

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



This beautiful photo of the Linesville Spillway this week by James Scott captures the opening volley of the walleye bite on Pymatuning. Anglers line the wire where current draws spawning walleyes. Arrival of first 'eyes here signals the start of walleye madness at Pymatuning.

LANDING NET by Darl Black

The ice departed a bit early this year, so some of those typical ice-out bites seem to be running a tad behind – as witnessed by low number of fish-catching reports from tackle shops and anglers. However, that does not mean this issue of NW PA Fishing Report is lean on information. There is a piece by Tim Tomlin on the possibility of a new state record yellow perch this year. Also a background story on the near state record crappie taken in mid-February from Wilhelm, as well as what happened at Woodcock Lake a little over a week ago. And don't miss the update on all waters in Area 1 Fisheries Management from biologist Tim Wilson!

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

- As you are likely aware by now, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission changed the opening day of trout season to a single date this spring instead of two dates for different sections of the state. The **STATEWIDE OPENING DAY OF TROUT IS APRIL 3, 2021. Mentored Youth Day is Saturday, March 27th.**
- Just in time for trout season, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission offers discounted fishing licenses to non-resident students attending Pennsylvania universities. Eligible students can purchase a discounted fishing license through the HuntFishPA online licensing system accessible at www.fishandboat.com.
- Following several years of partial drawdown due to seepage from the dam, Kahle Lake rehab was announced by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission on March 15th. Rebuilding of the dam and spillway will take about four years and cost \$7.5 million.
- Kevin Austin, owner of Luckis4rabbits fishing apparel is organizing a Shenango Lake clean-up day on March 27th. Volunteers will be meeting at 8:30 am at the campground parking lot off Rt. 18. To sign up or learn more information, contact Kevin at kevinaustin188@gmail.com.
- "Locating Citation Bluegills Year-Round" is an informative 42-page booklet on catching big bluegills by Brad Hierstetter and Bo Bartholomew. You will recognize Bo as a frequent contributor to the NW PA Fishing Report and co-owner of BC Bait Co. To purchase a copy, contact Bo at BDbaithadley@gmail.com.

Hotspots for the First Day of Spring this weekend:

- Pymatuning - Marina docks at Linesville for perch
- Presque Isle Bay – Perch all over but likely biggest ones deep
- Shenango Lake – Crappies on deep brushpiles
- Allegheny River – Smallmouth Bass in slower current breaks and pools

COUNTY BY COUNTY REPORTS

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Dave @ Richter's Bait; filed 3/15: The ice is finally gone and ramps are open, but lake level is still low. I'm hearing about some perch and crappie action mainly on the North End, but it's rather sporadic. I was out twice on Thursday to different locations in morning and afternoon, but didn't catch a fish. One of my buddies went out on Friday, and caught the heck out of crappies. Guys are piling into the Linesville Spillway but not hearing of any walleye being caught yet...will start soon. Wind was pretty bad over weekend – lake was boiling with white caps, so very few boats were out. Walleye season is closed in the river below the dam so no reports from there.

Becky @ Gateway Bait; filed 3/15: Slow start. Heard of a few walleyes and bluegills being taking off the causeway over weekend, but no walleye action elsewhere yet. No boats at the PA Causeway bridge.

Laurie @ Duck-n-Drake; filed 3/15: Reports came back of nice perch being caught off Linesville Marina Docks, but nothing on crappies or walleyes. Heard there were guys walking the causeway last night for walleye but they came up empty. Also, had a customer heading out this morning to wade points – seems a bit early for that. We are getting excited about the big crappie event starting later this spring; stop by the shop for details!

Conneaut Lake

Editor: No report. Usually, no action at Conneaut until at least mid-April or later.

