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*The Keystone State's
Official Fishing &
Boating Magazine*

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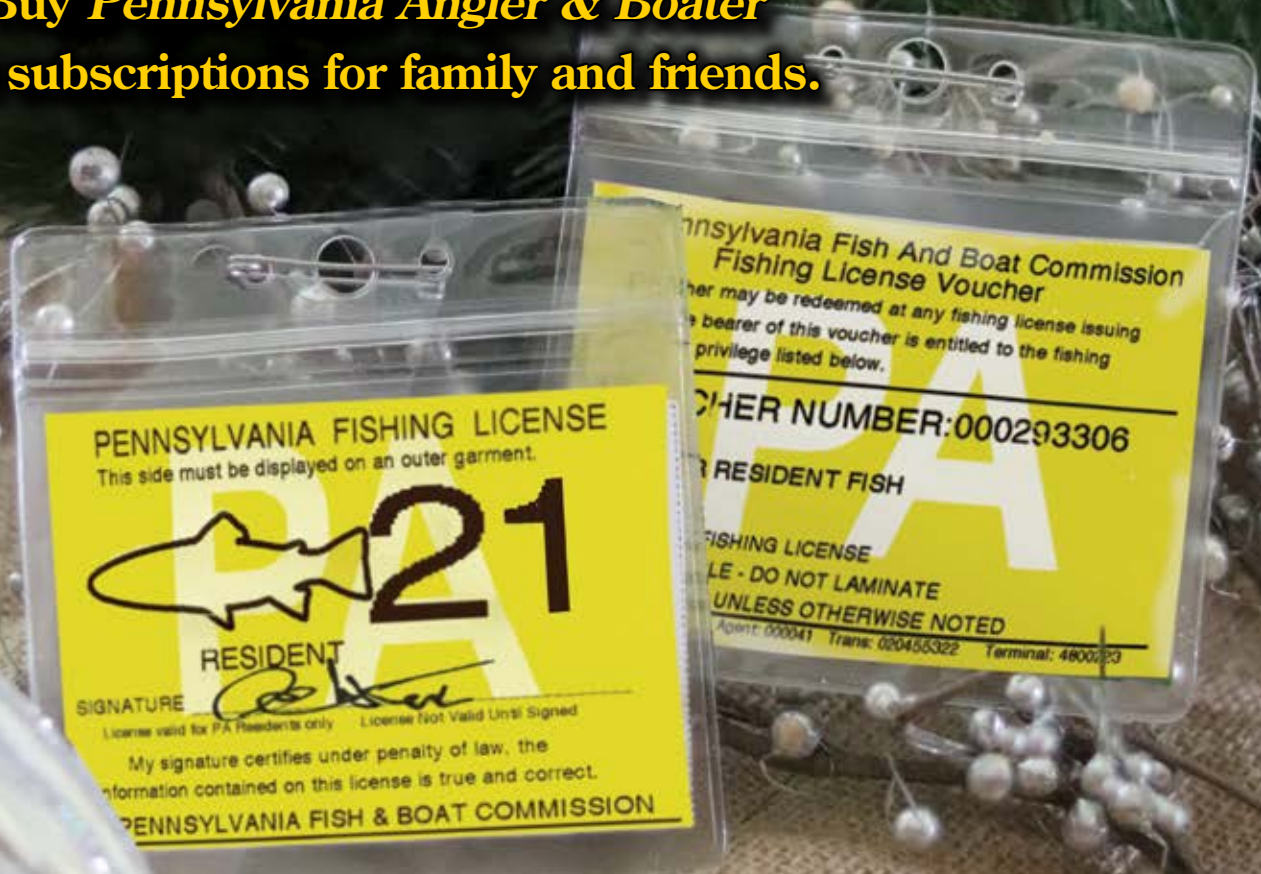


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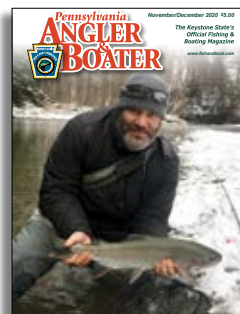
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On the cover

Christian Shane, Pittsburgh, caught and released this steelhead on Twentymile Creek, Erie County. He caught it on a #12 Stealie Caddis with an egg trailer.
Photo by Ken Crawford.



The PFBC social media and mobile app:
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Contributions at Work

by **Timothy D. Schaeffer**
Executive Director
Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

Much has been written about the dramatic increase in outdoor activities during 2020. Anglers and boaters have flocked to the water for fun, safe, convenient, and affordable recreation. As of this writing, fishing license sales are up nearly 20% for the year, and launch permits among those discovering and rediscovering the joys of unpowered boating have skyrocketed by nearly 40%. We are already looking forward to welcoming everyone back to the water in 2021.

These numbers are likely not a surprise to anyone who had an eye outside this year. Fishing rods, boats, and laughter on and along Pennsylvania water seemed to be everywhere you looked and listened.

When comparing figures to 2019, the one that saw the largest percentage increase may come as a surprise. Collectively, the four Voluntary Permits introduced in 2019 have seen an impressive 146% increase in sales, generating more than \$280,000 for projects dedicated specifically to four categories: Bass, Musky, Habitat/Waterways Conservation, and Wild Trout and Enhanced Waters.

To the over 17,700 of you who voluntarily contributed to this budding program that directly supports the long-term viability of aquatic resources in Pennsylvania, thank you!

We were not sure of the degree to which anglers would make contributions to such a voluntary program, and we have been pleased with the response and implicit faith that it reflects in our stewardship of the funds.

It is important to emphasize that this program is allowing us to do more for the species and habitats you care about than we normally would have been able to accomplish. We are not simply using the Voluntary Permit proceeds to supplant other funds. They are additive, allowing us to install more habitat, conduct more surveys, acquire better equipment, and make a significant difference for the resource.

By far, the most popular offering has been the Voluntary Bass Permit, with sales of 6,791 permits so far this year. That is nearly double the numbers for Habitat/Waterways Conservation (3,878 permits) and Wild Trout and Enhanced Waters (3,448 permits). The Voluntary Musky Permit has been supported by nearly 2,413 people so far this year.

We pledged to transparently invest these contributions, and we have been doing just that with your support. Despite the trying circumstances of a field season like no other, our staff have been hard at work across the Commonwealth investing the proceeds from the permits. If you are one of the generous donors to this program, here are some examples of how we are



photo-courtesy of PA State Representative Kate Klunk

The PFBC Lake Habitat Section Chief Ben Page (right) takes State Representative Kate Klunk on a tour of habitat improvements at Lake Marburg, York County.

implementing it on your behalf.

Lake Marburg, York County, is a 1,275-acre lake located in Codorus State Park and is a regional fishing destination.

With support from the Voluntary Bass Permit, we completed a large-scale habitat project that added fish habitat, improved angler access, and stabilized an eroding lakeshore. Habitat features included stone deflectors, rock rubble humps, and felled shoreline trees. I was

happy to join our team

at the lake to see them in action, and, as always, it was great to be a part of the energy that the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) staff bring to their jobs every day. From the biologists who design the projects to the crew who operate the heavy machinery, the PFBC staff are working for you.

Bass projects also included fish habitat improvements in Lake Arthur, Butler County; Woodcock Creek Lake, Crawford County; and Blue Marsh Reservoir, Berks County. Special thanks to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, which manages the waters at Lake Marburg and Lake Arthur, and to the United States Army Corps of Engineers for their cooperation at Woodcock Creek Lake and Blue Marsh Reservoir. With support from the bass funds, we are also conducting an opinion survey of tournament bass anglers to help determine fisheries management decisions statewide.

Other 2020 projects include stream habitat improvements in the Keystone Select Stocked Trout Waters section of First Fork Sinnemahoning Creek, Potter County; unassessed wild Brook Trout surveys in the Delaware and Lower Susquehanna Basins; deployment of Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tags and arrays to assess wild Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout movement in the Upper Delaware River; removal of five culverts to restore connectivity to 4.3 miles of Ott Fork, Lycoming County; acquisition of portable power winches used in the placement of large wood debris statewide; and the purchase of minnows and an inline water heating system to assist efforts to raise larger muskies that have a greater chance of survival and, ultimately, of being there for anglers to enjoy.

All of these projects were supported by Voluntary Permits sold in 2019. With more than twice as much funding being generated in 2020, anglers should expect to hear about even more exciting and meaningful projects being implemented in 2021. We will be featuring more success stories in e-mail messages, social media posts, and other outlets. If you read about something you like, please share it with fellow fishing and boating enthusiasts who may like to learn more about what we are doing for them.

Thank you again for the trust and confidence that is reflected in every Voluntary Permit contribution. You are making a difference.

Winter Steelhead Action

photo-Darl Black

by Marilyn Black

Would you like to get in on steelhead fishing action in November and December? Three seasoned anglers share tips about adjusting to stream conditions, selecting fishing locations, and fishing baits and flies that attract and hook steelhead.

William Luffy has fished for steelhead for 15 years. Today, Luffy co-manages Tudor Hook-N-Nook, Erie County. In his experience, optimal stream conditions for early winter steelhead are a few days after a high water event—either rain or snow melt—but before the water gets low and clear.

Ken Anderson, Crawford County, prefers falling flows when the water is starting to clear. Anderson, who began fishing for steelhead in the late 1970s with his grandfather who enjoyed their outings on Elk Creek, Erie County, still avoids fishing the streams on windy days that bring new leaves into the creek.

Ryan Novatnack serves as the Secretary for the Pennsylvania Steelhead Association. Novatnack began chasing steelhead in New York's tributaries to Lake Erie in 2001. Since moving to Erie in 2013, Novatnack concentrates on Erie County streams, especially during the chilly months, adjusting daily to fluctuating water levels, temperatures, and clarity, and believing each day could have magical moments on the water.

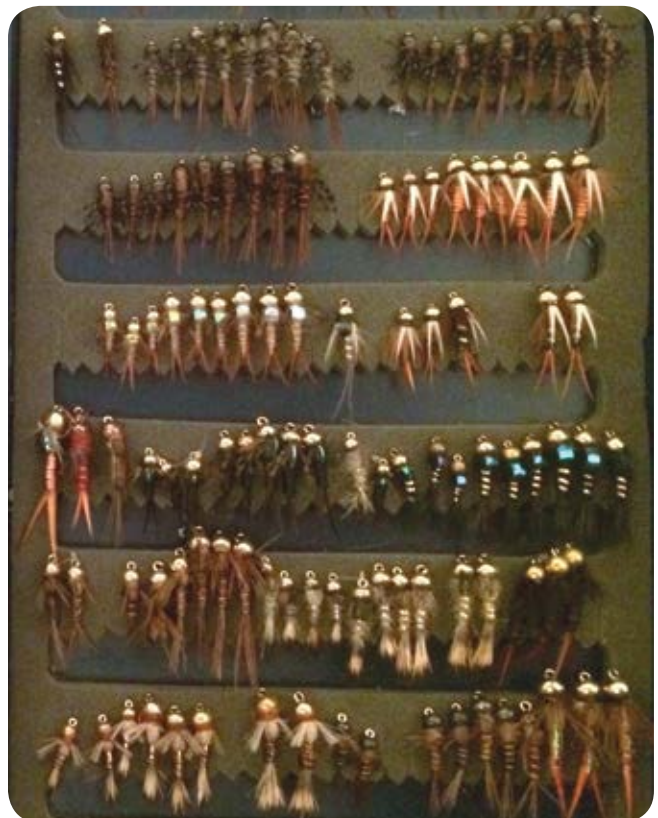


photo-Ryan Novatnack

This collection of nymphs tied by Ryan Novatnack are ready for action on Lake Erie tributaries.

Each of these anglers revealed their most productive tackle when it comes to catching steelhead in the late fall and early winter. Luffy's first choice when conditions are optimal is a live minnow on a drifting float. His next recommendation for almost all stream conditions is an egg sack fished on a spinning rod. "In higher water with less visibility, go big or go home," said Luffy. Try heavier egg sacks for more weight and bigger streamer flies and floats. "In low, clear water, go small or go home empty-handed," said Luffy.

Anderson loves fishing his own white feather streamers. He describes these streamers as looking like "knock-off marabou steelhead jigs that were made when there was a shortage of feathers and winding string, one feather and minimal warp, and some head cement will do, on a size 6 hook or smaller on a jig weighing no more than 1/32-ounce." Anderson's second choice is egg sacks purchased at area shops.

Novatnack uses only flies he has tied with steelhead in mind. In November, Novatnack will start with "Little Precious," which is a traditional pattern intended to represent the abundant Emerald Shiners on which steelhead have been feeding on in Lake Erie before entering the tributary system for the spawning run. Novatnack likes its versatility since it can be fished on the swing to search out active fish or be dead drifted under a floating indicator. When winter sets in, Novatnack uses a simple Black Stonefly Nymph. As soon as he sees steelhead eggs present in the water, he switches to fly patterns resembling steelhead roe, either as an individual egg floating by or a Sucker Spawn, which he pre-ties in numerous shades.

But, like all fishing, it seems conditions are rarely optimal. Each interviewee pointed out that the close proximity of multiple tributaries enables the angler to



photo-Ryan Novatnack

A colorful set of hand-tied sucker spawn flies enables an angler to match the shade of natural steelhead eggs floating in the stream.

choose their fishing destinations on any given early winter day, because conditions often differ significantly. East of Erie, streams have smaller watersheds dominated with shale-bottom creeks. The terrain west of Erie offers larger volume streams with more diverse bottom materials. Therefore, after precipitation, the east side streams rise faster and also fall faster. This affords the opportunity for anglers to fish from near the New York border (Twentymile Creek, Sixteenmile Creek, and Twelvemile Creek) to the Ohio border (Walnut Creek, Elk Creek, and Conneaut Creek) over the course of as many as three days.

Ken Anderson previously worked in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Division of Habitat Management and enjoys fishing Fourmile Creek including Napier Park, because he played a role in the fish passage effort at that location. "It is quite satisfying seeing fish and people enjoying the sport I love on waters that I helped to open to migrating fish," said Anderson.

All three interviewees encourage people to try winter steelhead fishing in Pennsylvania. "There is more water available to the public now than any time in my lifetime due to the Lake Erie Permit," said Anderson, who commends the non-profit interest groups, governmental agencies, and participating private property owners. "Hope for the best, expect the worst, and do not be afraid to change fishing spots until you find the steelhead," said Luffy. Novatnack points out the fellowship and learning opportunities available through the Pennsylvania Steelhead Association at www.PaSteelhead.com. ☐

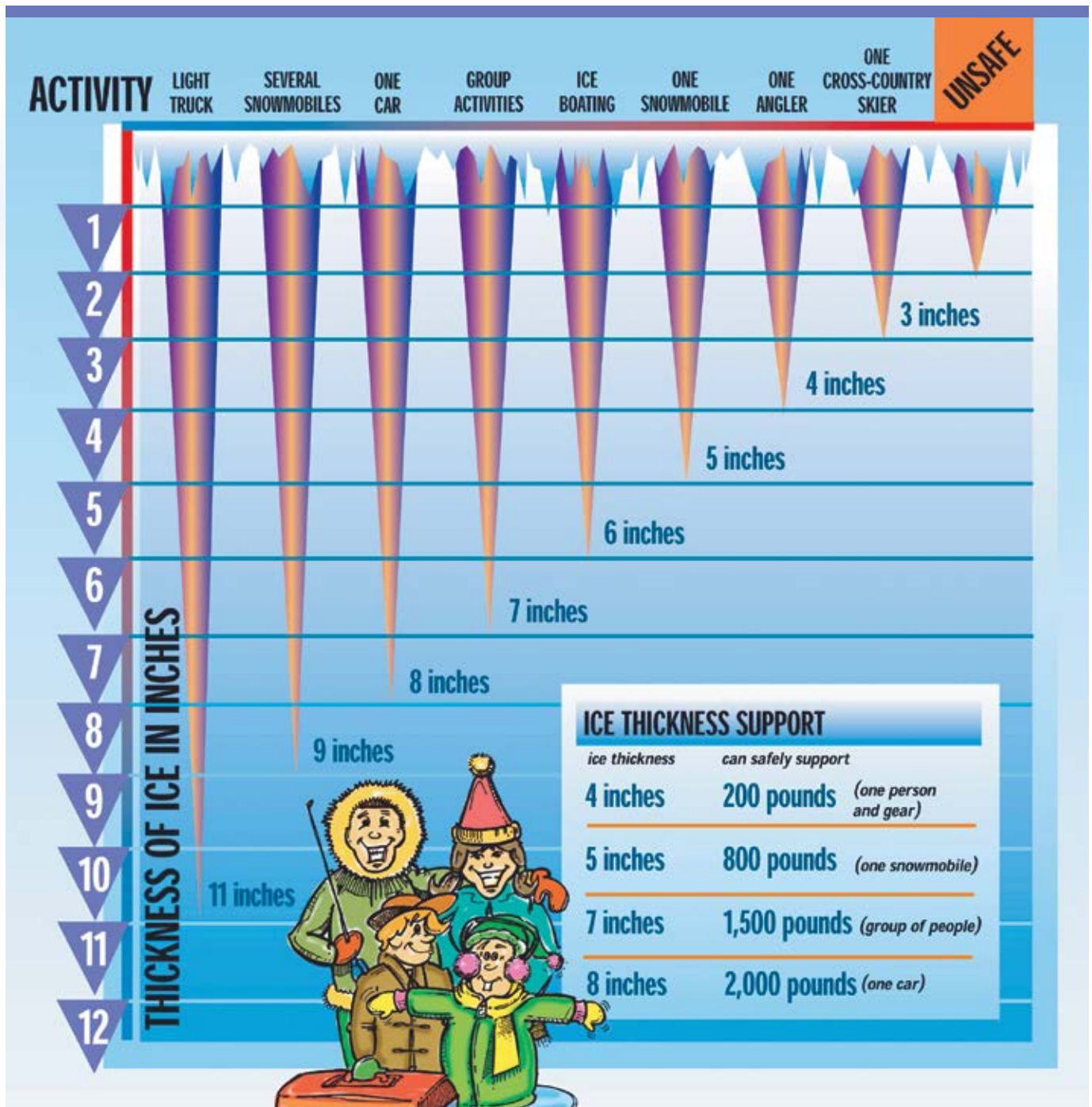


photo-Darrl Black

A fly fishing angler seeking steelhead on Twentymile Creek, Erie County.

