

NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FISHING REPORT

Published by Blackwolfe Communications LLC

Issue: December 16, 2022

The NW PA Fishing Report is brought to you by:



Fishing with Darl Black

Information Service



Happy Steelhead Season—photo from Tudor's Hook-n-Nook

THE LANDING NET by Darl Black

Although diehard ice anglers have been prepared for months, those with only a passing interest in ice need to get ready now. Looking at the long-range forecast, it should not be too long. In the meantime, if you still have Christmas shopping to do, let me strongly suggest you shop local – especially if there is one or more anglers on your list. See the Shop Local page in this issue. Don't forget to check out the final photo entries in the Gamma Personal Best Catch on the Gamma Tip Page; random drawing for the Gamma Line Sampler will be in January at Gamma Line headquarters in Franklin – date to be determined when Gamma President Dale Black is available. Don't like cold, snow and ice? Think Spring!

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 – December 17, 2022

Published by Blackwolfe Communications LLC

COUNTY-BY-COUNTY REPORTS FROM CRAWFORD, ERIE, MERCER & VENANGO

Fishing Forecast: Last Bite...First Ice

After a warmer than usual fall, it looks like ice fishermen may be getting their most desired Christmas present – early ice. Around Thanksgiving, those above normal water temperatures dropped quickly. Now the forecast from Saturday December 18th through January 1st 2023 features only below freezing temperatures day and night. If there is no surprise warm-up or huge snow dump, it seems likely there will be four inches of ice in the near future on some area waters. Regional waters that typically ice-up first are Canadohta Lake; the fingers at Lake Arthur, Lake Wilhelm and areas of Chautauqua Lake in New York.



If you are a newbie to ice fishing, be aware there is no such thing as absolutely “safe” ice no matter how thick in some areas. The PA Fish Commission strongly recommends four-inches of solid blue ice before venturing out to ice fish in small groups. Measure it with a ruler after punching a hole near shore with a spud bar, and as you work your way out. Going out on two inches of ice is a fool’s journey.

Meanwhile, the past couple weeks, anglers have been enjoying open water success at Pymatuning Lake, Shenango Lake, Shenango River, Allegheny River, French Creek and Sugar Creek. Check the Report for specifics.

And of course, the most impressive catches are being made in the Erie tributaries where the fall steelhead run has been large in both numbers and size of individual fish. See more in the Report.

Enjoy the last bites of open water as quickly as possible. Steelhead streams will be filling with slush, edge ice will be forming along inland rivers and creeks, and the skim ice on lakes will quickly become thick enough that you can't break through with the bow of your boat.

See you in 2023!

FRENCH CREEK – flowing through all four counties



Pete @ Smallies on the Yough; file 12/11: I have wrapped up wade guiding for smallmouth until spring. One of my last trips of the year was on French Creek and it was a great one! We started out early and immediately started to catch smallmouth. We used a variety of baits from Fishing Online including



412ube. The action went on all day. This was a terrific way to end the season on French Creek. I offer Gift Certificates all year for ½ and Full Day Wade Trips on the Allegheny River and French Creek along with the Youghiogheny River. (Photos)



Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 11/27: Over Thanksgiving Holidays, my brother-in-law visiting from North Carolina, caught his biggest brown trout of his visit from French Creek – a 20-incher. A day later, I caught a 22.5-inch walleye from French Creek. (Photos)



CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Dave @ Richter's Bait & Tackle; filed 12/14: The fall bite finally kicked in. Guys out in boats on the South End are cleaning up on walleyes this past week; mainly blade baits. Many are limiting out. But anglers are also catching a lot of sub-legal 'eyes as well which is a good sign for next year. I am hearing about a few catches of crappies from both shallow and deep water – mainly taken on soft plastic rather than blade baits. It's heavier than usual fishing pressure from boats for this late in fall. Also there are fairly good catches of bluegills and crappies some days from Jamestown docks. Water temperature is 34 degrees so things could begin to ice up shortly. (Photo)



(Editor's note: The courtesy docks at the Jamestown ramp remain in the water all year; these are the only docks still available for assisted launching. Bays on Pymatuning will likely begin to skim over with ice, but a track from the Jamestown Ramp to the open lake will probably remain open a bit longer as long as there is daily boat traffic.)

Patty @ Poff's Place; filed 12/14: With the main lake still ice-free, I'm hearing about quite a few perch coming from the Causeway as well as Linesville Docks (but docks might ice very soon) – although the bite is inconsistent day to day. Walleyes are primarily coming from the South End. No word on the Spillway.

