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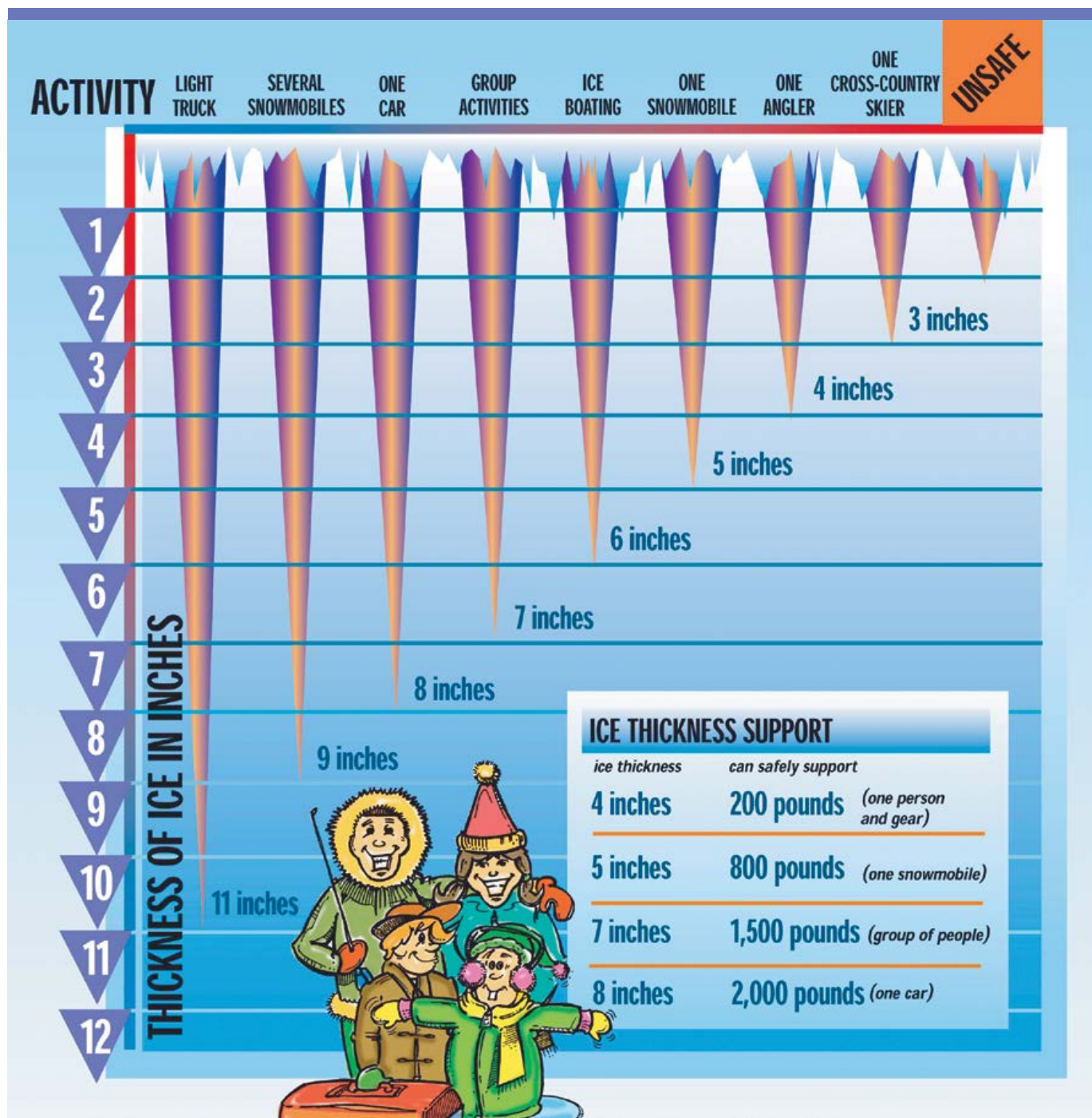
Pennsylvania ANGLER & BOATER



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Ice Safety Thickness

For ice anglers this winter, be safe on the ice and know the proper thickness.



There are many factors that influence ice strength including water chemistry, wind, and sunlight. Please note that these are general ice thickness guidelines and carefully check ice conditions before venturing onto the ice.



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On the cover

While Schuylkill County's Sweet Arrow Lake does not ice over every year, local anglers eagerly make the most of it when it reaches safe ice thickness. Clint Hummel, Schuylkill County, delightfully hoisted this panfish through the auger hole last February. Read more about ice fishing on Sweet Arrow Lake on pages 18 and 19. *Photo by Tyler Frantz*



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Opening Day is Back

by **Timothy D. Schaeffer**

Executive Director

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

The opening day of trout season is back! It was never really gone, but what is back is a single opening day for all of Pennsylvania. And, after two years of COVID-19-related adjustments to minimize crowding as trout enthusiasts took to the streams and lakes in the spring, it is clear that our anglers are looking forward to April 2.

For decades, the opening day of trout season statewide took place on the first Saturday after April 11. It was a time-tested tradition that many of us looked forward to each year. Few things rival the anticipation and excitement of opening day.

In 2007, in response to waters warming earlier in the southeastern part of Pennsylvania, opening day in 18 counties was moved up to the first Saturday after March 28—2 weeks before the statewide opener that remained the first Saturday after April 11. Opening day traditions continued, albeit on two different dates each year. Many people would take advantage of the two dates and fish both openers, at times resulting in complaints of overcrowding in some areas, particularly in those counties along the border of the two regions.

Then, COVID-19 hit. As the world grappled with the emerging realities of the pandemic in March 2020, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission was forced to figure out how to move over 3 million trout out of our state fish hatcheries as quickly as possible amid rapidly evolving travel and work restrictions that we feared may put a stop to the whole operation. At the same time, we were looking at the prospect of people standing shoulder-to-shoulder on the two opening days while everyone was learning the term "social distancing."

After extensive consultation with the Pennsylvania Department of Health and the Governor's Office, we opened trout season on April 7, 2020, without advance notice. The purpose was to spread out the opening day pressure and keep people close to home—and it worked. While some were initially irked by the decision, most understood the rationale, and everyone was happy to be out on the water.

In late 2020, with COVID-19 still impacting many aspects of life, concerns continued to persist about the upcoming opening day crowds and travel. Remember, that was when kids were mostly learning remotely from home, we were watching sporting events from empty stadiums and arenas, and vaccines were only just starting to roll out.

So, in January 2021, again working with public health experts, our Board of Commissioners endorsed a single opening day to take place on April 3. Acting nearly 3 months in advance returned a level of predictability and normalcy to the opening



photo: Mike Parker

Richie Williard with daughters Callie, age 6, and Kirah, age 11, while fishing Mahantango Creek, Schuylkill County, on opening day, 2021.

day experience, and it gave people in most of Pennsylvania an extra 2 weeks of trout season.

An unintended and pleasant outcome of stocking earlier in 2020 was that our staff were able to get back to the hatcheries earlier to start working on the trout that anglers enjoyed in 2021. We received lots of compliments on the quality of the fish, which was helped by the extra time our staff had to work with them in the spring of 2020.

With two consecutive years of a single opening day under our belts, we took advantage of the opportunity to evaluate whether it was time to return to a single opening day statewide or maintain the pre-COVID-19 practice of two opening days. Staff thoroughly evaluated the options and settled on a recommendation to the Board of Commissioners to return to a single opening day. This was strongly supported by feedback from anglers in the field and through survey tools that clearly revealed a preference for a single opener.

In October, the Board voted to officially return to a single opening day of trout season to occur on the first Saturday in April every year. This year, that will be April 2. We will continue to offer the highly popular Mentored Youth Trout Day a week before opening day, which will also take place on a single day statewide and will be March 26 in 2022.

Returning to a single opening day on the first Saturday in April simplifies the regulations, minimizes confusion among new anglers, is easy to remember, reduces conflicts in border counties that existed under the dual opener model, allows our staff to get back to the hatcheries sooner to start working on the next generation of stocked trout, and lets businesses plan for the annual sales surge of gear and licenses.

But, the best part is that trout season will start 2 weeks earlier and open up additional fishing opportunities in most of Pennsylvania! At a time when residents and visitors to the Commonwealth continue to enjoy, discover, and, in some cases, rediscover the joys of fishing, who could argue with more time on the water?

On behalf of our Board and staff, thank you for your patience over the past two trout seasons as we made decisions and adapted in the best interest of public health.

We are happy to be able to restore predictability to the forthcoming and future trout seasons and set Pennsylvania on the course for generations of anglers to again keep their eyes on the calendar for that magical first Saturday in April.



Ice Fishing for Beginners

by Carl Haensel

photos by the author

Winter is a great time to explore frozen waters and try out the sport of ice fishing. Opportunities exist around Pennsylvania on ponds and lakes to fish for bass, panfish, pickerel, trout, and other gamefish that are active during the winter. There are a wide variety of methods that anglers can use to target fish through the ice. It is easy to start ice fishing, and you only need a few specific items for your first trip. Wait for cold weather, dress warmly, and get ready to have some wintertime fun.

Ice fishing equipment

To start ice fishing, gather gear that will work for you when you are standing on frozen water. Some specific equipment like shorter rods, augers, and ice scoops are necessary. Hand-powered augers are inexpensive and lightweight. If you are out with a group of anglers,

powered augers are handy for drilling through thicker ice and creating more holes. Equipment like a life jacket, ice cleats, and ice awls are key to having a safe experience. Other items like sleds, sonar units, heaters, shelters, and comfy seats are optional additions to your array of gear. The most important optional piece of gear is a sonar unit, which may greatly improve your ability to find and target fish in the winter.

Ice fishing essentials

- Ice auger
- Ice fishing rods or tip-ups
- Ice flies, jigs, and hooks
- Bobbers
- Bait, bait bucket, and bait scoop
- Bucket
- Ice scoop
- Safety equipment



Ice augers are the most important part of your ice fishing setup. Ice augers come in both powered and hand-driven models. Some newer ice augers attach to cordless drills or may be powered by lithium batteries.

Getting on the ice

Safety is the most important part of ice fishing. Even if you see other anglers on the lake or pond, always test the thickness of the ice first before venturing out. Ensure that there is a minimum of 4 inches of ice thickness on a body of water in order to fish safely. Ice thickness may change easily on a body of water due to current, springs, weather, and other variables. Drill a hole a short distance from shore before exploring further, and use your ice scoop to measure the depth of the ice.

If you have a depth map of the body of water you are fishing, analyze the contour lines for key fish holding areas. Bass and pickerel often hold along weedlines near large flats. Crappies may suspend over the deepest hole in the lake during the winter. Sunfish and other panfish often cruise through deep, sparse weedbeds. Walleyes may frequent points and humps that lead into deep water. Once you select your spot to fish, drill a variety of holes in the ice before starting. It is good to have at least six holes to explore. Some anglers with powered ice augers may drill 50 or even 100 holes to more widely assess where the most fish are located. If you have a sonar unit, take it from hole



Basic ice fishing gear includes a short rod, an ice scoop, ice-specific line, bait scoop, bait container, and container of ice flies and terminal tackle. Artificial scented bait may be useful if you want to get on the ice without visiting a bait shop first.

to hole, checking to see if there are any suspended fish hovering above the lake bottom. When you have found a likely spot, it is time to drop your line.

Bobber fishing

The first technique that anglers often try when ice fishing is suspending bait below a bobber. Waxworms and other insect larvae are popular bait for panfish, while small minnows like Fathead Minnows are regular options for anglers looking to catch Walleyes, bass, and crappies. Keeping your bait just off the bottom usually appeals to the greatest amount of fish. If you do not have a sonar unit, attach a clip weight to the end of your hook, and lower your line to find the bottom. Raise it up 6- to 12-inches. Then, place your bobber on the line. Remove the weight, add bait, and you are ready to fish. Thin, lightweight bobbers are popular for ice fishing since these bobbers do not offer much resistance to the fish when fish bite. As you sit on the ice looking at your bobber, wiggle it regularly or move it up and down, then allow it to resettle. If you see a bite, get ready to set the hook. When fishing with waxworms or other larvae, set the hook with movement.



Yellow Perch are aggressive biters under the ice and often fall for jigging presentations. Try tipping your jig with a waxworm or minnow for better action.

Sunfish, in particular, may only move the bobber a small amount when taking the bait. When fishing with minnows you may want to let the fish pull the bobber down a small amount before setting the hook.

Jigging for fish

If you are having challenges finding fish, jigging is a good way to locate fish that are active and explore a large area of the water. Jigging works well with a sonar unit to see if there are any fish below a hole and if those fish are following your lure. Check a wide variety of holes to find fish, then drop your jig down toward the bottom. Alternate between small up-and-down movements of your rod and short pauses. Keep your finger on the line to feel subtle bites. If you are using sonar, try slowly raising your bait or lure away from the fish, then watch to see if it follows. Often, this slow lift can trigger a fish to think its prey is escaping and prompt a bite.

Tip-up fishing

The most passive method of ice fishing for beginners is tip-up fishing. It is a great option for children and groups on the ice. Most tip-ups are simple devices that use a spool of line resting in the water, combined with a flag that springs into a vertical position or “tips up” when a fish bites the bait and begins to take out line. Tip-up

fishing is done entirely with bait, and the fish targeted often include pickerel and Largemouth Bass. Other large species like Northern Pike and Walleye are also good tip-up targets. Smaller species like crappies and Yellow Perch can occasionally be caught on tip-ups as well. Often, tip-up rigs use minnows or other small fish like suckers as bait. Large predatory fish that cruise through lakes and ponds sense the vibrations from the fish at a distance and may hone in on the struggling fish. Try rigging the minnow by lightly hooking it through the back, just behind the dorsal fin. This provides a long life for your bait, as well as a natural presentation.

After rigging your tip-up and waiting for a bite, your chance at catching a fish will be when the flag tips up. Swiftly and safely make your way over to the tip-up. Look to see if the spindle is turning. If it is spinning, a fish is swimming away with the bait. Carefully lift the tip-up out of the hole. Bumping the edges of the hole with the line or tip-up may cause the fish to drop the bait. With a swift pull on the line, firmly set the hook on the fish, then bring the line in hand-over-hand, until the fish is on the ice. If you are targeting pickerel or pike, unhook the fish carefully to avoid razor-sharp teeth. Using a wire leader when fishing may keep you from losing these fish to cut lines. ☐



This Largemouth Bass took a minnow fished below a tip-up that was placed along a weedline.



FISHING PRESQUE ISLE BAY

in Winter

by *Darl Black*

photos by the author

Created by Lake Erie's west-to-east current depositing sand onto a moraine ridge, it took thousands of years for Mother Nature to build the looping finger of land called Presque Isle and its accompanying 3,800-acre Presque Isle Bay, Erie County.

Individuals view Presque Isle Bay through different lenses. History buffs reflect on Commodore Perry building a fleet in the shelter of Presque Isle Bay during the War of 1812. Pleasure boaters view Presque Isle Bay as a summer playground protected from Lake Erie's harsh waves. But, anglers are razor-focused on the fishing in Presque Isle Bay, especially during the winter when Lake Erie is unfishable.

According to Tim Tomlin, a life-long Erie angler, winter fishing on Presque Isle Bay involves both open water and ice opportunities. "I recall years ago having safe ice in early December. Now, we rarely see safe ice before mid-January. Within the last decade, there have been three winters without safe ice on the Bay at all," said Tomlin.



An angler with a hooked crappie from a drilled hole in the ice.

Early winter fishing efforts are primarily directed at Yellow Perch, which are migrating into Presque Isle Bay from Lake Erie in order to spawn in the spring. Upon entering Presque Isle Bay, perch initially hold at depths from 18- to 30-feet. With deep water brushing the city-side of the bay, shore anglers are as successful from piers and harbor walls as boat anglers.

"Eventually perch will spread out and move shallower into the various sub-bays and Head-of-the-Bay flats," said Tomlin. "But, that usually does not happen until later in winter."

In addition to perch anglers in early winter, charter boats and private boats will be trolling for steelhead and Brown Trout, which have also entered Presque Isle Bay. Trolled lures generally include slender stickbait plugs and spoons run near the surface. Local anglers also know particular piers and shore spots where steelhead or Brown Trout may be caught by casting spoons.

With an increase of Walleyes in Lake Erie, some Walleyes now follow the Emerald Shiner schools into Presque Isle Bay, too. Therefore, during late fall and early winter a handful of anglers will troll for these fish.

Until ice covers the sub-bays, a small cadre of anglers will be chasing Largemouth Bass located close to drop-offs and sink holes on the flats. More than once, I have broken thin ice at a ramp in order to launch near a key wintering area for Largemouth Bass. Suspending jerkbaits, lipless rattle baits, swimbaits, and jigging spoons are employed.

The first safe ice will form in Misery Bay, Horseshoe Pond, and Marina Lake, followed by the furthestmost section of Head-of-the-Bay. These areas will produce a mixed bag of Bluegills, Pumpkinseeds, and Black Crappies—species that are using weeds as cover and to feed.

Incidental catches of Northern Pike are routine by ice anglers targeting panfish. If interested specifically in pike, Tomlin advises using an underwater camera to locate a carpet of weeds that rises several feet above the bottom but does not grow all the way to the surface. Pike cruise above the weeds searching for meals.

If sufficiently cold temperatures are reached, the main part of Presque Isle Bay will acquire safe ice by mid-winter, allowing anglers to reach larger-sized perch, which seem to hold in slightly deeper water. However, in recent years, Presque Isle Bay has not achieved a complete safe ice cover. And, ice that does form may not be uniformly safe. A mid-winter warm up often weakens the ice. Use caution on Presque Isle Bay ice.

The shipping channel is the narrow gateway from Lake Erie into Presque Isle Bay with a strong current that prevents



A rare daylight catch, a Burbot, from the end of the South Pier during January. Burbot inhabit the deep waters of Lake Erie, coming shallow only to spawn during the winter.

it from freezing. But, ice chunks often fill the channel by mid-winter, preventing fishing opportunities for Yellow Perch, Walleyes, and Burbot.

If you want to try for Burbot, Tomlin recommends anglers dress for the worst weather and fish at night from the South Channel Wall. “Anglers use a chunk of cut bait or three Emerald Shiners on one hook. Due to the current, the bait must be held on the bottom with a 3-ounce sinker. Burbot is good tasting when prepared properly. However, it must be eaten within a day or two after capture. Many people think the quality of the meat degrades upon freezing. The window to catch these fish is short— typically late December to early February,” said Tomlin.

“Last winter was the first time in 4- or 5-years that massive schools of smelt showed up in Presque Isle Bay. Smelt are highly prized by Great Lake anglers who generally fry the entire small fish in oil and eat them whole,” said Tomlin. Erie’s Rainbow Smelt can be caught on tiny, unbaited gold hooks lowered into the school or tiny micro jigs with yarn bodies.

Winter’s closing act is a rush by anglers to get on the late ice to target the largest Yellow Perch of the season as more and more perch assemble in Head-of-the-Bay and sub-bays for an ice-out spawn. ☐



Ice fishing activity on Misery Bay, Erie County.

Attention to Details



by Jeff Knapp

photos by the author

Often, it is the attention to details in a presentation that separates anglers who enjoy consistent success from anglers whose productive days only occur when fish are extra aggressive. And, nothing replaces experience as the means to acquire the knowledge necessary to realize these details.

Take, for instance, my friend and frequent fishing companion, Sid Brown. While Brown is adept at a variety of tactics, I think he would agree that trolling is his specialty, particularly when it comes to Walleyes. Brown spends a lot of time trolling, is good at it, and catches a lot of Walleyes on trolled lines. Anyone who thinks trolling is a lazy man's method should observe Brown practice his craft.

Trolling crankbaits with lead core line is one of Brown's tactics. Lead core line may place the lure in the strike zone. In the case of structure trolling, that zone is within 1- or 2-feet from the bottom.

When we are trolling with lead core, Brown is constantly observing any changes in depth. If the depth

increases by a foot, he compensates by letting out 3- to 5-foot of lead core line (depending on boat speed), rather than adopting a "that's close enough" attitude. Some days, it is close enough, but Brown catches the Walleyes unwilling to move the extra foot, which is more often than not.

The same thing happens when the depth decreases. Rather than waiting for the crankbait to start dredging the bottom, where it can snag or pick up weeds or other bottom debris, Brown brings the necessary line to allow for the decrease in depth.