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.



Anatomy of a Predator—STEELHEAD

by Carl Haensel

photos by the author

Steelhead anglers are full of admiration for their quarry. Descriptions like “silver bullets” and “chromers” are often used when describing these fish. In Pennsylvania, young steelhead are stocked into Lake Erie tributaries and migrate downstream into the big lake. In the fall, adults ascend the tributaries, where these fish were stocked. Its fighting ability, size, and beauty inspire anglers to pursue steelhead. Understanding its unique characteristics may give you a better chance at catching a big one the next time you are on the water.

Camouflage and coloration

A wild steelhead begins its life in a stream or river, hatching from an egg laid in the gravel. After hatching, a young, wild steelhead lives for at least a year in its natal river. Called smolts at this life stage, young fish exhibit vertical, blue-black bars along the sides and spotting over the whole body. The bars are called parr marks. This varied coloration helps steelhead blend in with rocks and debris in the riffles and runs these fish inhabit. Pennsylvania steelhead are raised in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Fairview State Fish Hatchery near Lake

Erie and stocked as smolts. The coloration helps protect steelhead from predators as these fish grow and swim into Lake Erie.

The coloration of adult steelhead is optimal for the time fish spend in the vast reaches of open water. Native to the West Coast, steelhead historically mature from smolts into adults in the Pacific Ocean. After its introduction to Pennsylvania, the same coloration of a light underside and dark topside is beneficial in Lake Erie. It helps smaller fish hide from predators and larger ones ambush prey.

When a steelhead returns to spawn, its color gradually changes from shiny and silver to a brilliantly hued rainbow of colors accentuated by a large red stripe extending laterally down its sides. It is at this point that anglers may see that steelhead are a large ocean or lake dwelling form of Rainbow Trout. As steelhead spend



This young steelhead smolt is nearly ready to head to Lake Erie to start quickly growing. Vertical parr marks are commonly found on steelhead this size and help camouflage the small fish to avoid predators.



The nares, or nostrils, are located in front of the eye on this colorful, male steelhead.

Reproduction— finding its way home

The ability of a steelhead to return to the waters of its youth is legendary. In its native habitat on the West Coast, steelhead are able to return from the Pacific Ocean and ascend rivers for over 800 miles. To find the mouth of its home river, steelhead appear to use a form of navigation based on information about position and direction of travel. This information likely comes from environmental cues including day length, the sun's position, the earth's magnetic field, water chemistry, and temperature gradients. As spawning time

more time in spawning streams, fish continue to darken, with some males becoming almost black.

Body shape and feeding

Steelhead are built for speed, enabling these fish to capture baitfish in the open waters of Lake Erie. Steelhead mouths open wide, engulfing prey up to 12 inches in length when fish are adults. Compared to Coho Salmon and Chinook Salmon, the inside of the mouth of a steelhead is white, not gray or black. This allows for an easy distinction between the species. Steelhead that grow in Lake Erie grow large, commonly reaching 24 inches in length, with specimens regularly caught over 30 inches. The state record fish was 20-pounds, 3-ounces, and was caught in 2001. Like other trout, steelhead need cold water to survive. In Lake Erie, steelhead are found in colder, deeper waters in summer. Often, steelhead move further away from shore to find temperatures where fish are comfortable.

approaches, steelhead have the ability to orient towards the area where its natal waterway discharges.

By the time steelhead enter rivers, fish are guided largely by a sense of smell to the correct tributary. Young steelhead become particularly sensitive to the unique chemical odors of a location when small, under 10 inches long. Steelhead this size are called smolts. Odors that smolts encounter during this time of high sensitivity are remembered and become important direction finding cues years later, when adults return to home streams.

Steelhead in Pennsylvania that return to nursery waters like Trout Run are collected and spawned at the Fairview State Fish Hatchery, where fish are raised until smolt. The PFBC stocks 1 million, 7-inch long smolts into Lake Erie tributaries in Pennsylvania each March. Unlike salmon, steelhead can live to spawn again. Steelhead grow larger each year spent out in the lake. ☐



The lateral line on this steelhead is clearly visible below the dorsal fin in the light pink area of the fish. The lateral line helps steelhead sense prey in Lake Erie as well as the flow and current of streams.



The eyes of steelhead work well to identify prey and see in low light. Unlike humans, the pupil does not change size in different light conditions. Steelhead have excellent peripheral vision, which helps catch prey.

Preparing a Child for Fishing Success



by John Allen

photos by the author

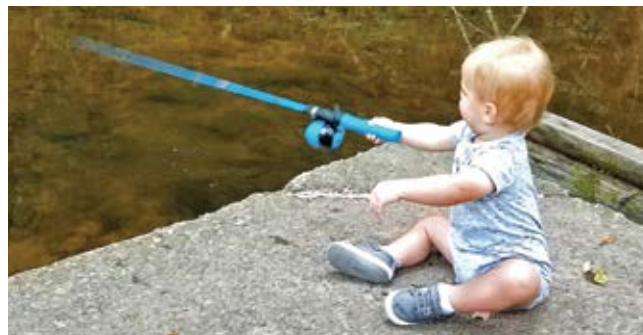
There is nothing more rewarding than passing on something you love to do to a child and watching that child flourish. I took my daughter fishing for the first time when she was a little bit more than 1 year old. I did everything except reel in the fish. It has been four years since her first fish was caught, and now the “do it myself” phase is stronger than ever. She picks out her own bait, casts, works the bait, sets the hook, and brings it in all herself. Getting to this point did not happen overnight. We had to work hard through each step.

Just as my parents did for me, I want fishing to be fun for my kids. From picking out their own rods and bait to celebrating a catch, the more fun involved, the more they will want to go again. When the kids say it is time to

stop fishing, we stop. There is no point in dragging it out too long. My kids tend to last between 1 and 2 hours per outing, depending on how well the fish are biting.

Casting

Casting a fishing rod is by far the most challenging fishing task for a child. The younger the child, the harder it will be.



The author's son practiced casting before he could even walk.



Part of the fishing experience is learning about the fish that we are catching.

As dexterity and hand strength increase, the learning curve will flatten out. Also, with age, the child will better understand your instructions as well. I learned this the hard way. Teaching a 2 year old to cast a fishing rod was a challenge to say the least. I did not learn my lesson either as I am going through it again with my son. With both kids, we have spent a lot of time practicing in the backyard. Children's fishing rods usually come with a plastic fish that you can tie onto the end of the line. The fish provides enough weight on the line to ease the casting experience. Showing children the motions of casting usually goes fast. The timing of when to push the button on the reel and ultimately when to release it is by far the biggest challenge of the entire process. With my son, I tried a lot of "reel-less" options, but he does not like that his sister has a reel and he does not. This has sped up the introduction to using a fishing reel a little faster than planned.

Between ages 2 and 4 years old, my daughter wanted to cast by herself, but it just never happened. Days before her fourth birthday on the opening day of trout, she insisted on doing the casting. There was no one around, so I gave her the green light. She cocked back, pushed the button, brought it forward, and released a perfect cast across the stream. I was stunned. Out of nowhere, she could suddenly do it. From there, it was like riding a bike. Every time out after that day, she gets better and can do it even more consistently. I attribute the success to the amount of times we practiced in the yard. If you find your child struggling with casting, give your child time. Keep

encouraging practice, and it will eventually all come together.

Catching fish

During a trout derby, I watched as my daughter's bait drifted past the trout without any interest. I decided to make up a game that would also give her bait a little bit of action. To the tune of "The Wheels on the Bus," we would make the rod go "up and down" and "bounce, bounce, bounce." Doing that made the bait dance, and the trout could no longer resist.

Flash forward a few weeks later, we were fishing for bass and she asked me to cast a tube lure out for her on my other spinning rod. I threw it out and handed her the rod. I look over to see her humming the tune we sang a few weeks earlier. All while bouncing the tube lure along the bottom of the lake. I then hear, "I think I got one." I look over to see the rod bent over with a 17-inch Largemouth Bass attached. She went on to catch several more fish that morning using her fun new method. One year later, she is still using the bounce method.

As I start the journey towards showing my son how to fish, I am often reminded of the lessons I have learned. First and foremost, make it fun for the child. While fishing may seem easy to some anglers, to a child it is a whole new experience that requires basic instructions. Be patient, and it will happen. The reward will outweigh the work involved. The result is a fishing buddy for life. ☐



Just as my parents did for me, I want fishing to be fun for my kids.



NOTES *from the Streams*

The mystery float

While on patrol at High Point Lake, Somerset County, I was in a location where I had an aerial view of the lake. I noticed two kayaks and what appeared to be a section of a floating dock between them. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) property is to be used for fishing and boating purposes only. As a new Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO), I created scenarios in my head about what the paddlers were going to tell me. At first, I thought about the private houses and camps bordering the lake and that someone needed a quick, easy way to take care of their dock. However, I realized there are no private docks on High Point Lake.

As I made my way down to the launch ramp, an angler approached me. The angler informed me that two sections of a dock floated across the lake. My eyebrows went up and

my mouth dropped. A gentleman and his kids were kind enough to paddle the dock all the way back across the lake. Those familiar with High Point Lake know how windy and challenging it is for kayaking. He informed me that they were floating near the shoreline of his property, so they decided to bring the docks back over. I was impressed, and thanked him for taking the time and effort. There is still kindness “floating” around in our world today. It still has not been determined how the docks were set free.—WCO *Dina M. Cable, Southern Somerset County.*

The catfish kid and bacon bait

WCO Peter N. Labosh and I were patrolling the Delaware River in Bristol Borough when we saw numerous people fishing and enjoying a beautiful day. We approached a young man and his father to ask if they were having

a successful day. The anglers were fishing for catfish and were having luck there and other fishing locations in Lower Bucks County. I asked what they were using for bait, having heard all sorts of interesting baits anglers use in that area for catching catfish—from garlic, blueberry bagels, or top secret recipes. He simply stated, “bacon.” Bacon? That was a new one for me. Although impressed, I informed him that my love of bacon far exceeded my desire to waste it as bait. Without hesitation, the young angler said, “That is a sacrifice you have to be willing to make.” Well, that is not a sacrifice this WCO is willing to make! —WCO *Michael Z. Blair, Southern Bucks County.*

Those in fiberglass boats shouldn't throw stones

While on boat patrol at Keystone Lake, Armstrong County, an individual flagged me down. This person was visibly agitated and stated that some other people were taking short bass and fishing without fishing licenses. The angler continued to fish in front of me, casting and retrieving, while continuing to accuse other anglers of ruining this lake. I took note of the complaint, though not much information was given. I told the angler that I would investigate the issue. At this point, I asked to see his fishing license and also noticed that his boat registration was expired. He left proof of his renewed registration at home along with his fishing license. Both of these are summary violations of the Fish and Boat Code. I issued two Notice of Violations to which the man was required to respond within 7 days with proof of his fishing license and boat registration or be charged with



illustration—Andrea Feeney

the violations. As I pulled away, I thought to myself, why point the finger at another person if your own hands are not clean?—WCO *Matthew A. Colian, Indiana and Eastern Armstrong counties.*

Small world...err...state

The PFBC breaks the state into six regions. Aside from statewide trainings, there is not a lot of interaction between all officers and the various regions, so I was surprised to see a call from the Southeast Region Law Enforcement Office. Captain Jeffrey R. Sabo called to ask about some areas on the North Branch Susquehanna River, as a friend of his recently purchased property in my district and was looking to do some boating and fishing on the river. I chatted with Captain Sabo for a while and offered some information, which he would relay to his friend.

About 2 weeks later, while on a focused law enforcement detail on the Susquehanna River, I observed a boat showing no registration. Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer Pat Dessoie and I conducted a boarding of the boat. Through the interaction, we learned that the boat was a recent purchase and all paperwork and safety equipment was in order. We also learned that one of the children on the boat caught a nice Northern Pike that morning before we arrived.

Before we parted ways, the boat operator asked my name and revealed that he was a friend of Captain Sabo's, and he thanked me for the intel I provided. I left thinking it was funny that it only took a few weeks to run into this person. I have a lot of ground to cover, approximately 2,600 square miles, so it surprised me when I pulled into the Terrytown Boat Launch and saw him coming off the water another week or so later.

Some people say they fished for their entire lifetime without running into a WCO, but it seems Captain Sabo's friend cannot go fishing

without running into one.—WCO *Jeremy L. Yohe, Western Bradford and Sullivan counties.*

Reflections

Working as the Resident Staff Officer at H.R. Stackhouse for the 22nd WCO class taught me to pause and reflect upon our chosen career as WCOs. Many workdays begin with what seems to be a well-laid plan to patrol certain areas, complete some required tasks, and investigations. However, it often ends up getting flipped upside down. Therefore, sometimes it is hard to explain exactly what a WCO does in a typical day, since typical is not a word that applies to this job.

Our new class of WCOs had a chance to experience this firsthand during training at H.R. Stackhouse. They had their sights and schedules set on the first field training session with anticipation after spending over 8 months in an academy setting. Unfortunately, like most of the world, COVID-19 changed plans. The command staff improvised by the day in order to continue the required training. The cadets adapted and continued to train and maintain professionalism during an extended stay of an additional 2 months at the school until they could finally leave for some well-earned field training time.

I am sure they were well-prepared and will look back at that time in their lives as a moment where they persevered through adversity. In the future, when tough days occur, they will look back at the resilience they showed and know they can get through anything with a little help from their brothers and sisters in their new family.—WCO *Troy W. Merrell, Eastern Schuylkill County.*

A life changed

Although the "Notes from the Streams" column is often used to discuss humorous topics WCOs encounter in the field, I wanted to

share an experience I had recently of a more serious topic.

While checking anglers at a local waterway, I encountered an individual that seemed familiar to me. Ordinarily, this would not strike me as odd in any way. This happens quite often, due to the number of anglers and boaters encountered on a routine basis. However, this was different.

The gentleman was about 30 years old and was fishing from shore. As I checked his license, I could not shake the feeling that I knew him.

We exchanged pleasantries for a few moments, and he asked, "You do not remember me, do you?" I explained to the man that he seemed familiar, but I could not place him. He responded, "You arrested me about 8 years ago, for Boating Under the Influence." The man went on to explain, "I was pretty messed up that day. I want you to know you changed my life." At that moment, I remembered the arrest. He was intoxicated that day and belligerent due to drug and alcohol abuse.

We spoke for a few moments, and I observed he had put on some weight, and his complexion was clearer, as was his attitude. He went on to tell me that it was during his court ordered drug and alcohol evaluation that he realized he had an addiction problem. He has been clean and sober since and has been wanting to see me again to thank me. He said that if he had not gotten sober, he probably would have wound up dead or in prison.

We spoke for a while, and we both walked away knowing that people certainly can overcome problems in life. I must admit though, while walking away, I felt not only a sense of joy for this man but a sense of pride in myself, knowing that just doing my job 8 years ago, somehow changed a person's life for the better.—WCO *Aaron B. Lupacchini, Southern Luzerne and Columbia counties.*

Getting Started in FLY FISHING

by Tyler Frantz

photos by the author

The allure of fly fishing means different things to different people. For some, it is an approach used to catch more fish. For others, it represents a unique personal challenge. For a select few, it is a dedicated lifestyle choice. But for many anglers, it is completely foreign.

I was first inspired to try fly fishing after watching the popular film version of Norman Maclean's novel, "A River Runs Through It," when I was a teenager. The idea of crawling atop large river boulders, slinging fly line against a sunlit skyline, wearing a wide brimmed hat, and hoping to do battle with a behemoth of the intrepid waters below was what initially drew me to the sport.

It was an idealistic interpretation of what fly fishing represented, and in trying to emulate what I saw, I found myself struggling with consistent knots, slapping the water with a rod too heavy for the task, not knowing what flies to use, and regularly tangling my line in vegetation while making a backcast.

There is definitely a learning curve when deciding to take up fly fishing for the first time, but if you are serious about giving it a try, I have some suggestions to help you navigate the process. In time, you will be catching as many fish as Brad Pitt's character and look just as good doing it.



There is nothing more satisfying than catching a wild trout on a fly rod.

Getting outfitted

The gear and equipment required for fly fishing can be overwhelming to someone new to the sport. There are different sized rods and reels designed for different situations.

To me, the most versatile rig would be an 8- to 9-foot, 5-weight rod and reel combo, which can be purchased as an introductory package at most sporting goods stores for under \$150. If you watch for sales, you can often find one even cheaper. These come pre-rigged with backing, line, sometimes even leaders, tippet, and a rod case. Fly lines, the weighted often colorful synthetic lines used to cast, come in different forms as well. There is floating line, sinking line, and so forth. Be sure to discuss the scenarios you plan to fish with a pro-shop representative before purchasing.

Beyond the rod and reel itself, you will need spools of 4x, 5x, and 6x tippet, as well as some 9-foot 5x leaders. This is used to taper your big, clunky fly line down to a clear, skinny line that is nearly invisible to fish. A leader can be used by itself, but after replacing flies and tearing your line, your leader will become shorter over time.

Thus, the tippet can be tied in incremental sections getting thinner and thinner to replenish your leader. Research knots for tying on your tippet. Blood knots and nail knots are both popular options.

Moving away from the rod and reel itself, you will need an assortment of flies, a fly box, a fishing vest/pack, strike indicators, sinkers, floatant, strike indicators, nippers, forceps, a net (preferably with rubber netting), polarized sunglasses, waders/wading boots, and a fishing license.

All of these things cost money. Build your collection over time. With the holidays right around the corner, now may be a good time to add some of these items to your wish list.

Acquiring all-purpose flies

There are three main types of fly fishing, with several variations adding complexity that I will not cover here. Primarily, you will either dry fly fish up top (no weight

required), nymph or wet fly fish underneath (weight and drifting required), or streamer fish (weight and stripping required).

Basic, all-purpose, flies you will want in your box based on those three categories are as follows:

Dry—Adams, Royal Wulff, Light Cahill, Elk Hair Caddis, Yellow Stimulator, Blue Winged Olive; **Nymph**—Pheasant Tail, Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear, Copper John, Green Weenie, San Juan Worm, Zebra Midge, Egg Pattern, Scud, Caddis Larva; **Streamer**—Woolly Bugger (in Black, green, and brown), both with and without a beadhead.

There are hundreds, if not thousands of other flies, specifically suited in color, size, and design to certain situations. To keep this as uncomplicated as possible, I have only listed a handful of standbys that can be quite versatile. Start with these flies, learn to fish them well, and branch out over time.

