

NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FISHING REPORT

Published by Blackwolfe Communications LLC

Issue: April 13, 2022

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

An unusually cold and wet spring thus far has made for uncomfortable days on the water. Also, any burst of cold weather stalled the progression of normal spring fish activity. Great for the steel-head fisherman, but resulting in an off-and-on bite for other species of fish. Hopefully some warmer weather this week will motivate more fish and more anglers. Check the report carefully to figure out the species and waterways that should turn on this coming week.



Things are getting interesting. Allegheny Smallmouth above. (Jeff Knapp photo)

Shenango Lake crappies left.

(John Kolodziejewski)

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 13, 2022

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County by county reports from Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango Counties

Special to the NW PA Fishing Report: PFBC Area 2 Fisheries Summary

In the previous issue of the Fishing Report, the PFBC Area 1 Fisheries Biologist provided insight from his recent work on the Lake Erie and Shenango River drainage. In this issue, Area 2 Fisheries Biologist Brian Ensign highlights items from the French Creek/Allegheny River drainage of interest to area anglers. You had questions about Woodcock, Tamarack, Wilhelm and Justus Lake...Brian may have answers for you in his following summary.

1) Woodcock Creek Lake – Crawford County:

- Commission staff completed trap net and night boat electrofishing surveys (May & October 2021) in Woodcock Creek Lake to determine the current status of the fishery following the inadvertent and significant dewatering event that occurred back in March 2021.
- Staff documented good numbers and quality sizes of Black Crappie, Yellow Perch and Smallmouth Bass; and the lake retained an adequate forage base consisting of Golden Redhorse, Golden Shiner, Bluntnose Minnows and Common Carp.
- However, other species such as Walleye and Muskellunge were sampled in much lower numbers. Additional surveys are tentatively scheduled this spring to further characterize and quantify remaining fish populations.

- In October of last year Commission staff assisted Woodcock Creek Lake Park staff with stockings of fingerling Walleye (6-8 inches), Muskellunge (12-14 inches) and forage species (Golden Shiners, Fathead Minnows), that were purchased by USACE from Gallon Bait and Fish Farm in Wisconsin.
- Stockings were distributed at the main boat launch and also transported by boat and placed along nearshores of the lake to further optimize survival.
- Traditional Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission stocking of Walleyes and Muskellunge continue, as well.

2) Tamarack Lake – Crawford County:

- Commission staff completed its first fish inventory since it was refilled and restocked back in 2019.
- Thus far, the lake has received fingerling stockings of advanced size Large-mouth Bass and fingerling Bluegills.
- Staff observed good numbers and size distribution of bass but with only one year of Bluegill stockings, they documented an overabundance of Bluegill.
- Also captured were a high number of Pumpkinseeds and Green Sunfish (all size classes), which were not stocked, thus indicating that many of these adult fish survived after the initial drawdown that occurred back in 2012.
- As a result, additional Bluegill stockings for 2021 have been cancelled.
- Stocking more predatory game species, as mentioned, hopefully will keep panfish from exploding in abundance. Staff will continue to monitor the fish populations as they develop and may consider stocking additional bass to keep panfish populations in check.
- Unfortunately, carp are still persistent in the lake and obviously will always be our concern moving forward.
- By stocking more predatory game species, hopefully this will keep carp from exploding in abundance.
- Additional plantings for this year will include Walleye and Black Crappie fingerlings, and yearling Muskellunge (12-14 inches).
- The lake still remains under Catch and Release regulations. (No harvest)

3) Lake Wilhelm – Mercer County:

- I seem to always mention this one every year, but how can we not, given all the trophy size crappies this lake produces!
- Other species of interest include Largemouth Bass, which appear to be on the upswing with several good year classes that are a year or two away from entering the fishery at legal size.

- The musky population continues to do extremely well, and I've spoken with several musky diehards targeting them in the early spring and late fall, and all have noticed increased hook-ups and follow-ups just in the last few years.
- Gizzard Shad are still persistent in the lake, which can pose some challenges for anglers, but using tackle resembling their appearance should be productive.

