

NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FISHING REPORT

Published by Blackwolfe Communications LLC

Issue: February 16, 2024

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



Solitude Steelhead Guide



Chris McVey photo



Ken Smith photo

LANDING NET by Darl Black

Winters continue to grow more unpredictable. Availability of ice fishing in NW PA continues to shrink. This is the first February Fishing Report ever without a single report from a contributor on ice fishing (which lasted less than two weeks in mid-January). All ice fishing tournaments have been cancelled for the winter. The good news is the lakes and rivers are open, and anglers are making some impressive open-water catches of walleye, smallmouth bass, yellow perch and crappies — along with the usual winter steelhead. Check out this issue of the Report.

The NW PA Fishing Report provides timely angling information for Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango counties. Fishing comments and photos are offered by regional tackle shops and area anglers. The NWPAFR is based on experiences, observations and opinions of individual contributors; information is considered reliable but comments are not independently verified. In providing information or pictures, you are agreeing to your comments being edited for clarity and brevity, and posted to websites and distributed electronically.

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County by County Reports

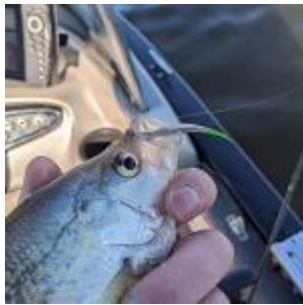
CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Dave @ Richter's Bait & Tackle; filed 2/13: With mild weather in January and February (and only brief ice cover), we are seeing a number of boats out on the lake. Anglers in boat and from shore are doing remarkably well for mid-winter. Some walleyes are being caught in Shenango River and many more in the lake. Blade baits are taking most of the lake fish. Also, good number of incidental muskies caught on blades by walleye fishermen. And some fishermen have located crappies and perch at the mouths of the bays, perhaps waiting for an early movement into shallower water.

Patty @ Poff's Place; filed 2/13: With only one week of good ice fishing this winter, and the big February thaw, we are seeing a lot of anglers out in boats...on decent weather days. Mixed reports, but certainly good walleye catches overall – up and down the lake. Waders are catching some crappies in Red Cross Bay and anglers are catching perch around the docks at Linesville Marina. But it seems the numbers of crappies being caught are way down.

Aaron @ French Creek Fishing Company; filed 2/19: We took advantage of the spring-like weather and made a trip to Pymatuning in search of panfish. We searched areas of 12 to 16 feet of water for bottom composition changes, stumps, lay downs or rocks which typically hold concentrations of fish. We quickly fan cast these areas with drop shot rigs. A ¼-oz. weight with a #6 hook is what I typically use. A variety of soft plastic can be effective using this technique, such as the French Creek Fishing Company 2” FC Drop Shad and 2” FC Darter. There is a lot of water to cover, so if we aren’t getting bites, we continue to search for action. With enough persistence – and keeping the bait in the strike zone – we caught plenty of panfish! (See photos below)



Editor’s Note: During Pymatuning Winter Fun Day last weekend, I ran into a long-time walleye fishing buddy who has been fishing numerous days by boat on Pymatuning from December through early February. He and his fishing partner have been catching lots of walleyes all winter, and particularly in the last warming spell that took the ice off the lake. The vast majority of the ‘eyes were of legal size, and occasionally they scored a double limit of legal ‘eyes. I didn’t ask what he was using because I am certain it was a blade bait.

ERIE COUNTY

Erie Tributaries and Presque Isle Bay

Robert @ Solitude Steelhead Guide Service; filed 2/11: Steelheaders certainly can’t complain about the warm early February air temperatures. After an ice lock period and subsequent “blowout” in January, winter steelhead fishing has been excellent. Steelhead are spread throughout all tributaries with the most consistent action occurring in the upper sections. The biggest challenge is the low and clear water, which has seemingly been the case for a large portion of the season. Expect a mix of fresh winter run/early spring run fish along with plenty of drop back and winter-over fish. A variety of

baits will be effective including egg flies, small streamers, egg sacs, minnows, etc. Proper presentation is key. Get out while you can before winter returns! (See photos below)



Kirk @ East End Angler; filed 2/13: It's really a great report for mid-February! There are steelhead spread throughout all the creeks – east and west side – although the water is currently low and clear making fishing tough...but a little rain to add color is the needed trigger. The panfish in the Bay are on fire, with anglers catching perch and crappies from shore, from piers and from boats all around the Bay. Depending on the species and the depth, you might need to use a bottom rig, or a slip cork or an ordinary bobber. Both plastic and live bait are working. However, there are lots of small fish, particularly perch. Some anglers are catching 40 or 50 perch to find a half-dozen keepers. Eaton is open, with anglers prying that lake for pike.