Learning the basics

There is a lot to learn when it comes to casting, fly selection, and how to read the water. Basically, try to match the hatch and give the fish what it is already eating. By turning a few rocks and watching feeding activity, you may gain some valuable insight. You may also prompt strikes using flashy attention-grabbing flies.

If you are dry fly fishing, you want your fly to settle on the surface with minimal disturbance to the water. If fishing underneath, a strike indicator can indicate a hit and when to set the hook. Both scenarios require a drag-free, natural drift.

Casting is something you should practice in an open yard or field before you hit the water. Then, transition to an open water source before moving to tight spaces requiring greater control and casting abilities.

Watch videos on casting basics, or better yet, reach out to a mentor to learn. Many fly fishing clubs and Trout Unlimited chapters offer free or low-cost programs for

teaching you how to cast, tie flies, and often will take you fishing. Seek these opportunities out, and tap their knowledge and experience.

There is definitely a lot of gear and learning required to be successful at fly fishing. But, there is also no better feeling than the steady pull of a running trout after a clean presentation and quality hookset. With time and dedication, even beginners can sample that satisfaction. There is something special about it that is worth the effort to experience, but you have to start somewhere. ☐



All-purpose attractor flies can fool aggressive trout, like this Rainbow Trout that fell for the author's Green Weenie presentation.

Tying
Together



STEELIE CADDIS:

Teaching Children to Tie Steelhead Patterns

by *Christian A. Shane*

photos by the author

“The caddis larvae is a standard (steelhead) pattern and is mainly tied in its common green Rhyacophila version.”
Matt Supinski, Steelhead Dreams (2001).

After many years of fishing, I still enjoy flipping over rocks and discovering the wonderful world of caddisflies and its self-created case building habitats. Non-anglers may not believe that a brightly colored creature can appear from such intricate and stylish dwellings constructed from twigs, sand, gravel, or bark. It is amazing for a child (or even an adult) to encounter the fluorescent green color of a caddisfly emerging from its home. What a great way to introduce a new fly angler or fly tier to the sport by demonstrating this specific aquatic critter.

Since caddisflies are prevalent in freshwater environments, the Steelie Caddis presents a wonderful steelhead pattern for young tiers. I tie this pattern with kids since it allows many variations and uncomplicated fly tying techniques, especially along the body of the fly. I find that three easy to acquire fly tying materials can be used to mimic the body of the caddisfly including Diamond

Braid, dubbing, or vinyl ribbing (V-Rib). The beadhead then simulates an egg (hot red, fluorescent pink, or natural black tungsten).

After matching the hook with the bead size and placing it on the hook, the first step begins with the body. I prefer Diamond Braid material since it is simple for young tiers to use. If that is not available, try V-ribbing or plain dubbing to create the profile of the caddis.

Version 1-Diamond Braid

Located in the chenille, braids, and yarns section of your fly shop or tying section, this material comes in varying colors including Fluorescent Shrimp Pink, Root Beer, and Caddis Green. Diamond Braid is versatile and works well for the Steelie Caddis' body. When tying the material on the hook shank, I encourage children to tie it in close to the hook eye and work back to form a body base. Then, wrap it forward in equal wraps to create the caddis body.

Version 2-dubbing

If you can locate some specific Caddis Green or fluorescent dubbing, your tier can use this in place of the Diamond Braid body. The advantage of dubbing is controlling the amount placed on the thread. Your tier can also mold a tapered-body shape of the caddis by using



Bead size rulers and sizing charts will help young tiers match the bead with the hook.

dubbing sparingly and adding it in as needed.

Version 3-vinyl ribbing (V-Rib)

Plastic tubing may also be used as a substitute for the caddis body. Tying with a vinyl ribbing product produces a segmented and uniform profile. Children may have a difficult time getting started with the plastic tubing. Have them start by tying in the tip of the ribbing near the eye and wrapping the thread over it down to the bend. This will provide a landing base for them to easily wrap the V-Rib around.



Trout crave this pattern since it contains a fluorescent green body, black head, and bright egg beadhead, similar to a caddisfly clinging to an egg.

Finishing the Steelie

After selecting and tying in the body material, two steps remain for the caddis. Select a hen feather to palmer around as leg materials. With the curved feather facing away from the hook eye, two wraps simulate the caddis emerging out of its case. Then, add some dubbing material or angora yarn fibers to place behind the beadhead. If available, I prefer Black Peacock Ice Dubbing for the head. Matt Supinski, in his book *Steelhead Dreams*, offers tying with ostrich or peacock herl as an alternative to the black dubbing. This final step of tying in a dark head simulates the caddis sucking on an egg.

Fishing the Steelie Caddis

Pull the Steelie Caddis pattern out of the fly box in high water or off-color situations. Add enough weight to the fly to reach the fish along the bottom. In John Nagy's *Steelhead Guide*, he suggests that fly brightness is more important than the color, so consider this when you are fishing it in varying winter weather and water conditions. Another option is to drop an egg or smaller nymph pattern off of the bend and fish it tandem-style. I drift the fly through deep channels with a long leader 90% of the time. The other 10% of the time, I will twitch it to induce a strike.

Try some variations of the Steelie Caddis on the tying vise with your young tier this steelhead season. ☑

Steelie Caddis

- Hook:** Heavy Wire Scud #10-14
- Weight:** Orange or gold beadhead $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch or $\frac{5}{32}$ -inch
- Thread:** Black 6/0
- Body:** Chartreuse Diamond Braid, V-Rib, or green caddis dubbing
- Hackle:** Brown hen feather
- Head:** Black angora, Black Peacock Ice Dubbing, or ostrich herl

Fly Tying Beadhead Sizing Chart

Bead size	Hook size
5/64" (2.0 mm)	#16-20
3/32" (2.4 mm)	#14-18
7/64" (2.8 mm)	#12-16
1/8" (3.2 mm)	#10-14
5/32" (4.0 mm)	#8-12
3/16" (4.6 mm)	#6-10

Presque Isle Bay *in the Late Fall*

by Darl Black

photos by the author

Presque Isle Bay, Erie County, offers outstanding fishing year-round, providing a different species lineup for each season. In the late fall, anglers have the opportunity to catch steelhead, Largemouth Bass, Northern Pike, Smallmouth Bass, Yellow Perch, and even the occasional Walleye.

Largemouth Bass and Northern Pike are year-round residents of Presque Isle Bay. Even so, late fall is arguably the best time to catch numbers of above average size bass and pike.

As the water temperature drops through the 50s and into the 40s, steelhead, Yellow Perch, and limited numbers of Smallmouth Bass follow main lake baitfish schools into the Bay from Lake Erie.

According to local fishing expert Kirk Rudzinski, arriving Yellow Perch will linger until the spring spawn. During the late fall, perch will school up at key deep water areas in the Bay. Boat anglers often focus on edges of the shipping channel in about 40 feet of water by the turning buoys as well as in front of Liberty Park



in roughly 25 feet of water. Shore anglers can reach perch at Dobbin's Landing in 20- to 30-feet of water, the old Border Patrol Dock in 25- to 35-feet of water as well as from Liberty Park.

Wanderlust steelhead follow bait all over Presque Isle Bay and may be caught just about anywhere. To pinpoint a steelhead, watch for surface disturbances of baitfish.

Smallmouth Bass are a bit mysterious. In the spring, Smallmouth Bass pour into the Bay in great numbers to spawn, then leave. In the fall, a few schools of Smallmouth Bass follow the Emerald Shiners into Presque Isle Bay. Angler contact with Smallmouth Bass is limited to a handful of weed points and humps relatively close to the shipping channel. However, bass do not stick around long before returning to the big lake.

In recent years, more Walleyes are being caught in Presque Isle Bay from spring through fall than 20 years ago. This is likely due to the overall higher population of Walleyes across Lake Erie.

Bass initially drew me to Presque Isle Bay in the late fall. Fishing with friends, we gradually figured out the progression of the



During the fall, these lures are used for predator gamefish in Presque Isle Bay, Erie County.

Largemouth Bass and Smallmouth Bass bite in cooling water. In doing so, we also discovered many of the same baits catch steelhead, Northern Pike, Walleye, and even jumbo Yellow Perch. After all, these gamefish species are chasing and eating the same forage— Emerald Shiners and Gizzard Shad.

Here is a rundown of several productive lures along with tips on when and where to fish them in Presque Isle Bay in the late fall.

Suspending jerkbaits

Suspending jerkbaits are particularly effective for bass and pike that are in a neutral mood. Best when water temperature is in the mid-50s falling into the mid-40s with gamefish still hanging around weedbeds. Figure out the right cadence of pull-pause to draw the strike. Sometimes, simply twitch it and let it rest for a minute or two. Steelhead love to smash minnow-resembling jerkbaits and then speed off.

Spinnerbaits

During certain late October and early November days when predators are tearing into baitfish schools, perhaps the easiest bait to throw is a shad-colored spinnerbait. The single hook makes landing and releasing fish much easier than treble hooks on hard baits. Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, pike, and steelhead will all hit spinnerbaits.

Lipless rattle baits

If the jerkbait is for lethargic fish and a spinnerbait is for hyperactive fish, consider the lipless rattle bait as bridging the gap. A steady retrieve over weeds or along the outside edge is great for triggering Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, pike, and steelhead. When bass move deep as the water chills, try a slow pull-pause along the bottom or a vertical lift-drop retrieve to generate smashing strikes. The smallest size lipless crankbait jigged vertically is deadly on Yellow Perch.

Soft swimbaits

Swimbait is available in a wide range of sizes—3- to 5-inches are best for all Presque Isle Bay predator fish. Have several sizes in your tackle box, because some days matching the size of baitfish will be critical. You can throw these baits shallow in early November and deep in December when bass are in deep water wintering sites. For the coldwater period, cast the bait, count it down to the bottom, and swim it slowly.

Blade baits and jigging spoons

Some anglers prefer blade baits. Other anglers favor jigging spoons. Lift and drop the blade. Jiggle and rip the spoon. Both will get the job done when bass, perch, and crappies are sharing the same deep water pockets in December. These sites will be roughly 20- to 27-foot deep and adjacent to a weedy flat. Do not be surprised if a steelhead nabs the shiny metal as it falls. ☐



Money \$aving Tips FOR BRAIDED LINE

by Braden Eisenhower

photos by the author

Despite a decades-long tenure, braided lines and fused superlines remain underutilized by many anglers today. Whether targeting panfish or seeking trophy predators—and all gamefish in between—there is often an application where braided lines outperform monofilament or fluorocarbon lines.

Braided lines are often three or four times stronger than monofilament or fluorocarbon lines of equal diameter. Heavier braids are ideal for baitcasting setups and heavy-duty fishing scenarios. The no-stretch and thin diameter properties of braid beat the bulky, unmanageable monofilament line of equal breaking strength. In lighter breaking strengths, a braid's thin diameter provides improved casting distance and increased sensitivity with spinning tackle.

As the saying goes, all good things come at a price. In the case of braided lines, there is no metaphor, merely a lofty price tag.

Anglers should be undeterred by the initial investment. There are several factors that make braid a surprisingly cost-effective option. And, with proper planning, there are ways to stretch your dollar.

Spooling the reel

The simplest way to increase the value of a spool of braided line is to limit the amount of line added to the reel spool. It is unnecessary to fill the reel's spool entirely with braided line. Most of the line will be unused. Borrow a fly fishing technique, and fill the non-braid portion with a backing line. I use an inexpensive monofilament line, similar in diameter to the braided line. This line remains under the braided line when fishing and is never in use. Once the backing line is on the reel, it is seldom removed.

I have found that 75 yards of braided line is ample for most casting situations. This amount leaves enough line on the spool to cover the knot joining the braid and backing line, even at the end of a long cast. With the 75-yard allotment, the standard 150-yard spool of line can fill two reels while a 300-yard spool can fill four reels.

Those who decide against the backing method often purchase the (more expensive) 300-yard spool, because most reels have line capacities beyond 150 yards for small diameter lines. However, the line left on the 300-yard spool is rarely enough to fill another reel.

Longevity

Another important consideration is the longevity of braided line. Braided line does not have memory retention; monofilament line kinks and coils when left on the reel's spool. Ultraviolet light makes monofilament line hard and brittle; braid is less susceptible and stays soft and pliable. To top it off, braided line is more resistant to abrasion caused by fishing in cover.

This information is noteworthy when calculating a line's expense. Monofilament line is much cheaper per yard, but I respool reels carrying monofilament lines several times each season. However, reels spooled with braided line may go unchanged for several seasons. In short, I may purchase two or three spools of monofilament line for each spool of braided line.

The longevity of braided line is also useful when questioning whether it is time to respool. Follow traditional rules when examining the line for wear, keeping an eye out for frayed or fuzzy line. Often, it is worse in the last few feet, closest to the lure. Removing a yard or two of line is a quick fix and prevents a complete respooling.

I do not use line color as an indicator for respooling. All braided lines will lose its bold, out-of-the-box color (most



Select a backing line of similar or equal diameter. When spooling with 80-pound-test braided line, I use 20-pound-test monofilament line for backing. Both lines are .018 inches in diameter.

sooner rather than later). In my first years of using braided line, I would ditch the line once it showed signs of fading, which meant that I was tossing serviceable line in the trash.

Reuse before replacing

When it is time to respool, consider reusing the existing braid rather than replacing it. Unlike a monofilament line, the braid toward the back of the spool (joined to the backing line) is free of coils and remains undamaged.

Swap the line end-for-end, so the braid that was in use now connects to the backing line. Exchange the ends at the beginning of the year to provide fresh line for the upcoming season. Since most casts are well under 40 yards, the “recycled” braid portion will be new, untouched line.

Leaders

One downside to braided line is its visibility beneath the surface. To combat this drawback, many anglers tie a short section of fluorocarbon leader. This retains the sensitivity and casting advantages of braided line while presenting the lure on low-vis line. Plus, the leader takes abuse from vegetation, timber, and rocks. This means less damage to the braid.

It is best to use leaders lighter than the braided line when fishing around snags, especially in rivers. This ensures breakage of the leader. It is difficult to break braided line as the true breaking point typically exceeds the advertised tensile strength. Snagging with braid likely ends in cutting a sizeable portion of line.

Braided lines incur a greater upfront expense than other line types, but the cost is somewhat relative over time when using these steps to increase a spool's lifespan. ☐



There are many knots available to join braided line to backing or leader lines. My favorite is a uni-to-uni (or double uni) knot with five wraps. It is strong, simple to learn, and quick to tie.

Vertically Jigging Late Fall Muskie



by Jeff Knapp *photos by the author*

It is common in rivers with good Muskellunge populations, particularly during the late fall through early spring period, to have encounters with these toothy predators. At this time, most gamefish species, including muskies, are concentrated in deeper, slow current pools that provide the necessary protective habitat to survive the winter.

But, there comes a time when these encounters can no longer be deemed “incidental,” when the frequency of hooked fish on a particular lure becomes a viable tactic. It is this way when vertical jigging river holes during the late fall and winter.

By vertical jigging, I am referring to classic jig-and-minnow combos and vibrating metal blade baits. These two offerings are well suited for jigging just off the bottom as the boat drifts slowly through the deep holes where gamefish, such as muskies, gather during the winter months. During the winter of 2019-2020, when mild weather conditions prevailed, I was on the Allegheny River (both the impounded lower Allegheny and free-flowing middle Allegheny) many times. During

these outings, which were primarily aimed at Walleyes, we hooked muskies, in some cases multiple muskies.

Myself and my boat partners landed muskies up to 48 inches vertically with a variety of lead head jigs and blade baits. Jigs have included bucktail jigs as well as ones dressed/tipped with plastics and live minnows. Blade baits have typically been ½-ounce versions of the Silver Buddy.

There is no doubt that muskies respond to musky-sized baits in the cold water of late fall and winter. However, it is also an accepted tactic during the early spring to downsize baits when targeting these toothy critters. So, if that is a viable approach in the cool water of early spring, it seems logical to be appropriate in the cold water experienced during late fall.

Knowing musky encounters are likely while vertically jigging river wintering holes, there are a few things you can do to up the odds, so you get fish into the boat. First, I have experienced relatively few bite-offs from muskies. Typically, muskies are lip hooked, having likely simply clamped down on the jig or blade as it drifted by. Hits are generally light, not unlike the subtle tap of a Walleye take.

Still, bite-offs occasionally occur. Minimize bite-offs by beefing up your leader. My standard Walleye jigging setup is a 1000 or 2000 sized spinning reel spooled with 15-pound-test braided line finished off with an 8- to 10-pound-test fluorocarbon leader. For musky protection,



A folding net takes up little space in the boat but allows for safe netting and release of Muskellunge.

I often increase the leader material to 20-pound-test line. Admittedly, 20-pound fluorocarbon line is not going to prevent a hard-fighting musky from shredding line across its sharp teeth. However, in cold water, musky battles usually do not include head shaking violence, but rather a series of powerful runs that shorten as the fish is brought boatside.

Another leader option is to use a light wire leader. I use 20-pound-test single strand titanium. It is “tie-able” to the extent that it accepts some simple knots, eliminating the need for crimps. I use a standard clinch knot. Although it does not set as neatly as with nylon or fluorocarbon line, it is strong and will not slip. A barrel swivel on one end of the wire leader serves as the braid-to-leader connection. On the terminal end, the wire is tied directly to the jig, or in the case of a blade bait, to a snap. Leader length is 12- to 18-inches.

With either wire or fluorocarbon line the goal is to achieve a fair degree of protection from bite-offs without hampering the action of the jig/blade.

The other major consideration comes in handling a musky once it is boatside. This is not a major issue for properly equipped musky anglers specifically targeting the species, but it is for Walleye anglers likely to encounter muskies.

Walleye-sized nets will not handle a good-sized musky. If the musky is small enough to fit in a net and if that net is rubber, the fish can use the springy material to catapult itself back out. Standard musky nets are huge, cumbersome devices that take up a significant amount of space in the boat. This type of net grabs anything it comes in contact with in the boat.

I found two good alternatives to the classic musky net. One is a musky cradle, and the other is a folding net.

The cradle wraps up like an oversized minnow seine, taking up little boat space. When in use, it is held in the water, parallel to the surface, with the musky led into it. The downside is that it takes two people to use it. And, you must be careful when lifting the musky into the boat. Do not allow the open end of the cradle to dip or the fish can slide back out into the river.