Brown is also a tip watcher—an expert at reading the tips of trolling rods for the presence of an action-killing weed that would preclude a Walleye bite, which is vital when fishing around submerged weedbeds, where summer Walleyes often collect. These fish respond well to slow trolled nightcrawler harnesses. Brown also watches for panfish bites that may rob the harness of bait. Whether it is a crankbait on lead core line or a nightcrawler harness behind a bottom bouncer sinker, his lure/bait spends a high percentage of time fishing.

Over the past year, I have come to know Roger Ramer, a bass angler who regularly fishes lakes in Armstrong County like Crooked Creek Lake and Keystone Lake. One of Ramer's favorite tactics, especially during the

spring and fall, is to present squarebill crankbaits in the shallows. Often, Ramer targets shallow wood and stumps.

"There is an art to working a squarebill. It is a sense of touch, of making contact with wood cover, but backing off when necessary to keep it from hanging up," said Ramer.

The side-to-side action and swimming attitude of a squarebill crankbait tends to prevent the lure from hanging up, but it is not nearly as snag resistant as a spinnerbait. Experience has provided Ramer with the feel to efficiently work the lure around cover. Sure, someone randomly casting such a plug along the shallows will occasionally catch a bass but not nearly as many as the angler who has learned the details of its proper presentation.

On both free-flowing rivers and inland bass lakes, fluke-style soft jerkbaits are often a mainstay of summer bass fishing. Flukes are versatile baits that may be fished a variety of ways, but one of the best ways is by a slack line technique with an unweighted bait.

Flukes are commonly fished by imparting a subtle jerk, followed by a pause. A fluke is often rigged weedless on a 2/0 or 3/0 worm hook without any additional weight. The jerk/pause cadence seems simple enough, but a small detail can mean a big difference in the number of bites. When the bait is twitched forward, slack line develops. Instead of winding in and recovering



Norman Dietrich was using just the right action on a jerkbait to catch this Smallmouth Bass.

all of the line before the next twitch, a small amount of slack remains. This keeps the bait subsurface, rather than being pulled to the top. Also, the bait has more freedom to rise and fall, which is much of what makes a bass take it.

Fluke-related details are not limited to the retrieve. The line and hook come into play as well. For instance, a high-visibility braided line can act as a strike indicator. Braided line floats, so keeping your eye on the floating

line for unnatural movement, a process helped by the high visibility color, aids in early detection of a strike. Also, this minimizes deep-hooked fish. Add 3 feet of fluorocarbon line as a leader for separation between the visible braid and the hook.

Regarding hooks, when fishing an unweighted fluke, consider hook size. For a 5-inch fluke, extra wide worm hooks from 3/0 to 5/0 are appropriate. Tailor the sink rate of the fluke by moving up or down in hook size within these parameters.

The next time you are being out-fished by someone who is using the same techniques, look for details in presentation that the other angler may be using. Most likely, there is a difference. ☐



Unweighted fluke-style jerkbaits often trigger Smallmouth Bass strikes when retrieved on a semi-slack line.

Panfish Plethora through the Ice

by Jeff Woleslagle

photos by the author



As we readied our gear and plotted our course across the lake, anticipation was running high. Early fishing reports were good, and we were all hopeful the action would be steady. The sun had already risen just above the tree line when we drilled our first holes over some known brush piles that a friend marked with GPS. We then made a diagonal line of additional holes a short distance



A nice Bluegill that was part of the panfish plethora for the day.

away, where we knew there was a weed edge. It did not take long to put a few nice crappies on the ice that were holding tight to the underwater wood. Our electronics showed crappies responding well to our jigs tipped with waxworms. Crappies are normally found around shallow vegetation early and late in the ice fishing season. These fish often migrate to other deeper structure as the winter progresses, which was the case with the crappies sticking tight to the brush. The state park lake we were fishing is known for an abundance of Bluegills and Yellow Perch as well, so we were hoping to also catch those fish.

We found active Bluegills by starting about 20 yards from the weed edge and gradually moving toward it. Often, schools of Bluegills will be out a distance from the edge. By starting in deeper water and moving shallower, you increase your chances. Oxygen levels and bait activity will usually dictate where the fish are holding, so areas of weed growth are always a great place to start. When searching for Bluegills this way, it is common to come across crappies and Yellow Perch as well. A successful ice angler once told me that the biggest mistake most anglers make while ice fishing is to remain in one location for too long. His philosophy is that being mobile is just as important, if not more so, through the ice than it is on open water. His mantra is that there are usually active fish somewhere. Do not be afraid to move and drill many holes to find the fish. His success on the



"Dead sticking" or holding a bait perfectly still sometimes entices reluctant panfish.

ice almost always proves his point. Once we located the Bluegills, the action was fast and furious for almost an hour. The fish varied in size, but we landed several that were as big as our hands, which is the way we normally determine if the fish are keepers or will be released for another day.

The next fish on our hit list was the Yellow Perch. We found Yellow Perch on the side of a weed edge along a soft bottom in about 20 feet of water about 150 yards up the lake towards the dam. This area produced perch for us in the past, so we had a hunch we would find fish. At first, our electronics showed the perch holding close to the bottom, but the perch did not seem interested in feeding. Finally, one separated from the others and followed a jig slowly raised toward the surface before taking the offering. Once we got that first one to commit, it seemed like others became more active. We enjoyed steady action until the bite shut down, just as mysteriously as it had started.

Medium to light action jigging ice fishing rods are perfect for panfish pursuits. Spool rods with 2- to 4-pound-test line in monofilament or fluorocarbon. There are many great ice fishing lines on the market. Tear drop jigs tipped with waxworms or spikes are highly effective for all panfish species. Small Fathead Minnows are good for more active fish and can often attract a few bonus bass. Tungsten jigs drop quicker than lead ones and give an angler a better feel for subtle bites. Small spoons may be effective as well, especially when the perch and crappies are aggressively feeding on baitfish.



The author with the first Bluegill of the morning.

Active panfish are normally facing upward and will pursue a bait that is slowly raised toward the surface. Keeping a jig or bait completely still, which is referred to as dead sticking, will often entice reluctant fish that will not commit to a more active presentation. Experiment with presentations until you find the one fish are willing to take. A flasher unit can show an angler much about the feeding mood of the fish and how the fish react to different presentations and baits.

By the time the sun was setting in the west, we had enjoyed a stellar day on the ice, landing dozens of crappies, perch, and Bluegills as well as a few bonus bass and two stocked trout. Most were released, but some made the trip home for a mid-winter fish fry. Odds are good a lake near you has what it takes to pull a plethora of panfish through the ice. ☐

NOTES *from the Streams*

Instructing the youth

When people think of the duties of a Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO), most would envision law enforcement related duties such as enforcing fishing license regulations, boating-under-the-influence regulations, and boating safety regulations. One of the responsibilities we have that most people may not realize is education. Every WCO is a certified boating safety instructor, and we hold classes on safe boating every year. We also educate the public on laws, fishing techniques, fish identification, reptile and amphibian identification, and more.

Recently, WCO Scott J. Christman and I attended the Annual Monroe County Youth Field Day, which hosts about 150 to 200 children at the Trexler Scout Reservation. Children ages 8- to 14-years-old were invited to attend and learn about a variety of outdoor activities including trapping, firearms safety, fishing,

and boating. WCO Christman and I were stationed at one of the lakes to assist in teaching the children how to paddle a canoe. We started with a brief overview of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), then moved to paddling safety and why a proper fitting life jacket is important, and finished with instructing them how to paddle a canoe. Then, we fit each child with a life jacket, went to the beach, and assigned them to canoes in groups of two or three.

We had a wide range of experience from the kids, from never paddling before to going on kayak trips with their parents. It was a lot of fun to see the kids that had no experience try to navigate a canoe and watch them gain confidence. Throughout the day, we had 10 groups of 10 to 20 kids paddling around the lake without anyone tipping or getting wet. We had a few canoes run into the docks, which resulted in a lot of laughter from the parents watching from

shore. All in all, it was a great day with lots of smiles. I hope we brought a new generation of boaters into the sport of paddling.—*Alec S. DeLong, Southern Monroe and Northern Carbon counties.*

It's like fish in a barrel

Being a WCO has its challenges at times. However, every now and then, there are moments that stand out and make the challenges all worth it.

Earlier this year, I attended an event called "Fishin Frenzy." This event was put together by Greene County Parks and Recreation, and it allows children to fish for stocked trout at the county-owned water park. When I heard about the opportunity I thought, "Where can I find a better opportunity to promote catching fish to young anglers than a stocked swimming pool full of trout?"

When I first arrived at the event, everyone was excited. As I started to walk around the pool, I saw children of all ages. Many children were taking photos with their first fish catch, then their second, third, and so on. I brought my tape measure to measure the fish they caught. I was lucky enough to measure numerous fish caught by one 9 year old boy whose smile got bigger every time I told him he beat his personal best.

After taking several laps around the pool, I felt slightly jealous, because, like most, the first time I fished I was not able to catch such beautiful fish—let alone several. It was a great environment for first time anglers. I will never forget the moment "like shooting fish in a barrel" came to life watching young anglers catch trout out of a public swimming pool.—*WCO Brian T. Guenin, Greene and Southern Washington counties.*



photo-WCO Alec S. DeLong

Searching for Brook Trout

One of the enjoyable things we get to do as WCOs is tag along with biologists and offer some help as they sample streams for Brook Trout. In August, we spent a few days in Schuylkill County sampling streams that were never (to my knowledge) electrofished. While the habitat looked great on a few of the streams, the low pH was a limiting factor for Brook Trout survival and reproduction. Unfortunately, we did not find a healthy population where I was hopeful we would.

This changed on the second day as we sampled an extremely small stream that ran nearly parallel with a power line. The stream had little overhead cover to provide shade and small pockets that held little water. Yet to my surprise, we found a thriving Brook Trout population existing in the entire stretch we sampled.

You never know what the water holds, whether it looks like a drainage ditch or a pristine mountain stream. I would like to thank the PFBC's team of biologists who invest their time and effort to find these streams and populations, so we can protect the waterways and develop a better understanding of the trout reproduction occurring in Pennsylvania's streams.—*WCO Troy W. Merrell, Eastern Schuylkill County.*

Raining snakes

I get several calls every year from people complaining that a snake or a family of snakes have taken up residence under their porch or somewhere in the yard. Occasionally, the complaint is about a snake that is inside the house. My most memorable snake call came from a frantic woman who said that there were several giant snakes residing in her bedroom. I am not afraid of snakes, but I could empathize with the woman since I also prefer a snake-free environment while sleeping. I arrived at the woman's house to find her sitting on the porch waiting for me. The woman immediately led me into the

house to the bedroom, but she refused to enter the room herself and stood just outside the door. It looked like a normal bedroom. I asked her where she last saw the snakes. She pointed to the ceiling. I looked up and noticed a typical white painted drywall ceiling. However, just above the bed, a section of drywall was missing and was replaced by a 4x8 transparent piece of plastic. Sometime in the recent past, the roof above the bedroom leaked, allowing rainwater to drip onto the bedroom ceiling, destroying that piece of drywall. The landlord repaired the roof, removed the damaged drywall, and stapled the piece of plastic there until proper repairs could be made. So, essentially, the plastic acted as a 4x8 window into the attic. Unfortunately, for him and his tenant, not only was the attic dark and scary, but was also a favored hangout for about a six large Eastern Ratsnakes. This poor woman was in bed, looking directly up at the snakes slowly crawling across the piece of plastic directly above her, terrified that at any moment, the plastic would tear allowing the snakes to fall through onto her and her bed, literally raining snakes.—*WCO Scott D. Opfer, Fayette County.*

Oh yeah?

While on patrol at one of the local state parks, I was conversing with park staff in the park office when I heard an individual enter the outer office and ask the Administrative Assistant at the desk what type of fish were in the lake. She answered his question and asked if he had a Pennsylvania fishing license.

"No, and I am not getting one. I tried to get one on my phone, but I guess I do not have a good enough signal from here," said the man.

"Well sir, you do need a license to fish in Pennsylvania," said the Administrative Assistant.

"You only have to 'attempt' to buy a license. The attempt is good enough," said the man.

"That is not true, sir," said the Administrative Assistant.

"It is. I know the law," said the man.

It was at this point I opened the door separating us, revealing my presence. "I assure you she is correct," I told the gentleman.

"What are they going to do if they catch me?" he asked, shrugging.

"Well, they is me, and if you insist on fishing without purchasing a license, I will be issuing you a citation."

"Yeah? How much is the fine?"

"Where are you from?" I asked.

"Queens," replied the man.

"\$227.25 with court costs and, quite possibly, your fishing gear being seized as evidence," I replied.

"Where can I buy a license?" the man asked.

I directed him to the nearest place just a few miles down the road.—*WCO T. Curt Tereschak, Southern Pike and Northeast Monroe counties.*

Be sure before you jump overboard

While working as a WCO along the Delaware River, you never know what the next call is going to be. One day during the summer, a call came across the radio for a marine rescue. This is not an unusual occurrence, but the cause for this particular rescue turned out to be quite interesting. A boater floating down the river claimed to see an alligator swimming in the river next to him. He was so shocked and scared that he jumped out of the boat and tried to swim away. Not being a strong swimmer, the boater clung to the boat and continued to float downstream. While all of this was occurring, a local Fire Department had launched their rescue boats and continued upriver to the location of the boater. The "alligator," which caused the man to jump out of his boat, turned out to be just a tree. Luckily, the man was rescued and the day turned out to be a good training exercise.—*WCO Peter N. Labosh, Northern Bucks County.*

PRESEASON PREPARATIONS FOR TROUT FLY FISHING

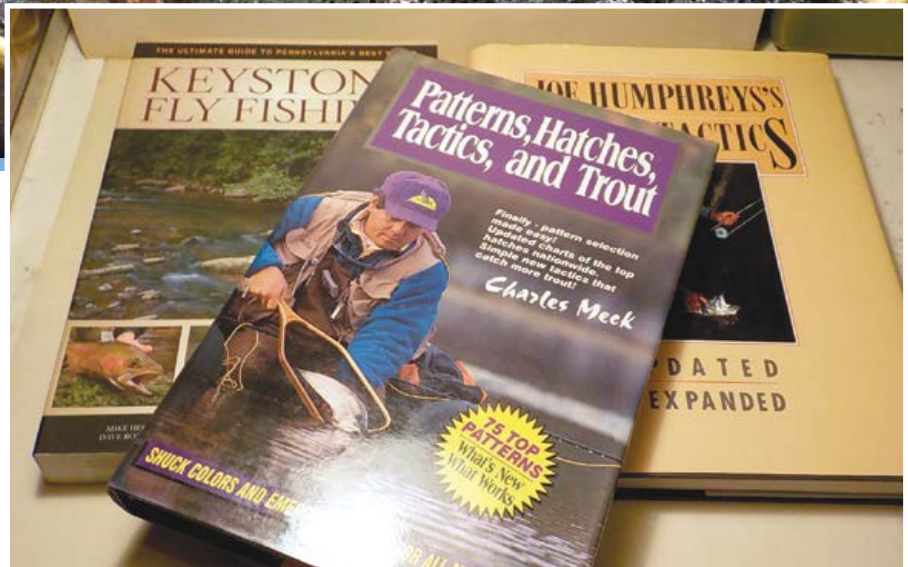


by *Richard Tate*

photos by the author

Winter is often not conducive for effective fly fishing for trout. Howling winds and freezing temperatures make outings uncomfortable, and cold water temperatures often inhibit the activity of the fish. Many fly anglers sink back into rocking chairs near their wood burners and settle in with some winter reading.

This winter reading may help prepare anglers for the upcoming fishing season. Hundreds of fly fishing books are available in bookstores, fly shops, or online that help anglers devise tactics about how to catch trout and what flies may be effective during the upcoming season. I recommend Charles Meck's "Patterns, Hatches, Tactics, and Trout," and "Joe Humphreys's Trout Tactics." Both of these books are good choices for Pennsylvania fly anglers and are found online. A Pennsylvania fly angler should also research Pennsylvania's trout streams. There are several destination guides available, with "Keystone Fly Fishing" being the most recent of these books. By reading guide books, you can research a number of streams that you may want to visit during the upcoming season. Some anglers



Some good reading material may help you prepare for fishing season.

who prefer to research fly fishing tactics and places often avoid a rocker and sit at a computer and surf the web for information about fly fishing. One good site to visit is www.paflyfish.com, which offers a wealth of information about fly fishing in Pennsylvania.

Besides doing research about where to go and what flies to use, a fly angler needs to have their gear ready for the upcoming season. It does not take a lot of time to prepare, but it may save some grief on the stream by having gear ready ahead of time. Even a mechanical dunce like me can disassemble a fly reel, wipe off the old dirt and grease, clean the spool, and put a fresh coat of grease on the spool to lubricate it. In addition, it is a good idea to clean the fly line on each reel. Several convenient fly line cleaners are available at most fly fishing shops. If a line is too badly



Fresh tippet and a clean reel are important when preparing for the season.

worn, it may need to be replaced. Again, fly shops are good places to find quality lines. Fly rods do not need much care. I like to wipe mine off with a damp rag. Also, check the guides to see if they are loose. Over the years, I have replaced several guides on a number of my rods, because the guides were breaking through the thread wrappings that attach to the rods. It is a lot better to re-wrap a guide prior to the season than to have to do it when a guide breaks loose during the season.

Just like other types of anglers, fly anglers must make sure their boots and waders are suitable for an upcoming season. Checking for small holes in boots and waders is important. If an angler uses wading boots with stockingfoot waders, the angler may want to replace studs in the boots to avoid slipping on stones. If the boots are beyond repair, buy a new pair of boots or waders. Of course, fly anglers should check fishing vests and repair any tears that may be in the pockets of the vest. You do not want to lose any equipment due to being inattentive to the condition of the fishing vest. Remove any old candy bars that may be stashed in the vest. Many fly anglers have abandoned fishing vests for daypacks, so check the condition of daypacks as well.

Many fly anglers fail to deal with their leaders and tippets between seasons. I have sometimes been guilty of this mistake and have lost trout because my tippet material was

brittle. I like to put new leaders on my most-used fly lines prior to springtime. I replace old spools of tippet material with fresh spools, so I will not lose a trophy trout because of outdated material.

Of all the things that a fly angler needs to deal with before a trout season begins, the most important is to make sure that your stock of flies is ready to go. During a typical season, many fly anglers lose or have trout tear up the flies that are used most often. These flies should be replaced. Fly anglers who do not tie their own flies need to visit fly shops to replace their favorite flies or order flies from shops online.

Only a few shops offer catalogs from which an angler can choose a selection of flies.

If a fly angler plans to fish more than 30 days in a season, it is probably economical for the angler to tie their own flies—after their initial purchase of tools and various fly tying hooks and materials. The angler may then tie the flies that are most frequently used during the season. For me, this includes Sulphur, Wright's Caddis, and Adams dry flies as well as Hare's Ear Nymphs and a smattering of other flies. As writer Chris Camuto once observed, it is a good feeling to have “full fly boxes” ready to go before the season gets into full swing.

On the many days that a fly angler cannot get on the water during winter, the angler may be able to prepare during the preseason for adventures that will occur during nicer weather. ☐



Fly anglers should have full boxes of flies ready.

Fishing with the Ice Men of Sweet Arrow



by Tyler Frantz

photos by the author

When winter's grip finally takes hold in southeastern Pennsylvania, hope begins to stir anew for a select group of Schuylkill County anglers. It is the same fishing contingency that shows up year-round at Sweet Arrow Lake, located just east of Pine Grove, Schuylkill County, in nearly all weather conditions. Only this time of year, anglers arrive hoping for ice.

What used to be an annual rite of passage, during a time when consistently colder winters were the norm, is no longer a given. Now, Sweet Arrow Lake may only ice over at a safe enough thickness to fish once every 2 or 3 years. When it does, however, one can bet their britches the "Ice Men of Sweet Arrow" will be out there with augers and Schooley rods in tow to prospect for finned treasures beneath the ice.

Twin brothers Ronald Krause and Donald Krause, along with fellow local angler Dale Hummel, have ice fished on Sweet Arrow Lake for at least 40 years. Hummel's son, Clint, now in his mid-forties, has also been fishing with his dad and the Krause brothers for 35 years, learning the ways and customs of the "chosen frozen."

