

# NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA FISHING REPORT

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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 Wizards of Wilhelm—Brad and Bo—know how to catch crappies.

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## Landing Net by Darl Black

Unpredictable winter weather leads into unusual weather for spring thereby yielding unpredictable timing of fish movements. It's been hit and miss through April and first week of May. Spawning for some species seems to be running ahead of normal, but given full moons late in these months – and up and down water temps – it's tough to figure it all out. But right now, walleye bite along the shore of Lake Erie is heating up, crappies are biting in the shallows, and smallmouth bass seem to be active in the shallows of many lakes. The bedding bluegill bite isn't too far off. Go Fish!

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 May 13, 2024

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### County by County Reports

#### French Creek – flowing through all four counties

**Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill**; filed 5//6: During the late afternoon hours of Saturday May 4<sup>th</sup>, Mikey and I did a bit of wade fishing on French Creek. I with a bucket-full of medium size live shiners and Mikey with a tin full of nightcrawlers. We also had a couple Rapala X Raps in Perch and Siner patterns! We caught several smallies on live bait and even a few with lures. Smallmouth bass were averaging 2 pounds and Mikey caught one rainbow trout! PTL from Angler Al.



#### CRAWFORD COUNTY

##### Pymatuning Lake

**Dawn @ Richter's Bait & Tackle**; filed 5/7: Crappies are in the shallows getting ready to spawn. Walleyes have moved deeper but a number of anglers are still getting limits on jig -n-crawler and worm harnesses. Not much bluegill action yet, but there are some

nice perch being caught. Reports of musky now and then; nothing particularly large reported. Walleye season opened in the river this past Saturday, and we are hearing of some 'eyes being caught there.

**Patty @ Poff's Place**; filed 5/7: Anglers are doing fairly decent, while others complain about not catching anything...the usual story. Each day is new hunt and search mission; if you have basic fishing knowledge and apply yourself, you'll catch fish. Crappies and walleyes biting on north end of lake. Spawning bluegill bite should start soon. You can catch catfish all day long.

**Aaron @ French Creek Fishing Company**; filed 5/5: The panfish bite on Pymatuning has really started to pick up. Shoreline structure and shallow submerged vegetation have been excellent areas to target pre-spawn crappies and bluegills. The 2-inch FC Darter and FC Pin Worm fished under a small foam float on a 1/23 oz. jighead about 15 inches below the surface is a very effective presentation. The fish can get spooked by fishing pressure, so sometimes after a few fish are caught in a certain spot, they may shut down or move. So, it's best keep moving if bites slow down. Fishing should improve as our weather stabilizes. (See photos below)



**Darl & Marilyn**; filed 5/7: One afternoon last week we headed to Pymatuning to check out smallmouth on the south end of the lake (this about week after a very successful smallmouth outing on PIB – see report under Lake Erie in this issue). Hit most of our smallmouth areas south of McArthur, landing over 20 smallmouth and dropping almost as many on way to boat. However, not one of them was over 8 inches. Marilyn caught her first smallie on a trimmed-down Ned Rig and never put the rod down for the next 2-1/2 hours; I was switching baits constantly to see if I could entice a larger bass. Square bill, had jerkbait, Fluke, swimbait, spinnerbait, finesse jig with craw trailer – not a single hit. But anytime I picked up a Ned-rigged rod, I would catch (or drop) a 6 to-9-inch smallie – light hits from small fish reason so many so many unbuttoned on way to boat. Figure these fish were 2 to 3 years old. (See photo)



Note: Pymatuning Lake Association will conduct their 2024 Kids Free Fishing Derby on August 3 & 4 at Espyville Boat Launch. Kids age 2 to 15; prize categories for seven different fish species. For more information and to register visit [tinyurl.com/KidsFish24](https://tinyurl.com/KidsFish24).