Canadohta Lake

Jerry @ Timberland Bait; filed 3/15/21: Canadohta still has ice on it; no one launching a boat yet. We had a successful ice fishing tournament in late February with an impressive walleye and musky winner in their respective divisions. (See photo right)

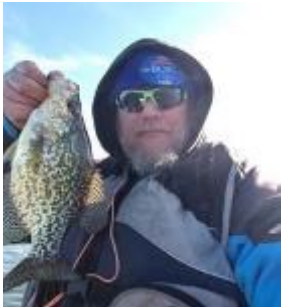


Sugar Lake

Jerry @ Timberland Bait; filed 3/7/21: We had a successful ice fishing tournament on Sugar Lake on March 6th on 10 inches of ice. There were 56 entries. No muskies or northern pike were caught, but there were several very nice Chain Pickerel, along with panfish and a couple largemouth bass. The two largest pickerel were a 28 incher by Aaron Ohl of Sharpsville, and a 26-1/4 incher by Mark Graziano of Erie. (See photos)

ERIE COUNTY

Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 3/15: Kayak and small boat anglers are catching crappies in Misery Bay. The length on perch now is 7 inches but many anglers are having trouble finding keeper perch. The guys on the piers and at Head of Bay are struggling. However, boat anglers in deeper water of the Bay are getting a few nice ones. There has been a fresh run of steelhead into East Side creeks.



Tim @ Presque Isle Bay Anglers; filed 3/15: Crappie and bluegill bite in the weedbeds of Misery Bay and elsewhere. BC Bait Co Stingers & Terry Bugs are producing numbers of panfish. But it's hit and miss in the shallows for perch right now. Some are showing up on 6 to 8 feet in Head of Bay but not in numbers. Bigger perch are in deep water of shipping channel off Donjon. The ice went out a little early this year, so I expect the shallow water and pier bite to pick up in the next couple weeks. (See photo left)

Doug @ Elk Creek Sports; filed 3/15: The anticipated rain a few days ago did not happen. Streams are low and clear; we need rain. A few fresh steelhead have been entering Elk Creek and moving up stream. Crawlers and maggots on jigs are best bets right now, along with the all the light- colored patterns the fly guys use.

Jake @ FishUSA; filed 3/12: Perch and crappie bite in the Bay is starting, along with pike in the Lagoons. Spring is one of the best times to focus on panfish. The excitement of bass fishing can't be far behind.

Bill @ Tudor's Hook-N-Nook; filed 3/12: Bob at Solitude Steelhead Guide Service has been keeping his clients on steelhead for several weeks. There are drop-backs throughout Elk with a trickle of fresh steelheads. However, even if we get rain, I don't expect much of a spring run at this point. (All photos on right are Solitude Guide Service)





Chad Prihode (Erie); filed 3/13: We got some good ones today. Ed Prihode with 6.5-pound steelhead taken from the lake in front of Trout Run. I got a nice brown trout at the Baron Road Elk Creek Access while fishing a candy Ugbug on fly rod.

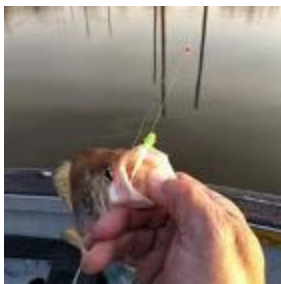


MERCER COUNTY

Shenango Lake

Kevin @ luckis4rabbits; filed 3/15: Customer Steve Williams sent these pictures of crappies he caught on Shenango Lake the other day using my hand-tied jig pictured in mouth of fish. Steve had his limit in two hours on this jig. (see photos below)

Ken Smith (Sharon); filed 3/13: I made my first trip out on Shenango today. Took my friend Timmy Oden. We started fishing an area that had been hit hard all week and guys were catching fish. But we quickly moved away from that area and found some unfished water – a couple of brushpiles on a small drop-off paid off. The other six boats were still in the same area catching undersized crappies when we left. But Tim and I had bigger fish. We kept a box full of slabs from 11 to 13 inches. Not bad for the first trip of the year. (see photos below)



Steve Williams photos



Ken Smith with first crappie



Ken's 11 to 13 inch catch

Lake Wilhelm

No open water report, but check the separate story of a near-state record crappie taken from Wilhelm this winter and results of Western PA Hardwater Series event on the Gamma Page.

