

# 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**



Gentry Deeter on the Allegheny River



Declan Jewel on Lake Wilhelm

## **Landing Net** by Darl Black

Spring fishing is in full swing. Check out the Report to see where anglers are catching perch, lake trout, crappies, wall-eyes, muskies, smallmouth bass, large-mouth bass, pike and more. Don't miss the exciting Garmin Tip from river guide Jeff Knapp. And Part II of PFBC fisheries biologists update on more waters in NW PA. Last month was Part I on Area 1 (PIB, Pymatuning, Shenango Lake); this issue Area 2 with several additional important waters in our region. You will only find these overviews of fisheries in the NW PA Fishing Report (unless, of course, you read the complete lake reports on PFBC website). And this season, be sure to take time to introduce some youngsters to fishing!

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.

## NW PA FISHING REPORT for April 7, 2021

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### News Bites

**PFBC TO HOST VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE TO HIGHLIGHT LINESVILLE FISH HATCHERY:** The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) invites the public to participate in the 2021 Linesville Hatchery Virtual Open House on April 15-17, 2021. This virtual event will replace the annual in-person open house at the hatchery, which has been canceled for 2021 due to public health concerns related to COVID-19. The Virtual Open house will be hosted on PFBC Facebook page ([www.Facebook.com/PaFishandBoat](http://www.Facebook.com/PaFishandBoat)). To review the schedule of presentations, visit the [www.PaFishandBoat.com](http://www.PaFishandBoat.com).

**Status Report on NW Waters:** Be sure to check out Region 2 water-by-water review by Fisheries Biologist Brian Ensign later in this Report. Coupled with the Region 1 review by Tim Wilson in the March 17 NW PA Fishing Report, you will have the status of the fisheries in each major lake in NW PA. You will not find this overview in any other publication.

### County by County Reports

#### CRAWFORD COUNTY

##### Pymatuning Lake

**Dave @ Richter's Bait;** filed 4/5: The walleye bite is primarily in the late evening into the night, with some good catches being made. Musky fishing has been very good, too, but mainly trolling during the day. Perch are everywhere and crappies are biting here &



Dale Clemmer



On Linesville docks

there – low water and cold fronts have hurt the crappie bite this past week or so. Should improve at temperatures rebound. (See photos 2 pics)

**Laurie @ Duck-n-Drake;** filed 4/5: The last day of March, Tony and Angelo got their limit of walleyes using blade baits. The walleye bite is shifting to wading shallow points at night with long minnow plugs such as Rapala F-9 and F-11. Crappies slowed down a bit from hot start in latter part of March. Perch bite is strong off the Espyville Causeway. Our first Catfish Tournament will be April 24. And the BIG Pymatuning Crappie Madness Brawl starts May 1<sup>st</sup> with a chance to win a 16-foot completely rigged Smoker Craft Boat. Stop by the shop and get registered for both events. (Photos)

**Russ @ Gateway Tackle;** filed 4/5: Anglers are wading at night to catch walleyes on minnow plugs; also fishing off the Causeway for 'eyes by jigging Sonars. Lots of perch. Spring bite is just starting on all species. Be careful – lake is down about two feet!

**Patty @ Poff's;** filed 4/5: Anglers are finding the bite for crappies and walleyes picking up after a week of unsettled cold weather. While most anglers find walleyes biting best at dusk and into the night, there are a handful of guys who are catching at first light in the morning, too. Last night was pretty good with several walleye reports from anglers, including a 26-inch.