### Conneaut Lake

**Bob & Linda Stiener** (Cooperstown); filed 5/7: We spent two days fishing this past week fishing for crappies at Conneaut Lake. They were biting in the shallows. We used a small minnow below a float. Over two days, we took home over a hundred good eating crappie for our freezer. (See photos)



## ERIE COUNTY

### Lake Erie, Presque Isle Bay, Tributaries

**Kirk @ East End Angler**; filed 5/7: Lots of action in Lake Erie & PIB right now. From 5:30 am to 9:30 am, anglers are catching Jumbo perch from North & South Piers. On the city side, crappies are coming from Liberty Park in the morning and evening. In Erie proper, lake trout are being caught in 80 to 100 feet and 50 to 60 feet between Shades Beach and North East. In addition, there are some walleye schools around 60 feet in the Shades to North East area as well. Now with walleye season open, anglers at the creek mouths at dusk are casting long minnow plugs with good success. And PIB is loaded with smallmouth right now.

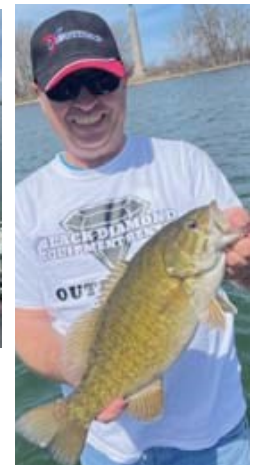
**Brittany @ Poor Richards**; filed 5/7: Walleye fishing has started with anglers concentrating on shoreline fishing near creek mouths. Some are trolling and jig fishing in 12 feet of water off the creek mouths. Stop by for our recommendations on lures to use. Smallmouth bass are in some of the larger tributaries, with the best fishing in the lower part of the streams. Smallmouth are all over the Bay, as well. Anglers are also catching perch and crappies from the Bay. Enjoy!

**Rob @ FishUSA;** filed 5/6: With walleye season opening up in PA this past week, it's game on! The night bite has started off strong. Try trolling shallow baits in 15 feet or less of water on inline boards. Some popular baits you could use are Bombers, Storm Thundersticks and Challenger Minnows. Any shallow plug will likely work. Smallmouth in the Lake and Bay seem to be in a transition period; reports have been very inconsistent and it seems to be a grind to get fish. The bite could continue to be tough the next week or so, but should improve.



**Mark Melega;** filed 5/3

- April 17: The smallmouth bite is starting to heat up. Tuesday, I had plenty of 3 to 4 pounds. Swimbaits on ¼ oz head fished with 8-pound Gamma Edge was the ticket. (Photo)
- May 3: The Presque Isle Bay smallmouth are getting shallow, and fish are darkening up. This smallmouth caught was 3 feet deep. Caught on a shallow diving jerkbait on 10-pound Gamma Edge Line. Good Luck to all! (Photo)



**Chad Prihoda;** filed 5/6: Presque Isle Bay is really heating up. Drop shotting around the North Pier catching smallmouth and fishing weedlines for largemouth. I caught my PB smallmouth (5.24 lb., 20-inch) while drop shotting a Berkley Flat Worm. (See photos)



**Darl & Marilyn;** filed 4/23: April 22 was the first day in spring of 2024 we had an opportunity (and cooperative weather) to make the drive to Presque Isle Bay to fish pre-spawn smallmouth bass. Arriving we found parking lot full of trailers but perhaps only a dozen or so boats actually fishing in the Bay. The partly cloudy skies forecast had turned to a complete cloudless bluebird canopy when we launched – not my favorite for small-

mouth. After casting a few points and humps with several different springtime baits, we only got bit with a 4-inch swimbait fished with a bottom bumping retrieve along break-lines in 15 to 18 feet of water. Furthermore, our Garmin indicated only a few fish around a point or hump – verified by fact we could only get one or two bites at a spot. Small-



mouth were moving, rather than holding on a break. So, using our trusted waypoints, we set up a drift across a series of points and humps. It wasn't fast and furious, but the incredible size of these smallmouths made for an exciting afternoon. Every smallmouth was oversized – heavy

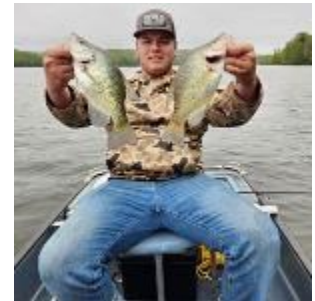


than even the typical pre-spawn we had caught for years from the Bay. Marilyn caught her PB Smallmouth on this trip – a 6-pound behemoth

