

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



On her first ice fishing trip, ten-year-old Audrie Kendall caught her first fish of 2022...a chain pickerel at Sugar Lake

LANDING NET by Darl Black

When one door closes, another door opens. That seems like an appropriate description of fishing opportunities in NW PA as winter weather sets in hard. The Erie steelhead streams are now completely locked up due to the extreme cold. But that same extreme cold has created a reliable (but by no means absolutely safe) layer of hard water on lakes to provide ice fishing opportunities. The Western Pennsylvania Hard Water Tournament Series held their first event this past weekend, and they have three more regional events scheduled; other tournaments have announced dates for events now that "fishable" ice is here. **Don't miss the "First Fish of 2022" photos starting on the Gamma Tip Page!**

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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COUNTY BY COUNTY REPORTS FROM CRAWFORD, ERIE, MERCER AND VENANGO COUNTIES

IS THE ICE SAFE?

Well...no simple answer. Yes, there is ice cover on lakes, and yes, at many lakes anglers are fishing on the ice. But reports of ice thickness vary greatly. Every winter the PFBC reminds ice fishermen (and I'm paraphrasing) there is no such thing as "safe ice."

First off, lakes do not freeze at a uniform rate; for various reasons (current, wind, protruding objects, submerged vegetation, heat collectors like concrete bridge abutments, etc.) there are always areas of weaker ice. Plus, the freeze/thaw cycles during PA winters create additional problems with establishing a solid base of thick clear ice. Currently (depending on the lake or lake section) there is a 2 to 6-inch layer of hard clear ice covered with crusty, porous frozen snow that has been packed down and frozen – i.e., "milky white" ice. White ice is nowhere as solid as "clear black" ice. That said, winter anglers are venturing out on the ice on many area lakes and catching fish.

One chart provided by the PFBC indicates 4 inches of solid ice is okay for **one angler**, and seven inches of solid ice is okay for **group activities**. So apparently, somewhere in between 4 and 7 inches is the "okay" thickness for scattered ice anglers.

Use extreme caution, especially on early ice: (1) never fish alone; (2) spud your way out to desired fishing area; (3) always have a pair of ice picks looped around your

neck or run through the sleeves of your coat on a cord for self-rescue should you break through; and (4) if you do not have a floatation suit, then wear an XXL PFD over your winter outerwear.

Status of NW PA waterways as of January 26, 2022:

- All Erie Steelhead streams are locked up with ice.
- Allegheny River and French Creek are pretty well locked up with edge ice and complete ice cover in slower moving areas. Boating not possible. Bank fishing likely not possible, and would be very dangerous due to slick ice/snow covered shorelines.
- Inland trout streams are likely locked up with ice and probably not fishable until a warming thaw.
- Inland lakes & reservoirs – I have received reports that most area impounded water is being fished by ice anglers – at least certain sections of a lake. Ice thickness and ice quality vary considerably.

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Bean @ Richter's Bait and Tackle; filed 1/24: Good number of ice anglers out on South End, concentrated from Dam up to Jamestown ramp, and greater numbers between main swim beach on west side and Snodgrass Ramp on east side. Many anglers catching sublegal walleyes, but some nice 'eye are occasionally showing up, too. Reports say crappies are being taken in shallow water – including some good size ones. Perch and bluegills are making up good share of the catch.

Ken Smith (Sharon); filed 1/22: Today I fished the Jamestown area of Pymatuning from 9 am until noon. No crappies were found, but the bluegill bite was great. I caught over 60, keeping just 25. All kept 'gills were over 7 inches; a few went 9 inches. Bluegills were deep, with 21 feet the best depth.



Dale Clemmer (Cochrannton). Dale was fishing the Linesville Docks at north end of Pymatuning in late December and doing very well on yellow perch. (See photos). Linesville Docks will likely provide a hot perch bite during the spring thaw.



Canadohta Lake, Conneaut Lake, Edinboro Lake, Lake LeBoeuf & Union City Res.