VENANGO COUNTY

Allegheny River

Mike @ Mike's Custom Tackle; filed 3/15: The river is fishing slow. Getting a few smallmouths but hard to detect bites. Tubes have been the best producer for us. Dale got a stud walleye on a baby tube Friday. Water temp was hovering around 40-degree mark as of Friday evening. But temp may start dropping with this cold weather. (See pictures)



SMB bite slow says Mike



Jeff @ Keystone Connection Guide Service; filed 3/13: My first scouting trip for Allegheny River smallmouth on March 12 produced half-dozen bass up to 18 inches in two hours. Water temperature was 40 degrees. The catchable bass were in 15 feet of water, in mild current, relating to wood embedded in the bottom. All fish came on blade baits. (See picture)

The Disappearance of Woodcock Lake

Sometime on Monday morning, March 8, 2021, USACOE personnel at Woodcock Dam discovered something missing – all the impounded water behind Woodcock Dam!



Water all gone on Monday, March 8

According to some Facebook posts, ice fishermen were suspicious of an unexpected drawdown over the weekend when they discovered the ice sheet previous resting on Woodcock Lake was sagging in the middle. Then on Monday, walkers along Woodcock Creek reported the creek was almost dry and big fish were floundering in the shallows. Pictures of muskies flopping on gravel shallows were posted. Questions directed to the Corps at Woodcock Dam went unanswered. Finally, the Corps posted to

Facebook that a gauge had frozen providing false readings which allowed water to be drained from the lake; that post was withdrawn late Tuesday. (continued on next page)

Woodcock Lake Disappearance continued

On March 12, in an interview, Lt. Colonel Timothy Butler of the Pittsburgh District, US Army Corps, stated the lake reached its lowest level at 7 a.m. on Monday morning. The gates were immediately closed, resulting in the dewatering of Woodcock Creek between the dam and French Creek. As the lake began to slowly refill to winter pool, water again flowed to Woodcock Creek. He said the full extent of the accidental drawdown is still under investigation and a full report will eventually be made, but that the dam structure is safe.



Only small pool remained

For fishermen, the biggest question is what happened to all the muskies, smallmouth bass, walleyes, crappies, and perch that inhabited the lake. It was disclosed that the gates on the dam are sufficiently large enough to allow even the largest musky to pass through. Pa. Fish and Boat Commission personnel checked the four miles of Woodcock Creek between the dam and French Creek on Tuesday the 9th, but

found no dead or distressed fish. As the ice melted and lake level rose, no dead fish were observed floating or on the bank of dam on a walk across the dam on the 12th. PFBC Area 2 Fisheries Manager Brian Ensign said they are unable at this time to make any predictions as to the short-term or long-term impact which the draining may have on the fisheries.



On March 12, water slowly rising

COULD THIS BE THE SPRING FOR A NEW STATE RECORD PERCH?

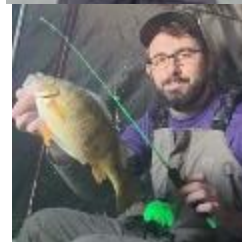
Interview with Tim Tomlin



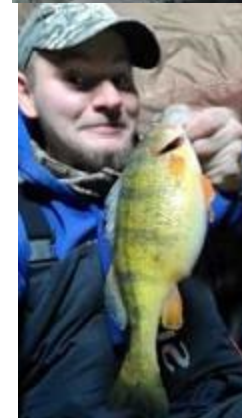
Facebook posts on PIB Anglers page and elsewhere clearly indicate late ice on the Bay this year produced a lot of jumbo perch. Tim Tomlin, administrator for the PIB Anglers Facebook page has his finger on the heartbeat of perch fishing in the Bay. Tim had this to say about a possible new record:



Congratulations to all the ice anglers on a tremendous season! We finished the season with a few rescues from the last ice, but no fatalities. The early spring open water bite is now in progress. Remember, the minimum size of perch now is 7 inches. Launches in the Bay are open but without the floating docks at this time. You must wear your life vest in boats under 16 feet until the end of April. Also, a recent rule change has come to my attention – launch permits are now required for Presque Isle State Park whereas previously canoes, kayaks and row boats did not need them; check the DCNR webpage for PISP.