For three consecutive years, the Krause and Hummel families have invited me to join them in their ice fishing

forays, but due to uncooperative weather patterns, our collaborative ice orientation was delayed until February 13, 2021, when I finally got the call that conditions were safe enough to make a go at it.

I arrived around 7:00 a.m. to find the Krause brothers with holes drilled and lines already in the water. The Hummel men were unloading their truck and slipping on warmer layers as I loaded up a sled with a bucketful of fishing gear. I was cold, but I was grateful to be at the lake.

"They say ice is safe when it is at least 4 inches thick, but we prefer 5 inches just to be safe," said Ronald, as we joined them. "We would probably have better fishing if we could get out past the channel," said his brother Donald, "but it is a little slushier than we like it to be today. We will stay here and play it safe."

It was instantly evident these longtime ice anglers always err on the side of caution—an imperative approach to ensure the safety of everyone on the ice. It is also clear this is not their first ice fishing rodeo, as their simplistic setup is built for efficiency and their knowledge of what works best has been tested through years of personal experience.

When a group of anglers typically averages 20 plus fish per day (Ronald's personal best alone is 47 in one day), one tends to pay attention to their tactics. The morning routine went something like this:

Shovel out the snow, open two holes within reach with a 6- to 7-inch auger and scoop out the slush with a



Clint Hummel displays a beautiful sunfish pulled through the ice at Sweet Arrow Lake, Schuylkill County.

slotted spoon. Affix small waxworm baited ice jigs to 4- to 6-pound-test line on a basic Schooley rod with an attached spring bobber for detecting subtle action in the line.

Drop the jig to the bottom, either by feel or by using a clip-on weight that may be later removed, and back the jig up two full turns to fish 12 inches or so off the bottom. Insert a peg in the reel to mark the depth.

What followed was a mix of dead sticking and jigging (6- to 10-inch pops at a time and then relaxing back down), some alternating between standing and sitting, and a great deal of patience. Time is leisurely passed talking about hunting season, families, schooling, community activities, health, aging, and food, all while tending the rods.

The anglers run only two lines at a time, both within close proximity, so it is easier to manage. When a bite is detected, they swiftly and steadily lift up the line, so the hook sets itself. This is equally effective on bass, crappies, perch, sunfish, and occasionally catfish, trout, and suckers.

Rather than waste time reeling and resetting the depth, the anglers prefer to gather line hand over hand, so they can unhook the fish, rebait the jig, and get their line back in the water as quickly as possible in case a school lurks below eager to bite again.

The group freely shared practical wisdom—fishing on overcast days is best or wearing wool socks will keep your toes warm. Keep your live bait in a hole-punched snuff can and store it on an inside pocket, so the maggots or waxworms do not freeze. I was grateful for the advice, and I listened carefully.

A few hours drifted like undisturbed snow in the middle of the lake. Most anglers caught a few fish, but I was still trying. Finally, a sunfish grabbed my line, and Ronald said, “Thank you Lord for the blessing!”

I know it is partly in celebration of my good fortune, and partly because the Ice Men of Sweet Arrow have



Small ice jigs come in a variety of colors. Tip the jigs with a morsel of live bait when fishing through the ice.

finally been granted another chance to do what they cherish most—ice fishing—which they so yearn for every time another winter rolls around. ☐



Ronald Krause proudly shows off his catch at Sweet Arrow Lake, Schuylkill County.

How to Target Late Season Steelhead

by Nick DelVecchio
photos by the author

It takes a hardy type of angler to brave the fierce wind and cold that often accompanies steelhead fishing in the late season. Gone are the days of t-shirts and mild October breezes, and warm days are now noted by precious time spent with temperatures above freezing. Fishing on Lake Erie tributaries in February and early March is as much a test of fortitude as it is fishing skill, but opportunities abound for the resilient anglers who brave the conditions to try to catch a few more steelhead before the run ends. Those who venture out during this time are well-served to understand that as the seasons change, so does the behavior of steelhead. With that comes a shift in strategy and technique to make this time on the water productive enough that you will soon forget about the iced-up rod guides and numb toes.

Where to find steelhead

Steelhead positioning changes throughout the seasons depending on water flow, temperature, and phase of the run. Early on, and especially after a big rain, steelhead may be found pretty much anywhere but especially in the shallow, faster runs. This is indicative of migrating steelhead that may pause in one place for a bit before continuing the run upstream. While steelhead are actively spawning, these fish will be on shallow gravel beds. During the late season of winter,

steelhead are often found in the deepest pools that the fish find. These deeper pools not only offer fish refuge from swift currents, shallow spots also ice over and leave fish trapped underneath. A pool that is 5- to 7-feet deep is not going to freeze to the bottom, so instinctively the fish know that this is a safe place to ride out the winter and wait until the spring thaw. This is not to say steelhead cannot be caught in faster riffles during the winter, but the deepest areas are definitely great starting locations for anglers looking to show their flies or bait to as many fish as possible.

One of the other great benefits of steelhead fishing in the late season is that fish will be found throughout the drainages. The first big rains of October and November will bring in a lot of fish, but these fish are only confined to the lower couple miles of the drainage. There, the steelhead hold, awaiting the next rain event, when fish will move up several more miles through the fall and early winter. By January and February, the steelhead have had enough high water to effectively spread out over dozens of miles. As steelhead spread out over more water miles, anglers spread out as well, limiting specific pressure on spots and giving everyone a chance to enjoy a bit more solitude. That is reason enough to head out on the tributaries during this late season.

When to go

So much of steelhead fishing revolves around the weather. In the early season, that means watching for rain and trying to time up the next run that will push into the streams with the surge of water, but from January through early March, look for changes. Rain may still be something to monitor, but often precipitation is in the form of snow, which does not have the same effect as rain. With that in mind, what matters most during the late season is temperature—specifically nighttime lows. Despite all our best efforts to fish in spite of it, there is nothing quite as debilitating as morning slush flows on the streams that make fishing feel like a hopeless endeavor. When nightly low temperatures dip down into the low teens and single digits, you can bet that the next morning is going to be tough until the sun can burn through the slush. Looking ahead to the forecast and picking those warmer days may help alleviate this issue and produce more efficient time on the water.

With morning slush flows in mind, the time you start fishing may also be different compared to



The rewards of late season steelhead fishing are well worth battling the wind and cold.

November or early December. If slushy conditions are going to be present, there is no reason to get on the water at daybreak. Sleep in a bit, have an extra cup of coffee, and rig up at the hotel. Most of the productive fishing is going to be during the late morning and early afternoon when the sun is high and hitting the water directly. This is the best time to avoid the slush, and

even if the water temperatures only bump a few degrees, it can trigger more activity amongst the fish and generate more action.

While solitude is typically rare on Erie's tributaries, this is the time of year when anglers hope to find some peace and quiet from the crowds. Venturing out into the frigid water is not for everyone, but those who experience this type of fishing usually get addicted to it. Busting through ice on the way to your favorite run or feeling the sharp sting of the water as you release a steelhead back into the depths is all a part of the adventure, and it is incredibly memorable. Others may be sitting inside waiting for spring to emerge, but there is no reason to stop chasing steelhead during these late season months, and those who do are often well-rewarded. ☐



Fighting against ice is a constant problem during the late winter months, but the fish are still hungry and eager.

Tying Together



photo-Dave Zielinski

Holding the Memory: *The Art of Net Making*

by **Christian A. Shane**

“May the holes in your net be no larger than the fish in it.” Irish Proverb.

After soaking the maple wood strips for a day, the net maker pulls the fragile lumber from the water and gently bends it around a curved form. When the wood fibers air out and dry, the wood has a unique characteristic to hold its memory in the familiar tear drop, forming a net shape.

For anglers, a reliable and durable fishing net may hold just as many memories and be as much of an asset as the rod, reel, bait, lure, or fly. Fishing inspires opportunities to branch off into different directions such as fly tying, lure collecting, rod building, lure making, and even learning to design a fishing net. Whether you purchase a net, find a customized net maker to create one for you, or decide to create your own masterpiece, nets are an essential and functional part of your fishing tackle.

Net questions

Some questions to ask yourself if you are purchasing a net or building one on your own: What species and size of fish will you catch? What is the purpose (boating, onshore, wading, or backpacking) of the net? Will you be fishing in freshwater or saltwater? Are

you keeping the fish, or will you practice catch and release? If so, what net material (nylon, rubber, mesh) best suits the purpose? What style of handle do you prefer (wood, carbon fiber, aluminum)? Aesthetically, what kind of net catches your eye or fits your fishing style?



photo-Dale Fogg

With the wood strips in place around the net form, the net begins to hold its shape.

Net maker

Dave Zielinski, owner of www.downhomeboatworks.com, not only designs wooden drift boats but also creates and customizes nets in his own distinctive and high-quality style. He utilizes reclaimed domestic wood when creating his nets with woods of ash, maple, cherry, and walnut. As a skilled woodworker, Zielinski began crafting his nets, so he could use them while backpacking in the Laurel Highlands and traveling to western alpine lakes and high country for native fish. Zielinski prefers a lightweight and balanced net for fishing these destinations while releasing the native species he catches. He offers a few suggestions if you are embarking on creating and customizing your own net.

Net making tools

Some of the basics of designing, creating, and finishing a net include simple tools such as a hammer, drill, drill bits, screws, nails, clamps, vise grips, PVC piping, twist ties, and a needle for the final weaving of the net. When getting into more complex net work, a band saw, planer, router, belt sander, and table saw allow for cleaner and more precise cut lines. Most net makers also recommend a varnish or finish on the final product to allow it to have some proof against water.

Net process

Zielinski suggests beginning your project by purchasing your net bag, designing your template on paper, and creating the plywood frame net form. Then, design the size and shape of the handle as it will be crucial in the final product. Next, the wood strips need to be measured, ripped, sanded, and soaked in water for at least a day. Zielinski immerses the wood in a PVC pipe filled with water, which allows the fibers to be pliable around the net form. He will bend the wood strips around the net form and clamp the strips down for a few days. "A lot of net building is waiting, and waiting, and waiting for the next step. There are many other ways to get the strips to become pliable, so it can be bent around a frame, such as using a steam box or applying heat using a bending iron," said Zielinski.

When the wood strips dry, it will eventually hold its form around the tear drop shape. Adding glue to the wood joints and clamping the joints down strengthens the shape and allows for the net builder to begin the sanding process. The wood strips forming the net hoop will configure around the handle, according to how long the angler prefers the handle length.

In the final steps, a net builder will use sanding blocks to blend and clean up the shape and begin drilling holes where the net material will attach to the wooden form. Spacing is critical in mocking up where the actual holes will be drilled, and a groove is routed along the outside of the net shape for this purpose. The net maker then connects the net bag to the frame by

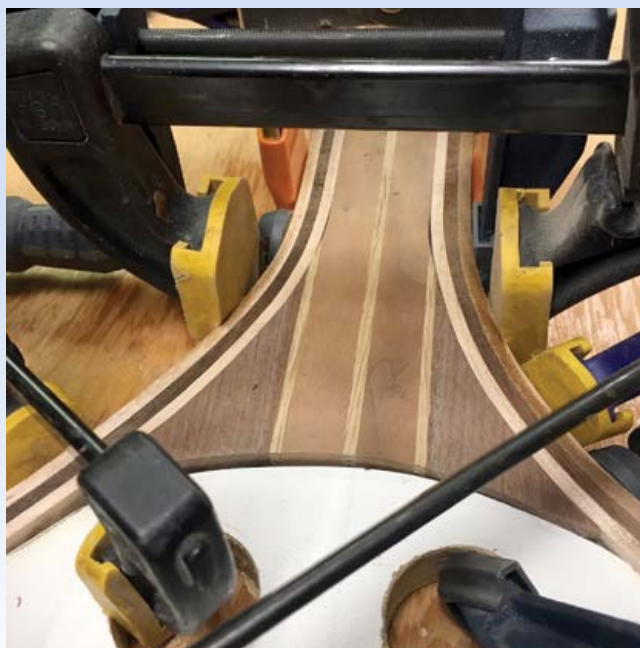


photo-Dave Fogg

In blended colors of maple, cherry, and walnut, the net takes its shape with the help of many clamps and wood glue.

using a needle and working meticulously with mini-parachute cord or repurposed fly line. The net maker finishes the product by coating it with a water-based acrylic, such as a polyurethane.

Finally, the angler must decide how to match their purpose for fishing with how they will transport it. Whether fishing from a boat, on shore, or wading and hiking long distances, each style lends itself to customizing your net. Adding a circular hook screw to the end of the handle allows the angler to attach a lanyard or a magnetic release. Some anglers choose to tuck the net into their wading belt or sling pack.

Design a customized net yourself or order a tailor-made net to hold new memories on the water. ☐

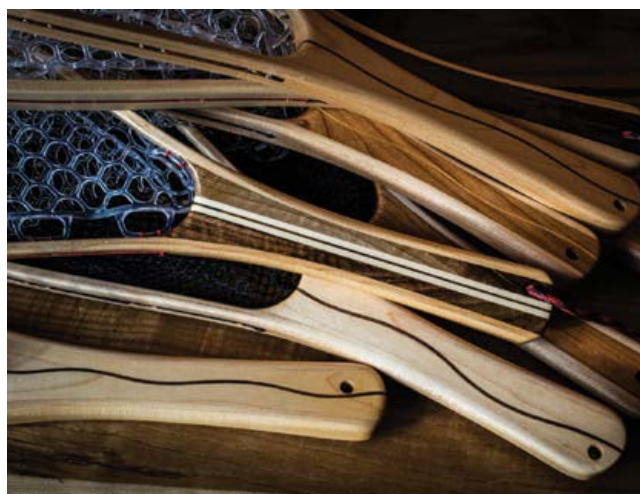


photo-Dave Zielinski

Wooden nets come in a variety of handle designs, mesh baskets, and wooden inlays.

George B. Stevenson Dam



by Ralph Scherder

photos by the author

It is my belief that the First Fork Valley in northcentral Pennsylvania is one of the most beautiful parts of the state. Within the valley, and located within the boundaries of Sinnemahoning State Park, is George B. Stevenson Dam. If you are looking for breathtaking scenery and good fishing, this little gem is a worthwhile destination.

Originally known as First Fork Dam, George B. Stevenson Dam was later renamed in honor of the Clinton County Senator who promoted its construction. Completed in 1956, the dam created a 145-acre lake with excellent fishing opportunities for Chain Pickerel, Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, perch, and various species of panfish. The reservoir is also stocked with trout in the spring and in the fall by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission.

The reservoir has a long and narrow configuration, but it is not a real deep lake. The main channel toward the dam ranges 20- to 24-foot deep, but most of it is 5- to 8-foot deep. A boat launch may be accessed by Park Road

off of Route 872. The lake is restricted to electric motors and non-powered boats only.

The reservoir's primary purpose, of course, is flood control. It services a drainage area of 243 square miles. The main stem feeding the reservoir is First Fork Sinnemahoning Creek, a high quality stream with lots of mayfly hatches and both wild and stocked trout. With a stream like that serving as its main artery, it is no wonder that fishing in the reservoir can be quite good.

There is excellent fishing from shore or boat. Over the years, a fantastic job has been done of installing dozens of fish habitat structures within casting range of shore. One of my go-to spots can be reached by parking at the boat launch area and working down toward the dam on the west side of the lake. There is a high concentration of structure along this shoreline, and I always do well catching bass and panfish.

George B. Stevenson Dam is a popular trout fishing destination, too. First day of trout, it is common to see dozens of boats scattered all over this little lake. Personally, it is not my favorite destination for early season trout, because water temperatures are usually still extremely cold come opening day. It can make the trout sluggish, and success can be hit or miss. It seems

like, the first week or so of trout, I either do really well or catch hardly any.

If you have ever visited northcentral Pennsylvania in winter, then you know that it can get extremely cold. On a typical year, winter seems to set in a little earlier here and hangs on a little longer than in most other parts of the state. Also, George B. Stevenson Dam is nestled between high-wooded ridges, and during the winter months, the valleys do not often get the full effects of the sun until later in the day. This is good news if you enjoy ice fishing. Based on my own experiences, George B. Stevenson Dam is typically one of the first larger bodies of water to freeze over every winter.

When conditions are right, ice fishing can be done anywhere on the lake except within 50 feet of the trash boom by the dam. This is the deepest part of the reservoir, around 27 feet deep, and where the ice is the thinnest.

Park Road parallels a portion of the lake and can be accessed by Route 872. The first entrance as you head north on Route 872, just after you pass the lookout by the dam breast, will take you to the only boat launch on the lake.

Continue along Park Road and you will soon enter a section of Sinnemahoning State Park known as 40



Not only is the lake teeming with bass and other panfish, it is also stocked with trout.

Maples Day Use Area. This stretch of park is named after Chauncey Logue, a long-ago conservation officer who lived in the First Fork Valley and who planted the beautiful maple trees visible in the area. Here, you will also find picnic tables, a basketball half court, horseshoe pits, and a volleyball net. Or, you can just relax and watch for wildlife.

First Fork Sinnemahoning Creek is stocked with trout all along this section in the spring. By mid-June, the water warms up and trout can get scarce, but by then the Smallmouth Bass fishing gets really good. I even caught a few Chain Pickerel in this stretch of stream.

George B. Stevenson Dam is a great family destination. Near the overlook by the dam breast, which is located along Route 872, there is a big parking area with a short hiking trail that is easy to traverse. It is a good place to stop and let the kids burn off some energy after a long car ride.

At the northern end of Park Road is a state-of-the-art wildlife center with educational exhibits featuring local wildlife, environment, and history. There are several unique hands-on exhibits, such as a bear cave and bobcat den, where kids can climb inside and experience these hideouts.

The PA DCNR hosts a variety of events year-round including free pontoon boat tours of the lake, woodcock walks in the spring, bird watching, blacksmithing demonstrations, and more. For a full list of upcoming events, visit their website at www.dcnr.pa.gov, and search Sinnemahoning State Park. Whether you come to fish, paddle around the lake, or look for bald eagles, this area truly has something for the whole family. ☐



Wildlife abounds throughout the park and the First Fork Valley. Elk sightings are common.



Strategies to Land Your First Muskellunge

by *Braden Eisenhower*

photos by the author

Muskellunge fishing is growing in popularity. Anglers across Pennsylvania have access to impressive specimens. But, as the top predator in any system, Muskellunge maintain an elusive reputation.

“The harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph.” Thomas Paine would have understood Muskellunge fishing, though I trust his efforts in shaping our country served a higher purpose. To many anglers, Muskellunge present the greatest challenge. Few muskies come easily, and these fish never come as often as desired. Newcomers must learn to overcome mental and physical hardships.

The journey is difficult but rewarding. However, with careful planning and preparation, the king of freshwater is within reach.

Equipment

Muskellunge tackle is a bit weighty and clunky at first. Starting with an 8-foot rod may make for a more

pleasurable introduction before graduating to longer, technique-specific options. Select a heavy or extra-heavy power rod.

Pair the rod with a 400-size baitcasting reel with a moderate speed (5:1 gear ratio), and spool it with 80-pound-test braided line. To avoid bite-offs, complete the setup with a well-constructed leader with quality components.

This setup is limited to lures that weigh around 5-ounces and have moderate resistance. The quintessential aspect of Muskellunge fishing is absurdly large lures, but the neophyte will appreciate lures that are less fatiguing and appeal to more fish.

Locating shallow Muskellunge

The simplest place to search for Muskellunge is in shallow cover on flats, bays, or coves. Provided the lake has not undergone herbicide treatments, vegetation is easy to find and likely to hold Muskellunge throughout the season. That said, the best times are often in spring and fall when water temperatures range between 60- and 75-degrees F.

Muskellunge relate to cover based on the vegetation type and density, or activity level. Active fish may position on the weed edges or roam open areas nearby. Muskellunge



Muskellunge starter kit: rod and reel, release tools, leader, and an assortment of lures. As the old saying in Muskellunge fishing goes, "Any color is good, as long as it is black."

Positive weather influences may also be slight. A lingering cloud may alter the pressure, provide a bit of wind and surface disturbance to the water, and limit light penetration. These conditions are difficult to predict, but keep casting when conditions align while on a good spot.

Solunar periods consist of sunrise and sunset, moonrise and moonset (minor periods), and moon overhead and moon underfoot (major periods). Referenced times are readily available online. Fish

react to fast-moving lures like tail-rotating topwater lures or bucktail lures. Fish fast and cover water to connect with as many aggressive chasers as possible.