The hoop of the folding net hinges, so it can fold in half like a clam. The handle retracts into the hoop. Stowed as such the entire package takes up little space in the boat and deploys for service in seconds.

Finally, one should carry some basic release tools. This includes a jaw spreader to reach a jig or blade down inside the fish’s mouth and long nose pliers for unhooking fish.

While catching river muskies on large baits may bring a certain sense of accomplishment, there is much to be said for presenting smaller baits that will consistently take both muskies and Walleyes. ☐



The author releasing a musky taken on a blade bait while fishing the Allegheny River.

WINTER FISHING

Northwest Pennsylvania



photo-Denny Puko

by Charles N. Cantella

“Anyone would go fishing thinking you’ll catch something. It’s when you go figuring you probably won’t that you know you’ve crossed some kind of line.” John Gierach, At the Grave of the Unknown Fisherman (2003).

Everything slows down when it is cold. Even air molecules, when cooled, slow down. So, it should come as no surprise that life in rivers slows down. Bugs slow down, baitfish slow down, and trout slow down, too. The first rule of fishing for trout in the winter is to go low and slow. The fish will likely be deep, and the fish are not likely to move far for a meal. Whether you are fishing an egg, nymph, Woolly Bugger, or streamer, your lure may need to bump fish to elicit a strike. It is possible to have amazing fishing during the winter, but, a more likely scenario is that just a few, if any, fish will be brought to the net.

Winter fishing success hinges on a great deal more than simply the calendar’s declaration of winter. Some winters do not get as cold as others, while others have more rain and less snow. Occasionally, you will have a day where the temperature is above freezing, causing the snow to melt.

But, instead of raising the water temperature, the melting snow lowers it. So, a whole host of variables come into play during winter fishing.

Plan for the weather

Even with air temperatures in the 50s, hypothermia is possible. As per a University of Michigan study, “Hypothermia can occur when you are exposed to cold air, water, wind, or rain. Your body temperature can drop to a low level at temperatures of 50 degrees F or higher in wet and windy weather, or if you are in 60 degrees F to 70 degrees F water” (University of Michigan hypothermia). Most trout streams are between 50 and 60 degrees F at their warmest, so despite the desire you may have to seek solitude on these winter forays, it is always a good idea to take a friend along and have a dry change of clothes in the car.

Starting points

If you mention winter fly fishing in northwest Pennsylvania, the first thing most anglers think of is steelhead fishing in the Erie tributary streams. However, this article is focused on winter stream fishing in other northwest Pennsylvania waters. There are a multitude of



Wild Brook Trout

streams that may be fished in the winter. Most of the wild trout fisheries may be fished successfully in the winter. We will take a closer look at three geographically scattered streams, each with different regulations. This list is, by no means, comprehensive.

Allegheny River, Warren County

This 8.75 mile stretch of the Allegheny River offers anglers the opportunity to fish big water for Brown Trout. Stretching from the base of the outflow downstream to the confluence with the Conewango Creek, this section has special regulations (see sidebar). *Pennsylvania Angler and Boater* writer Mike Bleech offered this advice in his March/April 2014 article, "Serious Trout Fishing on the Allegheny" in the *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* magazine, "...use big trout tactics to catch big trout." According to Mike Heck et al, in *Keystone Fly Fishing*, "There are two 'seasons' for fly fishers on the Allegheny-streamer season and the dry fly season. Streamer season is long lasting, stretching from October through May; it's when large trout feed on abundant baitfish" (Heck 13). This is big water with big fish potential.

Caldwell Creek, Warren County

This stream is managed with Catch and Release Fly-Fishing Only regulations for 1.49 miles from Selkirk highway bridge downstream to approximately 0.5 miles upstream of the Dotyville Bridge. Described by some as a "meandering stream", its slow, deep flows offer many undercut banks and deep holes. A parking area near the Selkirk highway bridge provides access, and Flat Road parallels the stream. In addition, the West Branch

Caldwell Creek offers a 2.75 mile stretch in the Catch and Release Artificial Lures Only Program from the West Branch Bridge upstream to Three Bridge Run. Many of Caldwell Creek's tributaries offer anglers the opportunity to fish for wild Brook Trout.

Oil Creek, Venango County

Oil Creek is a long, large tributary of the Allegheny River. With over 40 miles of creek, there is too much to cover in one article. So, I will focus primarily on section 7, which is a 1.55 mile stretch in the Keystone Select Stocked Trout Waters, Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only Program from the bridge at Petroleum Center downstream to the railroad bridge at Columbia Farm. This section is stocked

heavily early in the season but does warm up in the summer, hence the value of it being designated as Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only instead of catch and release. But, this section is slated to get stocked in October, so there should be fish through the winter. The section also offers easy access and parking at the Drake Well Museum and Park. The Oil Creek Bike Trail offers a path to follow the stream between the Drake Well Museum and Park and Petroleum Center.

When the days get shorter, grab your rod and give winter fishing a try. ☐

Regulations

Allegheny River below Kinzua Dam, Warren County

Allegheny River – 8.75 miles from the outflow of the Allegheny Reservoir downstream to the confluence of Conewango Creek.

From 8 a.m. on the opening day of the regular trout season through Labor Day, the minimum size for trout is 14 inches, and the daily limit is 2 (combined species).

From the day after Labor Day until 8 a.m. of the opening day of the trout season of the following year, no trout may be killed or had in possession.

It is unlawful to fish in rivers and streams designated as stocked trout waters open to year-round fishing without a current Trout Permit or Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit.

COLD WATER KILLS!



WEAR IT
National Safe Boating Council

WEAR YOUR LIFE JACKET!

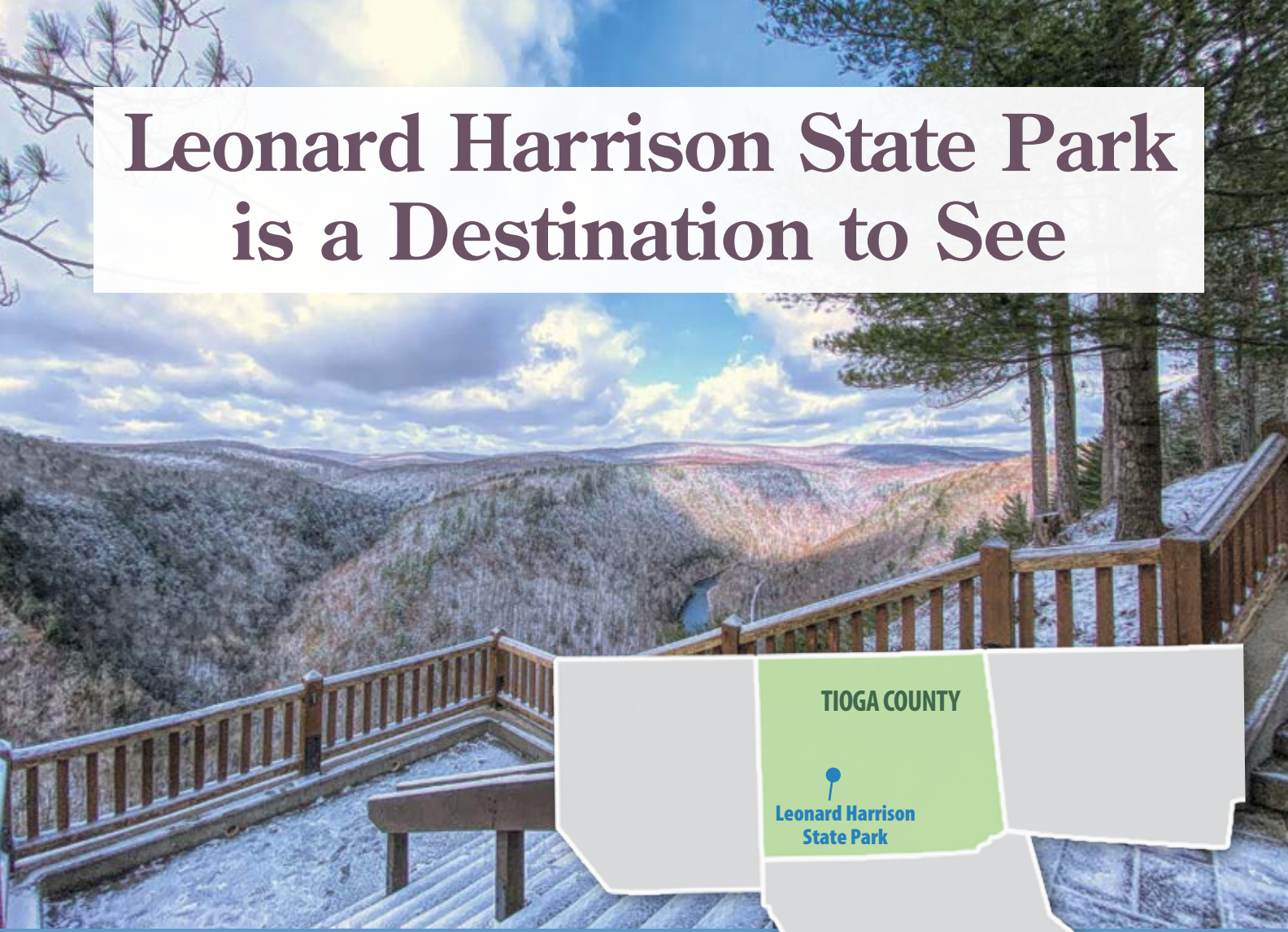
Boaters are required by law to wear life jackets on boats less than 16 feet in length or any canoe or kayak during the cold weather months from November 1 through April 30.

LIFE JACKET AND THROWABLE DEVICE REQUIREMENTS:

- All boats must have a United States Coast Guard (USCG)-approved wearable life jacket on board for each person.
- Life jackets must be the appropriate size for the person intended. Check the life jacket label to ensure it's the appropriate size for the person wearing it. Also, make sure the life jacket fits. See the *Pennsylvania Boating Handbook* to learn how to check for proper fit and for more information. Life jackets must be appropriate for the activity for which worn. See the USCG-approval label for information.
- Wearable life jackets must be "readily accessible." This means life jackets should be stowed where the life jackets can be easily reached or in the open, ready for wear. Throwable devices must be "immediately available," which means the devices shall be within arm's reach of the operator or passenger while the boat is operated. A life jacket that is sealed in its original packaging is not readily accessible or immediately available.
- All life jackets must be in good and serviceable condition and legibly marked showing the USCG-approval number. This means the life jacket must be functional, free of tears or defects in the material, and all buckles, straps, zippers, and other closures must be operable.
- In addition to wearable life jackets, boats 16 feet and over must have a throwable device (ring buoy, life ring, or buoyant seat cushion) on board. Canoes and kayaks, regardless of length, are not required to carry a throwable device.
- A throwable device may not be used as a substitute for a wearable device.

www.WearItPennsylvania.com

Leonard Harrison State Park is a Destination to See



by Linda Stager photos by the author

The cold winter wind howls and stings my face. Its bitter coldness bites into the skin on my hands and my fingers, even while wearing warm gloves. I feel the familiar sense of my fingers starting to numb.

But, I do not move away. This is where I want to be today. The scene is magnificent as it lifts my spirits. It does not matter when I visit this place; it is simply good for my soul. This scene is one of the most sought out destinations in Pennsylvania.

This place is the overlook at Leonard Harrison State Park. The overlook is a tiny fenced-in concrete platform perhaps 24- by 10-feet that clings to the cliffs on the rim of the Pine Creek Gorge. From here, visitors may gaze north or south for a spectacular panoramic view of the remote, isolated wilderness known as the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. Across the gorge, the overlooks at Colton Point State Park, a sister park on the west rim of the gorge, are barely seen.

The Pine Creek Gorge here is almost 4,000-foot wide (a little more than $\frac{3}{4}$ -mile) and 800-foot deep (.15 mile). In places, it is almost 1,000-foot deep. But, all through the gorge, Pine Creek, the largest "creek" in the country and one of Pennsylvania's

designated "Scenic Rivers," runs through the bottom, separating the gorge into two isolated, wooded, and divided areas.

The Pine Creek Gorge was designated a National Natural Landmark in 1968, and its 12,163 acres is also protected as a Pennsylvania State Natural Area. The rocks are estimated to have been around for about 400 million years, but the gorge itself was carved about 20,000 years ago during the last Ice Age. It is a geological landmark, formed by water erosion and cut through five major rock formations.

In its early years, previous to the human ecological destruction eras, the area was 85% hemlock and pines, with the rest of the trees being hardwood. It was said to be the home to a herd of 12,000 American bison. There were also herds of elk and some of its other wildlife inhabitants included the Pennsylvania panther, wolves, wolverines, and lynx.

In 1794, two early explorers found the northern end of the gorge and followed Pine Creek to explore the areas along the early Native American walkway. They found a lush wilderness and a creek full of trout and other fish.

Shad, salmon, and eels were also inhabitants of the fresh and pristine waters.

By the early 19th century, opportunistic industrialists found something of great value in the 47-mile wilderness along Pine Creek that is now designated the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon. The pines and hemlocks were sought out as ship masts. During the lumbering era, trees were cut and floated downstream on Pine Creek to the Susquehanna River and beyond to the Chesapeake Bay, where mills and shipbuilding factories awaited.

Once the pines were gone, local lumbermen moved on to the hardwoods of the forest. Sawmills dotted the countryside. In 1883, the Jersey Shore, Pine Creek, and Buffalo railroad was built along Pine Creek through the bottom of the gorge to haul lumber, freight, and passengers through the wilderness.

By the early 20th century, the entire area was clear-cut, and the gorge was now bare. Erosion and landslides followed as did fires. The land was barren and wasted.

One of the area's lumbermen, Leonard Harrison, had a sawmill at Tiadaghton, a small railroad town located partway through the most isolated portion of the Pine Creek Gorge. The mill burned, and the town eventually became a ghost town. Harrison was living in Wellsboro, Tioga County, at the time, and was active there as a civic leader. He helped construct the sandstone courthouse on Main Street, rebuilt the historic Penn Wells Hotel after a devastating fire, and assisted with many projects in the borough including drawing up plans for what was to ultimately become Soldiers & Sailors Memorial Hospital (now UPMC Susquehanna).

In 1906, Harrison bought 121 acres of land at the site of the current Leonard Harrison State Park. Harrison wanted to develop the area for tourism. He created the "Lookout" and invited the public to visit.

In 1922, Harrison donated his picnic grounds to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Over the following years, the state slowly bought other lands, often abandoned lumber companies in the gorge area, and those lands ultimately became the Tioga State Forest located across the gorge from

Harrison's "Lookout." Now, the state forest encompasses 160,000 acres, and Leonard Harrison State Park on the east rim of the canyon has grown to its current 585 acres nestled among private lands.

The park saw many improvements during the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) era. Its pavilions, comfort facilities, and roads were all built by the "CCC Boys," members of the local CCC camps. Today, there is a bronze statue of a CCC worker at the park that stands in tribute to their contributions.

Through the years, the park and surrounding areas continued to attract statewide and national attention. According to Church Dillon, well-known Tioga County author and naturalist, the area now has over 225 species of wildflowers, plants, and trees. The forest is lush and vibrant. There are scattered stands of old forest, but most of the gorge is now second-growth trees that may be over 100 years old. The fall "leaf peeping" season is especially popular because of the warm fall colors of the many hardwoods that populate the canyon's sides.

Recreation is a popular activity. Pine Creek becomes wild enough for a few weeks of river running by kayak, canoe, or raft. By summer, the river is host to tubing activities.

Likewise, fishing in legendary Pine Creek is superb during certain times of the year. Fall is the perfect time for trout fishing, as the waters cool and rise from fall rains. During the summer, warmwater fishing is popular, but trout fishing is paramount during the spring and fall months. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) stocks parts of the creek with trophy trout. Another area, south of the park, is stocked by the Pennsylvania Brown Trout Club. Various regulations exist across the length of Pine Creek including Delayed Harvest Artificial Lures Only, Catch and Release All Tackle, and conventional Commonwealth



The Leonard Harrison State Park entrance.



A fall day at Leonard Harrison State Park, Tioga County.



Fog rolls in for sunset at Leonard Harrison State Park.

Inland Waters regulations. For more information, see the *Pennsylvania Fishing Summary*.

In warmer weather, when Pine Creek waters are warm and low, bass fishing rules. Not far from Leonard Harrison State Park are Lake Hamilton and Lake Nessmuk, just outside Wellsboro, that provide fishing opportunities. Further away is Hills Creek State Park. Bring a boat or fish from shore.

Back at Leonard Harrison State Park, high on the canyon's rim, sits one of the best camping areas in northern Pennsylvania. The park is known for its views from the lookouts, but its campground is a great staging area for local outdoor activities.

The campground is located along an unpaved loop driveway and has approximately 24 campsites. Some of the sites have electrical hookups. The campsites are a mix of shaded and sunny areas. The campground has fire rings, picnic tables, a playground, and campground amenities like a dump station and comfort stations with hot water showers. It is open from April to October.

Summer and fall are the seasons during which most people visit because of the scenic views and ample outdoor recreation opportunities near the park. Hiking is a popular activity. The park is host to the 1 mile (one way) Turkey Path Trail that snakes back and forth along a mixture of dirt path and wooden walkways down the side of the gorge to its base. The Turkey Path Trail ends at the Pine Creek Rail Trail, the award-winning multi-purpose biking and walking path that follows the route of the original Jersey Shore, Pine Creek, and Buffalo railroads. Pine Creek will be in front of visitors who make it to the bottom of the path. The Turkey Path Trail passes a series of seasonal waterfalls along Little Four Mile Run. But, visitors should be warned that the path is steep with rugged terrain. Hiking the path is for the hearty. Know your limits and take it slow and easy on the way back up the side of the gorge.

A less strenuous trail is the Overlook Trail that makes its way to Otter View lookout along a ⅓ mile (one way) hiking path. All of the trails at the park pass close by to

many steep cliffs and follow rugged terrain. Stay on designated trails, and wear sturdy footwear. Not only will you be safer, but you will protect fragile vegetation and minimize erosion.

No description is complete without mentioning the opportunities provided by the Pine Creek Rail Trail, the 62-mile trail that starts 3 miles north of Wellsboro and ends in Jersey Shore. This basically flat, smooth surface, well-groomed, hard-packed limestone trail is doable by all.