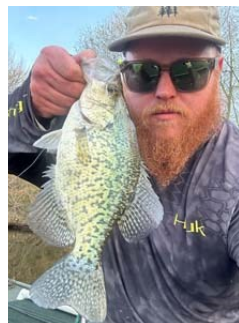
## MERCER COUNTY

### Lake Wilhelm

**Shawn Hostetler**; filed 5/5: My son Chase and I went fishing Lake Wilhelm on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, and he managed to land a couple decent 13-inch crappies. We caught 14 keepers in a few hours. The conditions were a little windy and overcast. We had a great time! I would like to thank all those individuals behind the scenes who worked to make Wilhelm such a great place to fish! (See photo right)



**Brad B @ibeeffishin**; filed 5/4: I've been hitting crappie good at Wilhelm with Rich. Found them deep and shallow; caught the bigger ones out of weed. Rich is absolutely crushing musky below the dam on crappie jigs! I've been catching a good number of bass as well – a lot of small males in wolf packs, plus one 3 pounder. I've noticed bass on beds this week, too. Got a surprise carp on a crappie jig as well; carp are everywhere spawning in the shallows, making fishing tough in the shallows. Crappies and carp caught on BC Bait Stingers and Pick Worms. Catching bass on the usual – jig or swimbait. (See photos below)



## Shenango Lake

**Randy @ Fish West PA**; filed 5/6: Shenango Lake water levels have returned to near normal summer pool and fish are biting. Crappie are active on shallow structure and bass are moving up. Some walleyes were even reported during their post-spawn bite. Now it great time to get out and fish! (See photos below)



**Darl & Marilyn**; filed 4/30: On Monday April 29, Marilyn and I headed to Shenango Lake hoping to connect with a double-digit hybrid striper. At the dock Randy from Fish West PA, was just coming off the water after morning fishing with a friend who was leaving; so, Randy jumped in our boat. We fish hard with the baits recommended by Randy at a site where stripers often come shallow at this time of year, but the best the boat could do was

two small hybrids both caught by Randy – one around six pounds and another smaller one. So, we went smallmouth bass fishing to finish the day – which proved more productive for Marilyn and I. (See photos)



## **VENANGO COUNTY**

### Trout stream reports

**Angler Al @ Buttermilk Hill**; filed 5/4: It certainly has been a damp spring. As a trout fisherman, stream current ran high and stained most weeks. However, in recent days, streams are returning to normal. My friend Dave Feltenberger and I fished Oil Creek the other day; we each managed 7 trout. He got most of his on spinners and I caught mine on Trout Magnets.



Mikey Galkowski and I have fished Sugar Creek numerous occasions. We have been doing exceptionally well using piece of nightcrawler. Mikey also caught several on spinners and Trout Magnets. I fished the eclipse, catching several trout prior to the total eclipse, nothing during the eclipse, and the trout turned back on when daylight returned, landing a 22-inch rainbow on piece of crawler. The following week I caught and released 20 plus palomino trout from Sugar. Mikey and I fished Sugar on Friday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the final Fish Commission stocking this year. We caught a total of 111 rainbow and brown trout. Mike's best was an 18-inch brown, my was a 21-inch brown. Again, bait choices were spinner or small pieces of crawler. PTL...out times on the water have been memorable. (See photos)



**Josh and Ronen Horne** (Hartstown); filed 5/6: We fished Sugar Creek below Cooperstown on the 5<sup>th</sup>. It was a great outing and we hooked then landed some nice fish, including a hard-fighting sucker and a 15-inch brown trout. Several additional trout were caught by stitching a nightcrawler and split shot along the bottom. (See photos)



### Allegheny River

**Jeff Knapp @ Keystone Connection Guide Service**; filed 5/4: Late April through early may witnessed a dramatic change in the Allegheny River. The river level dropped four feet and rose 12 degrees in a little over a week. Smallmouth bass quickly moved from the security of deeper holes to pre-spawn staging areas. Guide trip produced 30 to 50 smallmouth bass per out up to 20.5 inches. Productive baits included Ned Rigs, Galida's Grubz, rabbit fur jigs, and soft swimbaits. As of May 4<sup>th</sup>, the water temperature was 62 degrees. (See photos below)