4) Two Mile Run Reservoir (aka Justus Lake) – Venango County:

- Excellent fishing opportunities for both tiger musky and purebreds in the lake, as documented from last year's spring trap net survey.
- Anglers can expect to see and catch quality sizes of muskies ranging from 17 to 49 inches; nine of the 14 measured over 40 inches.
- Incidentally, two of our largest purebreds were pre-spawn females, measuring 49.2 and 48.4 inches and weighing 40.4 and 38 pounds, respectively. Several smaller tiger muskies were also captured, indicating good survival of our yearling stockings in 2018 and 2020.
- The panfish population remains stable with good numbers and quality sizes of Bluegill, Black Crappie and Yellow Perch. The size structure of the bass population in Two Mile Run Reservoir has improved since implementation of the Big Bass Program Special Regulations in 1998.
- During our 2019 night-electrofishing survey, two of our largest bass captured included a Largemouth Bass at 20.9 inches that weighed 5.8 pounds and a Smallmouth Bass at 20.3 inches weighing 4.1 pounds.
- The lake is also extremely popular with trout anglers as well.

Regarding the criteria we primarily consider when removing Catch and Release Regulations in favor of more traditional regulations:

- To properly quantify and characterize the fish populations, Commission staff will conduct a full lake survey that typically includes the use of trap nets, gill nets (if necessary) and night electrofishing gear types.
- Specific criteria in relation to species population dynamics to aid us in making these decisions would involve assessing the size distribution of individuals, comparing their overall growth rates to statewide averages (above or below) and then to historical size and catch data prior to the drawdown, presence of large adult bass (15 inches or greater), changes in relative abundance between sampling events (increasing/decreasing), how well were the previous regulations achieving set goals or not, and we see consistent natural production and

is it occurring over several sampling events (building of year classes) after initial stockings have taken place.

- Basically, each of these newly reclaimed impoundments and their associated fisheries often develop at different rates/times compared to other waters which is based on a multitude of factors, some quicker than others, obviously.

Brian A. Ensign | Fisheries Biologist – Area 2

Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission

172 Fish Hatchery Lane | Tionesta, PA 16353

FRENCH CREEK – flowing through all four counties

Aaron Williams @ French Creek Fishing Company; filed 4/3: It was tough fishing conditions for the opener of trout on the West Branch of French Creek. High and off-colored water conditions made fishing difficult. I caught trout using a variety of baits including stonefly nymph patterns and bead head cooper John flies. Other anglers had success using in-line spinners and drifting a variety of soft plastics.

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Bean @ Richter's Bait; filed 4/11: This past weekend produced some good catches despite the cold weather which moved in. Dad had a very good Saturday on crappies in the North End; crappies are still in the shallow bays. Some anglers have been getting very nice perch, too. The walleye spawn bite is in full swing with action in the shallows during the day but especially at night; a jig tipped with a big minnow has been one of the 'eye getters. And we've had our first reports of start of the musky spawn in the shallows, as well. One customer sent us a nice picture of 42-incher he caught the other day. Seeing the musky hunters' boats out trolling. (See photo)



Laurie @ Duck-N-Drake; filed 4/11: Walleyes are being caught off the causeway, as well as by guys wading the points; jig-n-minnow is what I'm being told. Crappie and perch reports have been spotty with the up-and-down water temperatures. Duck-n-Drake will hold a one-day walleye tournament on April 30, and then the night of April 30th will be our first catfish tournament of the year. And don't forget you must be registered by April 17th for the start of the 2022 Crappie Brawl on Pymatuning, with the Grand Prize of a new boat, motor and trailer to be awarded. Get all the information for these events at Duck-n-Drake. (See photo)



Grand Prize for Crappie Brawl

Becky @ Gateway Bait; filed 4/11: Anglers are reporting walleyes off the causeway using Vib-E and Rapala Minnow. Muskies are on the move, too, with one angler losing his rod and reel when a musky hit and pulled the outfit into the lake. Minnows and maggots are catching crappies and perch in the northern bays.