During late ice we witnessed many buckets of panfish, as well as the return of smelt in good numbers. Boat anglers are scoring some good perch in deeper water. At the present time, shallow water anglers are having hit and miss days likely because large numbers of perch have not moved shallow yet. Keep in mind, ice went out early so the perch timetable is off a bit and it's likely more fish from the lake are still in transition.



Given that smelt are back in good numbers in the Bay, along with schools of emerald shiners, perch have been feasting in recent weeks under the ice. We saw some incredible jumbos come through the ice. At times, remarks were made a fish could be a state record. However, a new State Record Perch must weight 3 pounds or more to qualify. Is there a new state record in the Bay or main lake? I think given the abundance of forage currently available, I believe there are numerous record perch swimming around out there. The question is "Will one be caught?" There are lots of perch, lots of bait, and a lot of baited hooks in PIB during the spring. However, no matter your skill level, catching a new record requires a dose of Good Luck! **(Who is coming close on next page)**



Could there be a new State Record Yellow Perch this spring?

Some of Monster Perch have been taken from Presque Isle Bay since the ice left... The record to beat is a 2 pound 14 oz monster caught by Brian Clark of Edinboro on March 30, 2015. A new record must beat the old one by two ounces (weighed on a state certified scale).



Paul Krott got this very fat 15 incher right after ice out.



Corey Wallace caught this 2 pound 10 oz super jumbo on March 16.



Do you have hand-tied jigs ready for crappies?

Near Record Crappie Caught at Lake Wilhelm

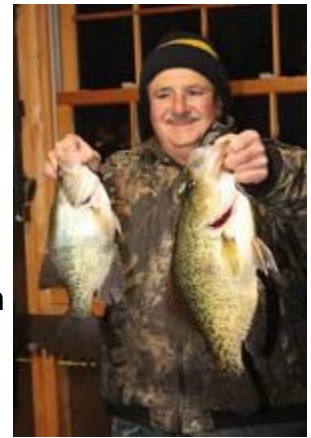
Late in the evening of February 12, I received a call from Dan Wielobob, a long-time fishing friend from Conneaut Lake. “Would you like to photograph a possible new state record crappie?” Well, that was a silly question. In minutes, Marilyn and I were out the door, with camera and a copy of a PFBC application for state record fish. Arriving at Dan’s house and with our masks in place, we joined Dan, his wife Cheryl and a two other of his fishing friends in the garage. When Dan pulled the fish from his bucket, it rocked me back on my heels.



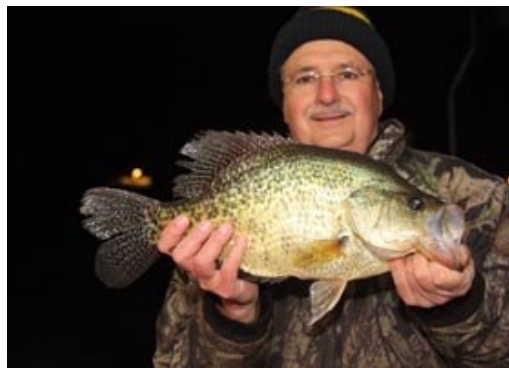
It was a 20-inch crappie – the biggest crappie I had ever seen up close. Dan said it weighed just over 4 pounds and had the printed receipt from the certified scale at Al’s Melons market to prove it. However, when we converted the digital reading of the scale to pounds and ounces, we unfor-

fortunately discovered his 4.02-pound fish did not beat the current crappie record by the required 2 ounces. We also had a discussion about the species of crappie. At first blush it looked like a black crappie, but white crappie vertical bars were also present (although my camera flash overpowered them in photos) and it had six spiny dorsal fins – usually indicating a white crappie. Our unofficial conclusion – it was likely a hybrid crappie.

Dan caught the fish late in the afternoon during a last-minute trip to Wilhelm. As soon as he had his holes drilled, he began catching crappies of better than average size. Just before the huge one hit, Dan has landed a 15-inch crappie – his biggest of the season. When he hooked the 20-incher on a tungsten Dingle-Drop Glow jig tipped with a maggot, Dan at first thought it was a walleye. But after working it to the hole, the fish rolled and he thought it was a largemouth bass. Then the fish turned and literally poked its head through the hole. He grabbed it by the lower jaw and flopped onto the ice. Only then did he realize it as a crappie – the biggest crappie he had ever caught.



