

NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FISHING REPORT

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The NW PA Fishing Report is brought to you by:



Pennsylvania's Great Lakes Region
crawford • erie • mercer • venango



Fishing with Darl Black
Information Service



The Landing Net by Darl Black

It's the middle of winter. Lakes are in process of freezing. Anglers have been out on at least 4 small area lakes. More lakes (or sections of lakes) should have good ice cover for fishing in about another week. As ice fishermen celebrate the coming of hardwater, steelhead anglers prepare for tributary freeze up. The prolonged cold that makes ice fishermen happy is cursed by steelhead anglers who will likely lose a few weeks of fishing until a warmup sometime in February. As for me, I'm just counting the days until all the ice is gone and the early spring crappie bites gets underway.

Under watchful eye of grandad, a young angler intently watches his float on Walnut Creek .

The NW PA Fishing Report provides timely angling information for Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango counties. Fishing comments and photos are offered by regional tackle shops and area anglers. The NWPAFR is based on experiences, observations and opinions of individual contributors; information is considered reliable but comments are not independently verified. In providing information or pictures, you are agreeing to your comments being edited for clarity and brevity, and posted to websites and distributed electronically.

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News Bites

Opening tournament for the 2021 *Western PA Hardwater Series* scheduled for Lake Wilhelm has been cancelled. They will not try to re-schedule but simply proceed with the remaining events.

Erie Pa. will host the *2021 B.A.S.S. Nation Regional Championship*, June 23-25 on Lake Erie and Presque Isle Bay.

Pymatuning Lake Crappie Madness will be held from May 1, 2021 to July 31, 2021. For more information go to **northeastohiocrappieclub.com**.

Need a PA Fishing license online? Upgraded program has online angling and hunting licenses sold at same site: **<https://huntfish.pa.gov/>**. Site may also be found by going to either the Fish Commission or Game Commission website.

Is the Ice SAFE Yet?

Decades ago, when I was writing an article on ice fishing, an individual I was interviewing within the law enforcement division of the Fish Commission (before it was Fish & Boat) told me there was no such thing as “safe” ice and the chart on ice thickness published by the Fish Commission was merely a guideline and should not be interpreted to mean that four inches of ice was automatically safe for one or two anglers.

I am reminded of that each winter as ice fishing season begins. This past week during conversations with Gus Glasgow (Western PA Hardwater Series) and Tim Tomlin (Presque Isle Bay Anglers Group) about which area lakes currently have ice thick enough to ice fish, both stressed similar statements: There really isn't such a thing as "safe" ice – especially in our region.

Here's why. The Fish Commission's ice thickness recommendation chart is based on measurement of solid, clear ice (a.k.a. clear blue or clear black). In the real world, rarely is the total measurement of thickness based completely on solid clear ice.

Unlike a water-filled ice cube tray placed in your freezer where they are consistently subjected to steady below freezing temperatures 24 hours a day, lake ice does not freeze uniformly. Lake ice is subjected to constantly changing conditions as it tries to freeze. Skim ice appears, but then sun, wind, brief periods of freezing followed by warming trends, rain, snow melt, and re-freeze produce poor ice. The result is a perhaps a couple inches of solid ice with layers of weak porous, crusty ice on top. Our inconsistent winter weather produces inconsistencies in ice formation.



Gus Glasgow photo

Add in marshy shallow shorelines, seepages, inflowing streams, current movement (especially around bridges and neckdown areas), falling/rising lake levels, object protrusions to the water's surface, heavy snow cover on thin ice and more – all of these can prevent uniform ice from forming at a specific site or across an entire lake. Until we reach a uniform well below freezing temperatures both day and night for a period of time, ice cover is always going to be questionable. This is why Gus Glasgow and others stress the need to have cord-connected ice spikes around the neck and to wear floatation suit (of PFD if no floatation suit),

AND to test the ice every few steps by striking the ice with a spud bar – particularly when moving onto early season ice.

A few eager beavers have been on ice for the past two to three weeks at various lakes. However, by applying the safety standards according to the on the Fish Commission's Ice Thickness Chart for groups of anglers, only a couple area lakes should have had more than one or two anglers on them. However, with the anticipated cold snap forecast over the next week, the experienced ice anglers I spoke with believe most lakes will be hard enough and thick enough for ice fishing group activity by the weekend of January 30/31. The exceptions may be Presque Isle Bay, Shenango Lake, Pymatuning Lake and Conneaut Lake – these are always late in freezing due combination of size, depth and current movement. Stay safe.