While at the park, panoramic views are only

100 yards past the Visitors Center at the entrance to the park. It is an easy, mostly flat walk along the rim of the canyon to the overlooks. Those interested in walking to the cliffside viewing platform will negotiate a series of 52 concrete steps and intervals of flagstone landings.

During the summer season, interpretive and educational programs are provided by park staff and volunteers. Educational displays including a video are available in the park's environmental interpretive center.

The spectacular vistas at Leonard Harrison State Park are a draw for visitors year-round. Even during the off-season, visitors may carefully traverse the walkways at the park and stand in awe on the viewing platforms. All of the park's trails are closed starting in October because of the extreme danger from ice and snow.

Whenever you visit Leonard Harrison State Park, it is a good time to think about the far-ranging vision of Leonard Harrison, who can be credited with the creation of this high-demand destination. Standing in this spectacular location, no matter the weather or the season, his gift is felt with all of the senses. ☐

More information:

Leonard Harrison State Park, Tioga County, in north-central Pennsylvania, is about 10 miles west of Wellsboro, a quaint Victorian town with good restaurants and shops.

The park is reached via PA Route 660 West from Wellsboro. Detailed Information is on the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources website at www.dcnr.pa.gov.

Visit the Pennsylvania Grand Canyon and fish for trout in one of Pennsylvania's best scenic rivers. Throw a line into a local lake, and try your hand for warmwater fish species. Hike the many trails in the state parks or Tioga State Forest. Bicycle the award-winning Pine Creek Rail Trail. Consider cross country skiing during snowy periods or snowmobiling the many miles of forestry roads during the winter months.



Late Season Trout Adventures

by Jeff Woleslagle

photos by the author

We loaded the car and pulled out of the driveway at 3:00 a.m. for the 4-hour drive to Erie's famed waters of Elk Creek. Stopping only once for coffee and fuel, we were in the access parking lot about 20 minutes before daylight and tried to rest before putting our waders on and hitting the trail to the water. The temperature was in the upper 30 degrees F. There was no wind, so we knew we would be comfortable. One angler was on the trail ahead of us, and he turned right on the trail where we turned left. So, the odds of having the water we wanted to fish to ourselves that morning just increased. Wading across at a shallow bar, we eased up to the nice fishing hole that was our chosen destination and found the deeper water to be a milky green. We could not see the fish holding in the current, but we knew fish were located here. As usual during late season trout and steelhead fishing, we fished for almost an hour before the first hookup. It took a little time to figure out the proper drift, as the fish were becoming more active as

the sun warmed the water. My son and his friend hiked back to the car to retrieve another fishing rod. While they were gone, I hooked a large male steelhead that immediately had me regretting my choice of 4-pound-test line that morning. I was just about ready to start guiding the fish toward my friend's net when it gave one more good head shake on the surface and broke the line. I was feeling dejected but knew we had the rest of that day plus two more days to fish. My chance would come again. About 1½ hours later, my son was using his fly rod and drifting an egg fly pattern of his own creation when his rod bowed with the weight of a heavy fish. He did a great job fighting it. When we got the fish into the net, we were all amazed to see not only his fly in its jaw but the egg sack that I was fishing. Incredibly, he landed the same fish that I lost earlier in the morning. We snapped a few quick pictures before he eased the beautiful steelhead back into the flow, and we watched it swim to deeper water. One of the great things about fishing that keep anglers coming back for more is that you never know what may happen on any given outing.

Late season trout adventures always seem to provide great stories to share in the warmth at home or at the hotel.



This wild Brown Trout fell for waxworms drifted along an undercut bank.

Odds are good that there is a stream within a reasonable drive of most anglers that holds trout throughout the year and provides good fishing if the water is not iced over. A little online research may reveal which waters in your neck of the woods may be good places to try. I am known for fishing whenever an opportunity arises, but I tend to be more selective about the days I fish in the late season. Look for a



Deep holes are excellent locations to look for late season trout.

warming trend or a few stable days without high winds to be successful.

A 6- to 7-foot light action spinning rod with a properly sized reel that is spooled with 4- to 6-pound-test monofilament or fluorocarbon line is ideal. Great baits in the late season include waxworms, live minnows, and paste baits. For live and paste baits, use small baitholder hooks from size 8 to 12 and enough BB-sized splitshot to keep it deep down. For artificial baits, small jigs in natural colors such as brown and black are good. Small 1/8- to 1/32-ounce inline spinners with silver or gold blades fished slowly along the bottom can be deadly. Cast across the current, and let your bait or lure drift down through each hole thoroughly before moving on. During this time of the year, focus on deeper holes and runs to locate fish. Fish undercut baits along deep water.

For fly fishing in the late season, I usually carry an assortment of nymphs as well as Sucker Spawn and egg patterns. On some days, midge hatches occur, so always keep an eye out for rising fish too.

Late season is an excellent time to fish for trout in Pennsylvania. More anglers every year are discovering the hot action that can be experienced, even in the cold. Now is the perfect time to plan your own late season trout adventure. □



Paste baits, waxworms, small jigs, and inline spinners are effective when the water is cold.

2021 FISHING LICENSES

LICENSE YEAR

Annual licenses are valid from Dec. 1, 2020, through Dec. 31, 2021. 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	\$22.90
104	Senior Resident (Annual)	65 & up	\$11.90
105	Senior Resident (Lifetime)	65 & up	\$51.90
108	1-Day Resident (not valid March 15-April 30)	16 & up	\$11.90
102	Non-Resident (Annual)	16 & up	\$52.90
113	Non-Resident PA Student (Annual) ****	16 & up	\$22.90
106	1-Day Tourist **(not valid March 15-April 30)	16 & up	\$26.90
103	3-Day Tourist	16 & up	\$26.90
107	7-Day Tourist	16 & up	\$34.90
110	Voluntary Youth Fishing License (Annual)	Less than 16	\$2.90
109	Mentored Youth Permit	Less than 16	\$0.00
150	Trout Permit	16 & up	\$9.90
140	1-Year Trout Permit ***	16 & up	\$9.90
143	3-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$25.90
144	5-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$41.90
145	10-Year Senior Lifetime Trout Permit	65 & up	\$81.90
151	Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$9.90
152	Combination Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$15.90
136	Alternate Display Annual Fishing License Button	Any Age	\$10.00

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.90 PALS transaction fee. Excludes the 109 Mentored Youth Permit.

** Includes Trout and Lake Erie permits, not valid March 15-April 30. *** Applies to Senior Lifetime purchased on or after 1/1/2015 or may also be purchased as a trout program donation. **** Available after mid-January.

2021 MULTI-YEAR FISHING LICENSES

Code	Type of Fishing License or Permit	Age	Cost*
140	1-Year Trout Permit **	16 & up	\$9.90
141	1-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$9.90
142	1-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$15.90
030	3-Year Resident	16-64	\$64.90
031	3-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$154.90
032	3-Year Senior Resident	65 & up	\$31.90
033	3-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$25.90
034	3-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$25.90
035	3-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$43.90
050	5-Year Resident	16-64	\$106.90
051	5-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$256.90
052	5-Year Senior Resident	65 & up	\$51.90
053	5-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$41.90
054	5-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$41.90
055	5-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$71.90
060	10-Year Resident	16 & up	\$211.90
061	10-Year Non-Resident	16 & up	\$511.90
063	10-Year Trout Permit	16 & up	\$81.90
064	10-Year Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$81.90
065	10-Year Combo Trout Lake Erie Permit	16 & up	\$141.90

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.90 PALS transaction fee. ** May also be purchased as a trout program donation.

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2021 VOLUNTARY PERMITS

LICENSE YEAR

The new 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	\$11.90
077	3-Year Voluntary Bass Permit	Any	\$31.90
081	5-Year Voluntary Bass Permit	Any	\$51.90
085	10-Year Voluntary Bass Permit	Any	\$101.90
071	Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$11.90
075	3-Year Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$31.90
079	5-Year Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$51.90
083	10-Year Voluntary Musky Permit	Any	\$101.90
070	Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$11.90
074	3-Year Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$31.90
078	5-Year Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$51.90
082	10-Year Voluntary Habitat/Waterways Conservation Permit	Any	\$101.90
072	Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$26.90
076	3-Year Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$76.90
080	5-Year Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$126.90
084	10-Year Voluntary Wild Trout & Enhanced Waters Permit	Any	\$251.90

* Includes issuing agent fee of \$1.00 and \$0.90 PALS transaction fee.

www.fishandboat.com

Ghost Town Trail



by Ralph Scherder

photos by the author

Walking or riding the Ghost Town Trail, Indiana County, is about more than just recreation. It is a journey through history, the story of how an area once an epicenter for coal and ironmaking industries was all but forgotten, and then reclaimed. Now, almost 100 years after the many towns along its course were abandoned, the Ghost Town Trail was acknowledged as a National Recreation Trail in June 2003 and named Pennsylvania's Trail of the Year in 2020.

The Ghost Town Trail is a 32-mile trail that runs from Saylor Park in the town of Black Lick to Route 422 in Ebensburg. There are also two extensions—the Hoodlebug Trail, which connects Black Lick to Indiana, approximately 10.5 miles, and the C and I Extension near the town of Vintondale, another 12 miles. All of the trail, with the exception of the C and I Extension, is surfaced with crushed limestone for a smooth bike ride or easy

walk. The C and I Extension is currently undeveloped, still consisting of remnants from the old railroad bed, but there are plans for resurfacing.

The history

Indiana County's coal industry boomed in the mid-1800s. The Eliza Furnace operated between 1846 and 1849 producing over 1,000 tons of iron annually. Located near the trail's halfway point outside of Vintondale, Eliza Furnace is considered one of the best-preserved hot blast iron furnaces in Pennsylvania. Another hot blast iron furnace, the Buena Vista Furnace, was built in 1847, and is located on the trail about ½-mile west of PA 56. Both sites

have historical markers that tell the story of the coal industry in this area and the role each furnace played in that industry. These markers are worth stopping to read while on a bike ride.

In fact, almost every placard along the trail tells an interesting story about something that happened in that particular location. For instance, along the C and I Extension, you can read about a train robbery gone bad and the potential for hidden treasure in that area. And near Black Lick, you can read about the trolley lines that used to shuttle people from town to town and how crossing the creek along the Ghost Town Trail was the most harrowing part of the journey.

The trail passes many other historical sites including Bracken, Armerford, Lackawanna No. 3, Wehrum, Scott



Every year, more than 60,000 people visit the Ghost Town Trail between May and October. The mile post markers are just one of the unique items you will find here during a visit.

Glenn, Webster, Beulah, and Claghorn. The coal industry began to decline in the late 1800s but held on for several more decades. And then, one by one, mines closed and each little town was abandoned. By the beginning of World War II, the people had moved on and the structures they left behind slowly sank back into the earth. Of all of the towns, Wehrum was the largest and is where you will find the only house still standing from that era.

The trail follows the path of Pennsylvania Railroad's Ebensburg and Black Lick line. In 1991, the Kovalchick Salvage Company donated 16 miles of the former line for the creation of the Ghost Town Trail. Additional donations in 1993 and 2005 by the Cambria & Indiana Railroad and others extended the Ghost Town Trail to its present length.

Access points

The main stem of the Ghost Town Trail has seven main access points, or trailheads, with ample parking and information available at each site, including mileage charts. The trailheads are Saylor Park, Heshbon, Dilltown, Wehrum, Twin Rocks, Nanty Glo, and Ebensburg.

Perhaps one of the greatest aspects of the Ghost Town Trail is that once you park and set out on the trail, you have a quality outdoor experience. Only in a few places, such as when you pass through one of the towns, does the road come close to the trail. So, you may want to plan which access point you want to go to ahead of time. On several occasions, I have burned a lot of time driving from one access point to another trying to decide where to start.



Historical markers along the trail offer stories of the area's history.



The Ghost Town Trail, Hoodlebug Trail, and C and I Extension combine for approximately 46 miles of quality hiking and biking.

Of course, this part of Indiana County is beautiful, so even the circuitous routes between points do not seem bad.

Once on the trail, though, I enjoy the opportunity to immerse myself in nature and enjoy the scenery and any wildlife I encounter along the way. It seems there are always deer nearby, or frogs in the boggy areas, or a plethora of birds flitting in the tree branches. More than anything, the Ghost Town Trail is a great place to go to clear your mind and focus on nature's beauty.

Fishing opportunities

Most of the good fishing in this area can be found close to the Hoodlebug Trail near Homer City. Within a short drive of the trail, you will find Yellow Creek, Little Yellow Creek, and Laurel Run, all of which are stocked with trout. And there is Yellow Creek Lake, which offers a lot of warmwater fishing and boating opportunities.

Blacklick Creek, which closely parallels the Ghost Town Trail from Black Lick to Vintondale, suffers from acid mine drainage. If you look upstream as you cross over the North Branch Blacklick Creek using the Main Street Bridge in Vintondale, just across the Cambria County line, you will see what appears to be fountains of water. These are actually boreholes that were drilled into the creek bed, and the water gushing out at a rate of 1,080 gallons per minute is the acid mine drainage that renders Blacklick Creek virtually lifeless during its entire 25-mile course. But, it will not be that way much longer.

Construction of an acid mine drainage treatment facility is scheduled to begin in mid-2021 and be completed in 2022. Hopefully, this will change the dynamics of Blacklick Creek the way similar projects have improved other Cambria County streams. For example, active treatment facilities on

Lancashire No. 15 and Barnes & Tucker Mine 20 have turned the headwaters of the West Branch Susquehanna River into a viable wild Brown Trout fishery. The same could happen to Blacklick Creek.

At a glance, Blacklick Creek is a beautiful stream filled with huge boulders and deep pools. It is the perfect backdrop for the Ghost Town Trail. As you ride or walk the trail, you can hear the constant flow of the nearby river, a soothing sort of melody that adds to the overall atmosphere. To have that stream running clear and clean again would be a major attraction and economical boost for the small towns along its course.

Past cleanup projects have already helped the South Branch Blacklick Creek, which joins the North Branch just outside of Vintondale. Although the South Branch is not stocked by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, several local sportsmen's clubs raise funds to stock trout in the sections around town.

In July, I crossed the foot bridge over the North Branch Blacklick Creek and looked down at the stream and saw trout gathered around some debris that washed up against the bridge abutment. The trout had come from the South Branch, which is clean but warms up too much to support trout in the summer. Unfortunately for the fish, the water pumping up out of the abandoned mines on the North Branch Blacklick Creek is cold enough but too polluted to support the fish. On a brighter note, if everything goes as planned, the North Branch Blacklick Creek as well as the main stem Blacklick Creek will soon flow both cold and clean enough for trout year-round.

The Ghost Town Trail is a great place to find solitude, beautiful scenery, and abundant wildlife. Throw in some great nearby fishing opportunities, and there is something for everyone. ☐



FIVE WAYS to Stay Warmer WHILE ICE FISHING

by **Ross Robertson** photos by the author

It is safe to say that ice fishing is the coldest form of fishing, but there is no reason not to be comfortable all day even in brutal conditions with today's technology and some simple tips. Here are several ways to stay comfortable in less than desirable conditions.

Jersey gloves

When your hands get cold, it may be tough to focus or do much, let alone fish. For this reason, I use a two-pronged approach to keep my hands warm. Start off with a pair of oversized mittens. Any piece of clothing that fits just right or tight constricts blood flow and causes your body to get cold quicker. Wear a pair of inexpensive brown jersey gloves underneath your mittens. Large mittens are great for keeping your hands warm, but do not offer much dexterity. When you remove the large mittens to do anything from pressing buttons to starting an auger, the cold air and wind quickly makes your hands get cold. These inexpensive jersey gloves can be purchased in bulk for less than a dollar a pair. Carry several pairs. When the jersey gloves become damp, switch the gloves out for a new pair.

Exercise mats

Even a good pair of cold weather boots has limits after a few hours of standing directly on the ice. Using a square, foam exercise mat provides a protective barrier between you and the ice, which keeps you warmer. The mat also keeps you drier when kneeling.

Neck gator

The saying, "you don't know how much you need something until you don't have it" was in my head when my neck gator was left in the truck on an ice fishing trip. A heavy neck gator keeps wind from hitting your neck and can be pulled up around your face to cover sensitive skin areas. Ski masks may accomplish the same task, but ski masks are not as comfortable or realistic to wear all day and may make visibility difficult.

Ski goggles

A pair of clear or amber-tinted ski goggles ensures better vision and closes up the gap between your neck gator and hat. Use a wipe on the lens to reduce fogging.

