

NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FISHING REPORT

Published by Blackwolfe Communications LLC

Issue: July 1, 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



Landing Net by Darl Black

Here is the latest fishing news from the PA GREAT LAKES REGION - just in time for making fishing plans over the long 4th of July celebration! Summer patterns are kicking in. Plenty of fishing opportunities when the weather cooperates. In this issue are two specials: **Overlooked NWPA Fishing Hotspots for the July 4th Holiday**, and a summer article title **Go Deep for Big Summer 'Gills and 'Seeds**. Check them out and GO FISH!

Summertime is also musky time on the smaller lakes of NW PA. Canadohta Lake is a favorite for Rick Shroul, pictured here with a 36-inch musky about to be released.

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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News Bytes

Mercer County, PA: the **2nd Annual Lake to Lake Paddle Challenge** is scheduled for August 26 with over \$5,000 in cash prizes. Two Classes: 30-mile Competitive Challenge and 15-mile Adventure Challenge. For more information, go to VisitMercerCountyPa.com.

Harrisburg, PA (June 2): The PFBC has certified a **new state record Flathead Catfish**. The fish was caught by Michael Wherley of Franklin County from the Susquehanna River on May 14, 2023. He was using a live rainbow trout as bait. The fish weighed 66 lbs., 6 oz, exceeding the previous record by more than 10 pounds.

Harrisburg, PA (June 13): The PFBC is alerting anglers that effective immediately, all season, sizes, and creel limits have been lifted on **Kahle Lake** located in Clarion and Venango counties. This action encourages harvest by anglers in anticipation to temporarily draining the reservoir to repair the dam.



It's official. A new PA State Record Flathead Catfish weighing 66 lbs 6 ozs.

COUNTY BY COUNTY REPORTS

French Creek – flowing through all four counties.

Pete @ SmalliesOnTheYough.com guide service; filed 6/25. (See photos on right)

- 6/21: Great day on the water today. The water level was low for this time of year and around 75 degrees. We employed a variety of soft plastic to land numerous bass. We used 6-pound Gamma in the ultra-clear water. Bass appeared to be well into the post-spawn period. Among our catch were two 20-inch smallies and several others in the 16-to-18-inch range.

- 6/25: My clients and I had a great day on the creek. Rick caught his PB smallie at 20 inches, and Ann Marie caught her first Rainbow Trout. A bald eagle flew over our heads only about 20 feet high. What a great day in NW PA!



Al @ Al's Angling Adventures; filed 6/24: Down on French Creek Mike and I took red worms, night-crawlers and live creek bait to drift through fast current, catching several nice smallmouth bass and even a few rainbow trout. (Photos left)

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Bean @ Richter's Bait & Tackle; filed 6/26: Anglers on South End are still doing well on walleyes, mainly along the weed edges on jig & crawler or worm harness during the day. Some guys are switching to trolling a little deeper with shad-like crankbaits. Reports continue on nice bluegills and perch, but nothing on crappies. Also, some clients report decent muskies.

Jennifer @ Duck-N-Drake; filed 6/26: More crappies were checked in over the weekend for the Crappie Brawl, but nothing else to report. (Photos right)



Stan Teitelbaum; filed 6-23: It was an overcast day on Pymatuning and that was fine with me. This South End 17 incher was pretty chunky. Overall, I caught 10 fish today including one rock bass that was larger than several of the largemouth! (See photo right)



Conneaut Lake



Adam Horne (Hartstown); filed 6/26: I fished Conneaut Lake at first light before boaters and skiers got busy on the lake. Panfish bite was on! Some fish were taken off Midway Beach but the best fishing was at the south end of the lake near the condos. Panfish were from 4 to 7 feet deep. All

were caught on my hand-tied jigs tipped with a maggot or small piece of worm using an ultralight rod & reel. (See photos left)

Canadohta Lake

Alan ShROUT; filed 6/25: Bill Logan and I fished Canadohta on June 20th for muskies and saw five fish. I was able to catch and release a 36-inch beauty that hit my Suick lure near a dock. Bill hooked a smaller fish in deeper water on a bucktail but it got away. We had three other follows in 4 hours of fishing. (Bill lost a nice musky back in May while trying to land it when the hooks got tangled on the rim of the net.) (See Cover)



See Cover

Sugar Lake



Adam Horne (Hartstown); filed 6/13: I fished Sugar on the opening day of bass season. I got out at first light and enjoyed steady action using live minnows for bass and a 1/32-oz modified Road Runner with Z-Man plastic trailer. I put a lot of panfish in the boat and had a very nice morning on the water. Also did well on largemouth. Sugar is a Big Bass Lake with 15-inch minimum size and 4-bass creel. It is a hidden gem with the chance to hook a pike or pickerel as well. Fish on!

