAMENT INFORMATION

Also visit our website

www.drfishermen.com

THE RIVER NEWS is the bimonthly newsletter of the Delaware River Fishermen's Association. The DRFA typically meets the last Wednesday of each month, 7:00 pm, at the Silver Lake Nature Center, 1306 Bath Road, Bristol, PA. All interested sportsmen and women are invited to attend our meetings and join the organization.

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