Boot warmer insoles

Even with a quality pair of boots and an exercise mat, your feet may still get cold. If your feet get cold easily, use boot warmers. You can purchase a disposable pair of boot warmers that are similar to disposable hand warmer bags. However, boot warmers will not typically get you through an entire day and require you to take your boots off and on. While more expensive, another option is to purchase a rechargeable pair of insoles that use batteries. The fundamental advantage is that many pairs of insoles are heat adjustable and should get you through an entire day. ☐

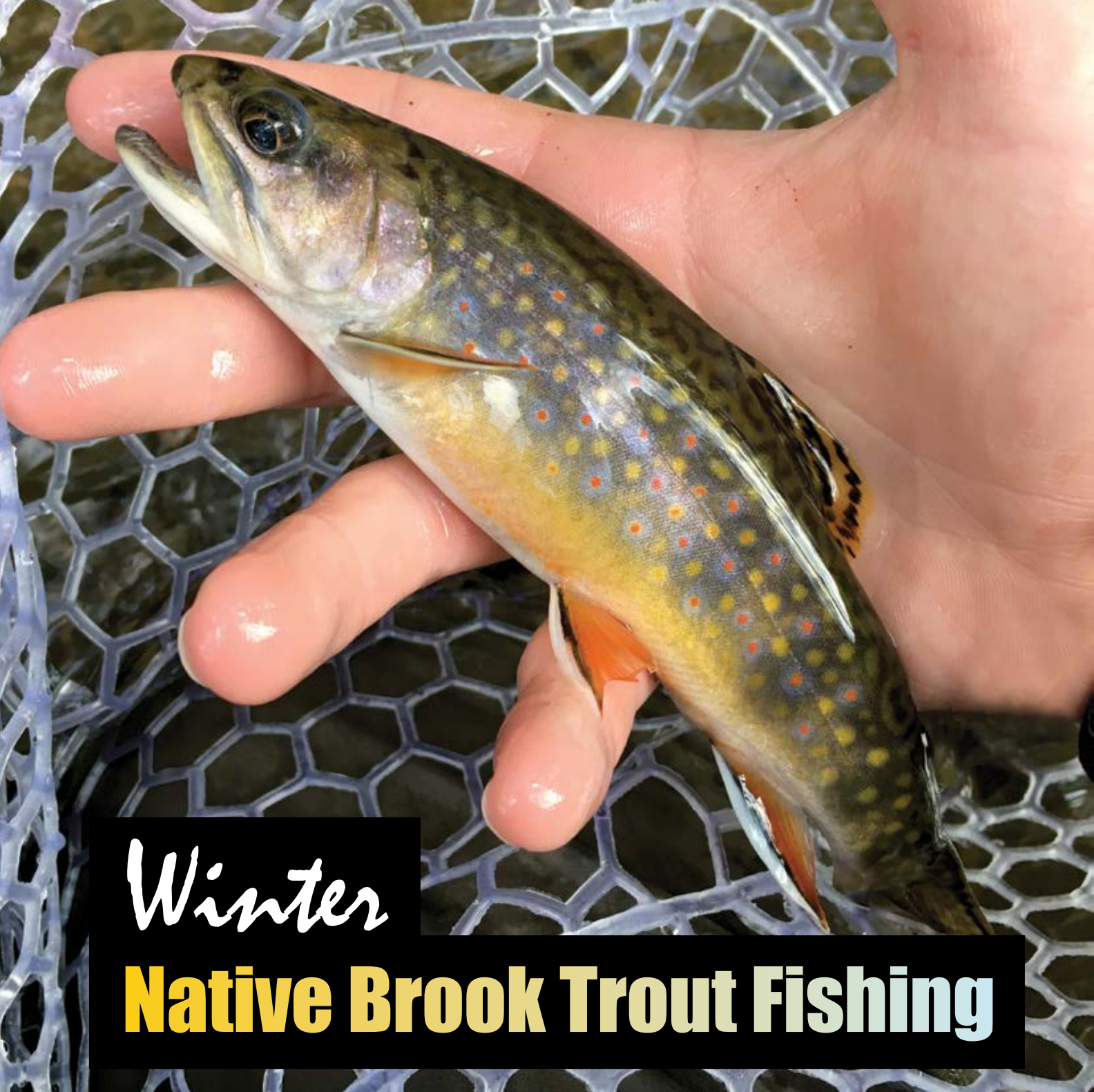


photo-Henry Robinson

Winter

Native Brook Trout Fishing

by *Nathan Woleslagle*

In the winter, an angler must become creative to catch fish. Chasing native Brook Trout in the Appalachians of Pennsylvania is as scenic as it is rewarding in the colder months. The fishing can be excellent, with trout willing to eat a variety of presentations. Do not put your fly rod or

trout pole in storage come December. There are still plenty of trout to be caught in the coming months.

One of the most challenging variables with winter fishing is the weather. Freezing temperatures may create issues in finding open casting water. Luckily, most native Brook Trout streams are quite fast flowing, so these streams hardly ever freeze shut. Another great thing about chasing Brook Trout in the winter is that the best time to fish is often midday. The closer you get to the daytime high

temperature, the better the bite may be. When the air temperature rises in the winter, it can sometimes trigger sporadic insect hatches as well. Whatever the case may be, there is little need to hit the creek early in the frigid morning or in late evening. The fish, like us, like a little warmth.

There are many effective ways to catch Brook Trout in the winter months, but a few stand out as consistently productive. If you are a fly angler, unless you noticeably see bugs coming off the water and trout rising, it may be more productive to use nymphs and small streamers. Green Weenies, leech streamers, and beadhead nymphs are all great for enticing Brook Trout to eat. If you see fish holding in pools, do not be afraid to tie on a caddis dry fly and gently lay it onto the water. Native Brook Trout eat dry flies all winter long, but my best results occur when there are bugs coming off the water.

For spin anglers, the world is your oyster. Live bait, such as small redworms and waxworms, are difficult for Brook Trout to pass up. A fun way to fish for native Brook Trout in the winter is with artificial lures. Small trout jigs bounced quickly in creeks will

draw explosive strikes from native trout. Inline spinners are another excellent option, especially when fishing slightly larger creeks and streams. For a rod setup, a 6-foot ultralight rod, paired with a 2000 size reel, is great for maneuvering mountain laurel choked streams.

When it comes to narrowing down fishing locations, all of your typical native Brook Trout streams will suffice. The trout may be operating a little differently in the streams though. Deep pools always seem to hold native trout. Do not be surprised to find native Brook Trout less reclusive than usual and out in the open. On many winter days, I have witnessed native Brook Trout high in the water column in a section of slower water. Whether these fish are soaking up a little sunlight or just hanging out is beyond me. Trout are vulnerable to small high-vis dry flies or well drifted worms. Polarized sunglasses improve visibility.

If you are feeling adventurous and would like to explore new winter waters, check out the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's Interactive Trout Maps. This is a tool I reference regularly and has provided me with unbelievable experiences fishing quality trout waters. You are able to filter the streams on the map to only show Class A streams, Wilderness Trout Streams, and other options as well. Class A streams have higher trout biomass, so I tend to focus my efforts on streams with Brook Trout populations. Naturally reproducing streams, as listed on the maps, have surprised me on occasion to how well fishing can be in certain sections.

A major factor in winter, as previously stated, is weather conditions. Fishing, especially wading, during freezing temperatures is no joke. During the winter, I am accompanied by a friend, or at the least make my whereabouts known to friends and family members. If traveling far from roads to fish, I highly advise carrying a backpack with lifesaving essentials in it. Waterproof matches, a packable blanket, food, and a first aid kit. At least keep survival items in your vehicle as a safety precaution.

Do not let winter be a glum time of year, and do not allow cabin fever to creep in. Winter native trout fishing can provide surprising opportunities at landing fish and having fun. The Appalachians in the winter are a sight to behold, and the trout still have a ferocious appetite. I seldom encounter another angler on native Brook Trout streams in the colder months. Pennsylvania is teeming with fishing opportunities when there is snow on the ground. ☐



photo-Aaron Morder

In February, native Brook Trout were easily enticed with beadhead nymphs while fishing on a snowy creek in Centre County.

Veterans on Pennsylvania's Water— *Appreciation for a Calming, Peaceful Experience*



by Jerry Bush

photos by the author

In February 2019, after nearly 50-years of full-time employment and simultaneous part-time employment, I moved into the realm of “semi-retired,” self-employed, outdoor journalist. Retiring from my full-time manufacturing/management position left me feeling blessed but with a burning desire to “give something back” to society. Even so, I struggled to figure out what I could do and for whom.

Trout season was a few months away, and one day, while imitating a skilled fly tier, it occurred to me that a wounded veteran may appreciate someone to befriend. A person who would volunteer to help veterans enjoy fly fishing, especially if physical ailments presented challenges.

One morning at church, I mentioned my thought to another fly fishing enthusiast—my church's lead pastor. “We have another fairly new member who attends a later service, and the two of you need to meet,” said Pastor Aaron. The next morning, I received a text from Ron Koshar, who was also recently retired. We agreed to meet for breakfast the next day. Koshar is a volunteer with Project Healing Waters. Project Healing Waters is an organization devoted to helping wounded veterans experience the natural, soothing relaxation generated by the experience of fly fishing. My new friend invited me to attend a Project Healing Waters event held at a mall in Pittsburgh. There, I could meet the southwest Pennsylvania chapter leader and observe, as volunteers and vets gathered to tie flies, build fly rods, and reach out to veterans interested in these activities. After observing the veterans and volunteers interact, I felt sure this was a worthwhile service I could help provide.

Koshar's son lives in the Pittsburgh area, which provides extra motivation for him to make the 90-minute drive from

our hometown. I opted to search for similar opportunities a little closer to home, but my searches proved futile at first. Eventually, I clicked on the website for the Neshannock Chapter Trout Unlimited, which is headquartered a short distance from my home.

The Neshannock Chapter Trout Unlimited was organizing a group of volunteers to begin a program dedicated to helping veterans and their families go fishing. Just as with Project Healing Waters, learning the craft of tying flies was among the activities to be offered. The goals were to help American veterans and interested family members experience the joys and relaxation offered by this honorable pursuit, played out in some of nature's most inspiring environments.

Our chapter leaders decided to go along with Trout Unlimited's (TU's) recommendation that volunteers be exposed to some online training, designed specifically to help volunteers of any organization interact with military veterans who may be dealing with issues we may not otherwise understand. Our online training is provided by PsychArmor®, a service dedicated to helping interested people develop a mindset to better serve physically wounded veterans and veterans who are dealing with post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other issues. They offer 15- to 30-minute courses. The training is very diverse. There is even a course to help volunteers understand how to interact with service dogs and service dog owners. I learned there were items I never considered, and the courses were thought-provoking and inspiring.

I realized I knew someone who served a few tours of duty in Afghanistan and suffers moderate PTSD. Before I participated in the online course devoted to PTSD, my mind was foolishly focused on soldiers with visible wounds. Often, it is the soldiers with hidden disorders who may



TU veteran's volunteer Reg McClelland with United States military veteran Steve Wiseman, who never previously fished with a fly rod.

benefit most from the soothing comfort offered by fishing on Pennsylvania's waterways.

Although TU does not limit its veteran programs to fly fishing like Project Healing Waters, this activity can offer the most mental benefit. Even when not on the water, anyone may work at a fly tying bench. Tying is an activity that fills time in a productive manner, and each creation brings with it the imaginative visit to a cool, free-flowing stream, surrounded by the sights and sounds of nature. Even investigating what flies to own and then collecting a substantial selection to fill a fly box takes thought and consideration.

In June 2019, our chapter teamed up with the Oil Creek Chapter of TU for a joint event. Nearly 24 veterans and some of their family members joined us for a picnic, fly tying demonstration, fly casting lessons, and time on the water. We even stocked trout for the event. After spending a few hours on the stream, some veterans said their time on the water brought appreciated tranquility. Most expressed a desire to participate again in the future.

Our TU veteran's volunteers do not limit activities to trout. The Shenango River flows through our vicinity, and it holds a good population of Smallmouth Bass. One of the people attending an event asked about bass fishing with a fly rod, and I explained that bass fishing is a lot of fun, and in the heat of summer, bass are a worthy target. We got together to catch Smallmouth Bass in August. It became obvious my new friend, who served our country during the Vietnam War, was becoming extremely interested in fly fishing. I recommended a good entry level fly rod and reel. I did not expect to make a new fishing partner while volunteering. In fact, I received a text from my new friend, "Hey, the Shenango water looks good. Any interest in fly fishing for Smallmouth Bass?" it read. The next day, we shared an incredible experience, and the fish we caught and released were only part of it.

It only takes a first step to get involved. If you are a veteran, these organizations will help turn you and your family members on to an activity you may find a welcome relief from the pressures of life. If you would like to volunteer, please do so. Many veterans thanked me for finding this means of

giving a little something back to those who gave so much. Your volunteer service will be appreciated. Sometimes, these brave men and women just need someone to listen as they reveal their thoughts while spending time on the water. It is rewarding to observe veterans and their family members surrender to the calming effects of Pennsylvania's streams and rivers.

Anyone who is interested, whether veteran or volunteer, should contact any of the local TU chapters. An internet search will provide contact information. Severely wounded veterans may feel more comfortable with the organization Project Healing Waters, because they specialize in providing dedicated fly fishing services geared toward wounded veterans. ☐

Pennsylvania Chapters of Project Healing Waters and Contacts

- **Allentown** - Not Forgotten Fly Fishing, Fly Fishers International
Program lead: Zach Taylor
zach.taylor@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Altoona/Hollidaysburg** - John Kennedy Chapter TU
Program lead: Dave Thomas
dave.thomas@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Coatesville (Philadelphia)** - Valley Forge TU
Program lead: Ken VanGlider
Ken.VanGlider@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Erie** - Northwest PA Fishing Association
Program lead: Craig Brandick
craig.brandick@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Harrisburg** - Juniata Fly Fishing Club, Fly Fishers International
Program lead: Glenn Klinger
glenn.klinger@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Kunkletown** - Brodhead Chapter of TU
Program lead: John Rocchio
john.rocchio@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Lebanon** - Juniata Fly Fishing Club, Fly Fishers International
Program lead: John Killinger
John.Killinger@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Pittsburgh** - Penn's Woods West Chapter of TU
Program lead: Amanda Thompson
amanda.thompson@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Royersford** - Valley Forge TU
Program lead: Thaddeus Nowakowski
Thaddeus.Nowakowski@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Sellersville** - Bux-Mont Freedom Fly Fishers, Fly Fishers International
Program lead: Jerome Coviello
jerome.coviello@projecthealingwaters.org
- **West Bradford Township** - Valley Forge TU
Program lead: Jason Scrafford
jason.scrafford@projecthealingwaters.org
- **Wilkes-Barre** - Stanley Cooper Sr. TU
Program lead: Heide Cebrick
heide.cebrick@projecthealingwaters.org



DUTCH FORK CUSTOM LURES

by Alex Zidock Jr. photos by the author

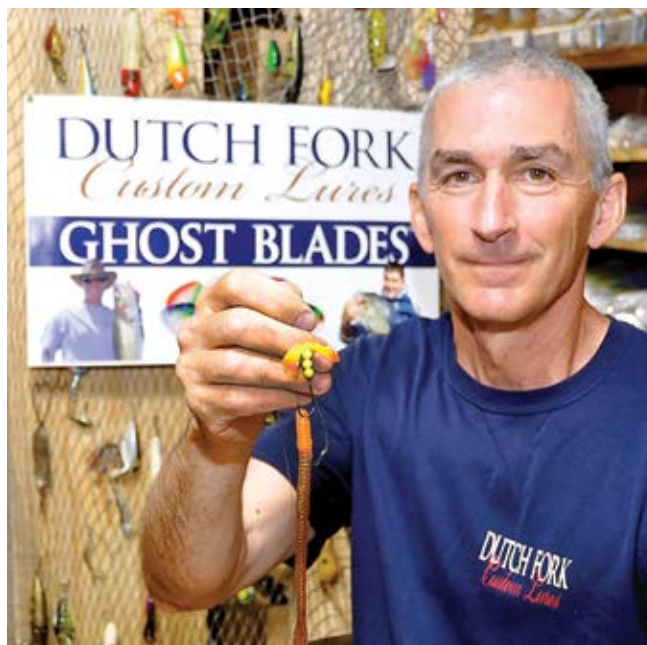
Water hazards are absent on the golf course at Oakmont Country Club, located about 14 miles east of Pittsburgh. However, the course had a unique attraction for Keith Eshbaugh. The one-time nationally ranked pro Walleye angler and now lure manufacturer and fishing guide does not even own a set of golf clubs. You may say he went bonkers over bunkers.

“I designed golf courses. I worked on some prestigious golf courses like Oakmont Country Club, where more combined USGA and PGA championships occurred than any other course in the United States. I was one of the guys who rebuilt the bunkers on that entire golf course,” said Eshbaugh. “Before that, I started a business cleaning restaurants. When I became successful at a business, I moved on to a new challenge.”

However, roots set early and deep would lead Eshbaugh to a career that linked his formal education and passion. “My dad used to take us trout fishing when I was 10 years old. But, my mom wanted to make sure I had an education, so she forced me to go to art school. I earned two degrees, but I could not sit still long enough to do wildlife art.”

“When I was in junior high school, I would get up, walk to the trout stream a mile, catch a few trout, eat them for breakfast, and then go to school. I took a fly tying course when I was 12 years old. Then, I started tying flies for my

dad and his friends. He worked in the former Murphy’s Mart stores, and he got my flies into the sporting goods department. Then, I started pouring jigs and making spinnerbaits. I made enough money to keep me in fishing



Keith Eshbaugh holds his newest creation and best-selling plastic Butterfly Blade. Eshbaugh’s Ghost Blades are made of plastic and spin at less speed than blades made from metal.

gear. At 12 years old, I did not know a lot about marketing, but now my fishing lure business can afford me to buy a bigger and better boat each year.”

In 2002, Eshbaugh fished as a co-angler in a few Walleye tournaments, and he did well. “I was the first professional Walleye tour angler in Pennsylvania. I was on tour for 15 years, and when I retired from professional Walleye fishing, I was ranked fourteenth in the nation.”

Eshbaugh’s training in art and fine arts and his love for fishing led him to painting fishing lures. During the last few years, he has painted over 75,000 lures, selling these lures under Dutch Fork Custom Lures.

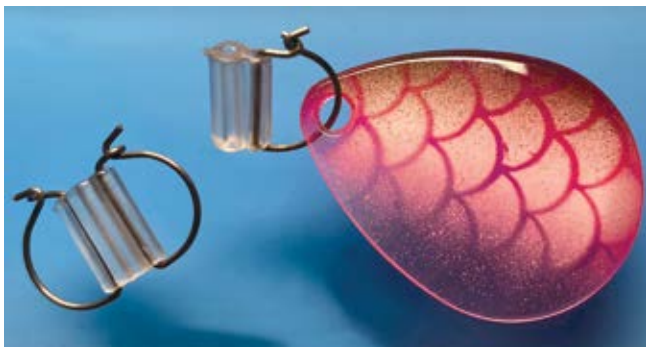
There are two facets to Dutch Fork Custom Lures. They will recreate lures no longer produced for individual anglers, and they provide a line of unique designs. “Especially bass anglers will send us a lure, and we can recreate one or a hundred,” said Eshbaugh.

“I also saw an opportunity to make spinner blades out of plastic,” said Eshbaugh. “Every blade manufacturer made their blades out of metal. I wanted something that would spin slowly and not sink to the bottom, so I decided to try plastic.” He handed me a few feather-weight blades and explained that their design would spin easily, because every plastic blade is half the weight of a metal blade of the same size. Some remain transparent, while others are sprayed metallic.

“The plastic blades are a favorite of anglers who fish structure and weeds. Anglers put it directly on top of the weeds and pull it slow, because the blades spin at just 4 miles-per-hour. It takes a metal blade at least 7 miles-per-hour to spin,” said Eshbaugh.

When I asked Eshbaugh about the durability of his plastic blades, he said, “Break one of those in your hand.” I could not break it. And he added, “The color embedded in the plastic will not come off either.”

“Most sporting good stores will take a few different colors, but right now, in stock, we have about 450 active SKUs. There are 12 different size blades, offered in 82 colors, and all blades and components are manufactured in America except for the clevises,” said Eshbaugh.



