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# Bass spots costly

Valley may lose millions, says tourist bureau head

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By Rick Dandes  
*The Daily Item*

SUNBURY — The head of a Valley tourist promotions group said fishing and related businesses on the Susquehanna River are responsible for literally millions in spending and added that the state and federal governments must come up with a plan to solve whatever is causing fish to become covered in unsightly blemishes.

"Think about it," said Andrew Miller, executive director of the Susquehanna River Valley Visitors Bureau, "we have river towns, camping grounds, and other fishing-related businesses all based on the health of the Susquehanna River. We absolutely cannot lose that source of income, even for a short time."

Federal lawmakers contacted about the issue on Monday said they were unaware of the problem until The Daily Item published a story about it.

"Why wasn't I told about this earlier?" asked a "disappointed" U.S. Rep. Tom Marino, R-10 of Cogan Station, who only found out about the situation after a call from The Daily Item.

Marino said he takes seriously any situation in which the rivers, streams and other waterways are affected.

So far, Marino has not received any official notice from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission or any other state or federal agency about the problem.

"Upon hearing of this today, I have asked for an immediate briefing from the federal agencies involved," Marino said. "The Susquehanna River is a critical resource in our region for commerce and recreation and any possible problem in the ecosystem needs immediate and careful examination."

U.S. Rep. Lou Barletta, R-11

# Valley tourism director: Bass spots costly

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of Hazleton, had a similar reaction.

The Susquehanna River is a tremendous environmental, economic, and recreational asset for many people in eastern Pennsylvania, Barletta said Monday.

"I don't want to jump to conclusions about the potential causes of these issues," he said. "I know that federal agencies are working with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission to study these fish and access the quality of the water in the Susquehanna River. I would like the partnership to continue so we can find out what is causing the issue and develop a safe, sensible solution."

What Barletta and Marino

are talking about is investigating what is causing black blotches on smallmouth bass up and down the Susquehanna River — something fishermen have been aware of for about two years.

"Yes, we have a serious water problem," said Commissioner of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Bob Bachman on Friday night.

What is creating pigments on the fish is unknown, Bachman said.

"We just don't know," he confessed. "Do you hear my frustration? But I need to let every angler who fishes on the river know that we are testing every possible avenue to find out what the heck is going on."

Yet, he said, "This isn't a great time to ask the governor, or anyone else for research

funding."

Pennsylvania's Department of Environmental Protection is aware of the problem and is working with the Susquehanna River Policy Committee on the fish issue "to determine the causes of the lesions and sores detected on the bass and the best methods to further study and, if necessary, mitigate the issue," said Daniel Spadoni, DEP's community relations coordinator based in Williamsport.

"This is a complex problem, and we are all still working to better understand it," Spadoni continued.

Paul Swarz, executive director of the Susquehanna River

Basin Commission, said his organization will continue lending its technical support and resources including collecting diseased young so they can be analyzed.

And Trish Carothers, interim executive director, Susquehanna Greenway Partnership, also was quite concerned. From her organization's perspective, "The Susquehanna River is one of our greatest natural assets. We enjoy it for its recreational opportunities and beauty, and over 6 million people rely on it for drinking water."

"The health of the Susquehanna is directly linked to health of our region and we must all be good environmen-

tal stewards of the river."

If people see fish kills or catch fish that appear to be unhealthy, they should report this to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission by calling 855-FISH-KIL.

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