Keith @ Dutch Fork Custom Lures; filed 4/8: I've been wading at Pymatuning a couple evenings this past week on the south end. I caught two the first night jigging live bait. The next night I caught 5 and lost 5 by jigging a Rattle Trap. (See photo)



Keith Eshbaugh's photo

Editor's note: Mid-April is the time of year when walleyes are very shallow at night. If considering going up for the night shift but are a novice at it, here are baits you should fish. Generally, you will be targeting water less than four feet deep. Jig tipped with a large fathead minnow is one option that has been mentioned. However, don't be without some shallow plugs, such as Rapala Original Minnow, Rapala Husky Jerk, shallow-lip Rapala Shad Rap, Bomber Long A, and one of the newer wake baits. Also, floating or suspending rattle baits such as Rattle Trap.

Canadohta Lake

Jerry @Timberland Bait; filed 4/11: The rain messed up the local trout streams this weekend so there still should be good carry-over of fish for the next weekend or two. Canadohta Lake has finally reached full level, however no sign of the crappie bite in the bays or canals.

ERIE COUNTY

Brittany @ Poor Richards; filed 4/11: Continued colder-than-normal temperatures have kept numbers of steelhead in the tributaries. There more fish lower in the streams, but still some reported up higher. However, about 90 percent of our customers are focusing on the perch bite in Presque Isle Bay. Majority of fish are being caught in the shallower water; no word about perch taken off the North or South Piers.

Bill @ Tudors; filed 4/11: With the colder weather we've had this spring, the steelhead have been hanging around. We have had good reports in most of the tributaries. Plenty of brown trout have been stocked and smallmouth are starting to be caught in the lower sections of the creeks, which provides opportunities to catch a mixed bag of different fish. (See photo)



Bill at Tudor

Bob at Solitude Steelhead Guide Service; filed 4/11: The cold and wet conditions during the past couple weeks have kept a good number of steelhead spread throughout the systems, with some still many miles inland. The spring sucker run has started and there are quite a few mixed in with steelhead. A few smallmouth bass have also started to move into the tribs. If you like catching a "mixed bag," next week's warmup will be a welcome change and nice time to get out and enjoy some great fishing! (See 4 photos below)



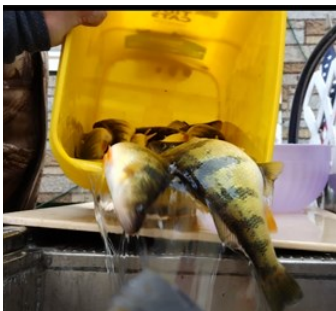
Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 4/11: Fishing is pretty good all over. Pier fishing has been good for perch, and some crappies are being caught around the State Park Marina on the peninsula. Twenty Mile, Water Works and Lake Pleasant have stocked trout. Lake trout are being caught in front of Northeast Marina to Twenty Mile Creek; trolling spoons are the best tactic. Steelheads are still in all the streams and in front of Twenty Mile Creek. We have medium golden shiners in stock plus emerald shiners. Waxworms in 250 count packs are now \$10.00; single containers are buy 1 get 1 free. We have lots of tackle and fresh bait in stock. Lots of great prices; come check us out for all your fishing needs. Thank you for all your support and happy fishing.