Neutral fish often hunker down in vegetation and require the coaxing of a slow presentation. Twitch gliding jerkbaits, dive and rise jerkbaits, or crankbaits through the cover. Pause the retrieve in open pockets of vegetation. The strike zone is small, so be thorough and make repeated casts.

Shallow-water Muskellunge fishing parallels bass fishing. Casts are precise and purposeful. But, with larger lures, an angler may comb an area much faster.

Locating mid-depth Muskellunge

Warm water temperatures in the summer and cool water temperatures after turnover will concentrate more fish in open water. Muskellunge relate to structure like breaklines, channels, or submerged humps.

Deep-running lures like soft baits and crankbaits work well in depths of 10- to 20-feet of water. Aggressive "ripping" retrieves are best in warm water. These require sharp snaps of the rod with minimal pauses. During the cold-water period, incorporate lengthy pauses to provide Muskellunge with an easy meal.

Activity indicators

Timing plays an enormous role in Muskellunge fishing success. Weather conditions and solunar periods are significant influencers of fish activity.

Pre-frontal conditions are ideal. Barometric pressure falls, skies cloud, and Muskellunge activity is often visible and may last several hours.

and animal activity often correlates to these periods. While not absolute, solar periods are a variable worthy of consideration to be at the right place at the right time.

Boatside maneuvers

Muskellunge are known to follow a lure to the boat without striking. If the angler makes the correct moves, Muskellunge may bite boatside during the "figure eight" maneuver.

Submerge the rod tip as the lure approaches before guiding the lure around in a figure-eight pattern by the boat. Make a habit of executing a figure-eight at the conclusion of each cast, even when a following Muskellunge is not apparent.

Release ready

Release tools should hold equal importance as tackle. Angler safety is a consideration when tooth-laden fish thrash and shake large treble hooks. Plus, many Muskellunge anglers are ardent practitioners of catch and release.

Nets with large hoops accommodate the largest fish. Leave the net and the Muskellunge in the water during the unhooking process. Long-nose pliers keep some distance between the angler and fish. A mini bolt cutter should be on hand to promptly clip hooks lodged in harmful areas like the gills or eyes. Mini bolt cutters are also useful if a hook unintentionally finds its way into an angler.

New Muskellunge anglers should familiarize themselves with equipment and learn lure styles. Develop a foundation, and the Muskellunge will follow and hopefully bite. ☐



photo-Marilyn Black

Do you dream about catching a phenomenal new Pennsylvania State-Record Fish? It could happen. Prepare now, so when you land that beauty, you promptly take the required steps to ensure its registration.

As outdoor writers, my husband, Darl, and I are often called upon to assist anglers who believe they have caught a potential new state record. We have enjoyed photographing and chatting with the anglers to share in their excitement.

Tips provided by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) staff and by the anglers (some became state-record holders; some did not) are gathered here, so you may use wintertime to acquaint yourself with the rules and people involved in the process.

Pennsylvania State-Record Fish lists and rules

The PFBC website, **FishandBoat.com**, includes information, instructions, and a list of current Pennsylvania State-Record Fish as well as information on the Angler Awards program. According to Carl Richardson, the record fish program coordinator, “We recommend that a

person pursuing a record should learn the qualifying weights and the current rules. For instance, recent rule modifications include that the candidate fish now must be at least 2 ounces heavier than the standing state record.” Having a packet in your vehicle or boat containing the current record list, application forms, and detailed instructions will come in handy and help you avoid errors.

The most time-sensitive period is from when you land the trophy fish until the official weight is printed from a scale that is certified legal for trade. The briefer that time interval, the less fish weight loss will occur.

But, just because a nearby grocery store or market has a certified scale does not necessarily mean they will be open, have scales large enough, or be willing to perform this unusual task. Fish such as Common Carp, Channel

Be Prepared to Register a Pennsylvania State-Record Fish

by Marilyn Black



Kirk Rudzinski, Erie, caught this 3-pound Yellow Perch while fishing in Lake Erie, Erie County, in 2021.

Catfish, Flathead Catfish, Lake Trout, Muskellunge, and Northern Pike may be large for such scales. If these fish are what you want to bring to the scales, it would be wise to visit businesses like feed stores or bulk material suppliers to explore such possibilities.

“After the weight is definite, the angler should carefully store the fish in a freezer without removing any of its organs. The next phone call is to your Law



In 2020, Jonathan Pierce, Philadelphia, caught this 56-pound, 3-ounce Flathead Catfish from the Schuylkill River. The catch set a new Pennsylvania record.

Enforcement Region Office, so they can arrange for a representative of the PFBC to inspect the fish in person; that is who makes its species identification,” said Richardson.

“The bottom line is, if you anticipate catching a record-breaking fish, have a game plan—know the form, know the rules, and know where you will take it to get it weighed,” said Richardson.

Anglers who have been successful at obtaining state-record certification for fish have planned ahead, took appropriate steps, and followed the procedures. They figured out how to promptly obtain witnessed weight measurements and photos, and they retained the fish intact for examination by agency staff. By planning ahead, you can carry the current lists, rules, and forms with you and know where to find people willing to put huge fish on their certified scales when the fish of your dreams is in your hands. ☐



Richard Nicholson, Fayette County, was fishing from the bank of the Youghiogheny River with his son, Richard Nicholson Jr., when he caught this 18-pound, 1-ounce Walleye.

Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission

ANGLER AWARD PROGRAM

Qualifying Minimum Weights

Species	Catch & Release	Sr.		Jr.	
		Inches	Pounds	Ounces	Pounds
Bass, Largemouth	20	5	0	4	0
Bass, Rock	8	0	12	0	8
Bass, Smallmouth	19	4	0	3	8
Bass, Striped-Marine (includes hybrid)	30	23	0	21	0
Bass, Striped-Inland (includes hybrid)	23	10	0	7	8
Bass, White	14	2	0	1	8
Bluegill	8	0	12	0	8
Carp, Common	28	14	0	11	8
Catfish, Bullhead	11	1	8	1	0
Catfish, Channel	24	10	8	8	0
Catfish, Flathead	34	20	0	16	0
Crappie	10	1	4	1	0
Drum, Freshwater	21	5	0	4	0
Muskellunge (includes tiger)	40	28	0	20	0
Perch, White	9	0	12	0	8
Perch, Yellow	11	1	4	0	12
Pickereel, Chain	20	4	0	3	0
Pike, Northern	27	11	0	8	0
Salmon, Atlantic	21	5	8	4	0
Salmon, Chinook	30	14	0	11	8
Salmon, Coho	24	8	0	6	8
Salmon, Pink	17	3	0	2	8
Sauger	18	2	0	1	8
Shad, American	22	6	0	4	8
Suckers	17	2	12	2	0
Trout, Brook	15	2	0	1	8
Trout, Brown	21	5	8	4	0
Trout, Lake	30	15	0	12	0
Trout, Golden Rainbow	20	5	0	3	8
Trout, Rainbow	20	5	0	3	8
Trout, Steelhead	24	10	0	8	0
Walleye	23	8	0	6	0

Rules

- Program open to residents and non-residents.
- All fish must be caught in Pennsylvania waters open to the public without charge or fee. Except for First Fish, fish taken from farm ponds, fee-fishing lakes, ponds or streams, or waters restricted to use by club members or their guests, do not qualify.
- Fish must be caught by legal methods during legally open seasons. Fish caught under No Harvest-Catch and immediate release only regulations will be disqualified.
- Kept fish must be weighed and measured. Weight and measurement by fishing license agents, Official Measuring Stations, tackle stores, or authorized employees of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is encouraged.
- Catch-and-release and First Fish catches must be witnessed.
- Measurements must be made with a metal ruler or tape measure. Measure from tip of the nose (with closed mouth) to tip of the tail.
- Photographs: For kept fish – a clear, side-view photograph is preferred but not required. For catch-and-release fish – a clear, side-view photograph of the fish IS required. Photographs for catch-and-release category must be taken at the catch site. Driveway, bait shop, or kitchen shots are unacceptable for catch-and-release fish. Photos showing mishandling will be disqualified. First Fish – need only a witness signature. Photos are encouraged but not required.
- To be considered for the annual “Biggest Fish of the Year” list, applications must be received no later than February 28 of the following year.
- To be considered as a potential STATE RECORD fish, additional requirements must be met and a separate application is required. See any Official Measuring Station or contact the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission at 717-705-7835 for an application. For more information on Official Measuring Stations, visit **FishandBoat.com**.
- The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission reserves the right to investigate the identification, methods used in catching, and the accuracy of measurement and weighing. It also reserves the right to reject any application.
- Only one patch will be awarded annually to each applicant.
- Each entry becomes the property of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission with all publication rights. The information contained on the application and accompanying photograph may be used in, but not limited to, press releases, published articles, and promotional materials. Photographs cannot be returned.
- Parental signature is required when applicant is under 18 years of age.

Application for: (check one)

Senior Angler Award

for those anglers 16 and older.
Award includes certificate and patch.

Junior Angler Award

for those anglers under 16 years of age. Award includes certificate and patch.

Husky Musky Club

anglers who land a musky that is 50 inches or longer. Award includes certificate and patch.

Catch and Release

award for those anglers who practice catch and release. Qualifications based on length.

First Fish

certificate recognizing a new angler's first fish. There are no size qualifications.

FishandBoat.com

Please print clearly.

Fish Species _____
Only the species with qualifying weights (in table above) are eligible for Angler Awards. Applications for other species will be returned.

Angler's Name _____ Age _____

Street or P.O. Box _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Fish Weight _____ lbs. _____ oz. Length _____ in. Girth _____ in.

Date Caught _____ County Where Caught _____

Water Where Caught _____

Rod _____ Reel _____ Line _____

Name of Bait or Lure _____

Weighed and Measured by _____

Catch Witnessed by _____

Applicant's Signature _____ Date _____




Parental Signature if Applicant is Under 18 Years of Age _____

Mail application and photograph to: Angler Award • Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission • P.O. Box 67000 • Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000

2022 SEASONS, SIZES, and CREEL LIMITS

COMMONWEALTH INLAND WATERS-2022

(includes the Youghiogheny River Lake and does not include special regulation areas)

Species	Seasons	Minimum Size	Daily Limit
 ALL SPECIES OF TROUT Additional regulations may apply- see Trout Regulations for stream sections that are both Stocked Trout Waters and Class A Wild Trout Waters.	Regular Opening Day of Trout Season - April 2 at 8 a.m. through Sept. 5	7 inches	5-streams, lakes, and ponds (combined species)
	Extended Season: Stocked trout waters Jan. 1 through Feb. 20 and Sept. 6 through Dec. 31	7 inches	3 (combined species)
	Extended Season: Stocked Class A wild trout stream sections. Jan. 1 through Feb. 20 and Sept. 6 through Dec. 31	NO HARVEST - Catch and immediate release only Class A stream listing: www.fishandboat.com/classa.pdf	
BASS - Lakes, Rivers, and Streams Largemouth, Smallmouth, and Spotted Additional regulations may apply.	Jan. 1 through April 8 and Oct. 1 through Dec. 31	15 inches	4 (combined species)
	April 9 through June 10		NO HARVEST - Catch and immediate release only (no tournaments permitted)
	June 11 through Sept. 30	12 inches	6 (combined species)
Muskellunge and Tiger Muskellunge*	Open year-round	40 inches	1 (combined species)
Pickereel*		18 inches	4
Northern Pike*		24 inches	2
Walleye and Saugeye (Hybrids)	Jan. 1 through March 14 and May 7 through Dec. 31	15 inches	6
Sauger	Jan. 1 through March 14 and May 7 through Dec. 31	12 inches	6
American Shad**	Open year-round	No minimum	3
American Shad	Open year-round - Lehigh River, Schuylkill River*** and tributaries	NO HARVEST - Catch and immediate release only	
American Shad	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND		
River Herring**	Susquehanna River and tributaries		
Hickory Shad**	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND		
Herring, Gizzard Shad	Open year-round	No minimum	50 (combined species)
American Eel	Open year-round	9 inches	25
Striped Bass and Striped Bass/ White Bass Hybrids	Open year-round	20 inches	2 (combined species)
Sunfish, Yellow Perch, White Perch, Crappies, Catfish, Rock Bass, Suckers, Carp, White Bass, Bowfin, and other gamefish not otherwise listed Additional regulations may apply- see Panfish Enhancement Special Regulations.	Open year-round	No minimum	50 (combined species)
Baitfish/Fishbait****(except Mudbugs/Includes Crayfish)	Open year-round	No minimum	50 (combined species)
Mudbugs (Dragonfly Nymphs)	Open year-round	No minimum	Unlimited if taken from lakes, ponds, swamps, and adjacent areas. 50 per day if taken from moving waters (rivers and streams).
Mussels/Clams	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND		
Paddlefish, Spotted Gar, and other threatened and endangered species	CLOSED YEAR-ROUND		

SEASONS, SIZES, AND CREEL LIMITS – Except for trout season, which begins at 8 a.m., all regulatory periods in the fishing regulations are based on the calendar day, one of which ends at midnight and the next of which begins immediately thereafter.

* Except those species in waters listed in the **Brood Stock Lakes Program**. Tiger Muskellunge is a muskellunge hybrid.

** Unlawful to take, catch, or kill American Shad in the Susquehanna River and all its tributaries. River Herring (Alewife and Blueback Herring) has a closed year-round season with zero daily limit applied to Susquehanna River and tributaries, Lehigh River and tributaries, Schuylkill River and tributaries, West Branch Delaware River, Delaware River, Delaware estuary, Delaware River tributaries upstream to the limit of the tidal influence, and Conowingo Reservoir.

*** Lehigh River upstream of the first dam in Easton, Pennsylvania and its tributaries and the Schuylkill River upstream of the I-95 Bridge and its tributaries.

NOTE: It is not a violation of the bass regulations if a bass is immediately returned unharmed to the waters from which it was taken. It is unlawful for an angler to cast repeatedly into a clearly visible bass spawning nest or redd in an effort to catch or take bass.

NOTE: For bass regulations, power dam pools and recreational dam pools on the Susquehanna River and navigational dam pools on the Ohio River drainage are "rivers." It is unlawful to conduct a fishing tournament on the North Branch, West Branch, or main stem of the Susquehanna River that allows a tournament angler to harvest bass. **NOTE:** Stocked trout waters are closed to fishing from February 21 to the opening day of the regular trout season in April, unless included in the **Stocked Trout Waters Open to Year-Round Fishing Program**.

NOTE: Landlocked Alewife less than 8 inches in length taken from inland ponds, lakes, or reservoirs that are collected by legal means may be harvested for use as baitfish.

NOTE: It is legal to fish for trout in Class A trout streams year-round, with no harvest beginning the day after Labor Day through the

opening day of trout season the following year. The exception is those stream sections designated as both Class A Wild Trout Streams and Stocked Trout Waters. These stream sections are closed to fishing from February 21 until 8 a.m. on the opening day of trout season.

**** **BAITFISH** includes all forms of minnows; suckers, chubs, Fallfish, lampreys; Gizzard Shad 8 inches or less; and all forms of darters, killifishes, and stonecats (except those listed as threatened or endangered species). Legally taken gamefish may be used as bait. It is unlawful to use or possess goldfish, comets, koi, and Common Carp as baitfish while fishing. **FISHBAIT** includes crayfish, crabs, and the nymphs, larvae, and pupae of all insects spending any part of their life cycle in the water.

For all crayfish species, the head must be immediately removed behind the eyes upon capture unless used as bait in the water from which taken.

2022 FISHING LICENSES

LICENSE YEAR

Annual licenses are valid from Dec. 1, 2021, through Dec. 31, 2022. WHILE FISHING, your license must be upon your person and provided upon the request of an officer.



Code	Type of Fishing License or Permit	Age	Cost*
101	Resident (Annual)	16-64	\$22.97
104	Senior Resident (Annual)	65 & up	\$11.97
105	Senior Resident (Lifetime)	65 & up	\$51.97
108	1-Day Resident (not valid March 15–April 30)	16 & up	\$11.97
102	Non-Resident (Annual)	16 & up	\$52.97
113	Non-Resident PA Student (Annual)	16 & up	\$22.97
106	1-Day Tourist ** (not valid March 15–April 30)	16 & up	\$26.97
103	3-Day Tourist	16 & up	\$26.97
107	7-Day Tourist	16 & up	\$34.97
110	Voluntary Youth Fishing License (Annual)	Less than 16	\$2.97
109	Mentored Youth Permit	Less than 16	\$0.00
150	Trout Permit	16 & up	\$9.97
033	3-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$25.97
053	5-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$41.97
063	10-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$81.97
151	Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$9.97
151SLE	Senior Lifetime Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$9.97
152	Combination Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$15.97

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.97 transaction fee. Excludes the 109 Mentored Youth Permit.

** Includes Trout and Lake Erie permits, not valid March 15–April 30.

2022 MULTI-YEAR FISHING LICENSES

Code	Type of Fishing License or Permit	Age	Cost*
150	1-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$9.97
151	1-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$9.97
152	1-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$15.97
030	3-Year Resident	16-64	\$64.97
031	3-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$154.97
032	3-Year Senior Resident	65 & up	\$31.97
033	3-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$25.97
034	3-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$25.97
035	3-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$43.97
050	5-Year Resident	16-64	\$106.97
051	5-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$256.97
052	5-Year Senior Resident	65 & up	\$51.97
053	5-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$41.97
054	5-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$41.97
055	5-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$71.97
060	10-Year Resident	16 & up	\$211.97
061	10-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$511.97
063	10-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$81.97
064	10-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$81.97
065	10-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$141.97

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.97 transaction fee.

2022 VOLUNTARY PERMITS

LICENSE YEAR

Voluntary Permits are designed to help maintain funding levels for several key fishing-related programs. Revenues generated from the sale of these permits will be reinvested into their respective program.

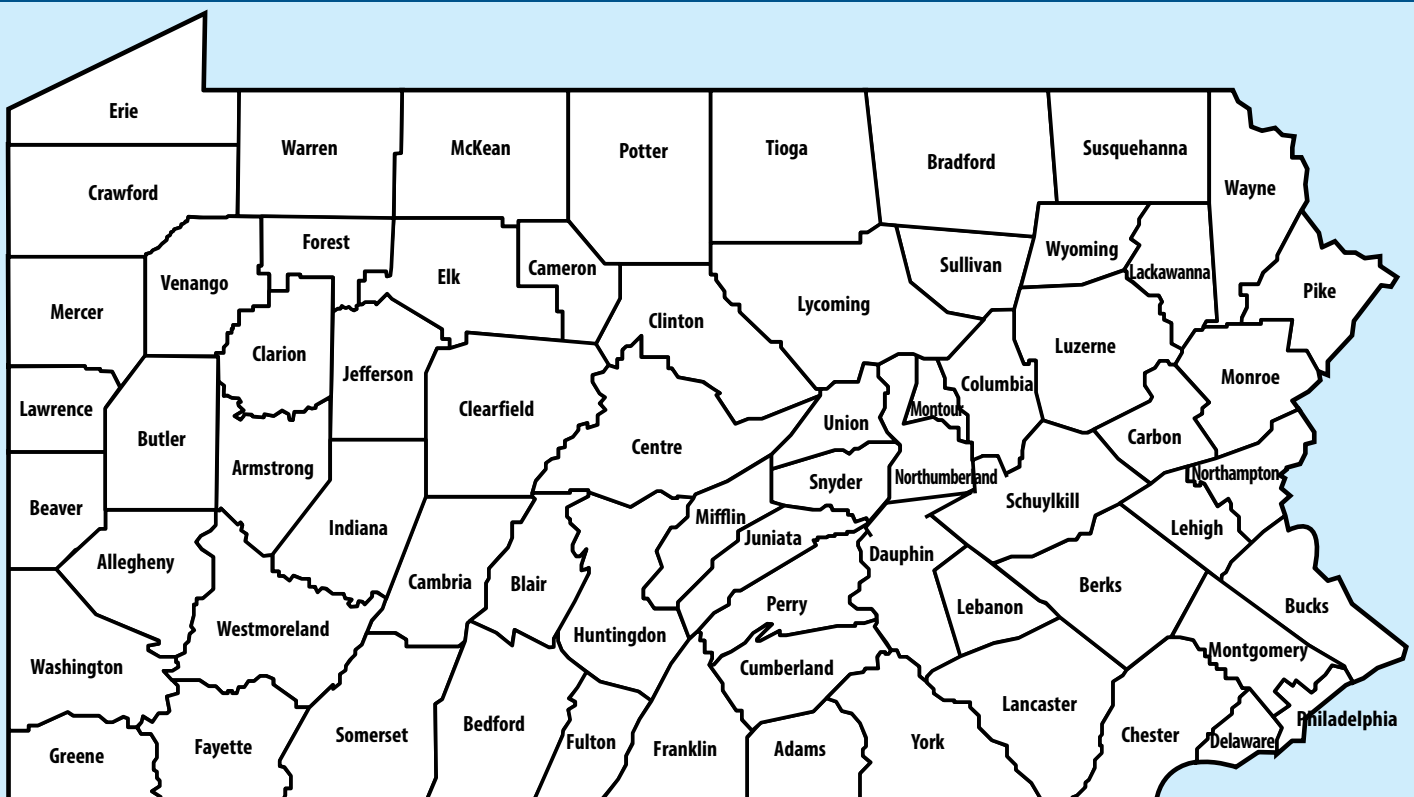


Code	Type of Voluntary Permits	Age	Cost*
073	Voluntary Bass Permit	Any	\$11.97
077	3-Year Voluntary Bass Permit	Any	\$31.97
081	5-Year Voluntary Bass Permit	Any	\$51.97
085	10-Year Voluntary Bass Permit	Any	\$101.97
071	Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$11.97
075	3-Year Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$31.97
079	5-Year Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$51.97
083	10-Year Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$101.97
070	Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$11.97
074	3-Year Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$31.97
078	5-Year Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$51.97
082	10-Year Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$101.97
072	Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$26.97
076	3-Year Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$76.97
080	5-Year Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$126.97
084	10-Year Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$251.97

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.97 transaction fee.