ERIE COUNTY

Lake Erie

Dave Ohmer (Erie); filed 12/9: I had one last opportunity to target lake trout on December 5th. They were congregating around ledges and boulders in 15 to 20 feet of water. Vertical jigging with SteelShad baits on 10-pound Gamma Polyflex gets the job done. (Photo on right)



Keith at Dutch Fork Custom Lures; filed 12/9: Winding down my lake trout trips but made one last run to test out a new lure. Caught numerous lakerson a Hot Wheel car with attached treble hooks. Fun to catch in shallow water, but... (photo on right)



Presque Isle Bay and Tributary Streams



Kirk's midnight 8 pounder

Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 12/14: The walleye night bite from the piers has been going on for some time. I got an 8-pounder the other night. My favored lure is the Smithwick Perfect 10 which suspends in 10 to 12 feet of water. Once you get down to depth, just apply a light twitching retrieve; bites are extremely light. Some nights when you see surface feeding going on, use a shallower suspending bait so you are not fishing below the fish.

Perch have been hit and miss in the bay – with most of the action happening along city side; emerald shiners are the best baits. A few guys are catching lake trout inside the North East Marina on white tubes and white hair jigs. The east side streams are loaded with steelhead; 12-Mile, 16-Mile and 4-Mile Creeks all have fish. Use a single egg, or black mini jig with maggot. (Photo on left)



17.25 lb steelhead

Brittany @ Poor Richards; filed 12/14: Steelhead run remains strong with some really hefty fish being caught. Last week, we weighed 17.25 pounder from Elk Creek plus a couple 16-pounders. Streams are low and clear, but some rain is expected Thursday to stain the creek a bit and maybe up the flow...maybe a fresh run will move in. This is the best steelhead fishing in years! (photo)

Doug @ Elk Creek Sports; filed 12/14: As of today, all streams are low and clear – including Conneaut Creek. But anglers are still catching them; there are plenty in the streams and are spread out. No word about lake shore fishing at tributary mouths this past week – lake has been rough. Go to baits are egg sacks, skein, jig & maggot.

Jake @ FishUSA; filed 12/12: Fishing for steelhead has been very good the last few weeks. It sure seemed like we had a later push of fish this year with late November and December having high numbers of fish move into the streams. I believe the warm fall kept the major push of fish in the lake. When the water is right, it is game on! Big bulky egg patterns and beads have been my go-to when the water is high. When the water

drops, I will break out the 6mm beads and 5-pound Gamma Touch to target every dark spot I can find!

Bob @ Solitude Steelhead Guide; filed 12/12: Despite the current low and clear water conditions Pennsylvania steelhead fishermen are currently experiencing, fishing remains excellent. The nice push of fresh fish we received during the last high-water event a couple weeks ago have spread throughout the system. When faced with the current conditions, it's always wise to downsize your presentation. Presented properly, small translucent egg patterns, nymphs, small streamers, single eggs and small jigs will always entice a few winter steelhead. If you want a shot at some of these beautiful winter fish without dealing with slush flows and stream ice, this is the time. Ice up is just around the corner. Best of Luck! (Pictures of Bob's recent clients below)



MERCER COUNTY

Shenango River Lake and Shenango River



Editor's note: cCappie anglers who have fished both Pymatuning Lake and Shenango Lake on a regular basis in the last few years discovered that Shenango Lake has become a prime crappie destination. No one knows this better than Crappie



Guru Ken Smith. Through the summer and fall, Ken works his magic on Shenango crappies. He always catches fish – sometimes shallow, sometimes deep — but he finds them. "The average crappie at Shenango nowadays is considerably larger than 10 years ago. There are some monsters in the lake, and the best time to get them is in the fall." This fall, Ken caught his largest Pennsylvania crappie. Add the exceptional white bass and black bass populations now in Shenango, along with opportunities for hybrid striped bass, and Shenango Lake is now solid fishing destination. (photos)

Randy @ Fish West PA; filed 12/10: Late fall on Shenango Lake means big crappies and white bass for us. The colder water temps have arrived and fish have moved to deeper wintering spots. It was a great season on Shenango, and the crew at Fish West PA look forward to the early spring of 2023 to get back on the water. (photos below)



Randy with crappie



Randy with white bass



Ken's final catch of 2022



Chris McVey—Shenango River

VENANGO COUNTY

Angler Al's Diary

11/27/22 – I spent the week fishing with my brother-in-law Dr. (Doc) Das, from North Carolina – it was our annual Thanksgiving fishing excursion. Most of the hours we invested were for trout. We left early on Tuesday morning for the Artificial Lure Only section of Oil Creek. However, upon arrival we discovered the stream to be iced-up. It was solid from the ice jam reservoir to the train trestle bridge. Above that it was slushy, so we drove back to Sugar Creek.

With our neoprene waders, we were able to tolerate the cold water. Hand warmers helped to aid our freezing fingers, as the air temperature was in the low 20s. By mid-day it climbed into the 40s.