**Woody Knis** (New Castle); filed 4/5: On our first trip to Pymatuning this year, we caught 3 muskies. On March 26<sup>th</sup> Todd Leopardi was fishing with me and he caught the 48" 33-pounder. This past Saturday, April 3, we caught 3 and lost several others. Most have come on the Leo Lures' Mojo Shad. Todd makes these baits in Ellwood City and you can find them online. (photos)



Woody Knis



Richter's photo—Max



Tony & Angelo



Ken & Tim from Pymie



Todd Leopardi



## ERIE COUNTY

### Presque Isle Bay and Lake Erie

**Kirk @ East End Angler;** filed 4/5: Out in the lake, some anglers are catching perch in 40 to 45 feet of water off the Cribbs. Also a few boats are picking up Lake Trout in 30 to 40 feet of water; lake water temp is 38/39 degrees. In the Bay, the better spots are North & South Pier; Dobbin's Landing; Donjon's and Liberty Park. Some steelhead are still in the creeks – but water is very low and very clear. Reports of an evening crappie bite at Eaton Reservoir.

**Tim @ Presque Isle Bay Anglers;** filed 4/5: Perch are filling the marinas and weeded areas in PIB. Pike are nearby those perch, which makes for an exciting change of pace when you hook one. The city side piers are hit and miss, while boaters now have a small number of smallmouth bass available in deep water. Floating docks have been installed at most of the launches, thereby signaling the real start of Lake Erie boating season. Be safe and good luck to all.

**Keith @ Dutch Fork Custom Lures;** filed 4/4: I've been out a couple times for lake trout. Captain Bob Henton and I started back on March 17<sup>th</sup> with water temp of 35 degrees. Lakers were hitting Dutch Fork custom spoons. This past weekend, I was testing a new bait we call the peanut, and the results for lake trout was impressive. (photos )



"Peanut" prototype

**Chad Prihode;** filed 4/3: Pike were very hungry in the Presque Isle Lagoons on Saturday, April 3. Emily Prihode landed five northern pike by fishing a minnow under a bobber in 5 feet of water. Water temp was 42 degrees. (photo)

**Jake @ FishUSA;** filed 3/31: Smallmouth bass are slowly starting to trickle into the Bay. Largemouth bass and pike are cruising the shallows looking for an easy meal. Local tributaries are full of steelhead and trout, but not much water, thereby fish are spooked easily. (See photos)



Captain Bob Henton



Emily Prihode



Jake @ FishUSA

## MERCER COUNTY



Thomas & Grayson



Reece @ Deer Creek



Casino on Lake Julia



Kasey, Trevor & Brian



Raelynn and Madalynn



Meghan

## North Deer Creek

The local TU chapter sponsors a youth fishing area on Deer Creek each opening day. However, this year they did not advertise it due to health concerns regarding COVID. The stream was extremely low and extremely clear, but kids fishing the special reg area caught fish. Here are some examples. (see photos above)

## Buhl Park Lake

Buhl Lake (a.k.a. Lake Julia) has been stocked with trout since the lake underwent revitalization several years ago. For this trout opener, anglers maintained their distance from one another and everyone seemed to be catching fish – even if they were not necessarily trout! (see photos above)

## Shenango Lake



**Randy @ Fish West PA;** filed 4/4: Shenango Lake is slowly warming up and the warmer days of spring have fish feeding. Bass and other predators are moving closer to the shallows but rain is needed as the lake and river are very low. The crappie and panfish bite are also improving. Warmer temps are right around



the corner so it's time to get out. Be safe and tight lines! (see photos)

## Shenango Lake report continued

**Kevin @ luckis4rabbits** fishing apparel; filed 3/28. We had a good turn out for the March 26 lake clean up. We picked up trash around Rt 18 Causeway and Golden Run boat launch. Thanks to everyone that helped out!



## VENANGO COUNTY

### Trout Opening weekend in Venango with the Beggs family and Angler Al



**Denny Beggs** (Franklin); filed 4/4: I

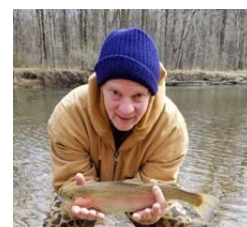
had the opportunity to fish with two of my three kids over Easter weekend. My son, Devin, and I fished the first day at Oil Creek with 23-degree temperature at 8 AM – COLD! Hook ups right away, many fish caught and released. Great First day! On Easter Day, my youngest Darla, came home from college and was anxious to fish. So, we fished Sugar Creek. My wife, Delia, took pictures of the fun and her twin sister Diana, also fished. I always enjoy the NW PA Fishing Reports – thanks! (see photos above)

**Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill**; filed 4/4: On Saturday March 27, Mentored Trout Fishing



Mikey

Day, I took Mikey Galkowski to a stretch of familiar water on Sugar Creek. We used many baits, including wax worms, mealworms, nightcrawlers, spinners and salmon eggs – all caught fish. Mikey caught and released 14; I caught and released 18. Except for 1 brook and 2 browns, all were rainbows. The largest was 18 inches. Later I had a friend stop by with his 3-year-old son



Tom Hays

Holden for a visit. I asked Holden if he wanted to catch a big fish from my phone...and so he did; the 5-pound LMB was released. The opening day of trout on Sugar Creek may have been the coldest on record for me. At 7 am it was 17 degrees. We only saw 3 fish caught, and none by our group. We left and tried a spot below Red Bridge. Tom Hays landed a nice 17-inch rainbow on a mealworm, I caught 2 smaller ones on wax worms. There will be plenty of days ahead on the calendar for trout.



## VENANGO COUNTY continued

### Allegheny River

#### **Jeff @ Keystone Connection Guide Service;**

filed 4/4: I've had a great start to the 2021 Allegheny River smallmouth bass season. Guide trips are producing numbers of quality sized bass up to 20 inches, particularly for anglers who are adept at finesse tactics and detecting light, spongy bites. While the majority of bass have been taken in and around wintering holes, we've caught some fish in staging areas close to spawning flats. Finesse tubes, Galida Grubz and suspending hard jerkbaits have all been productive. The jerkbait bite is often best later in the day when the water has warmed up a bit. Jerkbait in the four to five-inch range like the classic Rapala Husky Jerk excel at covering rocky flats near keeper holes, spots bass move onto as they become more active. (See photos on right)



**RJ Graham** (Tionesta); filed 4/4: Brandon Blystone and I fished the Western PA Team Bass tournament on the Allegheny River yesterday out of Oil City. We took 7<sup>th</sup> place with five fish for 16.12 pounds. All fish came on a jerkbait. We only caught 17 keepers – the cold front took its toll. (See photo on left)

#### **Pete @ Smallies on the Yough Guide Service Allegheny Diary:**

- March 23 – I got out for my first Allegheny trip this season. It started slow but picked up as the day went on. By evening I was catching them pretty good, including a massive 22-inch smallie on a 412 Tube, and 19 bass on back-to-back casts. Get out and fish! (See photos below)
- March 25 – Warm day today in mid-70s had smallmouth moving up into faster moving water and they were hungry. We landed a bunch on grubs, jigs and tubes. The next few week should be great! (see photos below)



## **Do not miss reading this update on lakes and streams in NW PA**

Area 1 waters were covered in the March 17th Fishing Report

### **FISH COMMISSION AREA TWO FISHERIES UPDATE by Brian Ensign**

#### **Lake Wilhelm (*Mercer County*):**

- Walleye stockings over the past few years have experienced excellent survival and thus have produced quality fishing opportunities for anglers. Our latest survey was in 2018, where we captured 246 individuals in the early spring with 86% of them over 15 inches in size. Walleye, along with all the other game species, are certainly taking full advantage of the abundant forage base present in the lake. Our largest Walleye measured 30 inches and weighed 11+ lbs. Anglers can expect some fantastic fishing for Walleye now and into the foreseeable future.
- Panfish, specifically Bluegill, and crappies are abundant, as we captured a combined 7,000+ individuals back in 2018. Of the 1500+ Bluegills, 69 % were over 7 inches; White Crappie at 2,200+, over half of which were greater than 9 inches and with fish measuring up to 16 inches. There are some giant White and Black Crappies in there too; how about that trophy crappie that was captured a few weeks ago that almost broke the state record!
- The switch from stocking Muskellunge fingerlings to yearlings is paying off and there is a large population of smaller Muskies with a fair number of bigger fish too.
- Yellow Perch are still present with fair numbers over quality size (9 inches and 7 inches, respectively).
- We recently started stocking yearling Channel Catfish in the goal of creating a targeted fishery and also to consume all those Gizzard Shad. We are optimistic they will do quite well in this lake and provide another element to the current fishery.
- Unfortunately, Gizzard Shad continue to expand in abundance. Anglers are encouraged to not transport any of these fish to other water bodies. Also, equally important that they should disinfect their gear, boat and discard any bait brought in or captured in the lake in the nearest dumpster.



