

Some Harrisburg stink not political

We put up with a lot of crap from politicians, but this quote jumped out at me from our story about the disgusting pollution flowing into the Susquehanna from Harrisburg's decrepit sewer system:

"Human waste from the governor's mansion and the state Capitol complex goes directly into the river when the sewer system can't handle the volume of water from the combined storm and sanitary sewer systems."



JEFF MULHOLLEM
EDITOR

One outfall immediately downstream of the Governor's Residence reportedly overflowed into the river 64 times in 2018 – more than once a week – sending more than 9 million gallons of raw sewage-contaminated water into the Susquehanna.

The above information was exposed by a newly released report by the non-profit, non-partisan Environmental Integrity Project. It reveals that anglers and boaters on the Susquehanna River are being exposed to high levels of human waste from sewage overflows from Harrisburg.

We have been led to believe the beleaguered river's well-publicized water-quality problems are being caused by unfettered agriculture. We thought this kind of gross contamination – resulting from cities' antiquated combined sewer systems – had been eliminated decades ago. Clearly we are naive.

Read the story on Page 4 if you have a strong stomach.

– **Don't miss our profile** of amazing Max Schulkins on Page 10, the 97-year-old Camp Hill man who continues to hunt and fish. He killed a bear with his crossbow from a treestand in Canada in June.

He has seen a lot and done a lot over nine decades in the outdoors, and it's interesting to read what he thinks about modern issues such as chronic wasting disease, trespass enforcement and hunter etiquette.

– **There has been a lot written** in the last year or so about the Game Commission's decision to allow hunting over "managed dove fields" and its relationship to baiting. But angry rhetoric aside, perhaps it's time for you to experience that kind of hunting.

Dove hunting is a blast and the commission has established managed dove fields on more than two dozen game lands across the state. To find them, visit the Mourning Dove page at www.pgc.pa.gov and use the interactive map, which plots the fields and provides details about what's planted in each, as well as other important information.

– **The more I read** about the compromise bill to allow Sunday hunting, the more lame I think it is (see story on Page 1). Hard to believe this is the best deal Sen. Laughlin can cut with the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau.

Let me get this right: The senator is giving the organization trespass enforcement by game wardens and the requirement for written permission to hunt on private property, and in return he can get only three Sundays for hunters. It goes to show, I think, how strong the Farm Bureau is in Harrisburg and the power the group still holds over lawmakers.

– **Denny Filmore**, president of the Pennsylvania Federation of Sportsmen and Conservationists, has a message for hunters and fishermen in the state: If they ever again want to have any say in the politics and rulemaking that affect their sports, they need to organize and join his organization (see story on Page 1.)

Sportsmen are largely being ignored here, he says, and

Harrisburg's sewage overflows foul Susquehanna

Disgusting status
continues in river

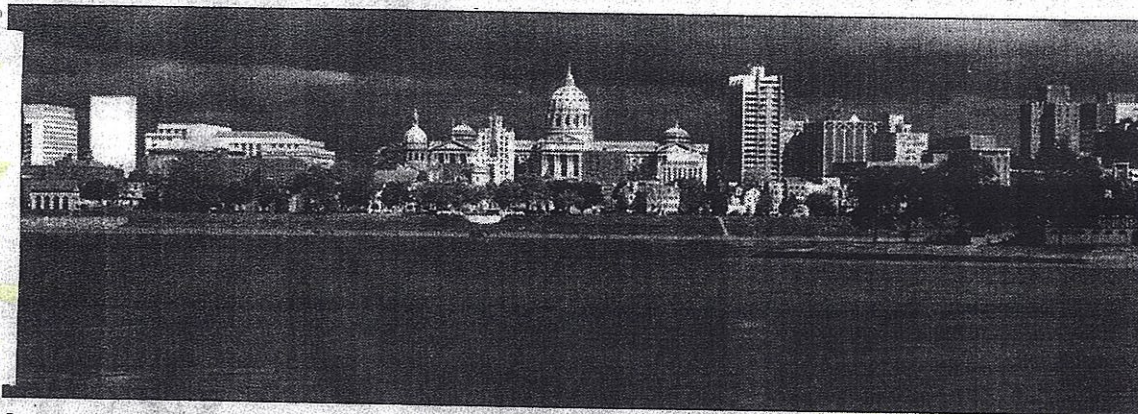
By Deborah Weisberg
Southwest Correspondent

Harrisburg — Anglers and boaters on the Susquehanna River are being exposed to high levels of human waste from sewage overflow from Harrisburg,

according to a newly released report by the non-profit, non-partisan Environmental Integrity Project.