With his fly rod, Doc presented just about every winter pattern he could think of, but trout were not responding. On the other hand, I drifted live creek baits. When my float indicator went under the first time, I knew it was most likely a large trout...because I use 5 to 6-inch creek baits! I had a good battle on my hands, eventually landed a respectable 22-inch brown trout.



At another location in Cooperstown, I caught a second brown just shy of 20 inches. Its vibrant colors told me it was a native brown. I also caught a decent holdover-rainbow. The next morning, we started at the lower end of Sugar Creek. I was able to hook and land another native 16-inch brown, and another rainbow.



Later, we met my friend Brian at the Third Street Marina and headed his jet boat north on the Allegheny. The bite was slow. We only landed walleyes and a solid 15-inch smallmouth. However, a fellow angler Tony Hall in his boat above us caught a 15-inch crappie.



Thanksgiving we were back on Sugar Creek, but ended up missing a few strikes. Friday morning, Doc caught three trout from Sugar. I switched him to smaller live bait and practiced a slow jigging retrieve with a float indicator. In the afternoon, we ended up on French Creek where Doc caught his biggest trout – a 20-inch brown that gave him a battle.

12/10/22 -- Through a correspondence from Darl, I reached out to Will Benner of State College, PA. He was interested in information about Sugar Creek. Primarily Sugar's ability to produce impressive brown trout. I offered him my assistance should he consider traveling here to fly fish the stream. He gladly accepted and arrived 10 am on Saturday morning, December 10th. His friend Ben Hoyer, also from State College, accompanied him and they met me at my place. We geared up, dressing appropriately for the air was cold. After a road tour beginning at the mouth of Sugar Creek and ending at the village of Cooperstown, I had them make their first presentations at the mouth of Lake Creek. Using a dark olive streamer with tungsten hook, Will caught a fish immediately. He won the hearty battle, then released the 14-inch brown trout. Later downstream, he caught another on a nymph, a waltz worm pattern. They had a great afternoon exploring and casting different holes southward. Eventually they fished the mouth at French Creek. A few more were netted including the nicest a 15-inch native brown. (photos on right)



It was my pleasure to integrate with them during their time here in our region. Look forward to fishing with them again on another day. PTL. Angler Al

Allegheny River

Bill Logan (Pleasantville); filed 11/26: Rick Shrout caught 11 smallmouth bass and I caught 8. All but one came on an amber tube. Biggest bass weighed 3 lb. 9 oz. (photo below)

Pete @ Smallies on the Yough; filed 11/23: For my final 2022 trip to the Allegheny River on Nov 23rd, I found the river cold and dirty. The bite was tough, which is rare for the Allegheny. I landed one 20-inch smallmouth from a spot I fished for the first time near Oil City. The fish hit a 412 Tube from 412Bait Company. (photo below)

Mike @ Mike's Custom Tackle; filed 12/13: Finally getting into some walleyes on the river. (Photos below)



Bill Logan



Pete Cartwright



Mike McFadden



Last Minute Christmas Shopping? SHOP LOCAL!

Wondering what you can get for an angler in your family as the final shopping days before Christmas come into view? Check out area Bait and Tackle Shops which contribute to this Report. Many offer rods and reels, chest waders, fishing vests, landing nets, new Personal Floation Device (life jackets), rain gear, bait buckets, coolers and more. For stocking suffers, how about several securely packaged lures or box o f handtied flies. Check out the list of Bait and Tackle Shops on the final page of this report.



Or how about a gift certificate for a guided outing? Check out the Guide Page in the Report to secure the contact information. Guides which contribute to the Report are specialist for particular species – just pick the species: steelhead, smallmouth bass, walleye, lake trout, crappie & bluegill, or even bowfin, and check the Guide Page to see their specialty.

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; keystoneconnectionguideservice@gmail.com; www.facebook.com/keystoneconnectionguideservice.

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

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

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



Email: Debbie@riverjetpro.com

Allegheny River action continues...



Jeff Knapp



Picture caption



Tony Hall—yes , river crappies.



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

Final entries in the Personal Best Catch with Garmin Line. Winner to be drawn in January.



Angler Al with 22 in
Brown Trout



Ayden Haid with catfish on
2 -ound Gamma.



Beth with catfish on 2-pound
Gamma

More on next page

Personal Best Catch on Gamma Line continues.



Ayden Haid with black
crappie on 4-lb. Gamma



Beth Gisselbrecht with crappie on 2-lb test
Gamma



Beth with pike on 4-lb
Gamma



Ayden Haid with ice fishing
crappie on 2 lb. Gamma

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



It was the week before Christmas and Gus at G&G Marine Electronics was busy with holiday surprise installs. But we will check back with him for the winter Fishing Report issue to get his advice on the best Garmin setup for ice fishing.

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