ERIE COUNTY

Aaron @ French Creek Fishing Company – Out and about Erie County; filed 6/25: Fishing in North West Pennsylvania has been great this spring. Presque Isle Bay has been producing great quality largemouth and smallmouth bass. Throwing weightless Texas-rigged 7" FC Finesse Worms has been the best technique for me. Inland lakes have been producing a great mixed bag of fish, including some beautiful Northern Pike and Walleye. We've been using the new FC Bladed Jig with a 4" FC Slim Swimmer and 4" skirts as trailers. These have performed great when fishing around heavy weeds and wood cover. French Creek has been rather tough lately with the low water conditions but we've managed to land some nice Smallmouth Bass by Ned rigging our 2.6" FC Deadly Neds in June Bug and Motor Oil colors. Hopping this bait along the bottom is great for tricking pressured fish to bite. This technique works excellent for walleye in area lakes as well. I'll have a booth set up at the Pymatuning Onion Fest coming up July 8th and 9th. Stop by and check it out! (See photos below—LMB from PIB; Pike from LeBouef; Walleyes from Canadohta)



Rob @ FishUSA; filed 6-26: Walleye season had a slow start due to several weeks of consistent Northeast winds. This has walleyes in deeper than normal water for time of year – reports have been from 60 to 85 feet. Walleyes are being caught on Bombers and Bandits, as well as mini spoons such as Dreamweaver WDs and Michigan Stinger Scorpion spoons. Also, the night bite has been in water as shallow as 9 feet, pulling shallow plugs. Smallmouth bass catches have slowed down in the Bay this past month, but some are still being caught; finding structure is key. The smallie bite in Lake continues but will slow down going into the hotter months. (Photos left & next Page)

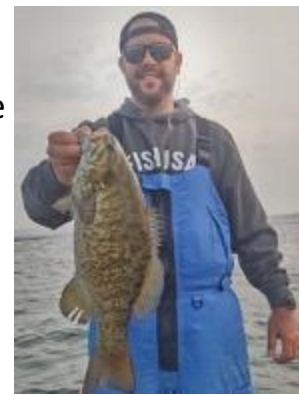


Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 6/26: Exciting news is perch being caught out of Shades Beach in 40 to 50 feet of water. Walleye are deep due to cooler lake temperature, on the outside of the Mountain from Shades to the Lighthouse in 65 to 80 feet of water. Lake normally 72 degrees end of June but this year it's only 63 degrees. But smallmouth bass are on fire. They are also catching some perch on the North and South Piers. Other breaking news is legal walleyes being caught at Eaton Reservoir in past couple weeks; keepers are 15 to 18 inches, but you've got to get beyond the shoreline vegetation.



FishUSA photo in Bay

Bill @ Tudors/Elk Creek; filed 6/26: Largemouth bass are going strong in Presque Isle Bay. Walleye catches are picking up with some local fish taken shallow in 25 to 35 feet, and transit fish in 66 to 70 feet. Trolling the usual stickbaits and crawler harnesses.



FishUSA photo in Lake

Brittany @ Poor Richards; filed 6/26: we had a very successful walleye derby this past week, with most of the teams coming in with a limit. Big fish of the event was a 13 pounder. Check out our website for details. (Photos below)



Big Fish—13 pounds



Winning Team

Captain Bob @ Perch Pirate; filed 6/26: It has been a rough start to the season due to screwy weather. With colder than usual water, fish are not as aggressive in shallow, and we have had to move deeper already in the season. Some of our customers are catching some walleye – if you are experienced with the cast and countdown on the swing technique with forward-weighted spinners. The big charter boats are doing okay with their mechanical trolling methods. But that's not we are about. On the Perch Pirate, you fish with a rod in your hand – cast, retrieve, set the hook and fight the fish. Ours is a true hands-on experience.

MERCER COUNTY

Lake Wilhelm

Todd Keller @ Lake Wilhelm Fisherpersons wants you know there are BIG fish of many species in the lake! Wilhelm photos below



Brad B at @beefishin; filed 6/25: Here is my latest Wilhelm big bass catch – a 21.5 inch largemouth weighing a little over 5 pounds, caught on a medium-dive crankbait. (See photo left)



(Editor's note: Prior to this catch, I had been riding with Brad in his boat while he fished for two hours. I had hoped to get a PA ANGLER useable shot of him with a big bass for an upcoming article. With about four small bass landed, the best one was about two pounds. It was late and I had to go. He dropped me off at the dock, but said he was going back out. When I got home, a text from Brad showed off this BIG BASS he caught only minutes after dropping me off. Unfortunately, the editor will not allow this photo because it is a one-hand hold. (Only bass supported by two hands are permitted.)