HuntFish.PA.gov

Pennsylvania County Map





A New Year's Perspective in the Northern Tier of Pennsylvania

by Linda Stager

photos by the author

What is on your New Year's list? New adventures? New equipment? New habits?

The New Year can be a time for anglers to making their fishing experiences better.

Why not visit the northern tier of Pennsylvania to check out your favorite fishing spots? Through the spring, summer,



A familiar sight during ice fishing season in the northern tier of Pennsylvania.

and fall months, these fishing spots are usually popular. But, in the winter months, there is a fresh new perspective.

We all get excited for the first day of fishing season, but fishing is also possible during the winter months. Whether it is traditional fishing over open water or ice fishing, the fish are waiting.

Your favorite place to fish will probably be yours and yours only in the winter. Competition thins out as the weather gets colder. However, it will also require you to do things differently. Fish have less energy when the water is cold. And, you will have to deal with your own coldness. But, you will find fish.

The fish will be at the bottom of the stream or lake where you are fishing. And, fish will be schooled up. If you catch a fish in a particular spot, keep fishing it, since there are probably more fish in that location. Fish the deeper, quieter waters. Also, fish the warmer spots and warmer times of day. As much as we all love an early morning on the water, during winter, the best times to fish may be in the middle of the day—11 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Trout like cold waters and will be moving around. Perch will bite no matter how cold the weather. Do you want to go big? Look for Channel Catfish and Northern Pike this time of year. These fish may grab your bait.

Bass may be fishable during the warmer parts of the day, especially around noon. This species will be difficult to catch but will provide a challenge.

And, of course, as soon as the weather gets colder and the small lakes freeze, the exhilaration of a good morning of ice fishing awaits. The smaller lakes of Tioga County—Beechwood Lake, Hamilton Lake, Nessmuk Lake, and Hills Creek Lake—draw anglers from all over Pennsylvania. These lakes freeze early and are reliable ice fishing locations.

Beechwood Lake, Tioga County, hosts an ice fishing tournament every February, sponsored by the CV Anglers Club. This active club hosts fishing derbies for kids and maintains a trout nursery in addition to sponsoring the ice fishing event. Last year, the lunger prize for largest “other” fish at the tournament was a 6.68-pound bass.

To find out when lakes are freezing, visit Wellsboro’s tackle shop just north of town. They are experts on ice fishing and keep a close watch on all the local lakes. You can check out the latest information about the area right here.

Or, visit Pine Creek. Pine Creek is the major waterway through Tioga County. There are trophy trout in Pine Creek. Visit one of the special regulation areas on Pine Creek and try a hand at cold weather fishing. If you would rather stay inside, drive to Slate Run and check out the tackle shop. The tackle shop specializes in fly fishing and knows Pine Creek better than most, and you can get a start on spring fishing plans.

For those who would rather stay off the water, visit Wellsboro, Tioga County, for good food and entertainment. Wellsboro is known for its gaslight-lined boulevard along historic Main Street. Visit during a quiet time and soak in the ambiance. There is nothing like a



A rare look at Pine Creek, Tioga County, from Colton Point. The road is accessible by snowmobile during the winter.

winter stroll on Main Street at dusk. Add in a snowfall and it becomes magical.

For those who want a little more activity, Wellsboro excels at winter festivals. The big holiday celebrations are over, but Wellsboro’s winter festival is usually scheduled annually for the weekend closest to Valentine’s Day. If the celebration is a go this year, plan for sales, live entertainment, and live ice sculpting on Main Street. By the end of Saturday, the historic district will be transformed into a walking ice sculpture garden. There is good fun and entertainment at most of the downtown businesses that weekend, and the sculptures are especially beautiful at night. The celebration will delight the non-anglers in the family.

All in all, there is something for everyone in Tioga County, even in the winter. Visit your favorite fishing spot, plan for spring fishing, do a little fishing, and have some fun. The fish are waiting. ☐



Darling Run on Pine Creek, Tioga County.

Zee Bait Co.—Built for Durability



by Alex Zidock Jr.

photos by the author

If growing up on a sheep farm had anything to do with Hunter Grogan's ability to pull the wool over a bass's eyes, that would be another exciting tale. But, it did not. It all started when Grogan went off to the Maryland Institute College of Art. "Of all things, I went there to study ceramics and particularly mold making and slip casting," said Grogan.

His family's sheep farm was located in southeastern Pennsylvania and offered the young Grogan the opportunity to fish many lakes, rivers, and ponds. "I have always fished for trout and other species, and by the time I went to college, I was a pretty serious bass angler. But, I was disappointed in the quality of the soft plastic baits you could get, which were not durable enough," said Grogan.

While in college, Grogan changed his major studies to industrial design for consumer products. He mainly specialized in the materials used in the manufacturing process.

"During college, my roommate and I had this idea of making plastic fishing baits," said Grogan, founder and CEO of Zee Bait Co. "He wood-carved a lot of the original designs, and our first bait to hit the market was one of those ideas," said Grogan.

"After college, I used the acquired knowledge to figure out the correct materials to use in the formulation to achieve our goals to make plastic baits more durable," said Grogan.

Hunter Grogan, founder and CEO of Zee Bait Co., displays the White Label series packaging of their tournament-grade soft plastic bait, the Bamboo Bomber™.

For that original design, they took a stick bait, which is one of the more popular bass baits, and a creature bait and made a hybrid of the two lures. Their first bait, the Bamboo Bomber™, is this unique design. "It took more than 3 years to refine it. As far as nature is concerned, it does not replicate anything except maybe a crawfish when it bounces on the bottom or an oversized worm, but it has a very undulating pattern on a drop shot rig. It can also be fished shaky-head or as a trailer on jigs. Sometimes, it is not exactly what the bait looks like, but the action it creates or the water disturbance that makes the fish more active to bite the bait," said Grogan. The Bamboo Bomber™ was introduced in 2016 at regional fishing shows and on their website.

"Now, we come up with new ideas based on previous bait designs. We will make the 3D plastic model. Then, I make a one-off silicone mold. If we like the bait, we will make a single cavity aluminum production mold. This mold will make the bait into precisely what it will be like in the final production mold. But, we may go through five or six adjustments and single cavity molds before we are



A single cavity aluminum production mold from which the final design of the Arma CRAW™ crawfish bait is produced for testing. This is the step before a production mold, with up to 100 cavities, is produced.

satisfied. Then, we send the retail-ready product to our testing tournament anglers to use and give us feedback," said Grogan.

The second bait developed was a natural crawfish. "Our crawfish bait, Arma CRAW™, is a prime example of a replica of a crawfish that comes off Lake Champlain. So, it has smaller claws, the same body structure that those crawfish have, and it has the longer antennae like the crawfish on Lake Champlain," said Grogan.

Last year, Zee Bait Co. reintroduced everything in two different packaging

designs. "The White Label series is the tournament-grade bait with unique shapes and unique plastic and heavy, aggressive scent that a tournament angler would want. In the green packaging is our Vital Series of baits. These baits are all the classic types of plastic worms that we all grew up fishing. They are a more traditional blend of plastic and have some salt in them," said Grogan. It is their introductory line for anglers who do not want to spend more money for their four baits.

"All the baits in the white packages are heavily scented with coffee and garlic. Many people in the industry believe that coffee is a very powerful scent. It does not necessarily attract bass, but it is a scent that blocks the olfactory system of the fish," said Grogan.



Hunter Grogan describes his facility as micro mass manufacturing. While it is hands-on, Zee Bait Co. can produce several thousands of baits a day or supply tournament anglers with custom colors of a particular bait.



Newly formed plastic baits hang on curing racks for at least a week before packaging.

There is no salt in the White Label line of baits. "By not adding salt, you get a more buoyant bait and a more durable bait. Salt in bait makes them sink. The baits I like to design are less buoyant than a gallon of water per pound, which allows the bait to float, which means you get a lot more subtle action on the pause of the bait when you are not working the bait underwater. And, at that pause is really when the fish strike at the bait when it is just moving slowly and looking more natural," said Grogan.

Also produced in their Birchrunville facility, Zee Baits sells a product they developed called Bass Syrup. "All of our White Label baits are cooked in it and soaked in it. It is a powerful scent. It is a unique blend of oils with some of the combinations of chemicals in our bait plastic. There are two options. One comes in earthworm scent, and the other is an anise and garlic mix that is the number one seller," said Grogan.

"In the future, I want to continue to innovate. Currently, we have three new baits we are working on, which will be part of the White Label tournament line. I have not pushed growing too fast. We are doing a slow, steady growth. I earned my Master's program degree in small business growth, the number one thing in manufacturing. They kept saying slow growth may be painful at some time, but it is better than being inundated with orders and not meeting the demand," said Grogan.

While not in big box stores yet, Zee Bait Co. is in many smaller tackle shops and available online at www.zeebaitco.com.

Zee Bait Co.
www.zeebaitco.com

Camping and Fishing at Chapman State Park



by Jerry Bush

photos by the author

Nestled in the southern portion of Warren County is a little jewel named Chapman State Park. Turn south at the only traffic light in Clarendon and drive about 5 miles. The small town of Clarendon rests between the cities of Warren and Sheffield. The park and its campgrounds are adjacent to the Allegheny National Forest and Pennsylvania State Game Land 29.

At the heart of the park is a small, 68-acre impoundment (Chapman Lake), which is fed by West Branch Tionesta Creek and includes one of the most picturesque spillways in Pennsylvania. The spillway is new, which is reason for anglers to exercise patience. Besides stocked trout, Chapman Lake held a good population of bass and panfish that lured anglers year-round, but the lake had to be drawn down for more than 2 years to rebuild the aging spillway, which was experiencing structural issues. As a matter of consequence, most of the fish had to be moved or passed downstream. To complicate matters, the project hit delays, further frustrating anglers and swimmers, who for decades enjoyed the beach area.

The lake was refilled in 2020, but until further notice, most fishing at the lake is catch and release. These special regulations will be in place to reestablish the quantity and quality of the fishery following dewatering. So far, Blugills, Largemouth Bass, and some forage species have been stocked in the lake. It may take several years for the fish to acquire the size most anglers would desire before selecting fish for the pan.

That should not stop the camping anglers who know the primary goal of the activity is fun and relaxation. My spouse and I were blessed during a 2021 camping trip to



Chapman State Park has about 12 tent sites.

have all our adult children and four grandchildren, ranging 5- to 7-years old, join us. We visited the lake several times to encourage dangling worms or grubs under bobbers, cast while paddling or from shore. Each child caught and released several fish during our ventures. The fish caught were understandably small, but the kids caught plenty, and a grandparent could not have been any happier than I was observing their beaming smiles. Perhaps, the most gratification came from watching my adult children pass on to their children the lessons they learned from me three decades ago in this magical place.

This is a great opportunity to teach kids the value of catch and release and how to perform the tactic successfully. Use barbless hooks or pinch the barbs, so fish can be released without harm. If the hook cannot be removed without harming the fish, cut the line and leave it in the fish. The fish will usually survive.

Brook Trout and Brown Trout, which for decades

have been stocked spring and fall at Chapman State Park, are again available for keeping or releasing. Anglers tempt trout from canoes and kayaks, shore, or during winter through the ice. Chapman State Park has an appreciated warming hut. Fly anglers do well where the creek pours into the lake and below the outflow spillway, though access through the thick vegetation is somewhat limited.

The campground is basically referenced as two loops. The “upper loop” is so referenced, because it is literally elevated above the lower loop. Pets are permitted on the lower loop only, and a children’s playground is onsite. Parents with children who ride bicycles will appreciate that Chapman State Park’s rangers patrol often and strictly enforce the 5-mile-per-hour speed limit.

Approximately 75 recreational vehicles (RV) sites combine the best of primitive charm and modern convenience. Most, not all, are electric sites nestled snugly into forested lots. In addition to the large group tenting area, the upper loop includes about 12 primitive tent sites, which are spread a short distance into the forest from the RV sites. A few sites are available for people with disabilities. The park includes a few cabin-style cottages and yurts for rent. Obviously, reservations are required well in advance. Facilities include two modern restrooms with flush toilets, showers, conveniently placed water hydrants, and a dump station.

Among some of the highlights are guided nature walks, stream studies, and children’s programs, which are presented just about every weekend during the summer. Besides fishing, other activities include canoe and kayak paddling, swimming, hiking, and hunting. Whether hiking or paddling, a venture to the upstream swinging bridge is a must. Chapman State Park provides a great opportunity for children to observe wildlife such as crayfish and salamanders. The wooden bridges over brooks and gullies become slick.

It may be that Chapman State Park’s charm is best shown by my adult children. When they were kids, many



Mom and daughter fish near the dam of Chapman Lake.

of our family vacations involved simple camping trips with an old pop up camper. We spent many hours fishing and swimming in the lake and hiking the surrounding forest. Our getaways must have been cherished, because even now as adults, with tents, campers, and families of their own, they insist we gather at Chapman State Park every year.

It is doubtful that a record fish will ever be pulled from Chapman Lake, but in terms of beauty and the additional outdoor activities, Chapman State Park is a treasure that camping anglers and paddling enthusiasts will always appreciate. ☐

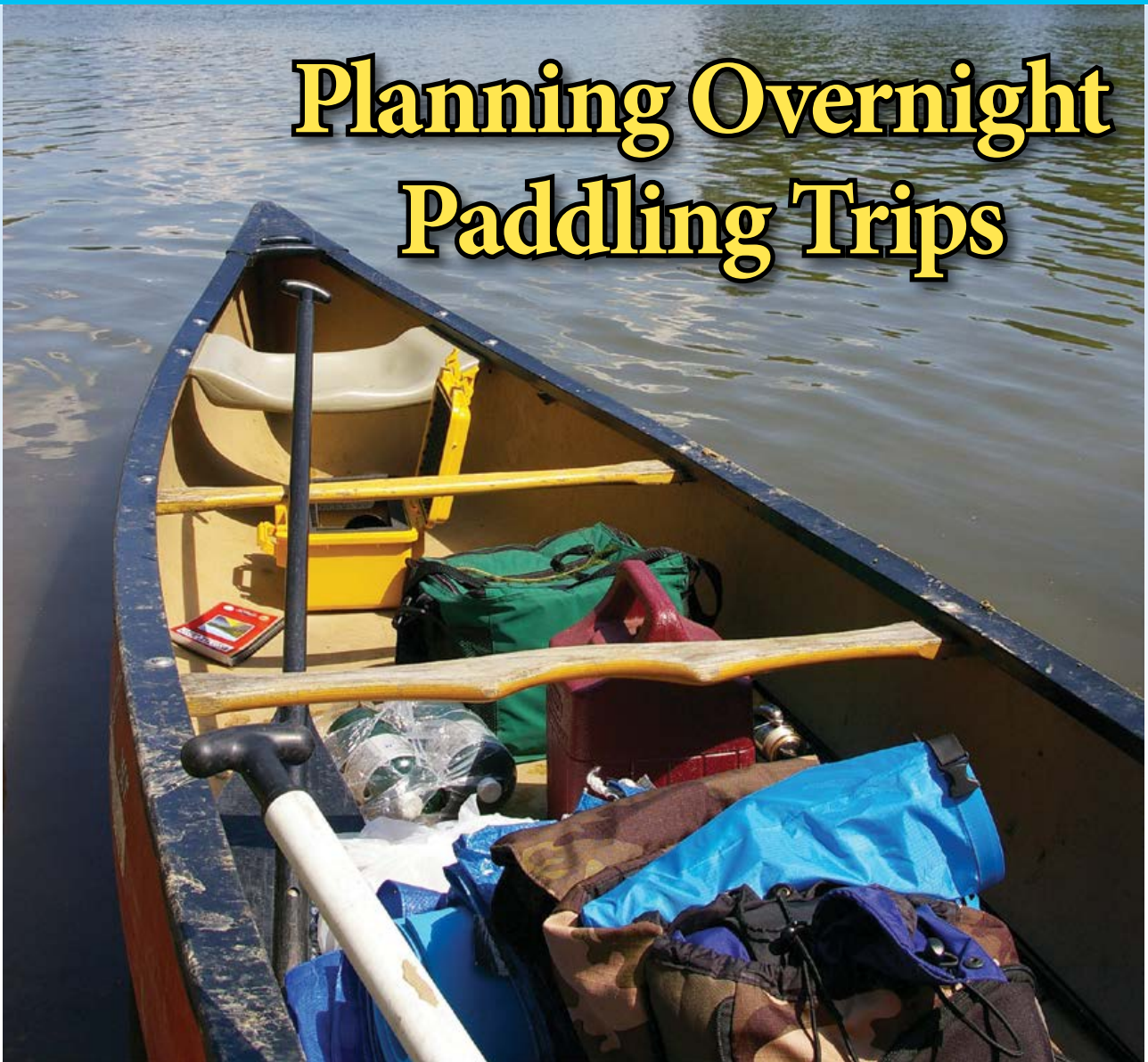


Salamanders may be a topic during a biologist’s guided tour at Chapman State Park, Warren County.



This recently caught bullhead was returned to Chapman Lake’s waters.

Planning Overnight Paddling Trips



by Bob Frye

photos by the author

The murmur of gentle current replaced the cacophony of competing radios, the glare of electric lights, the smell of wood smoke, and the noise of gas generators.

Twenty-four hours earlier, we were in a national forest campground. It was fine as such places go, but with its manicured rows of tents and recreational vehicles, it was crowded, noisy, and too much a place one step removed from the backyard.

Now, we were on a publicly-owned island in the Allegheny River. Free camping is allowed on a first-come, first-serve basis, and we paddled here to enjoy a night of primitive beauty.

Canoe camping like this is an opportunity like few others—a sort of water-borne backpacking. You must carry everything you need, but the tradeoff is soul-restoring time spent where relatively few others go.

However, it does take some planning to do it safely, efficiently, and comfortably. Here are some things to keep in mind.

Develop a float plan

A float plan outlines who is on your trip, where and when you are putting into the river and taking out, and where you plan to stop in between. It also describes your canoes.

It should be left with a responsible person at home, so if necessary, they are able to call for help and offer clues to your whereabouts. Sample float plans are found on the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) website at FishandBoat.com.

When your trip ends, contact the person you left the float plan with to report your safe return.

Follow a trail

Pennsylvania is home to more than 24 water trails (listed on FishandBoat.com).



Water, wood, waste

You are going to be in the middle of a river, or at least on its bank. But, what will you drink? You cannot drink untreated river water. Pack water or use a water filter or water purification tablets to treat river water.

Some of the most popular island campsites may be picked clean of ready firewood by summertime. Take at least a bit with you, along with some homemade or commercial fire starters and a waterproof lighter or matches.

