

NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FISHING REPORT

Published by Blackwolfe Communications LLC Issue: April 6, 2023

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



Dianne Kolodziejski with her first Shenango Lake slab of the 2023 season.

Landing Net by Darl Black

It's that time of year when things are happening very quickly as different fish species react to the warming water in lakes and rivers. The bite can change overnight, making it hard to keep up with what is happening. In order to get in on the short-lived early-spring bites, you need to be thinking ahead, so keep this in mind as you read this Report. What was happening last week may be over before you can get out. For example, right now, one of the hottest bites include crappies in the Bays of Pymatuning's North End; this should continue for 2 or 3 weeks. Shore wading for Pymie walleyes is just getting started. And should continue through late April as the straggler post spawn 'eyes remain shallow.

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 6, 2023

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County by County Reports for Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango

In addition to county reports, check out these News Bites...

- NW PA Fisheries Update from PFBC Area Fisheries Manager Timothy Wilson
- Habitat for Woodcock Lake from PFBC Lake Habitat Section Chief Ben Page
- “Off the Record” an account from Angler Al about a potential state record walleye from French Creek
- Gallery of walleye catches from the bank at Pymatuning Lake, April 2

French Creek – Flowing through all four counties

Recently French Creek flow has been high and muddy. No reports from anglers received. However, check out the story from Angler Al later in this Report about a huge walleye caught from French Creek in February which may have exceeded the current state record ‘eye if the angler had the fish officially weighed and application sent to PFBC.

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Gus @ Richter’s Bait & Tackle; filed 4/3: The walleye bite is just getting started. There are anglers in boats around the PA bridge on the Espyville/Andover Causeway. A few guys have started wading on the South End,



but not much to report yet. Crappies and perch are biting in the norther shallow bays. (See photo at causeway)



Bobbie Joe @ Duck-N-Drake; filed 4/3: They are getting some walleyes along the causeway at the PA bridge, and perch at the Ohio side fishing pier. No word on wading success along the shoreline yet. A few anglers are keyed in on crappies in the northern bays – usual early locations. (See photo left)

Darl @ Blackwolfe Communications; filed 4/3: Anglers have been having success with walleyes at the Linesville Spillway. Bite started days ago, but appears to have increased significantly as the full moon on April 6th approached. Check out Sunday walleye catches from the bank on a special page later in Report. (See photo here and more on Pymie Gallery Page)



Mike Morgan



Editor's Note: Earlier in March, there was a hot perch bite at Linesville Marina, and hot crappie bite at the Jamestown Marina Docks. **Kevin Austin of Luckis4rabbits** crappie jigs enjoyed several days of success from the docks. (See photo left) As of April 1, Marina docks are now closed to public fishing until November 1, 2023.

Conneaut Lake



Thomas Duncan; filed 3/27: Crappies finally turned on at Conneaut Lake. I've caught about a dozen each time out this past week. Biggest one was 15" at 1 lb. 15 oz. Also caught two largemouth bass. (See photos left and right)



Adam Horne (Hartstown); filed 3/22: I took advantage of recent warm weather and sunshine to fish along the north end of Conneaut Lake – I fished the canals and outflow. Fishing was slow but well worth the work in order to land the first largemouth bass of the year – an 18 incher. Also had a large bowfin break me off in the canal. Great day to be out; glad to wet a line! Go after crappies but get a mixed bag – but you can't catch anything if you don't go out! (See photo)



Canadohta Lake

Jerry @ Timberland Bait; filed 4/3: It was a rough Trout Opener as well as a rough Mentored Youth Day the previous week due to high water. Fish were caught but not in the numbers we normally see. By the way, I will no longer sell fishing licenses, nor will I take debit/credit cards. The shop will only take cash and personal checks.

ERIE COUNTY

Tudor Hook-N-Nook at Elk Creek Sports: New owners for Elk Creek Sports – but they are not newbies to the Erie tackle business. Bill and Lisa of Tudor Hook-N-Nook recently acquired Elk Creek Sports store and have moved their entire inventory from their old location to the Elk Creek site. They will offer rods/reels and tackle to meet needs of beginners through advanced anglers. And don't forget the live bait for trout, perch and walleye. They have been hard at work updating tackle stock, as well as snack and deli offerings – from breakfast coffee bar to lunch sandwiches to fuel the angler. They will continue to offer gasoline to fuel your ride as well. With the expanded space, there will be an area for sit and chat, change into and out of waders. (photo)