Keith Eshbaugh designed the single and double Quik Change Clevis for ease of blade change out and performance. It is called the “No Loss” blade system for inline crawler harnesses. The partially transparent Ghost Blade in the Pink Scale pattern is attached to the single clevis.



Trained as a fine artist, Keith Eshbaugh uses his talent to custom paint fishing lures.

“Our number one selling blade right now is a blade I developed, called a butterfly blade,” said Eshbaugh. “So far, it has caught 18 different species of fish.”

“You can troll the Butterfly Blade down to a quarter of a mile an hour, and it will spin. It comes packaged with three beads, two hooks, and the butterfly blade on 48 inches of leader,” said Eshbaugh.

From his manufacturing site in Cochran, Crawford County, Eshbaugh also runs Dutch Fork Fishing Charters on Lake Erie.

They are so busy producing lures that Eshbaugh has little time to devote to fine art wildlife painting. “But that is what I am saving to do when I retire,” said Eshbaugh. ☐



Dutch Fork Custom Lures are found in many mom-and-pop stores, major tackle outfitters in the United States and Canada, and online.

Dutch Fork Custom Lures

www.dutchforkcustomlures.com

www.dutchforkcharters.com



Cold Water Crankbaits for Largemouth Bass

by Vic Attardo *photos by the author*

Largemouth Bass do not have as much energy in water temperature below 55 degrees F as in water temperature above 65 degrees F. A prime outcome is the fish's reduced metabolism for digesting food; and a diminished willingness to take a meal. While bass still must eat, these cold water outcomes often mean bass are reluctant to chase "fast food"—highly active prey.

For anglers, lures that work in these conditions are slower, less energetic lures than ones used in the summer.

When I think about lures for cold water, I initially turn to jigs and blade baits. But, when working in jig-pressured waters, I switch to crankbaits.

It is the shape, length, and angle of the crankbait's bill that determines the depth it rides while the body shape determines its action. Generally, the bulkier the head and thinner the tail, the more wobbling action the lure will

display. Lures that are designed to be wide wobblers are not the best for cold water success. For cold conditions, a lure with a tight side-to-side shimmy but not an exaggerated tail action is preferred.

Deep divers—lures that track below 12 feet—are the traditional offering for cold water bass, but there are some non-traditional offerings that also put bass in the boat.

An early, successful lure that ran at a moderate depth and with little exaggeration was the cigar-shaped Pikie Minnow. The metal bill had a creased lip, like a single step. This configuration gave the lure a straight, tight action. I liked this design in cold water at depths where the lure could track a foot or so above the bottom. Though some are antiques, I successfully still use a Pikie Minnow where coves meet sunken creeks, along the edges of old road beds, and on special occasions when bass corral a pack of shad a foot or so under the surface in cold water.

Some anglers claim that a lipless crankbait works best in the spring, and maybe it does. But, if you combine these



The creased, metal lip of the Pikie Minnow gives it a distinct action useful for cold water.

triangle-shaped lures with a slow-retrieve casting reel, about 5:1, you have a lure that shimmies and can track slow, two important cold water attributes.

In addition, lipless crankbaits cast like bullets. I keep one ready when I am approaching moderately deep cover, in the 5- to 15-foot range, and when I think getting close may startle fish. I zing the lipless crankbait from a distance, let it sink, then work it along the cover.

So many crankbait bills are rounded or square, but there are also crankbaits with cut edges. These lures are good for bouncing off rocks or other hard structure, because the lure deflects to the side after contact. Combine a deflection design with a suspending or neutral buoyancy body, and you have a cold water winner.

But, as you work this lure bumping around hard cover, pause your retrieve after feeling contact. The lure will suspend or rise slowly. Then, after a pause, make a quick turn or two on the slow-motion reel, imitating a baitfish that is stunned and

regaining balance. Bass swoop in on this scenario.

Sometimes, it is necessary to think outside the box. Perhaps the least likely candidate for a cold water crankbait is a shallow runner—a lure with a square, stubby bill and a fat frame. When working southeast impoundments last season, I encountered a number of days when a square bill crankbait dominated.

With a rise in air temperature and a bright but not cloudless sun, the bass take one last visit to the shallows in late morning. Occasional flushes just under the surface—the kind where you see flat rings but no

splash or fish—are a giveaway. With this pattern, the bass are willing to take prey in the upper layer of the water column but not on the surface.

Last season, a 3-pound bass latched on to my tight, wobbling, square bill crankbait less than a foot below the surface. After that experience, I keep an eye out for these situations.

When the flat swirls are dominant, I use a silver side, square bill crankbait proven to connect with good bass. This pattern may only last for a few days and then fall apart with the next cold front. ☐



Shallow diving crankbaits are an odd choice for cold water, but shine on days when the water temperature spikes.



Where to Find Steelhead

by Nick DelVecchio

photos by the author

Each year, anglers flock to Lake Erie tributaries in search of one of the most exciting fish swimming in the waters of Pennsylvania. After catching a few steelhead, it is easy to understand why anglers come from far and wide to fish these small streams. Unfortunately, many anglers go home a bit disappointed as their days are spent walking up and down the banks in search of fish that are eerily elusive. While knowing which streams to visit is a big part of the equation, understanding what to look for and how to find steelhead are the real keys to success.

Weather patterns and stream conditions are extremely important to monitor before planning a steelhead fishing trip, because these factors directly impact where fish can be found. Heavy fall rains bring in fresh runs from Lake Erie, and steelhead will sometimes travel upstream miles in a night. When streams are blown out following a rain, fish can be difficult to locate in murky water. A general rule of thumb is to look for areas where fish will have to pause. These areas include rapids, plunge pools, and waterfalls. Fishing just below these migratory

impediments may yield fantastic results. As an added bonus, those who hang around these spots are sure to see a fish or two try to continue the upstream run by leaping up waterfalls or plunge pools, a true testament to the sheer power of steelhead.

Most of the time, the Lake Erie tributaries of Pennsylvania run low and clear. Many areas that may hold fish during high water now run ankle-deep, and it is obvious to anglers that a 26-inch fish is not holding at these spots. Anglers should focus on depth wherever they can locate it. Steelhead congregate in deeper pools as fish wait for the next rain event to trigger



Deeper pools may hold numerous schools of steelhead. These are key spots to fish on your favorite stream.



Low and clear water may be a challenge, but there are great rewards for those who know how to find steelhead in these conditions.

another upstream push. These areas of depth may hide numerous fish. For such a big fish, it is amazing how well steelhead hide. Deeper pools may have dozens of steelhead, providing anglers wonderful opportunities at multiple hookups.

One of the things that makes Pennsylvania steelhead streams so unique is its shale-lined stream bottoms. It may lead to hundreds of yards that are essentially a barren wasteland for fish since there is little refuge for fish to hide and even less food for fish to eat. Even though this may seem challenging, it may present a great opportunity. Since there are large swaths largely devoid of steelhead, those sections can be eliminated by anglers in their search. Instead, gravel and rocky bottoms (and even sand) hold a majority of the fish. If there is a section of water that holds a little depth and has a gravel bottom, that is a great spot to check out. Anglers who take the time to learn different stretches of water and find these areas of gravel and jumbled rocks should focus their efforts there each time, avoiding sections lacking fish.

Most steelhead fishing is centered on Erie's tributaries, and for good reasons. However, one of the more overlooked areas to find and catch fish is in Lake Erie itself at the mouth of the streams. As the days shorten and fall rains loom, fish will start to stack in Lake Erie near popular waters like Elk Creek, Walnut Creek, and Sixteen Mile Creek. This is an outstanding time to catch steelhead before fish enter the tributaries. Hooked steelhead fight hard as the entire lake is

available, and it offers the opportunity to lengthen the season by targeting steelhead before these fish move into the streams in heavy numbers. Early mornings and late evenings are excellent occasions to find fish moving towards the stream mouths during low light conditions.

Steelhead are one of the greatest gamefish Pennsylvania has to offer. Its acrobatic leaps and powerful runs leave anglers in awe and coming back for more each fall and winter. Patterns of steelhead do not change much from year to year, so once tried-and-true tactics are honed in, these strategies may be utilized for years to come. Finding steelhead is the first step to achieve success, and those who keep these few tips in mind will have a leg up in their pursuits this season. ☐



Cool fall runs bring steelhead in from Lake Erie. These fish hang around in the streams through March and into April, providing anglers the opportunity to catch steelhead for over half of the year.

FISHING HATS



by Marshall Nych

photos by the author

Ask any angler to identify the one constant of every fishing trip. What tops the list for each outdoor outing? Though the angler may have an affinity for the fly rod, the spinning rod may be summoned come summer. Some trips span a lot of water, requiring a boat. Others lace up wading boots and waders for a smaller, shallow stretch. Even the best of fishing buddies misses a trip now and again. The one loyal item eternally answering roll call is not rod, reel, tackle, or even person. The most faithful to an angler is a fishing hat.

I have encountered hats stitched from every fabric of life. Angler preference in headwear varies as widely as the styles. From classic Stetson western hats to trucker hats and ball caps, many anglers find their fit comfortable

or lucky. Still, others dutifully don the practical benefits of a visor or sun hat. Hearty winter warriors cover their craniums with an insulating stocking cap. The non-fishing public assumes it is the angler who picks the hat. Anglers know the hat selects the angler.

Regardless of style, no piece of equipment or clothing is relied on for so many aspects of fishing. The fishing hat is trusted with blocking the sun, staving off the cold, repelling the rain, displaying fishing licenses, holding tackle, or drying flies. While managing these many responsibilities, the fishing hat stoically conveys character and personality.

Like many anglers, I have multiple fishing hats. I rotate between trout season's Stetson and a desert camouflage boonie hat for all other fishing applications. The boonie hat was a gift my older brother picked up in Iraq during his military tour of duty. The oversized, floppy brim protects anglers from the elements, like the soldiers who wear these hats protect our country.



The fishing hat is trusted with blocking the sun, staving off the cold, repelling the rain, displaying fishing licenses, holding tackle, or drying flies.

The trout fishing Stetson evolved into a museum of memories. Upon milestones in life or on the water, meaningful flies retire to a life of leisure along its leather strap stitched above the brim. I find all patterns can be pinned into three categories, each fly telling its own story.

Remarkable firsts

A ragged Pheasant-Tail Nymph I clumsily crafted when I was 16 years old is proudly tucked in the middle. Not only is the weathered brown bug the first fly I ever tied behind the vise, it is the fly that tricked my first trout on a fly rod. Appropriately, the nymph is surrounded by firsts of my children. There are the pair of patterns connecting my daughter's first fish (a sunfish set off by a Beadhead Pheasant Tail) and my son's first fish (a Bluegill royally submitted to a Prince Nymph). Many years and tangles later, the flies my children landed their first trout on a fly rod are sunk into the threads. My daughter selected the most sparkly pink egg pattern in my box. My son wrestled his first fly rod trout with a white Woolly Bugger.

Special places

The fly that stands out and received the most questions is the crab imitation. This pattern pinched a task from my bucket list. Suntanned hands checked off the bonefish, shortly after they fought a fine specimen in the crystal clear flats of the Bahamas. Best of all, my wife was present for the experience.

The pair of exotic beetles also seem out of place in Pennsylvania. When I acquired these flies, I was out of the country. During the magical time between marriage and parenthood, my wife and I backpacked through Europe. Nearing the finish line of our month-long expedition, we relaxed in the Czech Republic. Feeling like a couple of bugs who had just crawled through six foreign countries, I bought the beetles in a European bait shop to commemorate our adventure. They remain the only flies on the hat that neither swam nor caught a fish.

One of the greatest fishing trips of my life was when Dad and his three sons headed west the summer I graduated college. Not only did the pattern, a Stimulator, ride the currents of the great western rivers Yellowstone, Colorado, and Green. The fly brought together fish with men and men with family.

Sentimental gifts

A Patriot, the aptly named dry fly of red, white, and blue, has waved atop my fishing hat like an American flag since it was given to me shortly after September 11, 2001. The brother who introduced me to fly fishing was destined to miss a few trout seasons to defend our freedoms. In his absence, a little brother became an angler. The fly salutes this chapter of life.

Reflecting upon these weathered hats, the brim still has ample room for more memories—maybe big fish, bigger adventures, faraway places uncharted, or family unborn. The best fishing hat keeps not only the sun and weather out but holds in the stories. ☐



Angler preference in headwear varies as widely as the styles.



Cope's Gray Treefrog

Cope's Gray Treefrog

photo-Brandon Ruhe

by Deborah Weisberg

An obscure amphibian—the Cope's Gray Treefrog—has resurfaced in Pennsylvania, adding to the state's herpetological diversity at a time when some species are disappearing.

Although believed to be native, the Cope's Gray Treefrog was recently heard for the first time in decades in the southwestern region of Pennsylvania, prompting herpetologists to want to learn more about its abundance and distribution.

The thumb-sized frog, more typically found in southern states, was discovered in Pennsylvania almost by accident, since it was initially misidentified as its close cousin—the Gray Treefrog.

"The two species look identical. If you are holding both of these species, you cannot tell them apart," said

herpetologist Chris Urban, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission's natural diversity chief. "But, these frogs sound completely different in its mating calls. That is the only way you can tell, aside from DNA testing."

An individual submitted an audio recording of what he believed to be a Gray Treefrog to the Pennsylvania Amphibian & Reptile Survey (PARS), a 10-year project aimed at mapping hundreds of snakes, turtles, salamanders, and other "herps" across the state.

When a committee of 12 scientists, including Urban, heard the recording they realized that they were not dealing with the Gray Treefrog but with the Cope's Gray Treefrog. "It was an exciting moment," said Urban.

"We were very pleased but not taken aback since some of us suspected we may have the Cope's Gray Treefrog in the



The Gray Treefrog looks identical to the Cope's Gray Treefrog, but these frogs sound completely different in its mating calls.

counties that border Maryland. It is cool to know for sure that these frogs are here, because Cope's Gray Treefrogs are a unique part of Pennsylvania fauna," said Urban.

Although the abundance and distribution of breeding populations needs to be studied, Urban believes the Cope's Gray Treefrog exists in 10 counties in Pennsylvania's southern tier. Currently, these amphibians are considered a species of special concern in Pennsylvania.

The Cope's Gray Treefrog and the Gray Treefrog occupy the same niche habitat, in the tops of trees, and come to ground just once a year, primarily in June, to mate. "That is when you will hear the calls. In the Cope's Gray Treefrog, it is a fast staccato trill. In the Gray Treefrog, it is slower," said Urban.

"Where Cope's Gray Treefrogs live in abundance, its chorus can be 'deafening' during mating season," said Urban.

Both species lay eggs around vernal pools and ponds. "The eggs hatch in 50 to 90 days, depending on spring temperatures. In cooler years, it takes the full 90 days. Tadpoles live in the water until legs are grown. Then, frogs climb up into the trees," said Urban.

The frogs' suction-like pads enable it to scale vertical surfaces. Its skin—lime green with lichen patterns—provides camouflage. "Cope's Gray Treefrogs are gorgeous, and have a chameleon ability to blend in," said Urban.

The frogs feed on whatever insects are available, stalking moths, ants, spiders, and other bugs until it is ready to make its move. "These frogs stare, and then all of a sudden, pounce," said Urban.

By the same token, the frogs are prey for any number of other animals, from snakes to birds.

"That cycle of life benefits the entire ecosystem," said Julian Avery, associate research professor of

wildlife conservation at the Pennsylvania State University, University Park. "The more biodiversity, the better. It helps every species in the system work more efficiently."

Discovery of the Cope's Gray Treefrog highlights the significance of the PARS project, which is set to conclude in 2023. "It is a comprehensive way for us to document species including where species live and in what abundance. It provides a database we can use to monitor trends," said Urban.

Anyone can submit documentation of reptiles and amphibians, ideally with photographs and/or audio recordings, to PARS.

In the case of rare species, or a newly surfaced species like the Cope's Gray Treefrog, scientists will then investigate further. "Before you know it, we will have a map," said Urban.

"About 9,000 entries have come in annually since PARS was launched in 2013, although the number was significantly down last spring—a season when reptiles and amphibians are most active—because COVID-19 kept people from exploring. We are hoping to make up for that going forward," said Urban.

"Discovery of the Cope's Gray Treefrog brings to 22 the number of different frog species known to exist in Pennsylvania, but not all are faring well. That, too, highlights the importance of participation in PARS," said Urban.

"We have concern about a lot of frogs. The chorus frog has disappeared. It was common at one time. Now, you cannot find it. It is the same with the Eastern Cricket Frog. It went endangered 10 years ago, because it is only in two or three places now. It used to be in 30 to 40," said Urban.

While loss of habitat is often a major factor, viruses, pathogens, land use, climate change, and other influences also come into play.

Avery emphasized the importance of not moving animals from one location to another for a variety of reasons including to prevent the spread of disease. "When you move a frog or turtle, you are also moving viruses and fungi. It is the worst thing you can do," said Avery. "It is important to leave animals in place, in nature, where they belong."

For more about PARS, including how to submit an observation, visit www.paherpsurvey.org. 🐸





Coastal Resources Management Program— *Protecting Pennsylvania's Coastlines*

photo-courtesy of PA DEP

by Tom Decker

PA DEP Northwest Region

Community Relations Coordinator

Steelhead season is in full swing. The sounds of anglers yelling, “Fish on!” can be heard along the streams in northwestern Pennsylvania. Thousands of anglers travel to the Erie area each year to try their hand at landing a steelhead. Whether you are fishing at one of the popular west-flowing streams such as Elk Creek or Walnut Creek, or venture to the east-flowing side to try your luck on one of the mile streams, one thing is certain—stream improvements are constantly being made to enhance fish habitat and angler access to their favorite fishing holes.

Many of these improvements are due in part to efforts between the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) and the Coastal Resources Management Program (CRMP), which is managed by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP). Most anglers are familiar with the PFBC and the amazing work this agency completes. However, they may not be

aware of the CRMP, a program that is celebrating an important milestone this year.

For 40 years, the CRMP has been responsible for protecting and enhancing Pennsylvania’s two coastal areas comprised of 77 miles of shoreline along Lake Erie, Erie County, and 112 miles of coastline along the Delaware Estuary including portions of the Schuylkill River that flow through Philadelphia, Bucks, and Delaware counties.

