



Committed to maintain, expand and enhance the quality and accessibility of the NWPA fishery - for today's and tomorrow's angling public.

17 October 2006

RTAO: Pennsylvania Steelhead Association
John R. Fuhrmann/President
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SUBJ: Proposed U.S. Coast Guard Live Fire Ranges - on Offshore Pennsylvania Lake Erie Waters

TO: RADM. John E. Crowley
Commander, Ninth Coast Guard District
1240 East Ninth Street
Cleveland, Ohio 44199-2060

The Pennsylvania Steelhead Association (PSA), a non-profit private organization, represents more than four hundred regional angler members and is pro-actively involved in sustaining and improving the Northwest Pennsylvania Lake Erie and Lake Erie Tributaries fishery and its public access for the all anglers.

The PSA is concerned that recently proposed “live fire” U.S. Coast Guard weapons training ranges on Lake Erie waters have not been adequately evaluated nor properly assessed in terms of negative impacts on angler safety, angler and boater access to prime public fishing waters and significant regional negative economic impacts.

Concerns rationale:

- These tentatively designated “live fire” range areas include waters located geographically north of Pennsylvania shorelines in Lake Erie waters and define, throughout annual March into November calendar periods, the absolute high volume traffic areas and epicenter of Pennsylvania sports fishing activities for steelhead trout, walleye pike and perch.
- Routinely, several hundred angler boats – at times approaching as many as one thousand boats - simultaneously occupy the proposed location in Pennsylvania waters.
- While the heaviest boat presence occurs on weekends, early spring through late fall week days also support major boat numbers in the areas in question. Annually, numbers validated and measured of more than 100,000 anglers frequent, transition to and from and anchor or drift in the proposed “live fire” water areas.
- Critical safety considerations and validated economic impact factors will unquestionably negatively affect charter, private angler boating activity and the associated fishing industry economy.

- Because a significant percentage of boaters do not equip their boats with marine radio equipment, critical safety advisories broadcast prior to “live fire” training events will not be known to or received by high numbers of watercraft operators, regardless of USCG safety notification efforts.
- *In essence, if a live fire training location was investigated to determine the absolute worst case location for selection - due to huge March through October angler boating traffic volume, extended calendar period public access curtailment, inability to insure range security due to sheer boating numbers and major regional negative economic impacts – the proposed Pennsylvania live fire zone is it! Additionally, the acknowledged facts that the USCG failed to contact or collaborate with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission or regional Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commissioners prior to announcement of these proposals is totally unacceptable.*

We fully understand the importance of USCG crewmembers and US Border Patrol agents maintaining weapons proficiency. The threats of potential terrorist activities and ongoing illegal immigration traffic occurring on or over Great Lakes/Lake Erie waters are key elements of homeland security concerns and citizen safety. However, the unavoidable hazards associated with such “live fire” activities on these high volume public waterway traffic areas clearly highlight the need for extremely cautious review and decision making. Armed Forces units routinely deploy to designated federal/state approved live fire ranges where range control is total and the possibility of public incident or accident is effectively non-existent.

We urge your direct involvement in the decision making process which ultimately must serve the training needs of the USCG and Border Patrol, continue to provide safe public access and utilization of Lake Erie waters and insure critical safety considerations for the angling and boating public.

For the PSA,

John R. Fuhrmann
President/PSA

Cc: Great Lakes Fishery Commission/ Board of Governors
U.S. Congressman Phil English
Governor Edward Rendell
PA State Senator Jane Earll
Commander USCG/ Great Lakes Region
PA State Rep. John Evans