Keith @ Dutch Fork Custom Lures; filed 4/8: North East launch docks are now in. I was out for lake trout with Bob Henton. We had 5 bites and landed 3 Lake Trout. We were trolling Dutch Fork Laker Rigs in green colors off Dipsys and downriggers. Fish were at about 50 feet. Special shout out to the PA Fish Commission for letting us launch while they were putting in docks. (See photo at left)



Lake trout

Tim Tomlin; filed 4/9: Presque Isle Bay Anglers are focused on the tremendous perch fishing nearly everywhere in the Bay. Be prepared to wait it out or move to another location if you're not catching them. They are eating SOMEWHERE just not necessarily the same place as the day before. Deep waters off the piers call for emerald shiners. Shallow edges along PISP call for minnows, soft plastics, or just plain jigs with grubs under floats at various depths. The Head of the Bay has been very productive for perch and scattered crappie. Smallmouth are trickling in and pike should be available for those not interested in panfish. Unlike a year ago when the new perch record was set, weather has not been allowing many boaters out to the spawning grounds for the small schools of giant lake perch or even lake trout. The boat launches all have floating docks in and are accessible. Remember No Wake zones and sportsmanship as areas get crowded during peak bites. Be safe, good luck. (See photos below)



Jake @ FishUSA; filed 4/5: Fishing success on PIB is heating up big time! Fishermen have been catching numbers of jumbo perch in the Bay. Emerald shiners and jigging baits have been the deal! Smallmouth are starting to show up in the Bay as well. As temperatures warm, more bass will be active.

Chad Prihode; filed 4/9

- April 3: Presque Isle Marina has been on fire the last couple weekends for perch. Minnows on the bottom is the ticket. (See photos right)
- April 9: Largemouth bass are getting active in the Lagoons at PIB. Water temp was 47 degrees. (See photos right)



MERCER COUNTY

Little Shenango River



Adam Horne (Hartstown); filed 4/2: I fished the Little Shenango River near Greenville for the opener. Opening day of trout provided some nice weather to be outdoors. Water was slightly stained but perfect for trout fishing. Minnow imitations and grubs were the bait of choice. Fly rod was productive throwing eggs-sucking leech patterns. Fish On! (See photo left)

Shenango Lake

Randy @ Fish West PA; filed 4/10: Shenango is finally starting to produce with anglers catching crappies with some regularity and bass starting to come shallow on sunny days. On the warmer days, crappies are being caught shallow, too. The bass bite is best on warm days before a cold front. As the lake warms, fishing will just get better. Tight Lines, Randy. (photo right)



Ken Smith (Sharon); filed 4/6: On April 6th, my bro-in-law Tim and I caught over 70 fish. It was a combined catch of several species, including some big crappies. White bass made up a good part of the catch but they were on the smaller side. All the fish were taken in deeper water by Hang Gliding with BG Baby Shad and Nibbles. (photo right)



John Kolodziejski's Mercer County Diary

April 6 at Shenango Lake

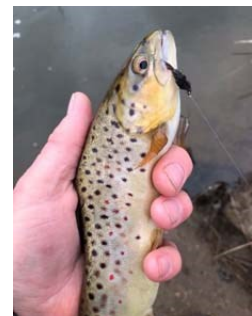
■ I've been eager to try out my new squirrel tail crappie jigs. I started fishing by wading to obvious structure but the wind increased. I knew fish were present but after having the second cold water wave enter into my hip boots, it was time to relocate. So, I drove to a cove with less wind. Three anglers were leaving and they reported the fish weren't biting at all. I walked to a small partially submerged tree and began casting. Fortunately, I found a singular spot with active slab crappie. I kept eight chunks and phoned my wife so she could join in the fun. Upon her arrival she caught five beauties in short order. We had plenty considering their size. Smiles all around. The natural squirrel tail jigs worked well but in all honesty the fish were aggressive and would hit without much bias. This was true only if the jig was presented in a very specific area. If the cast was out of that hot zone, no hits at all would occur.



Dianne's 1st 2022

April 8 at Cool Spring Creek

■ Upon arrival at Cool Spring, I thought it could be a futile attempt to fish for trout in the swollen muddy creek. Apparently, others believed the same as I was the lone fisherman along this stretch. My enthusiasm increased when I saw a brown trout follow my lure nearly to my feet. After a while I switched to a power bait along with additional lead split shot and began to land several trout. I began to wonder if I was really an adept trout fisherman in such adverse conditions or was it because the stream was generously stocked by the PAFB Commission the day prior. Humm? I switched to my fly rod and only had one taker on a Chartreuse woolly bugger despite several fly changes.