A small stove and some fuel are handy for cooking in case you cannot get a fire going.

Finally, leave any campsite looking better than when you arrived. Pack garbage bags for hauling out trash.

File a float plan before embarking on any paddling trip to let people know where you are going and when you plan to return.

Most are great options for canoe campouts. That is because water trails are mapped similar to hiking trails, showing everything from hazards to campsites to historical or natural points of interest. Water trails also identify the location of launches and tell you how much water flow is needed to float and how much is too much.

The water trails also mark river miles, so you can easily determine how far it is from point to point. You can cover about 2 miles per hour. A 10-mile trip may take 5 hours, for example.

If you bring newcomers, remember shorter trips that leave people wanting more are better than grueling marathons.

Make a gear list

If you forget something when canoe camping, then you do without it. There is no running to the nearest store. So, make a gear list before you go. A gear list should include the usual stuff—tents or hammocks, sleeping bags, food, sunscreen, bug repellent, flashlights, and the like. But, you will also need some equipment specific to boating or primitive camping.

Life jackets are mandatory in canoes for children 12 and younger at all times, and for adults during cold weather months, November through April.

Carry an extra paddle in case one gets lost, a throw bag for emergencies on the water, and an emergency whistle and first aid kit. Dry shoes are nice to have for camp.

Use dry bags to hold extra clothes and anything else you do not want to get wet. A spare dry bag slung over a branch and tied off with rope may keep your food away from hungry bears, raccoons, opossums, skunks, and other wildlife.

Take a shovel to dig a cathole or have some other plan for treating human waste.

Packing

Some canoes hold a lot of weight. My canoes tote 1,000 pounds. So, it may be tempting to overpack. However, do not overpack your canoe. A fully-loaded canoe is not a nimble beast. Over-packed canoes are slow to turn, hard to propel through still water, and prone to scraping bottom in the shallows.

That does not mean you have to cut the handle off your toothbrush, like some backpackers do, to save a few ounces. But, if you do not need something, leave it.

When packing the canoe, put the heaviest items in first, near the center of the boat to maximize stability. Keep gear below the gunwales, too.

Keep items you need while underway—sunscreen or rain gear—within easy reach. ☐



It is possible to do overnight paddling trips in groups. Think ahead about how much space you will need to choose an appropriate campsite.



Hot Rods

by Charles Cantella

photo by the author

What do cars and fishing rods have in common? Cars and fishing rods can both be customized to suit the owner's tastes.

Nestled in Elizabethtown, Lancaster County, craftsman Barry Weaver sits down to begin the process of turning out another heirloom caliber custom fishing rod. With 35 years of custom rod building experience, his hands have become extensions of his creativity and knowledge. Over the years, Weaver has built rods for use by both saltwater anglers and freshwater anglers. Tuna rods, surf rods, spinning rods, and spin cast rods among other, even more "species specific," rods have all been created in the Dream Weaver Custom Fishing Rods shop.

An angler in his own right, proprietor and master builder, Weaver has fished up and down the eastern United States in both freshwater and saltwater, and has even ventured out to the Pacific Northwest. "I actually started fishing rather late in life," said Weaver, who started when his son was young. From there, he progressed to building rods for different species and different conditions. Weaver started making rods for friends and relatives. Before long, he opened a shop in Elizabethtown. See the sidebar for the shop location and contact information.

Always one to think outside of the box, Weaver does not let political boundaries limit his fishing and has sampled a great deal of fishing opportunities and styles in both the United States and Canada. This breadth of experiences and contacts with others in the industry allows him to stay current and up to date with the latest in rod building materials and techniques.

Being a rod builder means that Weaver is part woodworker, part engineer, part lathe operator, part technician, and part assembler. When you add in the decorative aspect of the custom rod building process, he also has to be part artist and part tailor, adding various colored threads to personalize each rod to the customer's taste and preference. "With a custom rod, you get a fishing rod that is unique to only you. No one else has the same fishing rod," said Weaver.

Dream Weaver Custom Fishing Rods has customers from around the world. From places as far as Costa Rica to Denmark, Dream Weaver Custom Fishing Rods can create a rod as

specific as an angler may want. The process of getting a custom rod begins with a call or e-mail to Weaver. Then, it is questions, questions, and more questions. The more information you provide, the more personalized the finished rod will be. You will be asked questions such as: What kind of fish are you after? Freshwater or saltwater? What kind of reel? Are you spin casting, bait casting, or fly fishing? What line weight do you use? What is your height? Arm length? Hand size? Are you a righty or a lefty? These questions, and many more, refine the customer's wants and needs, so the ideal rod can be crafted. But, just building the ideal rod is not enough; there will be questions on the aesthetic aspect of the rod, too. Would you like hand-carved custom handles? How about a colored blank? Did you consider the thread color? What about decals? Would you like to personalize it with an inscription? There are many combinations of options, so the more Weaver knows about you, the more specific to you the rod may be customized. The rods may be as varied and unique as you prefer.

While it is true that most of the rods that Dream Weaver Custom Fishing Rods builds are fiberglass or graphite, Weaver is also able to perform rod repairs, restorations, and rod rebuilds. In addition, he also repairs bamboo rods. Like anything that is customized, a custom rod can take anywhere from 2 to 4 weeks for a rod to be completed, but it may be longer depending on material availability. If the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us anything, it is that supply chains do slow down on occasion. Starting at \$175, these rods are not as expensive as one may think, and with a lifetime warranty, you will not be afraid to fish your handcrafted gem. However, just like when purchasing a car, adding options will change the final price.

So, if you find yourself in the market for a new hot rod, I suggest that you cruise on over to the Dream Weaver Custom Fishing Rods website or their Facebook page. ☐

Dream Weaver Custom Fishing Rods

209 North Market Street
Elizabethtown, PA 17002
717-215-6945

bdreamweaver@msn.com
www.dreamweaverrods.com

Facebook: Dream Weaver Custom Fishing Rods

Play the Drum



Freshwater Drum

by Rob Criswell photo by the author

If you are in the right place on the impounded portion of the Ohio River system, or on Lake Erie or the lower sections of some tributaries during May or June, you may hear an inexplicable sound emanating from these waters. The location of the sound is difficult to pinpoint, and the phenomenon has been described by one biologist as “a motorcycle race in full swing several miles away, with increasing and falling volumes as if the wind varied in its strength to carry the sound.”

You have just experienced the spawning season drumming of the Freshwater Drum, *Aplodinotus grunniens*. Nobody is certain whether this drumming behavior is performed to attract mates (only males elicit it), or perhaps for the sheer joy that breeding season has arrived. The sound is produced by muscles and tendons vibrating against the swim bladder.

This fish is a member of the family Sciaenidae, which claims more than 200 species. Despite this largeness of varieties, the Freshwater Drum is the sole occupant of fresh waters in North America, marooned far from its coastal relatives. It belongs in a family well known to saltwater anglers that includes the black and red drums, kingfishes, seatrouts, Atlantic Croaker, Spot, and Weakfish.

In Pennsylvania, the Freshwater Drum occurs in Lake Erie and the Ohio River and its major tributaries. Although these fish range all the way upriver in the Allegheny River to the base of Kinzua Dam, Freshwater Drums are far more common in the lock-and-dam section of the system. These fish prefer sluggish open waters with a muddy bottom and can tolerate considerable turbidity.

The Freshwater Drum is deep-bodied and strongly arched below the first dorsal fin. It has the horizontal mouth of a bottom feeder, and there are rows of fine teeth on both jaws. It has a covering of heavy scales that make it unappealing to most predators and is even avoided by the Sea Lamprey that has infested the Great Lakes. The back and head are olive-brown to gray, the sides are a flashy silver, and the ventral region is whitish. Adult Freshwater Drum are generally 10- to 20-inches

long, although specimens nearly 3-feet long have been reported from the Ohio River.

Freshwater Drum may spawn from June through early August in Lake Erie. In Pennsylvania's western rivers, breeding occurs during May and June at water temperatures of 65- to 72-degrees F. Female drum are prolific egg producers. In Lake Erie, counts of the ova of 20 larger individuals averaged 127,000 eggs each, and a range of 43,000 to ½ million eggs have been documented. Males usually mature at 2 to 4 years, with females one year behind.

Freshwater Drum are well suited to a diet of hard foods. Powerful pharyngeal jaws armed with molar-like grinding surfaces crush mollusks and snails and spew out the shell fragments. Some ichthyologists felt that this adaptation made drum feeding specialists, but recent studies make it clear that drum enjoy a broad diet that also includes crayfish, aquatic insects, small crustaceans, and fish.

Freshwater Drum provide an important service to a number of species of freshwater mussels. Drum serve as hosts to glochidia, a parasitic stage in which the larvae bivalves develop while attached to the fish's gills.

Drum are gamey on the hook. Although these bottom dwellers are often taken incidentally by bait anglers after other species, a growing number of anglers have found the Freshwater Drum, like its popular marine relatives, a worthy target. Popular baits include worms, crayfish, minnows, and cut bait. The drum bite seems to be the greatest, by far, during the summer months. Anglers have the best chance of landing a whopper in the “Three Rivers” system. The Pennsylvania state record is a 19-pound, 14-ounce fish caught in the Monongahela River in 1994. The world record is a 54-pound, 8-ounce drum from Tennessee's Nickajack Lake, caught in 1972.

Those who are fortunate enough to land a drum may hear it utter another sound—a bullfrog-like grunt. The purpose of this utterance, if there is one, is unknown.

Some report drum flesh to be excellent; others not so much. Smaller fish are tastier, with flaky white flesh that is low in oil. Freshwater Drum are reported to be excellent when the meat is smoked. ☐

Keeping Fishing Interesting for Kids



by John Allen

photos by the author

As an angler with kids, we all yearn for the first time our kids ask that magical question, “Can we go fishing?” You load up enough gear and food to realistically last two meals, because you have thought about this day for years. You pick the perfect spot and make sure you get there at the best time of day. This is going to be everything you have waited for and then some. Twenty minutes into fishing, the fish are not quite cooperating, and the question that you did not plan for arrives. “Can we go home now?” Completely flabbergasted, you plead for a few more minutes to get the fish to cooperate. No matter what you do, you know the tears and temper tantrums are not far behind. It does not matter how many times you say, “We just got here;” you are not changing their minds. If you have ever fished with kids, the day will come no matter how much you try to avoid it. As I now have two kids fishing with me most times, I have learned I need to be ready for anything. If that means pulling the plug and doing something else 20 minutes in, then that is what we are going to do. Keeping things interesting can be challenging, but over the course of countless outings in 5 years, I feel like I finally have a successful formula.



Give kids plenty of room for casting.

Timing

I learned early on to time my outings properly. First lesson is to not get too close to nap time, mealtime, or even too early in the morning. I know you want to be streamside by 8:00 a.m. on the opening day of trout season, but your kids may not. Always pay attention to the weather. If it is going to be 40 degrees F in the morning, but 60 degrees F in the afternoon, go with the warmer weather. Yes, the fishing will not be as good, but you will create a much better experience.

I have found creating a routine around our outings to be successful. When we go fishing in the morning, we

always grab donuts for breakfast, and we will eat them at the fishing spot. In taking breakfast streamside, it gives you a little extra time to figure out the fish, while keeping the child a bit distracted. It also creates a fun, unique experience for your kids.

Location

Not every spot you fish is as child-friendly as you may think. Nothing will frustrate a child more than getting consistently stuck in a tree or falling in the creek, because you did not think the creek crossing would be that difficult. After going fishing with kids a few times, you will look at places in a different light. Give yourself plenty of space to work. You may be able to cast inside of a 1-foot window, but they need as much open area as possible.

In addition, when the impending “I’m bored” shows up, you need to be ready to do something else, even if it is just taking a short break. I now choose fishing spots based on what other activities can be done at that location. Whether it be a playground, frog pond, hiking trail, or even a patch of ripe wild blueberries, having a back-up plan can quickly end most possible meltdowns. Even this past year during a slow fishing outing, we stumbled upon the periodical cicada emergence. My bug-loving kids were just as happy to study these unique insects as they were sitting streamside waiting for that first bite. We did not catch a single fish that day, but they often talk about how much fun they had. There are plenty of times when your back-up plan will be more successful than the actual fishing.

Be prepared

Remember that you are fishing with kids. You may think fishing for 4 hours is fun, but they will not. Always



While the fishing was slow, the entertainment was not.

plan for a short outing and hope for more. I have found an hour to be about the limit, even on days when we are catching one fish after another. Anything beyond an hour is bonus time in my eyes. I have also learned that window can be much shorter in the right conditions. It is those days where selecting a dual-purpose location is clutch. When things start to break down, the ability to be able to pull the plug quickly and divert their attention to something else is important for not making fishing a negative experience.

So, while fishing with my kids is fun, it is also a much different experience than I ever could have expected. It has also opened my eyes to many of the little things that I do not pay much attention to while fishing by myself. Half the time they just want to cast, reel, and spend time with you. If they catch something, it is a plus. It is a much different mindset from the “do not get skunked” mentality we have as adults. Regardless of the fishing, I always ask my kids what they enjoyed the most. No matter the answer, I always know that we are having fun and that shines through when I get asked that magical question all over again. “Can we go fishing?” ☑



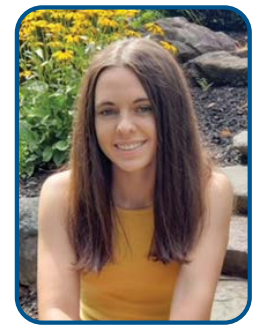
The author and his daughter having fun kayaking to their fishing spot.

GOVERNOR'S YOUTH COUNCIL for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation

by Riley Robbins

I recently stated that my friends are not as involved in the outdoors because of being on their phones or online. While I stand by this statement, what I neglected to say was that I am guilty of it as well. The internet, including social media, has become increasingly popular and now appears to be the go-to source of entertainment and communication for my generation. But, we are missing out. The beauty of Pennsylvania and all of the natural resources it offers lies just outside of our doors and beyond our phones. That said, I am fortunate in the respect that I have been provided the opportunities to experience the outdoors of Pennsylvania. I am aware that others may not have had the same opportunities. I hope to take an active role in helping change that. My name is Riley Robbins, and I am one of the newest members of the Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation. My hope is that the council will serve as the catalyst for the change I hope to see.

Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation is a platform for the next generation of Pennsylvania's hunters and anglers to communicate their ideas and contribute their perspectives and recommendations regarding conservation and youth engagement to the Governor. It consists of 20 individuals, ages 14 to 18, from across the Commonwealth. The goal is to provide energetic, varied, and intelligent input on opportunities to engage future generations in the preservation of our natural resources and our hunting and fishing heritage.



photos-courtesy of Riley Robbins

Riley Robbins

"By teaching and motivating others to take action, we are doing our part in helping to conserve and protect the natural places and animals we all love," said Elizabeth Bruner, Indiana County, who chairs the council. Bruner has been a member for 2 years. Her work with the council includes previous projects with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). "The Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation has worked in conjunction with the PFBC to create public service announcements that talk about cold water safety and wearing your life jacket," said Bruner.

Bruner is not the only member who is enthusiastic about the work the Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation is doing. "During the pandemic, it was difficult for us to meet in person. This coming year, the Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation is looking forward to meeting in person once again," said Brenden Leahy, Bucks County, who serves as vice president.



Some of the members of the Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation.

Recently, the Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation transitioned to new leadership. Derek Eberly serves as the new director. Previously, Eberly was the Pennsylvania Field Representative for the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, where he worked alongside other hunting and fishing groups across Pennsylvania to support conservation.

The Governor's Youth Council for Hunting, Fishing, and Conservation is thrilled to continue to increase the opportunities for Pennsylvania's youth hunters and anglers to share their thoughts on fish and wildlife conservation. If you are interested in being a candidate for the Council, please contact Derek Eberly at deeberly@pa.gov to learn more about what experiences are offered. ☐

PLAY



Winter
2022

Pennsylvania • League • of • Angling • Youth

Ice Fishing—A Winter Adventure for Everyone!

What are your first thoughts when you think of winter? Do you think of snow days, sledding, ice skating, and hot cocoa?

Ice fishing is another fun activity to try in the winter. Ice fishing is for all ages and experience levels.

Get ready for a new wintertime adventure. In this *PLAY* issue, you will learn about who ice fishes, how to get started, ice fishing gear, where to go ice fishing, and finding fish.



Vocabulary *(Watch for these words!)*

- **Ice auger** - hand-powered, battery-powered, or gasoline-powered tool used to drill holes in ice
- **Ice awls** - handheld picks used to pull yourself onto the ice if you fall into the water
- **Ice crampons** - metal plates or flexible straps with spikes placed on boots to prevent slipping
- **Mentor** - person who provides advice, guidance, or inspiration to another person
- **Spud bar** - steel bar with a chisel on one end used to check ice conditions
- **Tip-ups** - fishing devices that send up a signal flag after fish bite
- **Aquatic macroinvertebrates** - animals that live in water, lack backbones, and are large enough to be seen with your eyes
- **Ectotherms** - also known as cold-blooded animals, body temperature varies with environment
- **Endotherms** - also known as warm-blooded animals, metabolism used to maintain constant body temperature

Getting Started—Join the Community

Find A Mentor

Ice fishing may be intimidating. The equipment is different and safety is important. Find an experienced family member or friend to be your **mentor**. Or, if you already ice fish, consider becoming a mentor.

Get “Social-iced”

Many ice anglers are welcoming and willing to share equipment, tips, tricks, stories, and even food. The priority is not always the fish you catch, although it is a bonus. It is this social aspect that lures many anglers back to the ice.

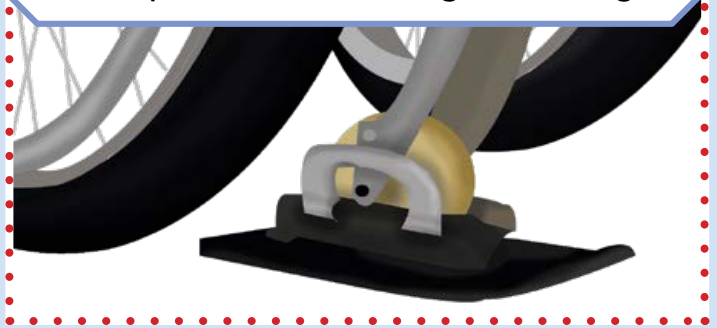
Ice Fishing is for Everyone

Ice fishing is challenging because of slippery conditions or thin ice. The advantages of ice fishing include no wading, water currents, or rocks to walk over. Instead, there is a flat path to key fish habitat. Ice also makes it easy to transport fishing gear with a sled.

Ice fishing equipment and technology is always changing. There are accessories and specialized equipment to make it accessible to everyone.



Ski attachments make it easier for anglers who require wheelchairs to go ice fishing.



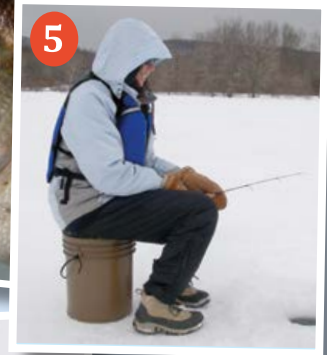
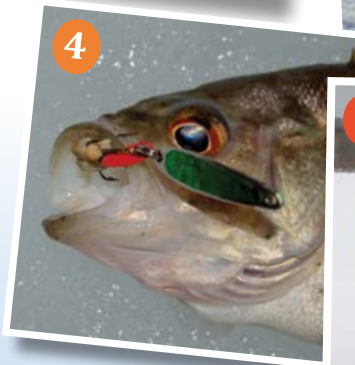
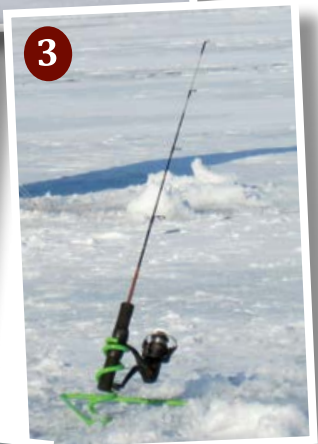
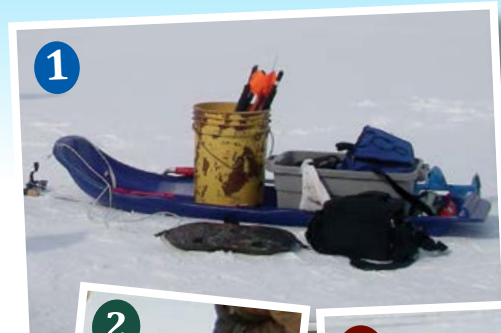
Getting Started—Ice Fishing Equipment

Ice fishing does not have to be complicated or expensive. Keep it simple. Here is what you need to get started.