Jerry @ Timberland Bait; filed 1/24: Canadohta has good ice, and anglers are catching lots of crappies in the deeper water areas. Also had reports of good ice on Lake LeBoeuf and Edinboro Lake. Scott Bacon reports his family caught 5 muskies at Edinboro in recent days. A couple of my regular customers made a trip to Conneaut Lake and caught several pike on live bait. At Timberland Bait Shop we the live bait you need for big fish. We will be holding a two-day Canadohta Ice Fishing Tournament on February 12 and 13 – conditions permitting. Looking at long range forecast, I see nothing that will negatively impact the ice. Also, on February 26th, we will hold a one-day tournament on Union City Reservoir with special permission. Only individuals with a ticket for the event will be permitted through the gate. Tickets available at Timberland Bait Shop. For more information, visit our Facebook Page.

Sugar Lake



Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 1/23: A friend of mine shared photos with me of her 10-year-old daughter, Aubrie Kendall, of her first-time ice fishing. Her father, Bud, took her to Sugar Lake. They used shiners and had a fun day catching several species of fish, including a nice chain pickerel and a largemouth bass. Congratulations on your catches Aubrie! (See photo)

ERIE COUNTY

Bill @ Tudor Hook-N-Nook; filed 1/24: Steelhead fishing is on hiatus until we get a thaw. Given the weather, we are gearing up for ice fishing. Keeping with our policy of supporting local businesses, we will be offering one of the largest selections of the popular **BC Bait Co** panfish plastics, plus a wide variety of soft plastic and jigs from **French Creek Fishing Company**. We also have a big shipment of Rapala Jigging Raps on the way.

Doug @ Elk Creek Sports; filed 1/24: Stream fishing for steelhead is on hold right now with the streams frozen up – unless you are one who drills holes in the ice to catch a steelhead. A few anglers are ice fishing the pooled water near the mouth of Elk Creek. We have wax worms, maggots and small golden shiners for ice fishermen.

Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 1/24: There are fish being caught all over the Bay. Perch are being caught in numbers at Misery Bay, Horseshoe Pond, off Chestnut St. Ramp and in Head of the Bay. Many are nice size, but the real jumbos are not here yet. The biggest news may be the impressive size crappie being caught in Misery Bay. I also have word of numbers of small pike being caught at Eaton Reservoir and trout at Lake Pleasant (along with some perch, crappies and bluegills). At the present time we are having trouble supplying local anglers with wax worms and emerald shiners due to COVID problems with our mid-west suppliers. We have maggots, and I am expecting a shipment of golden shiners before the weekend.

Tim @ Presque Isle Bay Anglers Group; filed 1/24: There is fishable ice all the way across the Bay off Chestnut. The shipping channel area to the east of Chestnut is not safe. Perch are everywhere; they are a good average size for winter perch. Hopefully, the jumbos will show up. There is considerable excitement over the crappie catches happening in Horseshoe Pond and Misery Bay. Best size crappies we've seen in some time. I hear they are fishing Eaton, LeBoeuf and Lake Pleasant. However, the ice at Lake Pleasant is only safe around the edges where the trout run the shoreline – not out deeper where jumbo bluegills are found. (See 1st Fish photo on GAMMA Page)

Jake @ FishUSA.com; filed 1/18: With ice fishing kicking in gear, it's time to capitalize on some early season panfish. Typically, panfish are eager to bite your offering because of the lack of pressure they have experienced so far. My favorite way to catch crappies and bluegills during first ice is to use an underwater camera to find the "green grass." What I mean is this: when water temp drops, aquatic grass starts to die and turn brown. Among the sea of dead grass will be small patches of green grass. These areas become a panfish oasis. Plastics and waxworms are always my go to bait, as well as jigging spoons such as the Northland Forage Minnow. (1st Fish photo on Gamma Page)

Bob @ Solitude Steelhead Guide Service; filed 1/22: Attached are some pictures for the newsletter. All were taken in January prior to the streams locking up. As far as a fishing report, steelhead fishing is on pause right now. Almost every stream is totally ice locked. Looking at the long-term weather forecast, I don't see any windows of steelhead fishing opportunity – unless you are targeting them through the ice. We need several days of warmer temps to blow out the streams to get us back on track. Once this happens, fishing will be excellent. (See photos on next page)

Paul Stewart; filed 1/24: I limited out on perch in Presque Isle Bay on two late December trips before the freeze. Emerald shiners worked well. (See photo next page)

Solitude Steelhead Guide Service success before freeze up.



Paul Stewart success on Presque Isle Bay with Perch in late December.