16-3/4" rainbow

April 9 at Cool Spring Creek

■ Both the clarity and flow of the stream improved somewhat from yesterday. The trout were equal opportunity participants and numerous fish took power baits and in-line spinners. After having plenty of fun, I decided to switch to the fly rod and took a brown trout on a chocolate hair's ear but missed several others. A highlight of the morning included a 16 3/4" rainbow.

April 9 at Shenango Lake

■ After a very enjoyable trout fishing outing at Cool Spring, I drove to Shenango Lake for crappie. The first location held muddy water due to wind and wave action and proved to be unproductive. It was time to move. The second spot, a popular location, was devoid of fishermen. I simply couldn't imagine the combination of rain, sunshine, sleet and snow had anything to do with the lack of interest. The rising pool made it a challenge to access my preferred spot. I knew this would likely be the last time I could hit this structure via the shoreline. To my pleasant surprise I immediately began to catch slab after slab. I began tossing my 1/16th ounce squirrel tail jigs with solid success and then switched to a mostly pink marabou 1/8th ounce jig out curiosity. They worked too. I decided a dozen was enough. Once again, it was all about the location and presentation. Apparently my very pretty hand-tied creations could not take all the credit (at least for today).



of

VENANGO COUNTY

East Sandy Creek



John Hummel; filed 4/9: It was a picture-perfect opening day of trout on East Sandy Creek. Many thanks to the PA. Fish and Boat Commission for providing the resource and to the property owners for allowing access. It's very much appreciated. Pictured are three generations at the creek fishing on this day – John, Joshua and Aiden Varhola of Vandergrift, Pa. (See photos)



Allegheny River

Jeff @ Keystone Connection Guide Service; filed 4/8: Last week I ran my final river scouting trip and first river guide trip of the spring for smallmouth bass. Both were productive with big numbers of smallmouth bass up to 19 inches being caught. Fish were near wintering holes. Water temperature ranged from 43 to 45 degrees. Productive baits included Jimmy D's River Bug hair jig, Galida's Grubz, Ned Rig, blade baits and suspending jerkbaits. Between a short downtime for annual engine maintenance and an otherwise full guide schedule, my first available openings start in early May. (See photos on Livewell Page)

Mike @ Mike's Custom Tackle; filed 4/3: River still cold in the 41-to-42-degree mark in Oil City area. Smallmouth bite slowed. Fish still deep and best results are with tubes, Ned rigs and, at times, jerkbaits. I'm getting 3-pound fish; water still high but dropping slowly. (See photos on Livewell Page)

Pete @ Smallies on the Yough Guide Service; filed March 25

- March 21: Another great bite today for smallies on the Allegheny. They were chasing and crushing baits. Water was stained and about 45 degrees.
- March 25: The temperature dropped some today and water is cold and dirty. The bass were eating moving baits and hitting them pretty hard. We landed around 30 bass with larger ones going a solid 20 inches.

Alan Shrout; filed 3/22: Bill Logan and I spent Monday and Tuesday (3/21, 3/22) fishing for smallmouth bass on the Allegheny River. We ended up catching and releasing over 50 bass from my new boat. I got luncker with a 4-pound 0-ounce beauty which gobbled a soft plastic from Mike's Custom Tackle. We caught several 3 pounders. Most of the fish were caught with a variety of soft plastics. (See photo on Livewell Page)

SHOP LOCAL—SUPPORT AREA BUISNESSES

For our Shop Local highlight page this issue, I am providing information on a new business by Dan Grove—an airbrush artist specializing in painting lures. Dan can be reached at his website: www.jrscustomlures.com. Check out the swimbaits he recently complete. If I was going to Justus Lake for one of big muskies that the PFBC Area 2 Fisheries Manager mentioned in his report, I would want the Rainbow Trout or Palomino Trout Swimbait tied on my line.