- 1 **Sled** - A sled easily transports gear.
- 2 **Ice auger** - A hand-powered **ice auger** is inexpensive and keeps you warm when you use it. Keep the blades sharp and cover it when not in use.

.....
: **SAFETY NOTE:** When not using
: your ice auger, make sure the guard is
: covering the blades to keep you safe
: and your blades sharp.
:

- 3 **Ice fishing rod and reel** - Stick with a short, light, or medium-action rod and reel ice fishing combo to target a variety of fish.
- 4 **Tackle** - Small spoons and jigs are simple and work great. Try different sizes and colors. Check with local bait shops to see what works best.
- 5 **Seat** - A 5-gallon bucket makes a great seat. It also works well for storage of fishing gear, bait, and snacks.
- 6 **Skimmer** - An ice skimmer or kitchen strainer removes slush from the fishing hole.
- 7 **Cell phone** - Bring a cell phone to photograph ice fishing adventures and make calls in an emergency. Protect your phone with a waterproof case and lanyard.



Learn more about basic ice fishing: www.youtube.com/watch?v=WocXAn31SHA&t=1s

Creature Comforts—Ice Fishing

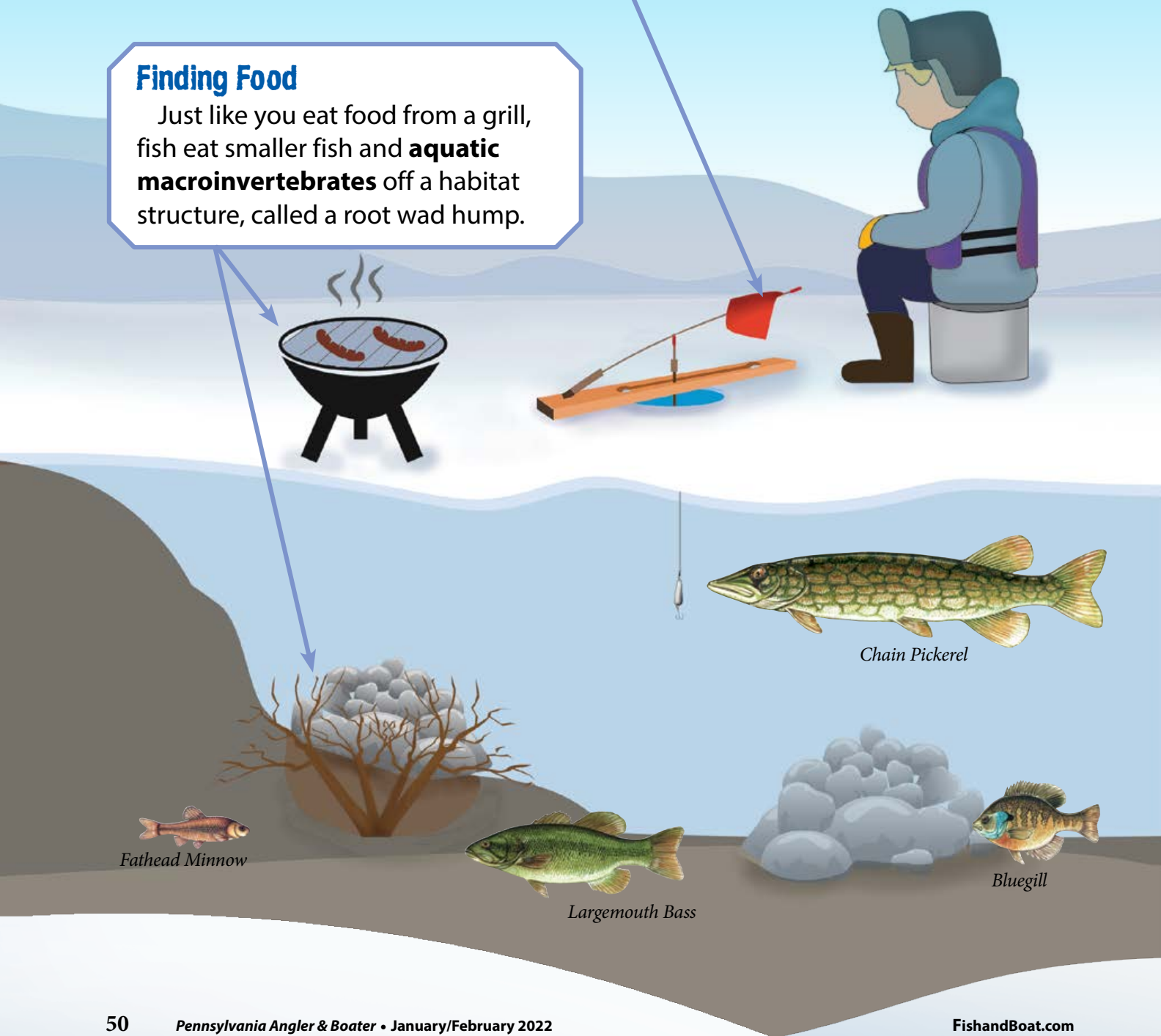
Discover what humans and fish need to survive and thrive in winter.

Catching A Bite

Anglers use tools such as **tip-ups** to catch their dinner. A fish uses adaptations to catch its meals. To read the Angler's Notebook: Fish Senses series, visit the Activities & Education Portal at **FishandBoat.com** and click on "PA Fishes." Then, scroll down to "Additional Resources."

Finding Food

Just like you eat food from a grill, fish eat smaller fish and **aquatic macroinvertebrates** off a habitat structure, called a root wad hump.



Climate

Humans are **endotherms** and dress in warm clothes or use a heater to stay warm. Fish are **ectotherms**. Fish have physical or behavioral adaptations to survive in cold water. Read *PLAY*—"Where Do They Go In Winter?" to learn more at **FishandBoat.com**.



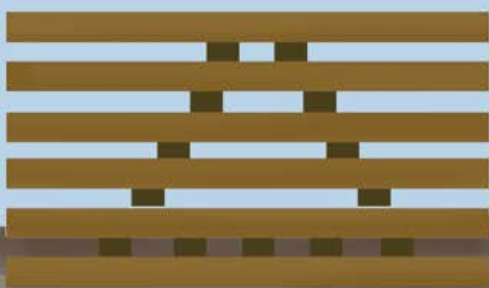
Use the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's mobile app at **<https://.pfbc.pa.gov/mobile.htm>** to download maps of lakes you want to fish. These maps provide GPS locations of habitat structures placed throughout the lake.



Shelter

Ice fishing shelters offer protection for anglers, just like porcupine crib habitat structures provide shelter for fish. These structures also provide great fishing opportunities.

SAFETY NOTE: Shelters should be vented when running a propane heater. A carbon monoxide detector may alarm you of unsafe conditions.



White Crappies

Ice Fishing Safety

Ice fishing has potential hazards. You need to know about ice safety, ice thickness, and safety equipment before going ice fishing. Check out this ice safety video for more information: www.youtube.com/watch?v=RONLQZ8kDxs&t=1s.

Black Ice and White Ice—What's the Difference?

Black/clear ice freezes at a uniform rate and is stronger than "white ice."

White/milky ice is slushy, has less strength, and is formed by melting snow and ice.

Areas to Avoid

Ice is not the same thickness across a lake or pond. Stumps, docks, and rocks absorb the sun's heat and can melt ice. For information on ice thickness, visit:

www.fishandboat.com/Fish/Fishing/Documents/ice_thickness.pdf.



Safety Equipment Checklist

- Spud Bar/Ice Chisel
- Ice Crampons
- Ice Awls

- Float Coat or Life Jacket
- Throw bag or rope



Throw bag

What to Wear—Layer Up

Layering clothes allows for adjustments when weather changes. Avoid cotton. Cotton is a poor insulator and holds moisture, making you colder.

A basic layering system consists of:

- Base Layer - Polyester or merino wool thermal underwear and wool socks
- Mid Layer - Fleece or wool shirt and pants

- Outer Layer - Wind and waterproof pants
 - Ice fishing bibs and coats with built in flotation are great for added warmth and safety
- Feet - Insulated, waterproof, and properly-fitted boots
- Hands - Neoprene or waterproof, nylon gloves or mittens

Ice Fishing Activity!

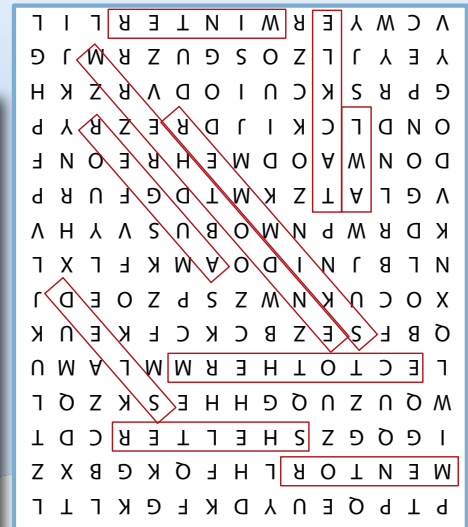
Find these ice fishing words in the word search.

P T P Q E U Y D K F G K L T L
M E N T O R L H F Q K G B X Z
I G Q G Z S H E L T E R C D T
W Q U Z U Q G H H E S K Z Q L
L E C T O T H E R M M L A M U
Q B F S E Z B C K C F K E U K
X O C U K N W Z S P Z O E D J
N L B J N I D O A M K F L X L
K D R W P N M O B U S V Y H V
V G L A T Z K M T D G F U R P
D O N W A O D M E H R E O N F
O N D L C K I J D R E Z R Y P
G P R S K C U I O D V R Z K H
Y E Y J L Z O S G U Z R M J G
V C W Y E R W I N T E R L I L

Word List

MENTOR
AUGER
SHELTER
TACKLE
SLED
SKIMMER
AWL
ECTOTHERM
ENDOTHERM
WINTER

Produced by: the Bureau of Outreach,
Education, and Marketing
Written by: Cody Whipple
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and Ted Walke
Photos: Andrea Feeney, Chris Calhoun,
PFBC archives, and Spring Gearhart
© Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission



Answer Key



Highlights from the

2022 Boating Regulations Recap *Information All Boaters Must Know*

This article reviews key regulatory and safety information that boaters must know before venturing out on the water. The annual Boating Regulations Recap brochure also highlights new regulations that were recently approved by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). The Boating Regulations Recap paired with the *2022 Pennsylvania Fishing Summary/Boating Handbook* provides boaters with comprehensive safety information to use when operating watercraft on Pennsylvania waterways.

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

- A United States Coast Guard-approved wearable life jacket is required for each person on board. In addition, one throwable device is required on boats 16 feet in length or longer.
- Children 12 years of age and younger must wear an approved life jacket on Commonwealth waters when underway on any boat 20 feet or less in length and in all canoes and kayaks.
- All water skiers and anyone towed behind vessels, personal watercraft operators and passengers, and sailboarders (windsurfers) must wear a life jacket. Inflatable life jackets are not acceptable for these activities.
- Wearable life jackets must be “readily accessible”, which means that they are out in the open ready to wear or they are stowed where they can be easily reached. Throwable devices must be “immediately available” or within arm’s reach. A life jacket that is stored in a protective covering or sealed in its original packaging is not readily accessible or immediately available.

Mandatory cold weather life jacket wear

From November 1 through April 30, boaters are required by law to wear life jackets on board boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe, kayak, or paddleboard. This regulation is intended to protect boaters from dangers of cold water shock if they fall into the water. Recreational boating fatalities that occur in Pennsylvania from November through April are primarily due to the effects of cold water immersion. When water temperatures are less than 70 degrees F, cold water shock is a major factor in boating fatalities. Victims who wear a life jacket when exposed to cold water have potentially life-saving advantages such as insulation from the cold,

Mandatory boating education

HP OF MOTOR	RESTRICTIONS OF USE
PWC	All PWC (personal watercraft) operators, regardless of age, must have a Boating Safety Education Certificate. Persons 11 years of age or younger may NOT operate. Persons 12 through 15 years of age may NOT operate with any passengers on board 15 years of age or younger or rent a PWC.
0-25hp	None
Greater than 25hp	Persons 11 years of age or younger may NOT operate. Persons born on or after January 1, 1982, may not operate unless they have obtained and have in possession a Boating Safety Education Certificate.

buoyancy for victims who are unable to tread water, and reduced risk of aspiration of water. In an effort to reduce the number of fatalities related to cold water immersion, the PFBC has amended regulations to require life jackets to be worn on small and unstable boats during the period most noted for cold temperatures.

Boating accidents

Boating accidents must be reported in writing by the boat operator or owner to the PFBC when:

- A person dies or disappears.
- A person is injured and requires advanced medical treatment beyond first aid.
- Damage to the boat and other property totals more than \$2,000, or there is a complete loss of the vessel.

Boating Accident Report Forms (PFBC 260) are available on the Commission's website. Reports must be sent to: Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Bureau of Boating, P.O. Box 67000, Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000.

Water-skiing and similar activities

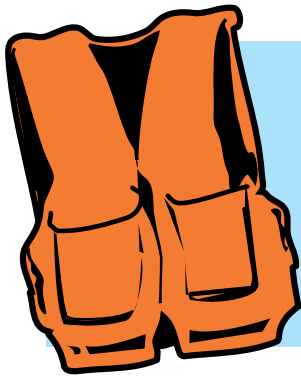
- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat at any speed with a person or persons sitting, riding, or hanging on a swim platform (teak surfing) or swim ladder attached to the motorboat, except when launching, retrieving, docking, or anchoring the motorboat.
- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat at any speed when towing a person on water skis or other devices using a tow rope of 20 feet or less.
- Wake surfing is excluded from the 20-foot tow rope requirement.
- Boats engaged in the activity of wake surfing are limited to slow, no-wake speed when within 200 feet of the shoreline, docks, launch ramps, swimmers or downed skiers, persons wading in the water, anchored, moored or drifting boats, and other marked areas.
- It is unlawful to operate a motorboat propelled by an outboard motor, inboard/outboard motor, or water jet while a person is wake surfing in or on the wake of the motorboat, **unless the propulsion system is specifically designed by the manufacturer for that activity.**
- Skiing is illegal between sunset and sunrise.
- In addition to the operator, a competent observer must be in the boat in a position to observe the towed person.
- Conventional water-ski tow ropes may not exceed a length of 80 feet.

Specially regulated waters

Additional regulations such as speed limit and slow, no-wake areas affect boaters on specific waterways. Boaters should read all regulations posted on the bulletin boards at access areas. Know the waters you plan to boat before you go.

By understanding boating regulations and safety information, you will be prepared while on the water. Visit FishandBoat.com. ☐

COLD WATER KILLS!



WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET!

Boaters are **required by law to wear a life jacket** while underway or at anchor on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe, kayak, or paddleboard during the cold weather months from **November 1 through April 30.**

Life jackets save lives year-round!
The Commission strongly encourages all boaters to wear their life jackets at all times on the water.



FishandBoat.com

Streambed Reconstruction, Sediment Reduction Project Underway at Commission Headquarters

Travelers along Elmerton Avenue, Dauphin County, may have recently noticed a large construction project happening on the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) property between the PFBC Headquarters and Veterans Park.

Crews with Resource Environmental Solutions (RES) are reconstructing the streambed of a heavily eroded stream, which eventually runs into Asylum Run, Paxton Creek, and the Susquehanna River. Due to increased development and excessive storm water runoff over several decades, the streambed has eroded to unnatural conditions that allow hundreds of thousands of pounds of sediment to flow downstream every year. Crews will be working to decrease

the height of the streambanks and widen the floodplain to allow water to flow cleaner and more naturally, reducing the amount of sediment that is carried downstream during heavy rain events. Native plants will be added to stabilize the streambanks, and the improved conditions will also enhance wildlife habitat. The project is expected to be complete in early 2022.

While the improvements are occurring mostly on the PFBC property, the project is funded by Susquehanna Township, Lower Paxton Township, and the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. It benefits local and state storm water management programs.



photos-Mike Parker

Streambed reconstruction includes decreasing the height of several streambanks and widening the floodplain to allow water to flow cleaner and more naturally, reducing the amount of sediment that is carried downstream during heavy rain events.

Commission Breaks Ground on Lower Woods Pond Rehabilitation Project

On Tuesday, November 23, 2021, Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Executive Director Tim Schaeffer was joined by PFBC District 7 Commissioner William J. Gibney, Pennsylvania Senator Lisa Baker, Pennsylvania State Representative Jonathan Fritz, and others to mark the beginning of construction on the long-awaited dam rehabilitation project at Lower Woods Pond, Wayne County.

The event featured a ceremonial groundbreaking. The contractor, Leeward Construction, Inc., will begin staging heavy equipment for construction at the worksite. Once underway, the \$2.6-million project will include the reconstruction of three dams and a spillway. Construction is expected to last approximately a year. Following construction, the 91-acre lake will take about 6 months to fully refill and will be ready to enjoy by the end of 2023.

While boaters will be able to enjoy the pond as soon as it refills, anglers will have to be more patient. When the pond is refilled, a multi-year restocking plan will begin to reestablish a

world-class fishery, which will include Largemouth Bass and Walleye. Lower Woods Pond was dewatered in 2012 following the discovery of a leak in the aging dam structures, which presented a safety hazard.



photos-Mike Parker

Pictured from left to right are Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Commissioner William Gibney; Gary Linde, Leeward Construction, Inc.; Representative Jonathan Fritz; Senator Lisa Baker; and PFBC Executive Director Tim Schaeffer.

New State Record Walleye

The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) announced a new state-record Walleye.

On the evening of October 28, 2021, angler Richard Nicholson, Fayette County, was fishing from the bank of the Youghiogheny River with his son. The father and son both live nearby and frequent the section of the river near the bridge in sight of the Connellsville Police Department.

Nicholson was targeting Walleyes using a spinning reel equipped with 6-pound-test line and a live Creek Chub attached to a #2 hook, weighted down with BB-size split shot weights and a slip sinker.

"We were fishing the bottom along the edge of a sandbar, just having a nice time being on the river," said Nicholson. "Conditions were good, and we were catching fish right away. Before we knew it, we landed a big Sauger

and then a 27-inch Walleye that weighed about 9 pounds. It turned out it was only the start of the best day ever."

Nicholson continued to fish the same hole, when at around 6:45 p.m., he recalled his son yelling to alert him that something was tugging hard on his fishing line.

"I looked over, and the rod had really taken a bend, so I grabbed it and just started reeling," said Nicholson. "I knew right away it was something big, and I thought maybe it was a musky. It fought me for about 25 minutes before I got it up on the bank, and my son got it in the net, and we could see it was a Walleye. It was so big that it actually broke the net."

Larger than any previous catches that evening, the fish measured 34 inches, with a girth of 21.5 inches. To see a photo of the catch, turn to page 29.

Single Statewide Opening Day of Trout Season Beginning in 2022

During its October Commission meeting, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) established a single, statewide Opening Day of Trout Season that will occur annually on the first Saturday in April beginning in 2022.

Under this change, which will result in a longer regular season for trout for most anglers, the practice of holding a separate regional opening day for Pennsylvania's 18 southeastern counties will no longer occur. A single, statewide Mentored Youth Trout Day will now occur one week prior to the regular statewide opening day.

Based on this announcement, anglers should plan around the following dates for the 2022 trout season:

- Saturday, March 26, 2022 – Statewide Mentored Youth Trout Day
- Saturday, April 2, 2022 – Statewide Opening Day of Trout Season

In selecting the first Saturday in April as the proposed permanent date for the statewide opening of trout season, the PFBC considered several factors such as weather, water temperature, stocking and enforcement logistics, and social impacts.

As a result of the change to the opening day of trout season, several regulations within the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Code (Title 58) that reference opening day dates required revisions to reflect the change, simplify language, and provide consistency within the regulations.

The Board approved changes to all language within regulations referencing the opening day of trout, so that "first Saturday in April" or "opening day of the regular season for trout," is clearly stated where applicable. These amendments will go into effect January 1, 2022.