## **AREA TWO FISHERIES UPDATE continues for four more pages—lots of information**

(Editor's Note – this update on Woodcock was written before the accidental drawdown of the lake. No determination of fish survival has been made yet. Later this spring the PFBC will conduct a fisheries investigation to determine the extent of possible fish lost and then take steps to restore the species which may have been lost. Time will tell if the lake returns to its previous fisheries status.)

### **Woodcock Creek Lake (*Crawford County*):**

- Walleyes: Area 1 & 2 staff conducted a NEF survey back in the fall of 2019 to assess YOY stocking survival. We documented excellent survival of these young fish along with good numbers and size distribution of adults as well. We netted many fish above the 15 MSL. We also hear of good reports from anglers catching these fish as well. So, we currently see strong year classes for anglers to catch now and into the foresee future.
- The lake also produces some really nice size Smallmouth Bass. Although their numbers are less dense compared to the other game species, their quality is exceptional. We've documented SMB up to 22 inches in size, with many fish between 12 and 15 inches as well.
- Our habitat folks over the past few years have installed numerous lake structures to include star clusters and log pylons which should really concentrate predators and forage species and thus improve fishing opportunities. We have habitat maps posted on our website for many of our PFBC managed lakes that include GPS locations of habitat device.
- The musky population remains strong and is showing signs of increasing in numbers now that we are exclusively stocking yearlings. Our hatchery guys continue to report good numbers of both Walleye and musky during the early spring trap netting season.
- Lake does undergo a significant drawdown in the winter, although it appears the fishery is still doing quite well despite this annual event. Anglers should also target the tailwaters during peak events, lots of great fishing opportunities for musky, Walleye and SMB, as both you and Marilyn can attest to<sup>2</sup>.
- We have a fall Walleye survey planned for this year and will post these results in a future web report.

### **Two Mile Run Reservoir (*Venango County*):**

- Excellent Smallmouth and Largemouth Bass fishing continues to persist in this lake. Results of our 2019 survey were excellent with the capture of 366 black bass in total (Largemouth Bass - 208 and Smallmouth Bass - 158), that ranged in size from 3 to 21 inches in length, yielding an impressive combined catch rate of 244 bass per hour. The measured assessment catch rates for Largemouth Bass at 138.7 bass per hour and Smallmouth Bass at 105.3 bass per hour were the highest on record. Equally impressive were the catch rates of Largemouth Bass  $\geq$  12 inches at 126 bass per hour and Smallmouth Bass at 35.3 bass per hour, which were both record highs and were well above the historic average catch rates of 42.7 and 10.8 fish/hour respectively.
- Great opportunities for anglers to catch stocked trout as well in this lake as it receives annual plantings of adult trout in the spring during the preseason and in-season fishing periods. It is also stocked once in the winter to provide additional ice angling opportunities.
- The lake also receives alternate year stockings of 12 to 14-inch yearling tiger musky. We're planning to survey the lake targeting tigers this spring so we can assess our stocking efforts and update the status of the current population.
- Black bass harvest is regulated under the Big Bass Program and Statewide Regulations for Commonwealth Inland Waters apply to harvest of all other species.