**Pete Cartwright @ Smallies on the Yough guide service; filed 5/1**

**April Trips to the Allegheny**

- 4/11: The river was still extremely high and stained with more rain on the way. Smallies were in shoreline eddies on the seams. We used tubes and bottom bouncing bait to catch bass up to 21 inches.
- 4/16: Very high water today on river. Targeted shoreline eddies and lands some very nice smallmouths. Tough spring for wading.
- 4/22: I am again on the flooded Allegheny. It was extremely high and water temperature had dropped. Found nice group of smallmouths hugging the bank in an eddy will to eat slow moving baits.
- 4/27: Water levels finally back down and smallmouth were chomping. Landed fish up to 21 inches. With warm up of water, I expect smallmouth to be moving towards spawning sites.
- 4/29: This will be my last time out on the Allegheny for smallies until after the spawn. It was wonderful day – sunny and warm. Smallmouth were aggressive eating everything we tossed. Back after the spawn.



## **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

Cover shot winner of Galida's Grubz: Brad B @ibeefishin.

Gamma Line winner: Chase Hosteler

Winner of Pack of Mike's Custom Tubes: Chad Prihode

In order to claim your prize, email me your shipping address, and then I'll get it out to you. darlblack@windstream.net

# The Livewell

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Email: [Debbie@riverjetpro.com](mailto:Debbie@riverjetpro.com)



Chris McVey BP Shenango  
River Smallmouth Bass

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Rob Selle with 16 inch crappie from  
Shenango Lake

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Ken Smith mixed bag of  
Pymatuning crappies and bluegills

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Captain Hook with Mercer County Largemouth Bass

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US ACE Shenango installing fish cover

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Black Knight Industries

Oil City, PA 16301

[www.gammafishing.com](http://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

Just a note on for the June issue of NW PA Fishing Report. There will be simple photo contest for the June spool of Gamma Line. Submit your photo of a bluegill, pumpkin-seed or green sunfish caught from any public water in Crawford, Erie, Mercer or Venango Counties. It does not have to be caught on Gamma Line. All names go into the hat, and the name drawn will win a filler spool of 2-pound Gamma Panfish Line.



By the way, the winner of the Gamma Line for this May issue is Chase Hostler. Either Shawn or Chase—send me your shipping address along with type and pound test of Gamma Line desired. Email me your address to [darlblack@windstream.net](mailto:darlblack@windstream.net).

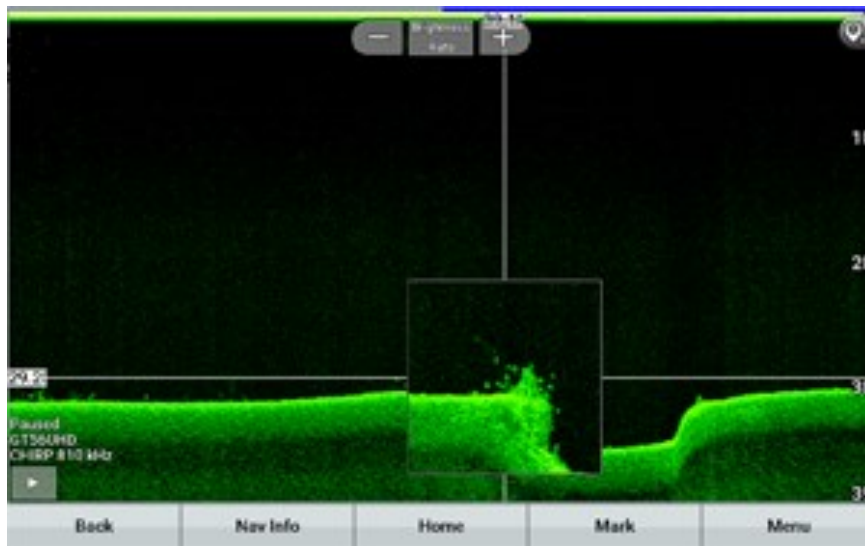
## GARMIN INFORMATION PAGE



- 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 Garmin Pro Jeff Knapp of Keystone Connection Guide Service

This past winter's mild weather provided ample open water fishing opportunities for lake-dwelling crappies. Significantly aided by the crisp detail provided by Garmin's Echomap Ultra and its GT56UHD transducer I was able to locate schools of crappies relating to select pieces of cover such as single stumps along creek channels. Using the magnification zoom option on the Clear Vu screen provided a closeup look at such areas.



## **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