MERCER COUNTY

Lake Wilhelm

Bo @ Fishing with Bo Guide Service; filed 1/24: Anglers have been catching quite a few crappies in the deeper basin down towards the dam – around the 20-foot level. Not getting really big ones, but keeper size. I'm hearing reports of a few guys fishing up in the stumps on the north end of the lake; all they are catching are small bluegills – very small bluegills.

Shenango Lake

Ken Smith (Sharon):

- December 24 – Went fishing Christmas Eve. Caught them good. Caught over 60 fish mostly crappies but also catfish, bass and bluegills. Only fished two sites. I was fishing with a fixed float set at 4 feet. With the lake 10 feet down, I was sitting in 8 feet of water casting to brush. Crappies were stacked in the brush. Lost some jigs but it was well worth it. Used Bobby Garland Itty Bits on a 1/32-oz jighead molded with #4 hooks. It was fantastic. At one point I caught fish on 20 straight casts. Not all monster size, but fun. Going to hold off putting my boat away while weather remains warmer than usual. (Photo right)



(Ken Smith on Shenango Lake continued)

- January 16 – My first day of ice fishing on Shenango Lake in 2022. Fished the swim beach area. Produced some crappies, but mostly bluegills. Had to search hard to find deeper water. Set up in 8 feet of water and had success there. My first crappie of the year was a 14-1/2 incher taken on jig-n-plastic. (Photo on right of bluegills; also First Fish photo on Gamma Page.)



VENANGO COUNTY

Justus Lake



Dia with Christmas trout

Denny Beggs (Franklin); filed 1/22: Over Christmas week my daughter Dia was home from NYC. We went to Justus Lake. Fished for one hour using PowerBait. Caught three rainbow trout. Always fun to get kids out fishing! (Photo on left)

To catch my first fish of the new year, I returned to Justus Lake on January 4th. Caught five rainbows on PowerBait. All fish were released! (See First Fish on Gamma Page)

Sue @ Sue's Bait Shop; filed 1/24: Anglers informed us that Justus Lake has ice, but it's not uniform across the lake, and may be risky in some areas due to water on ice then covered by snow. The most requested baits at our shop are wax worms, maggots and small golden shiners.

Allegheny River

Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 1/23: On New Year's Day, I accompanied my friend Brian fishing on the river. We went up river in his jet boat from the 3rd Street launch in Franklin. We caught walleyes from different locations in the river, and then found a spot where they were stacked up! My first catch of the new year was a 25-inch female walleye! I released her back in to the water. Between the two of us, we caught several other heavy females. Brian caught a rare "blue phase" walleye, too. It was released. We did keep six walleyes in the 18 to 20-inch range, which is perfect for my fish fry on Super Bowl Sunday. (See First Fish for both anglers on GAMMA Page)

Tis the Season for HARDWATER TOURNAMENTS

The Western PA Hardwater Tournament Series got their 2022 season off to a solid start with an event at Lake Arthur on January 22. Seventy-two two-person teams hit the Three Fingers area on Lake Arthur where the ice was deemed safe enough for a large event. The team of Brad Robison and Sean Carlin captured first place with a tournament limit of 8 crappies weighing 12.56 pounds. Tournament photos below.



To view additional photos, standings, and learn more about the three remaining tournaments in their series (**Feb 5th Lake Wilhelm; Feb 19th Pymatuning; March 5th Presque Isle Bay**), go to Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/WesternPAFishing/>

Other Upcoming Ice Tournament Dates in NW PA

January 29th – The 2022 Foxburg Ice Fishing Tournament on Kahle Lake. For more information call 814-227-7697 or 724-659-0196.

February 12th & 13th – Timberland Bait Shop's Canadohta Lake Ice Fishing Tournament. For more information visit Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/Timberland-Bait-Shop-149515848460618/>



Here is one fish-eater you don't want to disturb during his meal. Bald Eagle eating a sucker photographed by Ed Atts on a -11 degree morning at Lake Wilhelm.

2022 PRIZES FROM LOCAL MERCHANTS

When you send in brief catch commentary &/or photos to share in the NW PA Fishing Report, your name automatically goes into the hat for that edition's prize drawing. The names drawn along with eligible prize will be posted at the bottom of the Guide Page of the Report. In order to collect your prize, you must contact Darl at darlblack@windstream.net with your shipping address.