County by County Reports

FRENCH CREEK – flowing through all four counties

Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 1/17: On my first outing with my 2021 fishing license, I chose French Creek. Near the end of the day, I slid a quarter-ounce barrel sinker 15 inches up my 8-pound Gamma Line, pinched on a small split-shot to anchor it in place and tipped a chartreuse floating jig head with a medium-size shiner. Then I cast it to the current edge. While I used a slow, slight jigging retrieve, a 23-inch walleye smashed it. I kept it for dinner. (see photo)



CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Dave @ Richter's Bait; filed 1/20: I have tested the ice on South End. Only 1 to 1.25 inches – far from safe. Lots of open water in middle section of lake. Don't think anyone is foolish enough to try ice fishing on South End. The State Park has cut the flow to the river; a few guys are now catching walleyes in the spillway and downstream since the flow is manageable for fishing. Jig-n-minnow and blades seem to be the baits. Catches at Jamestown docks seem to have settled into small bluegills and perch.

Patty @ Poff's Place; filed 1/20: From what I see driving the causeway and hear from the few anglers that have stopped in, there is no fishable ice on the North End. Open water from Linesville Spillway out to first island; lots of open water around Andover Causeway. They were catching some bluegills and perch off the docks at Linesville Marina up until a few days ago. We are seeing some dead shad – that's good. My customers are buying bait for Sugar Lake, Eaton, and Canadohta.



Marilyn @ Blackwolfe Communications; filed 1/3: We made our annual first fishing trip of new year to the Shenango River downstream of Pymatuning dam. First day all we caught were small perch. Returned the next day and figured out where the crappies had gone; mostly small but some in the 10-inch plus range. (See photo)

Pymatuning continued

Dale Clemmer (Cochranton); filed 1/10: Until there was good ice a local lake, I fished both the Jamestown Marina Docks and the Linesville Marina Docks. Caught panfish, including perch and bluegill. (See photo)



Dale on Pymie docks

Canadohta Lake



Jerry at Timberland Bait; filed 1/20: We had good ice of 5 to 6 inches by the weekend of January 16/17. Lots of people out fishing. Heard of several small muskies being caught and some crappies. We are scheduling our annual Ice Fishing Tournament for February 13th – permit pending. Visit our website for more information. (Gus Glasgow photo from Canadohta Lake ice check weekend)

Sugar Lake

Bo @ BC Baits; filed 1/19: Sugar has 5.5 inches of ice as of the 20th. We have been catching perch and crappies on the shallow end of the lake in 12 feet of water. Fish are close to the bottom. Most of our success has been on white Short Pickworms on 2mm Log Hopper tungsten jigs.



Dale Clemmer on Sugar

Dale Clemmer; filed 1/17: I caught a mess of panfish on the ice the other day.

ERIE COUNTY

Inland Erie County Lakes and Presque Isle Bay

Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 1/20: They have been fishing on Eaton for over a week. The ice is really good right now with 6 to 8 inches. Anglers have been catching lots of small walleyes, crappies and perch, with the occasional nice fish. I hear Lake Pleasant has less than 3 inches, and fingers on Edinboro about the same. This should change with the steady cold forecast for next week or so.

Gus @ Western PA Hardwater; filed 1/20: Last week I checked out several area lakes looking for one with good ice for our first tournament this coming weekend. We were on 2.5 to 3 inches of ice on Canadohta, catching a small musky and small perch. It was about 3 inches on the Edinboro fingers where we caught a mess of small panfish; rest of lake judged not safe.

Tim @ Presque Isle Bay Anglers Group; filed 1/19: Presque Isle Bay perch anglers were getting some keepers out near the shipping buoys and off the Yacht Club before the recent cold snap. The bite in the channel hasn't been all that great on either the North or South Piers. Misery Bay gave up some crappies for brave souls willing to be out in their boats. Shore fishing has not been productive. Everyone is waiting for good ice on the Bay. Eaton Reservoir (Bull Dam) was the first to freeze and has given up some nice panfish in between long periods of minimal fish activity. My fish have been coming on BC Bait Company soft plastics, particularly Terry Bugs and BC Stingers. Approaching cold stretch should allow other regional waters to become accessible to ice anglers. Carry safety spikes and spud bars, and be safe! (Tim Tomlin photos on Eaton below)



Lake Erie Tributaries

Dominic @ Poor Richards; filed 1/20: Only the occasional steelhead being reported. Creeks are filled with slush and will likely ice up soon.