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



The Livewell

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Email: Debbie@riverjetpro.com

The Allegheny River bite has been hot and cold due to rising and fall water temperatures this spring. But things are about to change—the next couple weeks could be dynamite. See what some anglers have already caught and released.



Jeff Knapp photo



Alan Shrout



Mike McFadden



Mike McFadden photo



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

Sometimes things don't go exactly as you visualize. I thought it would be nice to have a page in the Report of youth under age 16 with a trout they caught on Mentored Fishing Day or the after regular Trout Season opened on April 2. I planned to draw a name among those entered, and award a prize package. Well, only two photos were received. (Thanks to Al Bell and John Hummel) Therefore, each youth will receive a prize pack with several baits from the product sponsors of the NW PA Fishing Report...Darl

Congratulations to Mikey and Aiden

on your success during this season's opening weeks of trout season!



Mikey on Sugar Creek



Aiden on East Sandy Creek

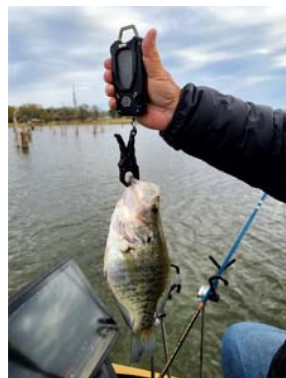
GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE

- Real anglers share actual fishing experiences with Garmin units
- For professional local installation of Garmin units, contact G&G Marine Electronics at 724-290-9045



Dan Dannenmueller, tournament crappie angler and publisher of CRAPPIE NOW online magazine, has visited NW Pennsylvania several times to fish Pymatuning Lake and Shesango Lake. He is also a Garmin Pro Staff member. This week Dan sent images of a recent trip for pre-spawn crappies on a southern lake.

Dan: "Hello to my crappie-fishing buddies in NW PA. Your crappies may not be in pre-spawn mode yet, but they will be soon. We found a big bunch of pre-spawn males in 6 to 10 feet of water holding around standing timber. (In PA, they could be on stumps, cribs or brush-piles at about the same depth.) Some big females were in and outside the trees, preparing to spawn with the males. Our rods were 14.2' BnM 75th Anniversary Poles spooled with Gamma line. The bait was a hair jig tipped with a minnow – but no cork. We were pitching past the fish that were visible on Garmin LiveScope, then watching the jig on the screen and moving it nearer the fish. Pitching beyond the fish seemed not spook the larger crappies compared to dropping it vertically onto them. Here another vital tip: Always be patient as the crappies may disappear without hitting the bait, only to suddenly reappear seconds later and hit the jig."



DIRECTORY OF FISHING REPORT SUPPORT

The following agencies and business may be found on Facebook pages.

PENNSYLVANIA GREAT LAKES REGION (Regional tourism association is prime sponsor of the NW PA Fishing Report)– County organization listing provides information on Activities, Shopping, Lodging, Restaurants and Special Events

- Crawford County Convention & Visitors Bureau
- VisitErie
- Visit Mercer County PA
- Oil Region Alliance

AREA TACKLE SHOPS – Regularly provide information to NW PA Fishing Report on status of the public waters fished by their customers. Support these shops.

- Erie County
 - East End Angler
 - Elk Creek Sports
 - FishUSA
 - Poor Richards Bait & Tackle
 - Tudor Hook-N-Nook
- Crawford County – Pymatuning
 - Duck-N-Drake
 - Poff's Place
 - Richter's Bait
- Crawford County East
 - Timberland Bait
- Mercer County
 - Consumer Direct Sports Supplies (CDS)
- Venango County
 - Maurer's Trading Post

LOCAL TACKLE MANUFACTURERS – They supply the prizes for giveaways on the NW PA Fishing Report.

- B.C. Baits Custom Tackle
- Dutch Fork Tackle
- French Creek Fishing Company
- Galida's Grubz
- Luckis4rabbits
- Mike's Custom Tackle