The CRMP receives an annual grant award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). This award provides a portion of the funds that are used for eligible projects that address one or more of the priority areas of the CRMP. The funds are distributed through sub-grant awards to state and local government agencies as well as nonprofit groups located in the Delaware Estuary or Lake Erie Coastal Zones.

Anglers fishing for steelhead on Fourmile Creek, Erie County, witnessed firsthand what may be accomplished when the monies from these grants are put to work. Often, this grant money acts like “seed money” for a portion of larger scale projects. Such was the case on Fourmile Creek, where two stream impediments halted the fish from making it further upstream, thus creating a log jam of fish. The initial phase of the project was to create a way for the fish to make it past a manmade dam on the Lawrence Park Golf Course.



The PFBC used grant money to build a 30-foot aluminum fish ladder.

The PFBC used the grant money to build a fish ladder. The 30-foot fish ladder, which is made of aluminum using an Alaska steep-path design, works perfectly. The grant money was also utilized to assist in the design of a waterfall bypass in the second phase of the project. A natural rock-cut bypass channel with concrete cast-in-entrance, concrete weirs, and precast exit chamber aided the fish in bypassing this area. As a result of the projects, steelhead are now able to swim as far as 5 miles

upstream, and the fishing opportunities on Fourmile Creek have increased.

Since its inception in 1980, the CRMP has provided funding opportunities toward countless projects that have created improvements in water quality, research, fisheries, boat launches, ramps, shoreline restoration, and bluff protection. Lardner's Point Park, a 4.5-acre park, Philadelphia, is a perfect example. The Fairmont Park Commission was awarded \$50,000 through a coastal grant to assist in one portion of the park's creation, which consisted of designing, planning, and constructing a new composting restroom in 2015. Lardner's

Point Park is a popular fishing pier. The addition of the new restroom was just the first step in the project phase, which cost \$150,000.

Since 1980, the PA DEP has completed over 850 coastal zone grant projects, and it is estimated that over \$50 million has been infused into both coast zones since then. While the CRMP celebrates 40 years of achievements, its focus is, and will always be, protecting Pennsylvania's coastlines. ☐



Lardner's Point Park, Philadelphia

Take Part in the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission PHOTOGRAPHY CONTEST



The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) Photography Contest aims to develop an appreciation of Pennsylvania's fishing, boating, and aquatic resources. Image contribution can include anglers, boaters, reptiles, amphibians, and waterway scenics. Winning entries will appear in a feature article in a future issue of *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* and on the Commission's Facebook page. All entries may be used elsewhere in the magazine, in the PFBC publications, on the Commission's website, on the PFBC's social media pages, and in Commission exhibits and other projects. The contest will run from November 1, 2020 through August 31, 2021.



photos-PFBC archives



Prizes

Grand Prize: Framed Ned Smith "Sting of the Hook" print

First Place: Framed trout stamps

Second Place: *Pennsylvania Angler & Boater* subscription voucher and hat

Third Place: Prize package

Contest rules

Employees of the PFBC, volunteers, their immediate family members, and contractors of the PFBC and their immediate families are not eligible. No purchase is necessary. All federal, state, local, and municipal laws and regulations apply. Void where prohibited.

- Entries must be original works taken in Pennsylvania on **waterways with public access**, and photos must have been taken by the person entering the contest.
- Entries must show adherence to Pennsylvania fishing and boating laws and regulations.
- Entries showing an angler holding a fish must have a valid license at the time the fish was caught. However, the license does not need to appear in the photo. If the angler does not have a valid license, the entry will be disqualified.
- Entries must show all boaters and anglers in boats wearing properly fitted, buttoned, and zipped life jackets. Boats must have a valid boat registration or launch permit at the time the photo was taken or the entry will be disqualified.
- Entrants are responsible for securing photo releases from identifiable subjects.
- Entrants must submit high-resolution digital photos (300 dpi or higher resolution)
- Entries that are retouched or electronically manipulated are not allowed.

The PFBC shall have the right to use all submissions for any purpose in the future without compensation. All submissions become the property of the PFBC. **The deadline for entries is August 31, 2021.**

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

Winners will be determined by review from various PFBC staff from several different bureaus. ☐



Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Bureau of Law Enforcement Awards

photo-Colonel Corey L. Britcher



Waterways Conservation Officer (WCO) Richard D. Morder, Perry/Juniata counties, was awarded the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators 2020 State Boating Educator of the Year for Pennsylvania. WCO Morder conducts Basic Boating Courses and facilitates numerous other educational programs within his district every year including visiting school districts and assisting with several area sports shows.

photo-Captain John G. Hopkins



The 2019 Gerald L. Greiner Environmental Protection Award was presented to WCO Daniel J. Wilson, Southern Westmoreland/Northern Fayette counties. This award is presented annually to the WCO who best exemplifies the ideals of 'Resource First'—the protection, conservation, and enhancement of our Commonwealth's aquatic resources.

photo-Colonel Corey L. Britcher



WCO Sean A. Sauserman, Blair/Huntingdon counties, received the 2019 Top Gun Award. This annual PFBC Bureau of Law Enforcement award recognizes an officer who apprehends the highest number of Boating Under the Influence offenders.

photo-Colonel Corey L. Britcher



The 2019 North East Conservation Law Enforcement Chiefs Association (NECLECA) Officer of the Year Award was presented to Northeast Region Sergeant Walter A. Buckman. Each year, NECLECA recognizes an outstanding officer from each member agency as that agency's officer of the year.

New State-Record Brown Trout Recorded

photo-courtesy of Robert Ferraro



The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) announced a new state-record Brown Trout. On the morning of August 8, 2020, Robert Ferraro, 68, of Erie, departed Walnut Creek Marina along with three friends aboard his boat to enjoy a day of fishing. The group was targeting steelhead as they began trolling in 74 feet of water.

At approximately 8:30 a.m., Ferraro said his group was trolling when they got a “big hit” on a

downrigger fitted to a 9-foot fishing rod that was trolling a small spoon lure on 14-pound copolymer fishing line at a depth of 56 feet. The fish immediately began to run, taking 50 feet of line with it, and swirled to the surface of the lake but never jumped out of the water. After a

stressful 10-minute fight, his friends were able to net the massive fish.

Upon returning to Walnut Creek Marina, the fish was positively identified as a Brown Trout by PFBC Fisheries Biologist Mark Haffley.

In the presence of PFBC Waterways Conservation Officer Tyler Soety and Deputy Waterways Conservation Officer Brad Donor, the Brown Trout was weighed on a certified scale, where it was officially recorded at 20 pounds, 9 ounces, exceeding the previous record set in 2000, also by an angler from Erie, by 11 ounces. Ferraro’s fish measured 33.75 inches in length with a girth of 21.125 inches.

As is required for state-record consideration, in addition to a witnessed weigh-in and PFBC in-person inspection, Ferraro completed an official state-record fish application including color photographs, which was reviewed by PFBC officials and confirmed. State-record fish are judged only by weight and must exceed the previous record by at least 2 ounces.

Since 2009, the PFBC has stocked approximately 100,000 fingerling Brown Trout annually into Lake Erie tributaries and Presque Isle Bay. These Brown Trout add diversity for anglers enjoying the annual fall steelhead run in the tributaries.

A list of current Pennsylvania State-Record Fish, official rules, and application can be found at www.fishandboat.com.

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2021 FISHING DATES *Commonwealth Inland Waters*



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Opening Day of Walleye/Sauger: May 1, 2021
Opening Day of Bass: June 12, 2021
Extended Trout Season: September 7, 2021

**18 southeastern counties*

Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful This Fall

Registration for Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful Pick Up Pennsylvania fall program is open.

Most communities have experienced an increase of visible litter lining their streets, parking lots, trails, and waterways during the past few months under stay at home orders. The results of a pre-pandemic statewide study on litter, conducted by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT), and Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful, estimated 502 million pieces of litter on Pennsylvania roadways. It is safe to say there is even more litter now, polluting our environment and affecting our quality of life.

To prevent litter from ending up in our waterways, Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful urges Pennsylvania residents to participate in Pick Up Pennsylvania in support of the Ocean Conservancy's International Coastal Cleanup. This annual event is an opportunity to improve neighborhoods by coordinating or participating in a litter cleanup.

This year's program runs from September 1 through November 30, 2020. During this period, registered events can get free trash bags, gloves, and safety vests provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, PennDOT, and the Ocean Conservancy as supplies last.



In addition to waterway cleanups, land-based cleanups are also eligible since a significant portion of waterway pollution originates on land. Individuals, families, neighbors, students, civic organizations, and local governments are all invited to participate.

"Our spring cleanup program was canceled due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), so your help is needed now more than ever. Though we cannot gather in large groups, we can still make a shared and cooperative effort to improve our communities by picking up litter. While this seems like a small effort when faced with such grave challenges, it is something that everybody can do. Individuals, families, or small groups can safely support our communities by picking up litter," said Shannon Reiter, President of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful.

The group suggests doing a cleanup either solo, with household family members, or in small groups and encourages adhering to the recommendations for social distancing. If you are cleaning up near a roadway, all that is needed is a trash bag, gloves, and bright colored clothing.

To host or join a cleanup event near you, visit keepabeautiful.org and choose Pick Up Pennsylvania. Questions can be answered by Michelle Dunn, Pick Up Pennsylvania Program Coordinator, at 877-772-3673 ext. 113 or mdunn@keepabeautiful.org.

photos-courtesy of Keep Pennsylvania Beautiful



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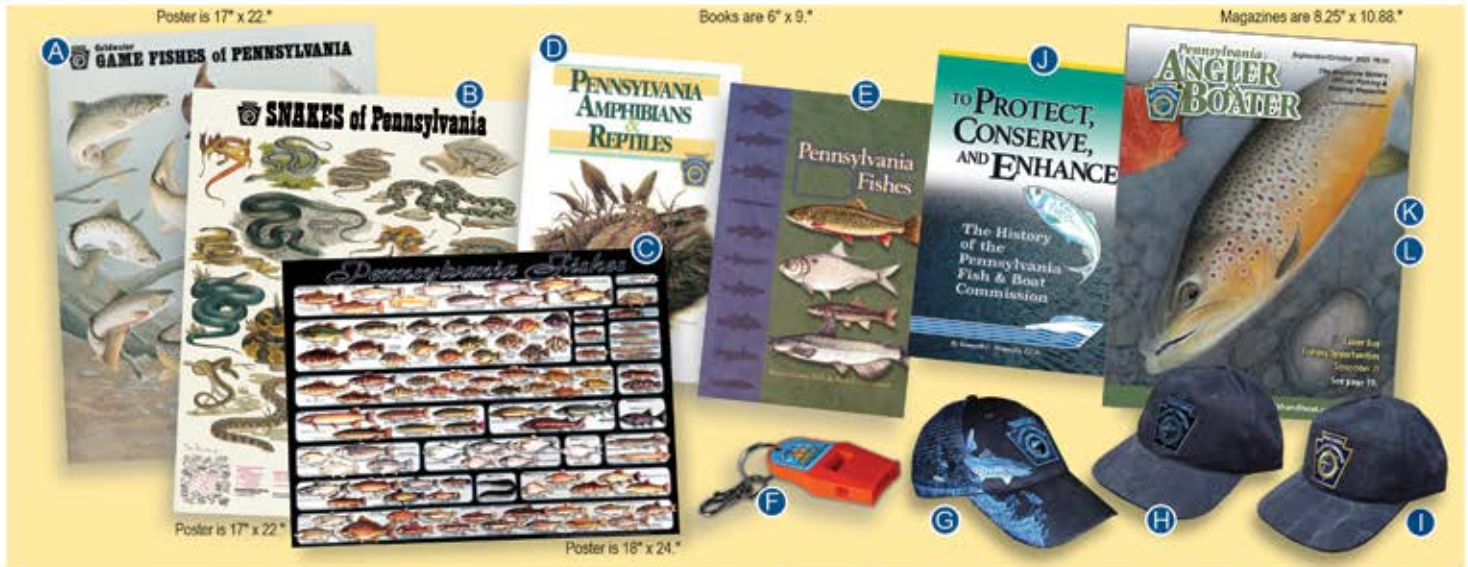
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Angler's Notebook

by Jerry Bush



photo-Jerry Bush

Lake Erie's steelhead fishing is not limited to tributary waters. Anglers who have not already winterized their boats should consider trolling calm waters, just off the mouths of tributaries. Hard-fighting fish stack up off the mouths while waiting for rains to elevate tributaries and create optimum conditions for entry. One large destination is Presque Isle Bay. Steelhead can be taken from bay waters by boaters trolling spoons and diving crankbaits from October through November. Shore anglers often catch steelhead by using heavier spoons that can be cast a good distance. Many steelhead are caught through the ice throughout the winter months.

Fishing murky streams is typical in Pennsylvania, especially as winter climate takes over Lake Erie. However, fishing somewhat muddy water is doable. Adapt to muddy conditions by going large and bright. Though more difficult to see, the fish did not go anywhere, and fish do not stop eating. Be determined. Steelhead need an obvious target to focus on. Bring lots of flash. It is also more difficult for fish to see you as well in muddy water.

Presenting a fly in a natural manner is not always easy. The movement of a fly tied directly to a leader or tippet is limited during its movement downstream by the restriction from the monofilament line. Tying an open clinch knot helps a fly behave more naturally during the drift. The key to the open clinch knot is that it does not clamp down on the hook's eye. Instead, the eye stays within a small, loose loop created and maintained as the knot eventually clinches tight to the

line, above the loop. The loop allows a hook to be loosely but firmly attached, so it can freely move about the loop as the fly is affected by subtle nuances throughout the drift.

Accurate casting is a challenge for Pennsylvania anglers as winter winds prevail. When fishing for Northern Pike and Muskellunge in these conditions, keep thinking tight lines when choosing optimum lures. Large spinner baits and heavy crankbaits give anglers the best opportunity to cast lures accurately along a tight line to land in targeted zones. Choppy water and wind will make loose line, finesse fishing practically impossible. Most bites will go undetected. Conversely, a bite administered to a good-sized lure that is being retrieved on a tight line will be immediately felt.

As winds become more prevalent, it is tempting to hang out in coves and spend your time where the wind is less challenging. While not entirely a bad idea, anglers may be missing some of the best action by ignoring drop-offs along points that extend into the lakes, helping to form coves. Most gamefish seek deeper water at this time of year, but these fish are not necessarily ready to flee to the deepest water. Each species is looking for its preferred water temperature, but it needs to remain close to food sources. While fishing drop-offs, pay attention to where the drop bites are experienced. Fish around the point at roughly the same depth, assuming it makes sense in regard to available food sources.

Fishin' from the Kitchen

Roasted Pike with Gremolata

by Wayne Phillips

Bring summer freshness to a winter meal by topping roasted pike with zesty gremolata.

Ingredients for four servings:

- 4 6- to 8-ounces boneless, skinless pike fillets
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Gremolata ingredients:

- 1 cup Italian parsley, finely minced
- 1 clove garlic, finely minced
- Juice of ½ lemon
- 1 tsp. lemon zest
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and black pepper to taste

Procedure

Mix the gremolata ingredients together. Let it stand for 30 minutes, so the flavors can combine. Brush the olive oil on the pike fillets. Place the fillets in a glass baking dish. Bake

in a 350-degree F oven until cooked through, usually about 15- to 20-minutes. Season with salt and black pepper. Spoon some of the gremolata over the pike.

Serve

Serve over a bed of fusilli or other short pasta dressed with a light tomato sauce.

Tips

To avoid overpowering the pike, make your pasta sauce by mixing half cream and half tomato sauce for a more delicate rosé sauce.

To perk up any fish dish, try topping it with a spoonful of gremolata. It brings the freshness of Italian flat leaf parsley, the robust taste of garlic, the zip of lemon, and the peppery zing of extra virgin olive oil. Make it your own by varying the amounts of the basic ingredients.



photo-Wayne Phillips

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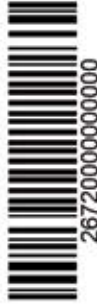
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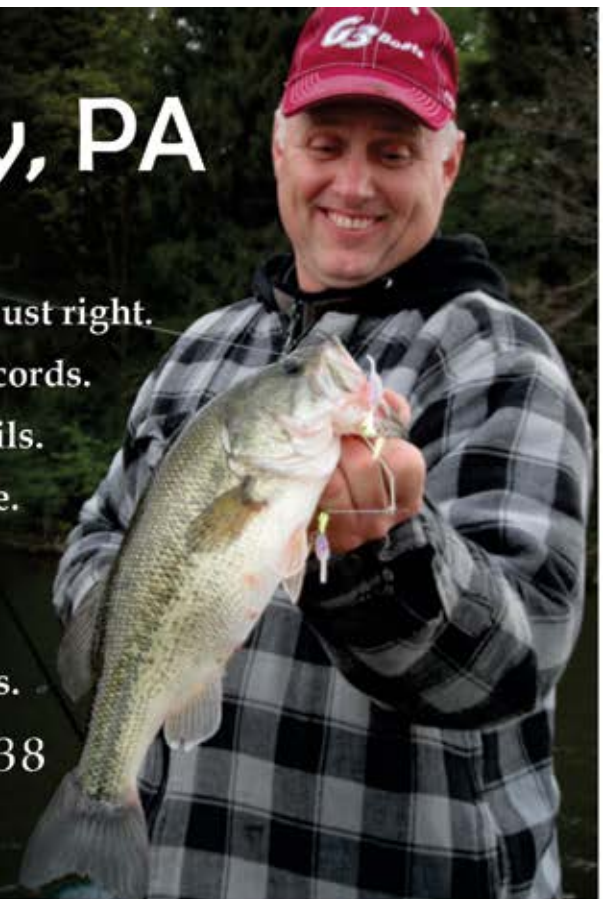
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CAST & CAUGHT



Hesikaya Hays, Age 9, caught this 8-pound, 8-ounce, 27¼-inch steelhead while fishing Walnut Creek, Erie County.



Giselle Janicki, age 11, caught and released this 19-inch golden rainbow trout while fishing North Fork Little Beaver Creek, Beaver County.



Jim Lawson, Warren, caught this 5-pound, 8-ounce, 22-inch Brook Trout while fishing West Branch Tionesta Creek, Warren County.



Michael Sheppard, Camp Hill, caught and released this 25-inch Walleye while fishing the Susquehanna River, Dauphin County.



Jerry Amalong, Latrobe, caught and released this 24-inch steelhead while fishing 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. Persons 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



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