Doug @ Elk Creek; filed 1/20: Creeks are low and clear, only a few fish being observed. Long range forecast looks like it will freeze the creeks.

Bill @ Tudor's Hook-N-Nook; filed 1/20: I've been out and about. I've seen a few steelhead in lower Elk Creek. Nothing in Walnut – it's too low. Most of the late fall/early winter run have spawned and have dropped back towards the lake. Hopefully spring run is staging to run, but it's too cold right now. We need a warm spell to melt snow and warm the water in the tributaries. I've looked at Conneaut Creek and observed fresh chrome fish in the lower sections staging for spring spawn run. (Tudor photo above of Solitude Guide Service)



MERCER COUNTY

Shenango Lake

Ken Smith reports no safe ice on Shenango Lake.

Lake Wilhelm

Since Western Pennsylvania Hardwater Series had their first tournament scheduled this weekend on Lake Wilhelm, and this morning on Facebook they announced cancellation of the tournament, we must assume there is no safe ice on Wilhelm for groups of anglers.

VENANGO COUNTY

Oil Creek

Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 1/17: The other day I fly fished the artificial only section on Oil Creek. A double tandem rig, orange egg pattern top, gridle bug low; caught three rainbow trout – all about 13 inches. All were released. (See photo)



Al on Oil Creek

Justus Lake

Sue @ Sue's Bait Shop; filed 9/20: We have not heard of anyone trying to go out on Justus Lake ice this past week. All our customers have been picking up bait to head over to Sugar Lake in Crawford County or Kahle Lake in Venango County to go ice fishing. But when the ice on Justus is thick enough to fish on, expect anglers to be catching lots of stocked trout.

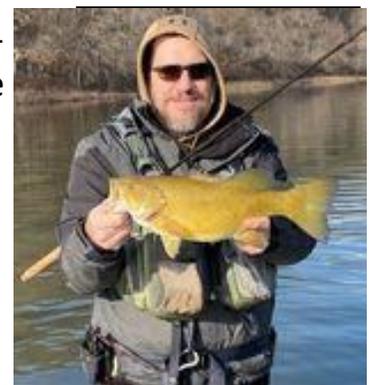


Al's January hellbender

Allegheny River

Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 1/16: Spent several hours fishing for walleyes from the shore on the Allegheny – even into the early darkness. All I caught was this hellbender. (See photo)

Pete @ Smallies on the Yough Guide Service; filed 1/15: We finally were able to get out for the first time this new year, so we headed to the Allegheny near Oil City to wade fish. It was a nice sunny day with 40-degree air temperature and the water was clear with temperature of 35 degrees. We fished 3 hours and caught 3 nice smallmouth bass on hair jigs and tubes. We used 6-pound Gamma Edge to throw our 412ubes and homemade hair jigs.



Pete on the Allegheny

Allegheny River continued

RJ Graham of Tionesta made it down to the Allegheny near Oil City during the warm spell the first week of January. While everyone else was trying for walleyes in the river, RJ Graham and Matt Malesky had a rather remarkable day with an impressive catch of around 30 smallmouth bass in water temperature of 37 degrees using Mike's Custom Tackle 2.5-inch tubes. Check out some of the fish pics below. Week later, he caught a musky while walleye fishing at Tionesta.



"Grannie Gears"

By Al Bell

As the new year chugs along, so too the days of winter. Staring out my window, the blanket of white has me wishing for a spring break.

When I was my twenties, spring break was associated with hanging out on the beaches of Florida. However, as time sped by, life changed and those days became a thing of the past. I moved back home and resettled where my roots were inherently anchored.

The northwest region of Pennsylvania sports some of the best darn fishing our planet has to offer! However, with each calendar year there are given dues. Some years the tax of winter isn't that painful. But accumulations of snow, temperatures below freezing and icicles above take a toll. Too many days left only to gaze through the haze of a seemingly long and hard winter. Months like this are usually the norm.

As an open water angler, I yearn for a different encountering break. Longer days with lots of warming sunlight! Opportunities on just about every cast. Stocked trout, smallmouth bass or panfish – with each hookset comes a head shake, torpedo dive and a fish trying to slip the hook. Awe, that wonderful feel! A reel sense of fun.