Tributaries

Bob Packey @ Solitude Steelhead Guide; filed 3/29: The steelhead fishing season is definitely winding down. Smolts have been stocked in all tributaries and these fish have voracious appetites. Be very careful when handling these fish, or move to a smolt-free area because today's smolts are tomorrow's future steelhead run!. As far as adult fish, there are still a few fish scattered throughout the systems. Expect a lot of walking and fair amount of fish-less water. Steelhead can be found, but you've got to work for them. Suckers are also starting to arrive in numbers – a sure sign spring is just around the corner. Although not in any numbers yet, lake-run smallmouth bass have started to enter the tributaries. I personally witnessed a fisherman land half a dozen on lower Elk. Good luck to all. (Last of season photos below)



Presque Isle Bay

Jake @ FishUSA; filed 4/3: The fishing around Erie is heating up quickly! This coming week is looking like it should set up Presque Isle Bay and surrounding lakes for the spring transition. Panfishing in Presque Isle Bay has been on fire. The crappie fishing has been off the hook as well as a large number of perch being caught in the Bay, too! Presque Isle Lagoons will start to set up soon as crappies and bluegill seek warmer water. Once the panfish move shallow, so do the predators like big largemouth bass and pike. Smallmouth bass are starting to slowly slide into the bay and position themselves on deep water breaks. One of my favorite lures this time of year is a small swimbait like a Keitech Fat Swing Impact and a bottom contact bait like a tube jig. Good luck this season, and I will see you on the water!

Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 4/3: Anglers are catching some perch and crappies off the piers and fishing docks. Customers in boats reported having good success in 18 to 30 feet of water at the mouth of Misery Bay for perch. Some anglers did the usual opening day of stocked trout fishing thing in the streams, and ponds on the peninsula. There are a few steelhead still hanging around some of the streams.

Aaron @ French Creek Fishing Company; filed 4/1: Despite poor weather conditions, fishing has been good in Northwest PA. Perch and crappies fishing has been excellent in PIB. Soft plastics such as 2" FC Darter on 1/32 oz. jighead fished below a slip bobber around vegetation has been an effective technique. While fishing around sand/gravel for rocky bottoms, a finesse drop shot rig can be deadly. Covering water and tracking down concentrations of fish is key to putting numbers of fish in the bucket. Trout fishing in Delayed Harvest Sections across the region has been excellent with anglers catching fish on a 2" FC Pin Worms and 1.375" FC Stoneflies. (See photos below)





Chad Prihode; filed 3/23: Misery Bay has been producing crappies from 8 feet of water using a slip bobber set for 5 to 6 feet down, match to 4 lb. Gamma Panfish Line. Pictured is Damien Scott with his first crappie – he just started fishing this season! (Photos



left and right)

Main Lake

With all the wind, few (if any) boats have been out on the lake. However, all the charter boats and private owner boaters are getting ready for the 2023 season. Captain Keith Eshbaugh wanted to remind everyone that he currently booking Lake Trout Trips starting in mid-April. Contact him at 724-884-3977.

MERCER COUNTY

Lake Wilhelm

Brad B; filed 3/23: I've been catching nice perch and crappie in the shallows at Wilhelm with finesse baits. Dragging and hopping a 1/16-oz jig with BC Bait Pickworm in Eagles Milk and BC Bait Stingers in red and char. On a bad note, the shad are taking over the lake with having a good winter freeze and die-off; they are biting panfish jigs right now – not looking good for the season. (Photo right)



Shenango Lake

John Kolodziejski; filed 4/2...

- March 8: I was quite elated to locate a large active school of perch on the morning of March 8. The day was clear and sunny but the temperature was in the upper 20s. My rod tip was clogging with ice. No other anglers were present. However, the fish were very active. I called Dianne and she immediately canceled her morning workout routine to join in the fun. Initially we were using small minnows but between handling a lot of fish and repeatedly plunging our numb hands into the minnow bucket, we wisely switched to 1/16-oz yellow and chartreuse twister tail jigs with excellent results. (Photos)



- March 23: Dianne and I found a few hefty slabs in fairly shallow water near submerged cover. Interestingly they were only staged at a very specific location. Nearby seemingly identical cover proved to be void of fish. A simple suspended jighead tipped with a juicy mealworm was the offering of choice. But when the bite was over, it was over. I always ponder the reason for the quick end. Did we catch all the fish present? Did

we spook them? Did they just shut down? Did a large predator fish arrive? Or did the school simply slip back into deeper water with the setting sun? We'll never know but that's just another intriguing reason to keep us coming back! (Photo on cover)