Shenango River

"Captain Hook" Morocco; filed 6/25: The Shenango River is still providing a nice mix of fish including walleye, catfish and smallmouth bass – both below and above Shenango Lake. Early morning and late evening are best during the summer. (See Photos below & in Overlooked Hotspots.



Shenango Lake

Ken Smith (Sharon); filed 6/25: Crappies are in the shoreline blowdowns right now. I used hi-vis 8-pound Gamma Panfish Line with Bobby Garland baits tipped with Crappie Nibbles to get them. I was fishing with my friends Shawn and Pastor James King. King is from Pittsburgh area – one of my lifelong friends. (See Photos below)



Randy @ Fish West PA; filed 6/25: Shenango Lake has been on fire through June with great catches of bass, panfish, catfish, and our favorite – hybrid stripers and white bass! With the dog days of summer approaching, we hope the strong bite continues. While some fish are still shallow, most are dropping into deeper water due to higher water temperatures, and will chase open-water baitfish schools. (See photos below)



VENANGO COUNTY

Angler Al's Venango Diary; filed 6/24:

I was able to do a bit of fishing over the last couple weeks. Most of the time I was casting and drifting pieces of nightcrawler or medium-size live creek minnows for trout in Sugar Creek. However, I did take the fly rod down there as well. Considering the low water and above average heat, the last month of trout fishing has been extremely good. Lots of stocked rainbows and browns, as well as an occasional wild brown made it exciting. Over at



Justus Lake, Mikey and I boated 11 fish, including largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, perch and a crappie – all on shiners. (See photo right and on [Livewell Page](#))



Also, this past week, my brother Steve Bell and Kyke Ward of Franklin spent one morning at Kahle Lake. They did exceptionally well with 26 largemouth bass on artificial lures. PFBC has placed temporary regulations on Kahle – no season, no creel, no size on any fish in order to reduce populations through harvest before they draw it down for repairs. (See photo left)

Allegheny River

Bill Logan (Pleasantville); filed 6/17: While fishing for musky on the Allegheny one morning, we had 3 follows. I had taken a novice musky angler with me on that day; he froze when he saw the red fin following. I coached him on making a figure 8; half an hour later he had a follow that chased the figure 8 twice! We were pumped! Two days later, I missed on my first cast. Later I hooked a keeper by the boat that threw the hook. A few casts later, my novice had a follow. Two hundred yards down river, the novice had another follow. Minutes later I caught a small 33 incher which was released at boatside. (So goes the life of a musky fishing...)

Pete @ SmalliesOnTheYough.com guide service; filed 6/25: After a morning of fishing French Creek with clients, they decided they wanted to try the Allegheny. We landed a bunch of smallies with 16 inches being the largest one. The river is very low for this time of year. (See photos on [Livewell Page](#))

Jeff @ Keystone Connection Guide Service; filed 6/24: I resumed river guide trips for smallmouth bass in mid-June after the spawn. The action has been good for fish up to 16 inches, indicating the fish are past their annual post-spawn doldrums. Larger female bass have been absent, which is typical of early summer – particularly given the low, clear conditions. Rapala X-Raps and Zoom Super Flukes have accounted for nearly all the fish. There has been an abundance of suspended algae in the river, but the situation seems to be improving. (See photo on [Livewell Page](#))

Overlooked NW PA fishing Hotspots for the 4th of July Holiday Period

Centered around the 4th of July Celebration, the first week of July has long been a family vacation week. Typical vacation sites are overrun with people. Boating, skiing, jet-skiing, wake-boarding, kayaking, canoeing and fishing are traditionally part of the busy water sports at popular lakes during the week of the 4th. Of course, fishing and paddle sports receive the short end of the straw on many lakes and rivers when motorized craft burn up gas racing up and down the lake.

Trying to find a locate a place to fish (from shore or from a boat) can be problematic during this week-long celebratory holiday. Personally, I never plan a fishing trip to any of my favorite waters during this time due to excess boating traffic. Popular fishing lakes I avoid are Presque Isle Bay, Edinboro Lake, Conneaut Lake, Canadohta Lake, Pymatuning Lake, Shenango Lake. And in the last two decades, canoe/kayak flotillas populate the Allegheny River and French Creek during this July holiday with a steady stream of mostly inexperienced paddlers who clog the waterway – therefore any serious attempts at fishing are futile.