In addition to amending 58 Pa. Code § 69.12a (Special Regulations Applicable to Lake Erie Tributary Streams) related to the opening day of trout season, the Board also approved an amendment to 58 Pa. Code § 69.12 (Seasons, Sizes, and Creel Limits—Lake Erie, Lake Erie Tributaries and Presque Isle Bay

Including Peninsula Waters) that would modify the start of the opening day of trout season as well as daily creel and minimum size limits for both Rainbow Trout (steelhead) and Lake Trout. Currently, the daily creel and size limits for trout during the regular season of trout (8:00 a.m. on the opening day of trout season through Labor Day) are five trout per day (combined species), only two of which may be Lake Trout, greater than or equal 9 inches in length. Under the amendment, the daily limit will remain at five trout during this period, only two of the fish may be a Lake Trout, and the minimum size limit would be increased to 15 inches for Rainbow Trout and Lake Trout. It should be noted that amending the daily creel limit and minimum size of Rainbow Trout and the minimum size limit for Lake Trout will not impact the creel or size limit for Brown Trout. Then, during the extended season for trout (the day after Labor Day until 12:01 a.m. to the Friday before the opening day of trout), the daily creel limit would be reduced to three trout, only two of which may be a Lake Trout, and the minimum size limit for all trout and salmon is 15 inches. The amendments will go into effect January 1, 2022.

The Board voted to approve a Trout Slot Limit program. Given the success of an experimental slot limit regulation program in place since 2014 that resulted in the presence of larger wild Brown Trout on Penns Creek, Section 03, located in Centre and Mifflin counties, the PFBC recognizes potential opportunities to utilize an official regulation of this type at other suitable wild trout waters. The Trout Slot Limit program will have two subprograms under the PFBC's Special Fishing Regulations (58 Pa. Code § 65): All-Tackle Trout Slot Limit and Artificial Lures Only Trout Slot Limit. These subprograms will provide the PFBC with the ability to select the most appropriate tackle option to achieve biological and social objectives for each water considered for inclusion in the program and provide an opportunity to evaluate the effects of different terminal tackle types. The new regulation will go into effect upon publication of a second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

Recognizing an additional opportunity to simplify and provide consistency throughout fishing regulations, Commissioners adopted several amendments to black bass regulations (i.e., Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, and Spotted Bass). Commonwealth Inland Waters regulations require catch and immediate release of black bass from 12:01 a.m. the first Saturday after April 11 to 12:01 a.m. the first Saturday after June 11. Under the amendment, all references to the "first Saturday after April 11" will be changed to the "second Saturday in April," and references to the "first Saturday after June 11" will be changed to the "second Saturday in June." The amendments will go into effect January 1, 2022.

The Board voted to table a proposal to amend bowfishing regulations until further discussion can occur. While the use of long bows, crossbows, spears, and gigs used in bowfishing is already regulated within the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Code (58 Pa. Code §63.8), a proposal presented to Commissioners addressed an increasing number of complaints to PFBC law enforcement regarding the intense lighting and generator noise that can be created by those participating in bowfishing. The proposed amendment aimed to clarify that bowfishing is prohibited on any special regulation trout waters, would make it unlawful to shine any artificial light from a watercraft onto any building or other watercraft, and would limit noise from generators used aboard a boat while bowfishing to no more than 90 dB(a). The Board indicated that the proposed amendment would be revisited during a meeting of the Law Enforcement Committee.

The Board voted to add Leaser Lake, Lehigh County, to the Big Bass (58 Pa. Code § 65.9), Panfish Enhancement (58 Pa. Code § 65.11), and Stocked Trout Waters Open to Year-round Fishing (58 Pa. Code § 65.19) programs. Through this action, Leaser Lake will be removed from Miscellaneous Special Regulations, which allowed for the harvest of trout under Commonwealth Inland Waters fishing regulations but allowed only catch-and-release fishing for all other fish species. Commission biologists have determined through surveys conducted from 2016-2020 that sportfish populations, including black bass and panfish, within the lake have improved to levels that can now sustain limited harvest. These designations will go into effect January 1, 2022.

The Board voted to add Opossum Lake, Cumberland County, and Lake Perez, Huntingdon County, to the Stocked Trout Waters Open to Year-round Fishing program (58 Pa. Code § 65.19). This designation would allow for trout fishing on a catch-and-release basis as well as fishing for resident warmwater and coolwater species during the current closed period. Waters with this designation are managed with Commonwealth Inland Waters regulations for the remainder of the year. These designations will go into effect January 1, 2022.

Commissioners voted to remove Somerset Lake, Somerset County, from the Big Bass Program. The Commission plans to initiate stocking the lake beginning in late fall 2021, or as soon as refilling conditions allow, with fingerling plants of select fish species to establish a high-quality, warmwater and coolwater fishery. At the April 2021 quarterly Commission meeting, the Commission approved the addition of Somerset Lake to the Catch and Release Lakes program (58 Pa. Code § 65.17), effective January 1, 2022, to allow for the most rapid development of a balanced warmwater and coolwater fish community. Once the

fish populations can sustain limited harvest, the lake will be recommended for removal from the Catch and Release Lakes program and inclusion in one or more of the Commission's existing warmwater regulation programs that accommodate appropriate fish harvest while maintaining high-quality recreational fishing opportunities. To facilitate transition of Somerset Lake to temporary management under the Catch and Release Lakes program while the fish community develops, this water must be removed from the Big Bass program. If adopted, the designation will go into effect upon publication of the second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

The Board voted to remove Raccoon Creek State Park Upper Pond (Group Camping Area Lake), Beaver County, from the Catch and Release Lakes program. This reservoir will be completely dewatered in early winter 2022 in preparation for a floodplain restoration project planned for 2022. The lake is currently exempt from all seasons, sizes, and creel limits for all fish species to encourage anglers to harvest fish in advance of the pending complete and permanent drawdown of the impoundment. The designation will go into effect upon publication of the second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*.

The Board approved the addition of nine stream sections to the list of Class A wild trout streams. The Board also approved the addition of five new waters to the Commission's list of wild trout streams, revised the section limits of one water currently listed, and amended the name of one water currently listed. These additions, revisions, and amendments will go into effect upon the publication of a second notice in the *Pennsylvania Bulletin*. A list of waters proposed for wild trout stream and Class A Wild Trout Stream designation can be found on the PFBC's website.

The Board voted to amend boating regulations at Blue Marsh Lake, Berks County. Under the amendment, regulations will be clarified to reduce confusion over the use of water ski devices. Currently, the regulation states that boaters may not tow more than one "water-skier." The proposed change, requested by the United States Army Corps of Engineers, would replace the term "water-skier" with "water ski device," which encompasses not only conventional water skis but also aquaplanes, kneeboards, inner tubes, inflatable hot dogs, air mattresses, parasails, and similar devices. This proposed change would continue to limit boats from towing more than one device but permit devices that are designed to carry more than one person. The number of people being towed on a device is limited to the boat's capacity. This amendment will go into effect on January 1, 2022.

Commissioners adopted an amendment to boating regulations at Shenango River Lake, Mercer County. Recently, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, which manages the lake, revised its local regulations to allow for the use of motors up to 20 horsepower, an increase from the previous 10 horsepower limit, in the area west of Penn Central Railroad (Leavittsburg) causeway to the Ohio line. The United States Army Corps of Engineers requested that the PFBC make the same change to Title 58, so Waterways Conservation Officers can continue to assist in boating enforcement. The amendment will go into effect January 1, 2022.

The Board authorized the acquisition of a 53-acre property in Middlesex Township, Butler County. The property is located

adjacent to and at the head of the PFBC's Glade Run Lake property and will help protect the quality of the water flowing into the lake. The Glade Run Lake Conservancy and Allegheny Land Trust have entered into an agreement to purchase the property from Jones Estates Group, LLC, for \$344,500, contingent upon due diligence and funding requirements. Upon acquisition of the property, the Trust plans to donate the property to the PFBC.

Commissioners authorized the leasing of the PFBC's Lake Nessmuk property to the Borough of Wellsboro and the

Wellsboro Borough Municipal Authority. The current lease agreement between the PFBC and the Borough and Municipal Authority expires March 3, 2022, and the parties wish to enter into a new 25-year lease agreement consistent with the original lease. The Borough and Municipal Authority are and will continue to be responsible for the routine maintenance, operation, repair, and supervision of the lease area. Under the agreement, the site will remain open for public fishing and boating free of charge, and fishing and boating will take precedence over all other recreational activities.

BUY A 2022 FISHING LICENSE BUTTON



BUTTON SHOWN AT ACTUAL SIZE

GET HOOKED ON COLLECTING VINTAGE FISHING LICENSE BUTTONS



ACTUAL SIZE 1 3/4"

www.PaVintageFishingButtons.com

HuntFish.PA.gov

Take Part in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST



Winning entries will appear in a feature article in a future issue of *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* and on the Commission's Facebook page. The contest will run from January 1, 2022 through August 31, 2022.

Entries must be e-mailed to sgearhart@pa.gov. The following information must be included in the e-mail.

- Entrant's Name
- Entrant's Address
- Entrant's Phone Number
- Entrant's E-mail
- Photo Description (location, county, species, etc.)
- Date of Photo





Adventure Awaits at the Activities & Education Portal

Have you heard about the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's (PFBC's) Activities & Education Portal (A&E Portal) yet? It is an expansive resource for anyone interested in aquatic resources and fishing and boating opportunities. The A&E Portal includes videos, activities,



printable documents, *Pennsylvania League of Angling Youth (PLAY)* newsletters, crafts, coloring pages, background information, and more. Topics include: Amphibians and Reptiles; Aquatic Habitat, Watersheds, and Pollution; Aquatic Macroinvertebrates; Boating and Water Safety; Fishing; Fly Fishing; Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, Kayak Fishing; Paddlesports; and PA Fishes.

We are now making *PLAY* educational materials more accessible to people with vision impairments by releasing audio versions of our most popular *PLAY* newsletters.

Looking for an educational package? Find one that you can use for an in-person or virtual Career Day, for example, on our PFBC Overview Page.

Whether you are a student or teacher participating in the Trout In the Classroom (TIC) program or Pennsylvania's Envirothon, you will find a plethora of valuable resources.

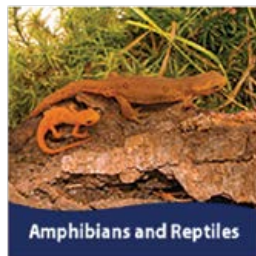
The A&E Portal includes an overview page.

We can even help with your Physical Education (PE) and Arts curriculums. Our staff can train you or your PE teachers to become Fishing Skills Instructors and Boating and Water Safety Awareness



Instructors. And, we provide educational videos that show you how to go fishing and boating. For art enthusiasts, we provide step-by-step instructions on how to draw a variety of fish species. Plus, we can show you how to tie basic flies for fly fishing.

Other videos offer free virtual field trips for anyone interested in aquatic conservation.



Amphibians and Reptiles



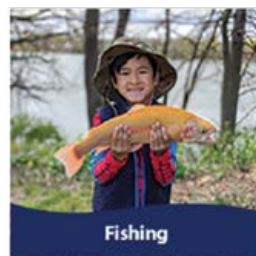
Aquatic Habitat, Watersheds, and Pollution



Aquatic Macroinvertebrates



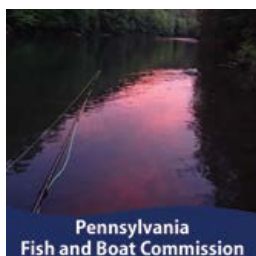
Boating and Water Safety



Fishing



Fly Fishing



Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission



Kayak Fishing



Paddlesports



PA Fishes

Poster is 17" x 22."

Books are 6" x 9."

Magazines are 8.25" x 10.88."



	Price	Quantity	Subtotal
A Set of: Coldwater Fishes, Coolwater/Warmwater Fishes, Migratory Fishes, Miscellaneous Fishes, Panfishes, Forage Fishes (6 posters)	\$13.99	_____	_____
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D Pennsylvania Amphibians & Reptiles Book (172 pages)	\$14.34	_____	_____
E Pennsylvania Fishes Book (172 pages)	\$14.34	_____	_____
F Denim Blue Hat with Blue Logo - non-taxable	\$18.56	_____	_____
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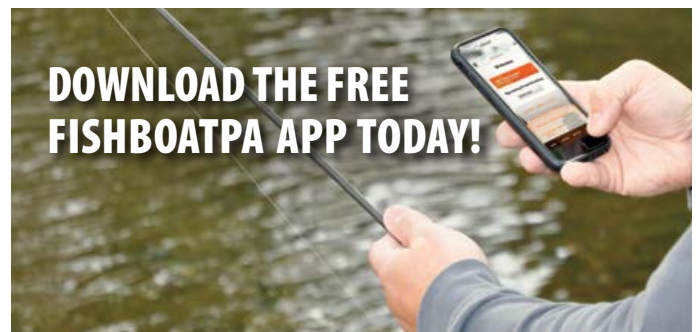
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For more products and to order fishing licenses and boat registration renewals, visit HuntFish.PA.gov.



Angler's Notebook

by Jerry Bush



A pair of polarized sunglasses are beneficial during sunny winter days because of the light reflected by snow. Using polarized lenses while fishing allows you to see fish and structure in the water. Polarized sunglasses also offer protection from harmful ultraviolet rays and unintended contact with objects that may occur during fishing.

Winter steelhead fishing on Lake Erie's tributaries often means encountering areas of flowing or stationary ice that prevents casting to desired water. Often, the only open water is found at harder to reach, mid-stream flows. The reach provided by a long rod is invaluable to stretch over the icy regions, so baits or flies may be dropped into the mid-stream flow. "High sticking" (rod raised high) and swinging offerings submerged in the current at a speed matching the flow usually provides the desired fishing action.

Now is the time to perform maintenance to fishing reels. If you have never done so, disassembly is usually limited to unscrewing a few screws, so a side cover may be removed. Inside, a few wearing parts may be observed (gears, levers, and sometimes springs) that enable the mechanism to work flawlessly when in good condition. These parts will last longer and perform better if kept clean and well lubricated. Performing this quick maintenance annually is adequate. Numerous dedicated

lubricants are available at most discount and sporting outlets that will serve the task well. Disassembly over an old, white cloth is helpful if you drop one of the small parts.

Avoid fishing alone during winter. Safety should always be a priority. This is not a time for solitude on the water. If your fishing buddies cannot accompany you, choose to fish locations where a moderate number of people are likely to be. You will want someone to notice if you slip into even shallow water. Anglers should keep extra clothes in their vehicle this time of year. If it becomes necessary, change into dry garments as quickly as possible.

If you are a hunter in possession of a portable, pop up game blind, you are also the proud owner of an ice-fishing shelter. Most game blinds are light, easy to transport, simple to put up, and quick to tear down at the end of the day. You will likely find the same list of positive points listed by the manufacturers promoting their dedicated, ice fishing shelters. Depending on the weight and ease to carry, a sled may be necessary to scoot the shelter across the ice, but most ice fishing anglers prefer using a sled to carry other items onto the ice.

Fishin' from the Kitchen

Italian Style Baked Pike

by Wayne Phillips

Baking pike fillets smothered in tomato sauce and covered in mozzarella cheese will make many happy diners.

Ingredients for four servings:

- 1 Tbsp. olive or canola oil
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 4 6-ounce boneless, skinless pike fillets
- 1 cup shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup tomato sauce
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Procedure

Coat the bottom of a baking dish with oil. Season the pike fillets with salt and black pepper. Place the fillets in the baking dish. Add oregano to the tomato sauce and spoon on top of the pike fillets. Sprinkle mozzarella cheese on top. Bake in a 350 degree F oven until the cheese has melted and the pike is cooked through, about 15 to 20 minutes.

Serve

Serve on a bed of penne or ziti that has been tossed with extra tomato sauce. Place cooked fillets on top of the pasta.

Tips

Be generous with the shredded mozzarella cheese. It gives the fish a gooey crust. If there is any extra tomato sauce and cheese in the baking dish, put it on the pasta before the baked fillets.

Use your favorite tomato-based pasta sauce, either homemade or store bought. Adding a bit of oregano to the sauce gives it a special taste. Many recipes suggest not using cheese with fish. Mozzarella cheese is mild, so it does not overpower the pike. Grate the mozzarella cheese, so it melts evenly. Use fresh mozzarella cheese for an extra tasty dish.



Photo-Wayne Phillips



VOLUNTARY PERMITS FEATURED PROJECTS: *Musky Program Improvements*

by Mike Parker

PFBC Communications Director

While Pennsylvania is widely referred to as a trout fishing destination because of its wealth of both wild and hatchery-stocked trout resources, the Keystone State is quickly gaining another nickname from a growing number of anglers seeking a larger type of gamefish.

Welcome to “Muskyvania.”

As more and more anglers find success in catching Muskellunge in medium and large-sized lakes and rivers across Pennsylvania, much of the credit for this emerging fishery belongs to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission’s musky program. While some natural reproduction of these fish occurs, most muskies caught in Pennsylvania waters are stocked fish that were raised from eggs and spent the first year-and-a-half at the Linesville State Fish Hatchery, Crawford County.

Muskellunge, which can grow to trophy sizes between 40- and 50-inches over a decade, are stocked as yearlings, measuring an average of 12- to 14-inches long. The PFBC stocks approximately 30,000 muskies into 70 total waterways, with about 35 lakes or river sections receiving a new batch of yearlings every other year. Instinctual predators, muskies prefer to hunt for meals, and a hatchery diet of pelletized fish food must be supplemented with live minnows, which are expensive to purchase.

A custom diet is just one example of the special processes required to raise healthy muskies. Delivery of the minnows to the growing muskies requires special feeders, and heaters are needed to maintain consistent water temperatures in tanks and raceways. Along with raising the current generation of muskies, Commission hatchery staff and biologists participate in field work to monitor the success of the stocking program and overall populations.

In 2020, the PFBC generated \$38,960 from the sale of Voluntary Musky Permits to supplement the funding



of these improvements and research efforts throughout the 2021 season:

Inline Water Heating System Linesville State Fish Hatchery

Investment: \$15,285

The addition of this water heater will allow the musky program to have a heated water system independent of other fish culture activities at the facility. As a result, muskies can be raised in ideal flows and temperatures to maximize growth and survival.

Snap Feeders for Musky Culture Linesville State Fish Hatchery

Investment: \$8,750

These 10-foot elongated feeders can distribute feed to all the muskies in a tank at the same time, reducing cannibalism, feed waste, and improving weight gain of fish early in the culture process. Five additional snap feeders will be purchased.

Minnows to Feed Musky Fingerlings Linesville State Fish Hatchery

Investment: \$5,000

Since Commission pond space for minnow production is limited, 1,000 pounds of minnows will be purchased to supplement musky hatchery diet.

Fingerlings to Re-establish Shawnee Lake Bedford County

Investment: \$4,225

Musky stocking at this 451-acre lake was discontinued in 2005 due to frequent water level fluctuations and algae blooms. Biological conditions have improved at the lake and can support a quality musky fishery. Purchase of these fish from a commercial hatchery will reestablish the musky population until the lake can be reintegrated into the PFBC stocking program.

Equipment for Muskellunge Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) Study Statewide

Investment: \$5,700

This study, which involves implanting muskies with PIT tracking tags, will promote better musky fishing through the evaluation of musky stocking strategies and length limit and creel limit changes. □

CAST & CAUGHT



Jeffrey Goetz, Mercersburg, caught and released this 45-inch musky while fishing the Juniata River, Huntingdon and Mifflin counties.



Stephanie Sheridan, Cherry Tree, caught this steelhead while attending the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Women's Intro to Steelhead Fishing Program in Elk Creek, Erie County.



Sara Becker, Boalsburg, caught this steelhead while attending the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Women's Intro to Steelhead Fishing Program in Elk Creek, Erie County.

For the "Cast & Caught" column, send only prints (no larger than 8"x10") and a completed "Model Release form" available at www.fishandboat.com/Transact/AnglerBoater. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want your photograph returned. People aboard boats must be wearing properly fitted and buckled life jackets. Mail to:
**Editor, Pennsylvania Angler & Boater,
P.O. Box 67000, Harrisburg, PA 17106-7000**



Bryant Dean II, Marianna, caught and released this 24-inch steelhead while fishing Elk Creek, Erie County.



Mark Graziano, Erie, caught and released this 21-pound, 42-inch Northern Pike while fishing Marina Lake at Presque Isle Bay, Erie County.