Through the generosity of local tackle makers, again this year there will be the following prizes for each Report: (1) drawing for a spool of Gamma Line of your choice; (2) drawing for specie-specific pack of two or three lures – choose Panfish, Bass or Walleye; and (3) a pack of soft plastic baits offered for the cover photo.

This season, prizes are being provided by the following businesses based in NW PA: **Gamma Fishing Line; Mike's Custom Tackle; Galida's Grubz; Dutch Fork Tackle; BC Bait Company; Luckis4rabbits** and **French Creek Fishing Company**.

Thank you,
Darl

Reminder: Names drawn will be listed on the bottom of the Guide Page in the Report. **In order to claim your prize, YOU MUST CONTACT ME WITH YOUR SHIPPING ADDRESS; I do not automatically ship out the prize.** If you see your name on the prize box (bottom of Guide Page), send me an email with your shipping address. Any prizes not claimed will be rolled over to future Reports.

Area Guide Services contribute to the NW PA Fishing Report

Looking for a trip on a Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango county water?

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/.

Fishing with Bo Guide Service: Specializing in panfish in area lakes and kayak swamp trips for bowfin. Bo Bartholomew at bcbaitshadley@gmail.com; 724-704-1723

Solitude Steelhead Guide Service: Fly-fishing the tributaries of Pennsylvania. Bob Packey; 724-972-8813; solitudesteelheadguide@yahoo.com; www.solitudesteelheadguideservice.com

PRIZE CORNER—if your name is drawn and listed here, you must email darblack@windstream.net and provide your shipping address to claim your prize.

Spool of Gamma Line: William Schultz

Species Prize Pack: Tim Tomlin

Cover Shot Lure prize: Aubrie Kendall

Special “First Fish of 2022” drawing this issue only: Ryan Kulnis’ son (name not provided)

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

Before the river froze up, smallmouth bass and walleyes were biting through late December.



Above, Al and Brian enjoyed success Christmas week. Below, RJ showed it was possible to catch numbers of smallmouth in 40 degree river water.





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
- East End Angler, Harborcreek, PA; 814-898-3474

Gamma Fishing wishes everyone an awesome fishing season in 2022. Many have already gotten off on a positive track by catching your first fish in the new year! More on next page. One name will be drawn for a prize package, including Kevin Austin's hand-tied jigs.



Jake Schneider—Erie Trib



Al Bell—Allegheny River



Steve Udick—Allegheny R



Denny Beggs—Justus Lake



Brian's First Fish—Allegheny

First Fish of 2022 continues

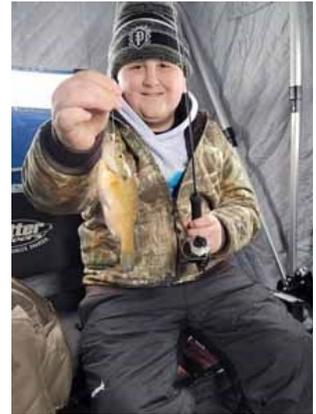
See bottom of Guide Page to see name drawn for prize pack



Solitude client—Erie Trib



Beau Jones—Pymatuning



Ryan Kulnis' son



T.Latwin—Lake Arthur



Tim Tomlin—PIB



Tom Luciano—Elk Creek



Audrie Kendall—Sugar Lake



Ken Smith—Shenango lake



William Schultz—Shenango

GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE



- Anglers sharing experiences with Garmin units
- For professional local installation of Garmin units, contact G&G Marine Electronics at 724-290-9045

Garmin Tip

How it happened...

Gus Glasgow of G&G Marine Electronics: Here is an excellent picture from Pro Staffer Bo Bartholomew of BC Custom Baits. Bo is running a Garmin 106sv (10-inch screen) paired with an Amped 30sh battery. Notice the voltage on the screen. A solid charge from a good battery equals a quality image. (The weaker the battery, the poorer the image.)



Bo Bartholomew: I was fishing the Jamestown docks on Pymatuning in late December. I knew where a brushpile was located, so I dropped the transducer down into the corner where two docks met to scan the brush. Boom! The LiveScope showed all these fish milling around. I knew by the general shape they were likely crappies as opposed to yellow perch. In exactly 20 minutes I caught 11 crappies. All on a black Tad soft plastic from BC Baits. They were not huge crappies, although some were keepers. Suddenly after catching 11 fish, the school moved on.