Randy @ Fish West PA; filed 3/26: Shenango is fishing pretty decent despite water temps in the mid to low 40s. The lake level is up with all the recent rains. Crappie and perch bite seems to be best right now. (Photo



left) **UPDATE from Randy**: Randy fished Shenango yesterday, April 4, with Brian and Jeremy. Found the bite to be a little "bassy." (Photos right)

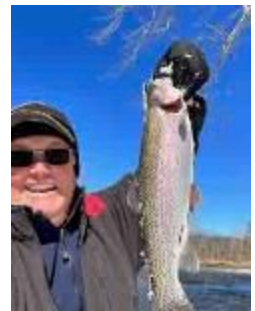


"Captain Hook" (Hermitage); filed 3/23: 2023 is about to fire up here on Shenango. Got a little taste from shore. Only a few, but better days are coming! (Photo left)

VENANGO COUNTY

Oil Creek

Denny Beggs (Franklin); filed 3/23: I fished the Delayed Harvest section of Oil Creek a week ago using my fly rod and nymphs. I caught 5 rainbows; a couple of them were 15 inches. Fish were all lip-hooked and released successfully. Here is a photo of a colorful rainbow. (Photo right)



Sugar Creek



Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 4/1: Mentored Youth Day on the Saturday before opening of trout season was a bust. Very unsafe conditions around our region, but more specifically on Sugar Creek where I had planned to take Mikey Galkowski. On the following Saturday, April 1st, the official opening day of trout statewide, we attempted again. However, the overnight storm blew streams up once again. Knowing an

area where I could take Mikey that the current would not be as dangerous, together we waded in. Using a weighty tandem setup – nightcrawler low and 14 inches above it an orange trout magnet, Mikey cast into the muddy flow. Surprisingly a nice 13-inch rainbow hit the 'crawler and Mikey successfully brought it in...PTL from Angler Al. (Photo)

Allegheny River

Pete @ Smallies on the Yough.com; filed 3/23...

- March 17: We started around noon today because it was cold early. The water was clear and low for this time of year – just the way I like it. The bite started slow and picked up during the day as the water warmed to 40 degrees. We used soft plastic to catch our smallmouths. The bite was tough; we would feel a thump and set the hook, but nothing was there. When we downsized our baits, we began to catch them. (Photos)



- March 21: It was a nice day to be out. The Allegheny was in good shape; water temperature was 39 degrees. The bite was very, very soft making for tough fishing. I had to crawl baits at unbelievably slow pace – three to five minutes to retrieve each cast. I landed 7 bass, but it took all day. (Photos right)



Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill; filed 3/11: I received these pictures and story from my good friend Brian Perry of Franklin. He and his buddy Mike Behe of Rocky Grove caught a dandy stringer of river walleyes. The fish hit live shiners fished on the bottom in 16 to 18 feet of water. Fished vertically as the boat drifted along in current break. Fish were very aggressive. Brian's largest was 28 inches. And Mike's largest was a 25-inch 6 pound 'eye – taken on a 5 ft. ultralight rod with 4-pound test line. Note: They released the big females, keeping smaller ones to eat. (Photos left)



Bill Logan (Pleasantville); filed 3/9: In early March, Rick ShROUT and I caught 24 smallmouth and one wall-eye in four hours today on amber tubes. Water temperature was 36/37 degrees. (Photos right)



Gallery of Pymatuning First-Bite Spring Walleye from the Shore



Andrew Mast



Josh Owens



Lois Elder



Kami Pashakarnis



Jonathan Mast with 9-1/2 pounds

“Off the Record” by Angler AI

I recently received word from my friend Tom Hays. He told about a record-size walleye that may be caught on French Creek. He gave me the guy's name was Lewis Smith, told me where he worked and that he was from Dempseytown.

I was able to make contact with Lewis. He agreed to meet up so I could get a recap of his story. Here are the details of Lewis's catch.

It was Presidents Day, February 20, 2023. Lewis left work for home. On his way down Rt. 322 he opted to stop by a familiar section on French Creek, an area he has caught several 10 pound-plus walleye the past. Upon arriving, he noted the water color was a greenish tint, perfect looking in his book.