Of 60 water samples taken around the Pennsylvania state capital this summer, 29 showed a violation of state health standards, said project spokesman Tom Pelton.

"On average, they had three



Sewage-laden storm water released into the Susquehanna by the city of Harrisburg increased from 789 million gallons in 2016 to almost 1.4 billion gallons.

Photo by Kevin Long

times the amount of *E. coli* considered safe for water-contact recreation," he said. "In some cases, they were 10 times over the safe standard."

E. coli is a bacteria that lives in the intestines of humans and in the guts of some animals.

It is a turn-off and a health hazard for folks trying to enjoy the river, he said. "I know when I go kayaking I don't want to put my hand in anyone else's feces."

The report – "Sewage Overflows in Pennsylvania's Capitol" – also cites impacts to the Chesapeake Bay, because the Susquehanna is the bay's largest single pollution source.

While much of the focus over the past decade has been on farm-related nutrient overload associated with algae blooms and disease in smallmouth bass, the sewage issue has been under-reported, Pelton said.

"The truth of the matter is sewage is more of a public health problem than nutrient overload, since human waste carries disease pathogens and bacteria harmful to humans. If I were fishing, I wouldn't want my hands in that water."

Long-time river guide and environmentalist Rod Bates said sewage compounds the fishery's other habitat woes and may force him to change the way he runs his trips.

"When people bring grandchildren on catfishing trips, we usually stop on the islands so they can catch crayfish and play in the water," he said. "Now I'm rethinking whether we'll continue to do that because of health concerns."

Sewage-laden storm water released into the Susquehanna increased from 789 million gallons in 2016 to almost 1.4 billion gallons in 2018, despite a 2014 consent decree requiring Capitol Region Water to address the problem, said Pelton, who cited the water authority's own data.

While a near-historic amount of rainfall last year overwhelmed Harrisburg's antiquated sewer and storm water system, overflow events rose during dry weather, too – from seven in 2017 to 28 in 2018, Pelton said.

Water was tested at three locations – just south of Gov. Tom Wolf's residence, south of State Street, and at City Island, which has been closed to swimming for years because of bacterial contamination.

"Human waste from the governor's mansion and the state Capitol complex goes directly into the Susquehanna when the sewer system can't handle the volume of water," Pelton said, noting that one outfall immediately downstream of the governor's residence overflowed into the river 64 times in 2018 – more than once a week – sending more than 9 million gallons of raw sewage-strewn water into the Susquehanna.

Capitol Region Water was threatened with fines five years ago for violating state and federal environmental laws, but avoided penalties by negotiating a partial decree with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection.

That decree required it to update its long-term plan for improving its municipal plumbing. Unveiled last year, the plan includes \$315 million in infrastructure upgrades as well as green stormwater management

systems that will be billed to rate-payers over the next 20 years.

Lower Susquehanna River Keeper Tom Evgeniadis said the plan doesn't go far enough, since it doesn't include regular water testing, or the installation of underground tanks that other cities, including Scranton and Arlington, Va., are building to store stormwater during rain events.

Capitol Region Water responded to the Environmental Integrity Project report by saying, in a written statement, that while it has begun to correct deficiencies, "unfortunately, it is idealistic to believe that the City of Harrisburg can completely eliminate overflows in the immediate future given the substantial revenue that would be necessary to overhaul and update infrastructure."

Evgeniadis asserts that the state should provide the additional needed funds since government agencies own half the land, tax-free, in Harrisburg.

"This is the Capitol of Pennsylvania so you've got the governor, the politicians, the lobbyists all flushing toilets along with everybody else," he said. "We've got to hold the state responsible to act as a financial partner in this initiative ... to find some money in the budget to fix the problem."

Bates agrees. "The government needs to get its priorities straight. We're talking about people's drinking water."

THE WIZARD OF ID