Dominic @ Poor Richards; filed 2/13: Good numbers of steelhead in the middle and upper reaches of the main tributaries; bite is slow right now due to clear water but minnows and single eggs are taking some fish. The hottest bite is panfish in Misery Bay.

Bill @ Tudor's Hook & Nook at Elk Creek Sports; filed 2/13: Steelhead action has been very good when water conditions are right. More fresh fish moved into the streams during recent high water. Appears to be numbers of fish on redds right now, and current clear water condition makes it easier for anglers to target these fish. Many steelheaders believe that fish on redds should be left alone, and given a chance to spawn thereby providing some self-sustaining numbers to the stocked fish population.

Chad Prihode; filed 2/9: After the thaw on upper Elk Creek, fishing was great. Green egg sac about 3 feet under a float was the go-to bait. (See photos below)



Paul Stewart is back chasing perch in Presque Isle Bay. The photo here is from late December, but he was able to continue fishing and catching perch through January and February. (See photo right)



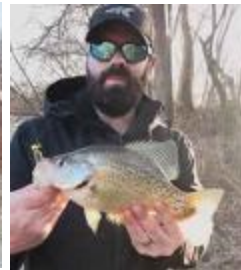
MERCER COUNTY

Shenango Lake and Shenango River



Randy @ Fish West PA; filed 2/13: Shenango in February is COLD but fish are catchable. Panfish including crappies are being caught by those brave enough to get out on the lake – with many fish being caught from shore. Certain areas on the Shenango River – areas rich with downed trees – also produce crappies in the winter. Size varies. Spring is right around the corner and like everyone else, we are ready! Tight lines, Randy. (See photo left)

Chris McVey; filed 2/13: The Shenango River has been very good to me this winter! I've been catching walleyes, muskies and crappies up and down the river at key spots from Pymatuning Dam outflow to Shenango Dam outflow. (See photos below)



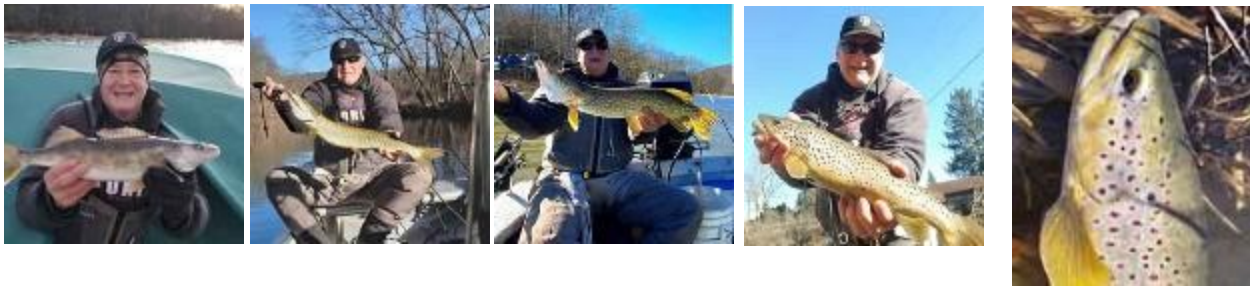
VENANGO COUNTY

Angler Al's Angling Adventures

As an angler who hails from northwestern Pennsylvania, my adventures wading trout streams or boating the river this time of year are based primarily on weather conditions. Extremely cold, iced up, torrent high, stained brown water makes current fishing dangerously challenging! However, the climate can also be amazingly spring like, too. Since my last report, I have successfully landed fish under all above mentioned conditions.

My choice of presentation when fishing the Allegheny River is jigging. I use as heavy a jig as necessary to feel the bottom. A leadhead outfitted with a chartreuse twister tail and a live shiner between 3 and 5 inches, is my go-to bait. I'll cast and reel the presentation slowly, bouncing it over the bottom contour. This technique works great in 6 to 12 feet of water. With deeper current, I prefer vertical jigging.