Fortunately, Northwest Pennsylvania has several often-overlooked fishing hotspots likely to be less crowded than the more recognized sites. Here is my list of suggestions.

Lake Pleasant (Erie County) – A small-but-deep natural lake known mostly for trout during the early spring. But a ring of shallow vegetation around the lake perimeter hosts big bluegills, nice yellow perch and some decent largemouth bass. Motorized boats are not allowed, including a ban on electric motors. Live or dead fish is also prohibited to use as bait. Small PFBC Parking area and access for paddle craft. Shoreline fishing is limited.

Lake LeBouef (Erie County) – Another small-but-shallow natural lake with minimum wake restriction on entire lake. PFBC has access with ample parking and decent ramp for trailered boats. Thick weeds around the edge of lake plus a couple weedy points provide haven for largemouth bass, northern pike and crappies, along with a behemoth musky or two; bowfin have overrun the lake.

Tamarack Lake (Crawford County) – After being completely drained for extensive dam repair, Tamarack Lake was refilled and stocked several years ago. The lake is still under catch-and-release regulations for all species of fish. Electric-motors only on this PFBC impoundment. Several launch sites are suitable for small boats; parking available at each ramp. Ample shoreline fishing opportunities, although you must contend with

aquatic vegetation. Species being caught are bluegills, pumpkinseeds, green sunfish and largemouth bass; some bass in the 15 to 17-inch range reported.

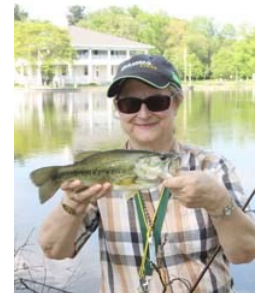
Sugar Lake (Crawford County) – A small natural lake with a perimeter of thick vegetation comprised mostly of pad-type species. At the only public access, PFBC access has a very poor gravel ramp and very limited parking; get their early. 10 hp limit. While the lake has given up some huge largemouth in past years (talking 5 to 8 lbs.), most bass caught seem to be 12 to 15 inches. (Minimum size on bass is 15 inches.) Huge population of small crappies, along with possibility of catching three Ecocides family members: northern pike, muskellunge, and chain pickerel.

Conneaut Outlet Marsh (Crawford County) – If you primarily interested in catching a bowfin, you should give the Conneaut Marsh a try. Shore fishing is limited with best sites at the Custead and Geneva bridges.



Justus Lake (Venango County) – Deep, “two-story” lake within Two Mile Run County Park, owned by county of Venango. Ample shore fishing. Access at shallow, weedy upper end of lake suitable only for canoes and kayaks; steep paved ramp within day-use area near beach is suitable for larger boats. Limited to electric motors. Minimal weeds are close to shore in lower end. Summer species include panfish, largemouth & smallmouth bass, along with the occasional big open-water musky; trout are usually deep in the colder water.

Lake Julia – i.e., Buhl Lake (Mercer County) – Located in Buhl Park, this shallow lake was rehabilitated by the PFBC several years ago and restocked. Ample shoreline fishing access. Check on-line regulations regarding kayaks. Hotspot for stocked spring trout; focus turns to panfish and largemouth bass during summer.



Upper Shenango River (Mercer County) – The Shenango River from Pymatuning Dam outflow to backwaters of Shenango Lake is favored by kayak and canoe anglers. Shoreline access to river is difficult; limited to kayak launch areas and bridges. Species caught in the river include walleye, smallmouth bass, muskellunge, channel cats, and flathead catfish. Although a fish consumption ban exists in the river below Shenango Dam, fishing is permitted; anglers routinely catch walleye, northern pike and hybrid stripers in tailwaters downstream for a short distance. Flathead catfish populate the river through Sharpsville, Sharon and beyond.

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; fishinkeef5132@gmail.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

Has your name been drawn for a prize? Email darlblack@windstream.net with your shipping address to receive your prize. You must email Darl to claim your prize, otherwise it goes back in the hopper for next drawing.