On a day like today I'm able to hear past the non-stop running of my furnace and the gears of a grinding winter. Listening I can overhear the faint whisper of a spring break. It tenders my heart with remembrances...and so to do those days of my twenties.

As always, Angler Al

Area Guide Services contribute to the NW PA Fishing Report

Looking for a trip on a Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango county water?
Check them out!

Dutch Fork Guide Service: Lake Erie Walleye trolling, casting and jigging. Keith Eshbaugh; 724-884-3977; www.dutchforkcustomlures.com

Keystone Connection Guide Service: Allegheny River Smallmouth, Walleye and Musky plus Pymatuning Walleye. Jeff Knapp; 724-902-6082; keystoneconnectionguideservice@gmail.com; www.facebook.com/keystoneconnectionguideservice.

Smallies on the Yough LLC: wading for Smallmouth Bass on the Yough River, Allegheny River and other streams. Pete Cartwright; 412-215-6254; pete@smalliesontheyough.com; www.facebook.com/smalliesontheyough/.

Wildwood Outfitters: Fly fishing for Trout, Steelhead and other species. Nick DelVecchio; www.wildwoodoutfitterspa.com/; www.facebook.com/wildwoodoutfitters.

PRIZE WINNER — The contributor's name drawn for a spool of Gamma Line in this issue of the Fishing Report is Dale Clemmer of Cochran, Pa. To claim your prize, Dale, you must send me your shipping address and tell me what type of Gamma Line and pound test you desire. Email to darlblack@windstream.net.

The Livewell

Brought to you by:
Wiegel Brothers Marine
704 1/2 Elk Street
Franklin, PA 16323
Phone 814-437-2077



Email: Debbie@riverjetpro.com



If you are looking for the perfect fishing boat our area's 20-HP lakes (Pymatuning, Wilhelm, Arthur) that handles well, has plenty of storage and can perform a range of fishing techniques, here it is. This allows you to fish unlimited HP waters such as Shenango and Presque Isle Bay. Check it out this G3 and 20 HP Yamaha combo at Wiegel Marine.



Black Knight Industries

Oil City, PA 16301

www.gammafishing.com

Gamma Line may be found locally at the following tackle shops:

- Consumer Direct Sports (CDS) near Grove City Outlet Mall
- Maurer's Trading Post, Franklin, PA

Darl Black: With a reduction in my travel and writing assignments this winter – and seeing my friend Kevin Austin showing his jig creations on Facebook, I decided to mess around tying a few jigs, too. Almost 50 years ago, I learned the basics of fly tying from the Masters – George Harvey and Joe Humphrey – while attending Penn State at State College in the early 70s. (Can you believe I actually got college credits for my fly casting and fly-tying classes?)



But tying flies wasn't my cup of tea – tying jigs was more up my alley. I tied through the 80s, but gradually lost interest with so many other lures to fish. So, last week I dug out the few supplies I still had in the basement, and visited FishUSA to stock up on additional tying material. Besides doing some marabou/chenille jigs for crappies and marabou leeches for bass & walleye, I have been messing around trying to come up with a baby shad pattern for use with float-n-fly for smallmouth bass, white bass and hybrid striper – as suggested by Rick Como whose uncle tied a shad pattern jig. But I could not obtain basic white or gray color in the craft hair I wanted to use – so many things on backorder. Still working on a prototype.

The panfish and smallmouth jigs will be fished on either 4-pound or 6-pound Gamma Edge with a very light action 6.5-foot spinning rod. Float-n-fly jigs on 8-pound Gamma with an 8-foot rod.

GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE

— Real anglers share actual fishing experiences with Garmin units



Gus Glasgow has gone full Garmin for his ice fishing electronics this season. With his LiveScope powered by a lithium battery stored in a backpack and positioned on his sled, he remains very mobile so he can move quickly to different areas. Just the way he likes it. Says he loves the Garmin on ice, but had a major failure of the 2-year old lithium battery on his first ice outing of the season. You can ask him about the brand lithium battery that gave up the ghost.

On this test trip on Lake Arthur fingers, LiveScope display showed what he thought were crappies in 11 feet of water. Presenting a jig to the fish, he did not get a positive bite response. But when some fish in the school followed his jig up to the hole where he put an eyeball on them, he discovered they were gizzard shad — not crappies!