### **Lake Pleasant (*Erie County*):**

- Continues to provide excellent opportunities for catching stocked trout throughout the entire year. The lake receives Rainbow and Brown Trout plantings during the preseason, in-season, and winter time. Often hear about holdovers in the lake as well due to it being deep and cold throughout much of the summer months.
- Besides trout, the lake is also a great place to target warm/cool water species to include Bluegill, Black Crappie, Northern Pike and Largemouth Bass.
- The lake maintains a modest Northern Pike population with fish reaching up to 35 inches in size. Early spring shortly after ice out and after the spawn are great times to target them. We captured 6; this was well after their spawning time, but all were over 24 inches in size.
- Panfish species, specifically Bluegill and Black Crappie are abundant given the small size of this impoundment. In 2017 we captured 1100 + Bluegill with 96% of then over 7 inches in size and Black Crappie at 261 fish with 79% over 9 inches. Anglers should target structure and surrounding weed beds for best results.

- Anglers should also be aware of the new regulations (January 2021) prohibiting the use of live bait. The new regulation prohibits the use of live or dead fish as bait (i.e., minnows); however, it would allow for the use of “salted minnows” and terrestrial invertebrates (i.e., worms) for angling purposes. Additionally, the regulation prohibits the release of fish in the lake, except for those caught while angling at Lake Pleasant. This prohibition aims to preserve the existing ecosystem characteristics of Lake Pleasant, a pristine glacial lake, and protect native and at-risk species from harmful impacts that may be associated with non-native species. Bait captured in the lake is permitted; all other bait (live or dead) either purchased and/or brought from another water body is not permitted. See page 16 in the PFBC Summary Booklet for more information.

#### **Little Sandy Creek (*Venango County*):**

- Each year our office surveys numerous streams documenting the presence of wild trout throughout the 13 counties we cover for management responsibility. These wild trout surveys consist of potential Class A's, wild trout extension limits, streams on the wild trout list but contain no data and those that are currently unassessed with no data. One I want to highlight in particular we surveyed this past summer was Little Sandy Creek, tributary to Sandy Creek and several smaller tributaries in the Venango area. We documented great wild Brown Trout populations in Section 01 from the headwaters in Mill Creek downstream to the Bridge on Bombish Road. We conducted two sites totaling 708 meters and captured 142 Brown Trout that ranged in size from 2 to 15 inches. Based on these results the stream met Class A criteria. The downstream sections near Polk also contain good populations of bigger Brown Trout. Many of the UNT's we surveyed made Class A but are mostly on private property.
- Other quality fishing opportunities for wild Brooks and Browns in various streams within the NW area would include Benson Run, tributary to LeBoeuf Creek in Erie county (located on State Game Lands); Cherry Run, tributary to Oil Creek (Venango); East Branch Sugar Creek (Crawford County); and Elk Creek Park Run in Erie County. If anglers are interested in fishing for wild Rainbows (yes, we have a few!) they should check out Porcupine Creek and Hemlock Creek, both tributaries to the Allegheny River located in Venango County.
- Anglers will need to check with landowners and seek permission to fish some portions of these creeks, although there are areas that they will find spots that are open to public fishing.
- More details on wild trout fishing in PA can be found by clicking the flowing links: [Trout Streams \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com) and [classa.pdf \(fishandboat.com\)](https://fishandboat.com).



### **Tamarack Lake (*Crawford County*):**

- Lake construction was completed in the spring of 2019 and thus we were able to stock fish once the lake was half-full in late fall of that same year.
- Largemouth Bass and minnows are currently being stocked during the first initial years, followed by additional plantings of Bluegill and then shortly thereafter all remaining species to include Walleye, Black & White Crappie, Yellow Perch and Muskellunge.
- The lake is currently open for all types of recreational activities, including fishing.
- Anglers should be aware that the lake is currently being managed under Catch and Release Regulations for all species. The purpose of these regulations is to allow these warm/coolwater stockings to repopulate the lake and rebuild the fishery to where it once was prior to being dewatered. The good news is due to the “new lake effect” phenomenon that we often observe after refilling we don’t anticipate this to take too long for fish to reach adult sizes and they should start reproducing on their own within just a few years.
- The new regulations are listed in the 2021 Summary Booklet and we’re current working with our WCO’s to get additional signage posted around the lake.