He first began casting and retrieving a perch pattern #12 Husky Jerk. He got a strike on it, but didn't hook up. After several minutes of casting the lure to the same thread of water, he changed to a second lure. A #12 silver and black Husky Jerk. At dusk he was about to give up and head home. However before doing so, he decided to try a third lure.

A smaller #10, chrome Husky Jerk. It turned out to be the right choice.

During a slow retrieve, he felt a slight tap – but he thought the lure may have hit bottom. It stopped like it had grabbed a snag. However, his rod tip began to bounce. Instinctively he swung a sideways hookset. The huge walleye immediately resisted and a timely battle ensued. Several minutes later he got the fish near the bank. It flailed and splashed as he reached to put a net under it. Once in the net he realized the magnitude of what he had caught. But the saga of this story only gets more intense.



With numbing cold hands, he hoisted the fish out of the net. But the lure got hung up in the mesh. During the process of attempting to remove the treble hooks from the net, his hand slipped. One of the trebles burying into his finger past the barb.

With one set of treble hooks still in the fish's jaws and a seriously impaled finger, he knew he was facing a challenge. Having cut the lure free of the 20lb Power Pro braid

line, he was able to remove the lure from the clinches of the fish, quickly carried the walleye to his car and headed for Meadville ER.

During the three hours in the ER waiting room, all he could think of was the possible state record walleye subsiding in the trunk of his car. Upon exiting the hospital, he knew the likelihood the fish wouldn't be alive. Slim to none.

Sadly, Lewis had always believed a fish must be kept alive in order to meet the criteria of being certified as a record catch.

When he opened the trunk of the car, the big fish still showed a bit of life. After driving home, he weighed it on his digital scales. When it registered a reading of 18.6 pounds. He was devastated. Had it been certified, the weight of this fish would have surpassed the current state record walleye. Had he not had the lure impediment he would have taken the fish to Erie for certification. Instead, he placed the walleye in a water filled plastic tote and drove the fish to a nearby spot on upper 2-Mile Run Creek in Franklin. He tirelessly spent 2 hours attempting to revive it. By 3 a.m. in morning he came to the sad conclusion the fish could not be revived.

Unfortunately, his older phone does not take a quality picture – certainly not one to give justice a fish of this size deserved. And truly not the accreditation it would have received.

In the short amount of time I spent with Lewis, his passion for fishing was imminent. He enjoys targeting trophy fish. Showed me a picture of a walleye that put his 18.6 pounder to shame. He caught it on the Allegheny River before he owned a scale. It was 36 inches and figures it weighed closer 20 pounds.

Lewis, thanks for sharing your story with me, with us! You my friend, have my regards and upmost respect...

PTL... Angler Al

Editor's Note: Each year for the spring issue of NW PA Fishing Report, Area Fisheries Manager Tim Wilson provides brief information for anglers on programs, findings and management plans for area fisheries.

NW PA Fisheries Update by Tim Wilson, PFBC Area Fisheries Manager

Regarding crappies at Pymatuning and Shenango: Our nets confirm what many anglers are experiencing that the crappies in Pymatuning are down right now. So far PA and OH agree that we haven't seen a response to the new regulations in the crappies. Both states have more sampling planned to keep looking, although, there isn't much more to be done. We already have the most restrictive harvest regulations available in place. We just haven't seen any of the big year classes (which are usually the driving force in crappie population dynamics) in a while.

We plan to trap net Shenango River Lake this spring. It seems like the anglers there are slowly warming to the new regulation but some still aren't happy about it. We'll see what our nets tell us.

I would like to highlight some programs rather than individual waters. The PFBC's switch to stocking the much larger Muskellunge yearlings is showing results in practically every water we stock in NW PA. Most (if not all) waters have shown increased abundance of Muskies and things should only get better as these fish get older and larger. Pymatuning, Edinboro, Canadohta, Conneaut, Tionesta, Wilhelm, Justus and LeBeouf are all good lakes for Musky anglers. There is also a small niche fishery for Muskies stocked in lower Conneaut Creek.



Numerous NW PA waters are stocked with Walleye yielding varying levels of success. Everyone is familiar with Pymatuning Reservoir, which is in very good shape with Walleye. But other waters anglers might target are Lake Wilhelm, Howard Eaton Reservoir, East Branch Clarion River Lake, Allegheny Reservoir (Kinzua Dam), Lake Canadohta and Shenango River Lake which have fair to good Walleye populations. The Allegheny River and French Creek are now managed exclusively for Walleye through natural reproduction.