Cover Shot: **Rick Shroust**, drawn for pack of Mike's Custom Tubes

Gamma Line: "**Captain Hook**" **Morocco**; you choose type and lb. test

Lure Pack 1: **Adam Horne** drawn for pack of Galida's Grubz

The Livewell

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Email: Debbie@riverjetpro.com



Allegheny SMB— Knapp photo



Allegheny SMB—Cartwright photo



French Cr SMB—Cartwright photo



Shenango Hybrid Striper—Randy



Justus Lk LMB—Mike



French Cr SMB—Cartwright 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

Go Deep for Big Summer Bluegills and Pumpkinseeds

By Darl Black

I can remember my first encounter with deepwater summer bluegills...on a 1980s Canadian fishing trip to a clear-water lake in southern Ontario, we were searching the 25 to 28-foot depths for walleye and smallmouth with my Humminbird Super 30 flasher. We could see marks just off the bottom, and kept getting hits but could not hook up with anything. I downsized and connected with a huge bluegill! We spent some time catching them, then moved on to hunt for walleye – but I locked that info away in a memory file.

Decades later when my interest turned to panfish and crappies, I pulled down that file and decided to look for big summer bluegills on my regular stomping grounds of NW Pennsylvania. With superior Garmin electronics now on my boat, I was able to easily ID the difference between baitfish schools, panfish schools and larger gamefish in the deep water, as well as identify the bottom configuration.

I was also better equipped with the baits, rigs, and rods to tackle smaller fish. Eye-popping catches of bluegills and **pumpkinseeds** followed! Here is a quick rundown on my approach.



In many lakes (particularly ones that are relatively deep and feature offshore bottom structures beyond the deep weeds), a good portion of larger bluegills *and pumpkinseeds* within the lake school-up on hard bottom during the summer. Key areas to search are outside weedlines with rocky area near the deepest weeds, long points and the crests of mid-lake humps or ridges. Depth can vary from as shallow as 12-15 feet to as deep as about 30 feet if bottom is still hard – restricted of course by a thermocline or oxycline which may or may not set up on a particular lake. I assume these fish are snacking on organisms associated with a rocky debris. But they are also feeding on open-water plankton and small minnows, because I can watch a school of bluegills move off the bottom to higher in the water column – which invariably indicates the bite is about to go crazy.



On the other hand, pumpkinseeds hang closer to the bottom and are more solitary (or in loose groups) compared to large schools of bluegills.

For me, drop-shotting is the best way to reach these fish. I use a 7-foot medium light rod with a smooth soft taper (but not whippy like an ultralight). Reel is spooled with hi-vis 4-pound test **Gamma Panfish line**. To the tag end of the line, I tie a small roller swivel to which I attach about a 30-inch leader of 4-pound test.

I attach a 1/64 oz. jig with a size #8 hook (#6 maximum). I run the line through the hook eye and slide the jig up to just below the swivel; holding the jig, I make a double over-hand knot thereby allowing the jig to freely move on the resulting loop. At the terminal end of the leader, I tie a cheap snap swivel. I clip a ¼, 3/8 or ½-ounce bell sinker into the snap – weight depending on depth and how strong the breeze is. Keep the line as vertical as possible.

To the jig I attach a small 1.25 to 2-inch soft plastic bait. Examples are Trout Magnet Split-tail, Garland Baby Shad, Powerbait 2" Power Minnow. I tip the Split-Tail with a live mealworm and the Baby Shad with a Crappie Nibble but usually do not tip the Power Minnow. Typically, I use a drop of super glue to keep the body on the jig, otherwise panfish pull it off quickly.



I simply drop the rig to the bottom. If the 'gills or 'seeds are hugging the bottom, I keep the sinker in contact with the bottom. However, if the school is suspended, adjust the line length so the bait is hovering about the depth the panfish are seen on the Garmin. I use a combination of drifting and running the electric motor to move through the area. Be observant to changes in depth of bluegill schools.

GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE

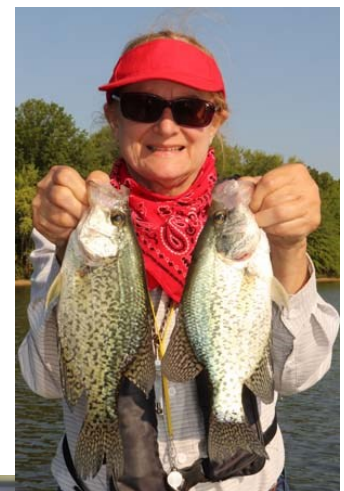


- Real anglers share actual fishing experiences with Garmin units
- For professional local installation of Garmin units, contact G&G Marine Electronics at 724-290-9045

FUN WITH GARMIN DURING JUNE TRIPS TO SHENANGO LAKE



River bend swings in on a point—WB



Stump on drop-off— Crappies



Erie Canal bed rise— Crappies

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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

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B.C. Baits Custom Tackle

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