If I can provide one final plug for anglers to check out our Fisheries Summit presentations that were presented to the angling public several weekends ago. In total 12 presentations were put together by fisheries biologist staff that covered Walleye, catfish, bass, musky, Steelhead (Lake Erie) and wild trout. These presentations provided our agency an excellent opportunity to highlight some of the diverse and high-quality warm/cool water fisheries we have here in Pennsylvania. See links provided below to view these presentations via various media formats.

The Fisheries Summit is currently archived on our Facebook page, here: <https://www.facebook.com/watch/PaFishandBoat/1050278892125838/>

As well as on our YouTube channel, here: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLIfadSBA9jjivwVLzAvzj93wKR4fZB9f>

## **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](http://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](mailto:keystone-connectionguideservice@gmail.com); [www.facebook.com/keystoneconnectionguideservice](http://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](mailto:pete@smalliesontheyough.com); [www.facebook.com/smalliesontheyough/](http://www.facebook.com/smalliesontheyough/).

**Wildwood Outfitters:** Fly fishing for Trout, Steelhead and other species. Nick DelVecchio; [www.wildwoodoutfitterspa.com/](http://www.wildwoodoutfitterspa.com/); [www.facebook.com/wildwoodoutfitters](http://www.facebook.com/wildwoodoutfitters).

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Keith with Erie Lake Trout



Dutch Fork Charter—Erie Lake Trout



RJ with Allegheny Smallmouth



Jake with Presque Isle Crappie



Dave with Allegheny SMB







**Black Knight Industries**

**Oil City, PA 16301**

**[www.gammafishing.com](http://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**

**Contributor names drawn for Prizes:**

- **Gamma Line: Jake Scheider—(email your shipping address to Darl Black)**
- **Lure Pack: Denny Beggs—(email your shipping address to Darl Black)**
- **Cover pic - automatically win: Pack of Galida Grubz to Gentry Deeter and pack of Mike's Custom Tackle Tubes to Declan Jewel**



James Scott Sunset on Pymatuning

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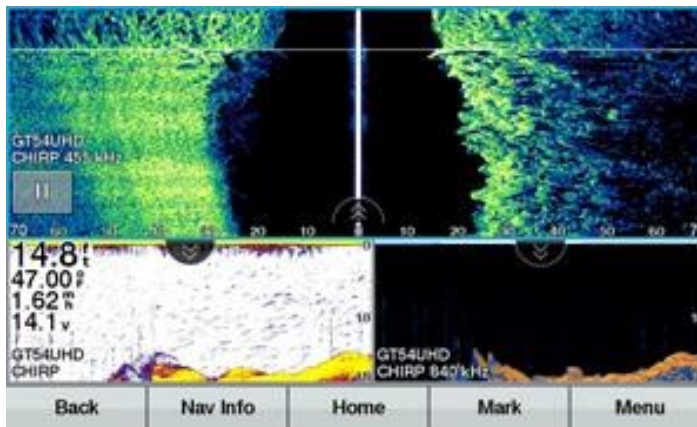
# GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE

- Real anglers share actual fishing experiences with Garmin units



## Garmin tip by Jeff Knapp

**Wintering holes** – where river smallmouth bass can stack up in impressive numbers – figure greatly in early spring fishing. As daylight levels increase and water temperatures rise such spots produce some of the best big fish bites of the year. I'm always on the lookout for such areas. My Garmin electronics play a big part in that search. Take for instance a recent trip where I located large numbers of biting smallies along the edge of a deep hole. In this location there is a distinct bottom transition of large rocks/boulders in the 12-to-18-foot zone, with barren bottom out in the 20 foot plus zone. You can note this transition on the Side Vu image of this screenshot from my Echomap UHD. Note the rocks on the right side of the boat and the featureless bottom on the left. If you look closely, you'll see scattered white dots within the shadows of the rocks – likely smallmouth bass. In 30 minutes, I caught over a dozen bass in this area, jigging blade baits within the rocks and boulders.



Screenshot #1



Screenshot #2