On the Allegheny, which was awarded River of the Year, we have been catching musky, northern pike, perch and walleye. My buddy Brain Perry of Franklin, caught what I thought was a freshwater drum, however, upon further review, it turned out to be a quillback carpsucker. It was 20 inches and weighed 6 pounds. (See photos below)



When fishing trout streams, I prefer drifting live minnows. The key I smacking the right sinker weight to the current flow, slowing your bait presentation but not letting it snag bottom. The longer you keep the bait in the trout's strike zone, the more likely they are to smack it. In cold conditions, fish usually don't chase down bait. Results have been good. I've had a few good days and one great day on Sugar Creek this winter, catching a fair amount of holdover rainbows and browns, and a couple solid native browns. The largest one was 22.5 inches and another one went 20 inches. (See photos above)

My friend Delora Lusher, winner of the 2023 Pick Three Gamma Line contest, is currently back home in NW PA visiting. This past week, she caught a largemouth bass from my pond. (Photo right)



I have one more big fish to report back in mid-December. Lewis Smith reached out to me in order to share info on big walleye he caught after dark from the Allegheny River on 6-pound line with a Rapala #12 Husky Jerk in perch pattern. He weighed and measured the fish on the shore: 34 inches, 16 pounds. Then he filled large plastic bag with water, put the fish in it and drove to the nearest gas station so someone could take a picture of it, then released it and watched it swim away. (See photo left)

Allegheny River

Bill Logan's River Diary:

- 12/16/23: We boated 11 smallmouth bass today. Pretty good for mid-December.
- 12/24/23: No better way to celebrate Christmas Eve than bass fishing on the Allegheny River. Rick – 11 smb with largest bass going 3 lb. 2oz.; Bill – 7 smb. Water temp was 38.4 degrees.
- 2/8/2024: Total for Rick and I was 4 legal walleyes (all released) plus one short walleye, two smallmouth bass, and one dink pike



Rick Shrout, filed 2/12: I caught this nice 3 lb. 1 oz smallmouth in 34.5-degree water while fishing with Bill Logan. It hit a Ned rig from Mike's Custom Tackle. We boated 8 fish in 5 hours and lost a couple at the side of the boat. (photo left)

Mike @ Mike's Custom Tackle; filed 2/12: Since it's been a while, I figured to send you some pics of our winter on the river. While walleye fishing has been good, we decided to take a break and go for smallmouth bass for a change. We put about 30 bass in the boat in less than 3 hours; not a bad day for February. Fish were biting all day in that 39-degree water. (See photos below)



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



Sugar Lake, February 11, 2024

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



The Allegheny River is always a hotspot for walleye and musky during winter months if it does not ice up. However, the warm late fall and warmer than usual temps in late January and early February has the smallmouth bass feeding as if it was spring.





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

For this first issue of 2024, the NW PA Fishing Report put out a call for any angler to send a photo of their first fish caught in 2024 from a NW PA water. From among those who responded with a photo, a spool of Gamma Line is being awarded via a random drawing. First Fish Entries below:



Tony Sobina— brown trout



Chris McVey— musky



Angler Al— Rainbow t



Brad Bee—yellow perch



Ken Smith — Crappie



Randy — Quillback

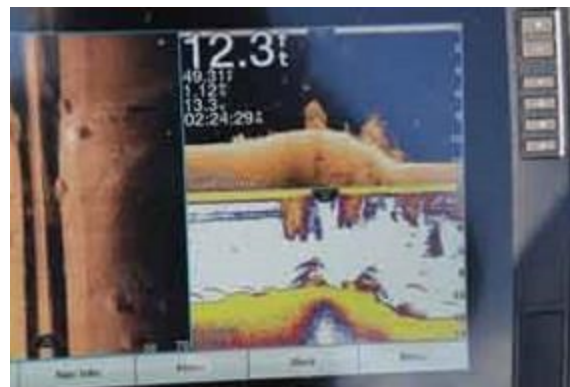
Gamma Line Winner of First Fish 2024 drawing is: Randy Hedderick

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

As I lay my head down to sleep, visions of the previous fishing season dance my mind. When we return to monthly Fishing Reports starting in April, please send your personal tips on using Garmin to share with our readers.



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

French Creek Fishing Company

Galida's Grubz

Luckis4rabbits

Mike's Custom Tackle