15" vs 20" crappie



Editor's Note: This is the first part of a two part series on the most recent updates of fish surveys conducted by Area Fisheries Managers in Area 1 & Area 2. First up is Tim Wilson on Area 1 waters. The next April issue will carry updates on Area 2.

PFBC Area 1 Fisheries Update from Tim Wilson, Fisheries Manager

Pymatuning Reservoir:

- Walleyes that were stocked in 2019 and 2020 have experienced excellent survival and have produced the 2 largest year classes since 1997. Great news, but anglers should expect to catch large numbers of sub-legal Walleyes between 8 and 14 inches. Please release them gently as they are the future of the fishery. There are still plenty of bigger Walleyes to catch.
- Crappie numbers are down from their peak abundance in 2017-18, but the majority of the population is of quality size and is equal to or greater than legal size (9 inches).
- The switch from stocking Muskellunge fingerlings to Muskellunge yearlings is paying off and there is a large population of smaller Muskies with a fair number of bigger fish too.
- Yellow Perch and Bluegills are still abundant with fair numbers over quality size (9 inches and 7 inches, respectively).
- **White Perch continue to expand in abundance. Anglers are encouraged to kill all that they catch. There is no limit on them. Just make sure they know how to distinguish them from the native and more desirable White Bass before doing so.** (See ID cards to identify white perch vs white bass)



(Continued next page)

Area 1 Fisheries Update continues:

Shenango River Lake:

- We haven't surveyed it in a few years but anglers are reporting they are satisfied with the new Panfish Enhancement regulations on Crappies.
- Even with the COVID restrictions we were able to acquire Hybrid Striped Bass fingerlings to stock in 2020, so anglers can expect that program to continue as normal.
- We've had only fair success with our recent Walleye stockings in Shenango River Lake, so anglers should expect tough Walleye fishing this year.
- Channel Catfish continue to be strong and Flatheads are slowly expanding.



Anglers with Shenango Lake crappies

Presque Isle Bay

- Remains an excellent place to target Bluegills, Rock Bass, large Brown Bullheads and Largemouth Bass year-round.
- The seasonal Smallmouth Bass fishery should continue to be strong in the Bay and selected tributaries.
- Yellow Perch look good and Crappies only fair.
- The Bay continues to benefit from the outstanding Walleye population in Lake Erie with pretty good numbers migrating into the Bay.

Shenango River

- Good Smallmouth Bass fishing from Shenango Dam downstream to the mouth, with the best fishing in the first couple miles below the dam. There is still a 'Do Not Eat' consumption advisory on this portion of the river, so anglers should practice catch and release. The recent addition of several canoe/kayak access points make the Shenango a good destination for canoers and kayakers.

NW Pennsylvania Streams

- Statewide Opening Day of Trout Season is April 3rd with the Mentored Youth Day occurring on Saturday, March 27th. See the PFBC website for details.

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; keystone-connectionguideservice@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.

Starting in April, look for prize winners in each Fishing Report on the GAMMA Page. This space will be available for guides who regularly contribute reports and photos to the NW PA Fishing Report.

Gamma Line winner this issue: Dave Parisi

Lure pack winner: Chad Prihode

Contact Darl at darlblack@windstream.net to claim your prize.

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Allegheny 'eye before 15th



Mike McFadden's Wilhelm catch



Dave & Tyler Parisi—plus



Sonar showing crappies =



Livewell of crappies



Black Knight Industries
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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



Even Grizzly Adams got out for walleye before the 15th. Of course he was using 7-pound Gamma Touch!



Western PA Hardwater series concluded their season on Lake Wilhelm. Gamma is a sponsor of the tournament trail

GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE

— Real anglers share actual fishing experiences with Garmin units



Gus Glasgow was so pleased with his Garmin LiveScope for ice fishing, that is now shopping for a second unit for his second boat.