Most of the lakes in NW PA, be they natural or manmade reservoirs, are generally shallow, weedy, and productive. Which makes most of them great destinations for Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass. Some of the best bass waters are Pymatuning, Shenango River Lake, Presque Isle Bay, Lake Wilhelm, Conneaut Lake, Edinboro Lake and Kahle Lake. Some are better for numbers, some for size and some have both. Of course, the Allegheny River is the best destination for Smallmouth.

Timothy Wilson | Area Fisheries Manager
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Editor's note: Last year many of you likely noticed the piles of stone and cement "reef balls" stored in the upper parking lot at Woodcock Lane launch. At the time, I did not know what a reef ball was, although I was certain it was for a habitat project. So I contact Ben Page at the PFBC Lake Habitat Section to learn more. Here is the reply.

Habitat for Woodcock from Ben Page, PFBC Lake Habitat Section Chief

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and the PA Fish and Boat Commission have continued our partnership efforts to improve fish habitat at Woodcock Creek Lake. We recently produced a new five-year fish habitat improvement plan for Woodcock Creek Lake. The plan includes several new fish habitat sites with rock, concrete, and wood structures. The annual drawdown gives us a perfect opportunity to use heavy equipment to install fish habitat structures directly on the lake bed. The new fish habitat sites can be located on the habitat improvement plan map on our PFBC website. Lake Improvement Plans (fishandboat.com)



Ben Page | Lake Habitat Section Chief
Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission | Division of Habitat Management
595 E Rolling Ridge Dr. | Bellefonte, PA 16823
Mobile: 814.933.2955 | Office: 814.359.5162

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

Note from Bo's Guide Service: I will be running spring panfish trips on Wilhelm and Conneaut Lake from ice out until the end of May. From June until the September 1, I will be running bowfin trips on Geneva Marsh and Conneaut Lake. I will finish up the year with fall panfish trips from September through December. My rates will be the same as last year: \$25.00 per hour per person. (See his contact information above.)

The Livewell

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Phone 814-437-2077

Email: Debbie@riverjetpro.com



What do you miss by not fishing the Allegheny River during February this year since the river did not ice up? Ask Angler Al:



On a summer-like day in February with air temperature nearly 70 degrees, Tom Livermore of Butler, PA, smiled as he launched his G3 jet boat. He smiled even more broadly when he hooked a brute muskellunge. While using 8 pound line to work a 1/4-ounce jighead tipped with a large minnow, he hooked a 49 inch 41 pounder with a 22.5 inch girth. When the musky finally tired Tom was able to boat it—even with a broken net. After measurements and photos, the fish was released. Congratulations and thanks for sharing your catch! PTL...Angler Al.



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**

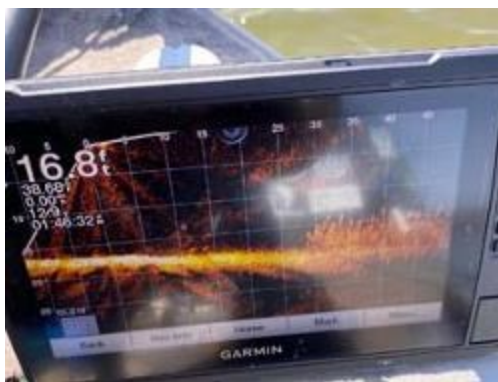
GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE



- 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

Garmin Tip from Ken Smith

When Ken Smith could not catch crappies from mid-depth brushpiles on his initial trip onto Shenango Lake about two weeks ago, he broke out his Garmin LiveScope sonar. He had bought the unit several years ago, but after installing and testing it, he decided his regular Down-Vu and Side-Vu options served his style of fishing better – and he continued to catch all the crappies he desired from Shenango Lake without LiveScope. But he was stumped this spring, getting out earlier than usual due to the milder weather in March. So out came the forward looking sonar and he discovered where the coldwater crappies were. He found a large school on a flat just off the river channel, near brushpiles he had fished but not holding on them. Instead, they were suspended and moving. And fish didn't seem to be going to any destination – just wandering about slowly. He was able to keep up with them and target them with his favorite jigs. See below.



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

 - FishUSA

 - Poor Richards Bait & Tackle

 - Tudor Hook-N-Nook At Elk Creek Sports

- 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