

Northwest

Pennsylvania

Fishing Report

Reporting Date:

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Pennsylvania's Great Lakes Region
crawford • erie • mercer • venango

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The NW PA Fishing Report provides timely angling information for Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango Counties – covering all species and all waters open to the public. The fishing comments and photos are offered by regional tackle shops and area anglers, compiled and published twice a month. The NW PA Fishing Report is based on experiences, observations and opinions of individual contributors; information sources are considered reliable but comments are not independently verified. If you would like to share your fishing experiences or photos from any waterway in the four counties, please email to Darl Black at darlblack@windstream.net. In providing information or pictures, you are agreeing to it being posted in the Fishing Report and distributed electronically to media and websites.

The Landing Net

by Darl Black

It is shaping up as another weird winter in NW PA. On the first official day of winter, December 21, we got our first taste of real winter. Then it warms up around the first of January. Then it's into a deep freeze about the middle of the month. Now at the end of January it's nearly 60 degrees and rain. Granted, I don't like the cold, the slippery roads, or the deep snow. But I do know that a thick lingering snow pack that melts slowly in the spring is needed to recharge our water table and keep us from experiencing the low water in lakes and rivers as we did by late summer of 2012. Of course this on-again off-again cold weather is also playing havoc with ice fishermen who look forward to sitting around a hole on hard water. This weather is also hurting local tackle shops that have a stock of ice fishing equipment. The cold returns February 1. And it's anyone's guess what Phil will say on February 2.



Ice Fishing Season 2010 was a good year

NW Pennsylvania Fishing Report: Special Groundhog Day Issue

Brought to you by PA Great Lakes Region tourism

What's biting in the waters of Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango Counties?

Under normal circumstances, this mid-winter Fishing Report would be filled with photos of ice fishing catches. However, the unusual weather pattern prevented safe ice on most area waters until just this past week. Yes, I know anglers have been fishing a couple smaller lakes since early January. But safe ice simply did not exist (or last long) elsewhere. Fishing reports from readers have been very sporadic.

With a three-day warming trend this week to the upper 50s with rain, and then Thursday's high dropping to 20 degrees, who can predict what fishing opportunities will be here by February 1? Will there be ice left? Will steelhead streams opening up? With this being the Groundhog Day issue, it's only appropriate to bring on the fishing prognosticators!

French Creek: Flowing through all four counties

Dustin Shay (Meadville): Dustin has been fishing French Creek as creek conditions and his work schedule permit. He says walleyes have been tough to come by. But using his hand-tied hair jigs (and sometime live creek bait), Dustin has caught a number of muskies, pike and even a carp. With the warm up and rain, he expects the flooded mouths of tributary streams feeding into French Creek to be the hotspots. (See Live-well Photos)

John Ensworth (John's Bait Shop): "Our winter hours are 10 AM to 2 PM on Monday thru Friday; 9 AM till 2 PM on Saturday and Sunday as long as there is ice. Bait shop phone is 814-337-6445, and cell numbers are 330-414-5559 and 814-323-8687."

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Scott "Loby" Lobins (Conneaut Lake): During December, Loby achieved some nice mix bag catches of walleye, crappie and perch from the deeper waters of Pymatuning.



Scott Lobins December photo

Norman Brakeman (Hills Country Store) filed 1/26: "This is Hooker from Hills country store in Williamsfield. Ice is on Pymatuning. Two inches and thicker on south end where perch are being caught at drop-offs at the intersection of feeder creek and the

main channel. North end the ice is thicker and crappies are the rule. Both are being taken on teardrops and Hookerbugs – with more fish falling for black Hookerbugs tipped with a piece of worm or a maggot. The best catch so far is 61 crappies from the North End stump field. All mentioned baits are available at Hills Country Store. We open Monday through Friday at 7 AM; Saturday 8 AM; and Sunday 9 AM. We close at 6 PM on weekdays; at 10 PM on Friday and Saturday, and at 4 PM on Sunday.”

Dave Richter (Richter’s General Store) filed 1/28: Dave says his late fall fishing for walleye (post hunting season) with blade baits was excellent. “During the first freeze of the lake, there were some guys out on about 2 inches of ice – but certainly not something I would recommend. When the lake thawed two weeks ago, I launched my boat to fish the open water – catching only one crappie. Then the deep freeze came. Over the weekend (26th – 27th) there was 3” to 5” of good ice on the lake. Some guys were catching crappies and bluegills, but only sporadic walleye reports. However, after the warm up this week with rain, I think the ice will be a mess. I certainly would not suggest anglers go out on the lake until we have another period of good freezing temperatures – and always proceed with caution. When you do come up to Pymatuning, remember we are open 7 days a week from 7 AM to 7 PM. We have all the popular blade bait colors, the ice fishing tackle and live bait in the tackle shop end of the store – and all the food, snacks and hoagies to fuel your fishing expedition in the grocery section of the store.”

Chris Hall (Espyville Outdoors): “Our winter hours are 6 AM to 6 PM, seven days a week. Right now we have fatheads, shiner, wax worms and maggots, with live suckers expected in another week. Plus a full selection of terminal tackle and small ice fishing jigs.”

Canadohta Lake

Sarah & Jerry Van Tassel (Timberland Bait): “The Canadohta Lake one-day ice tourney is scheduled for Saturday, February 9th, with a make-up date of February 23rd. Tournament hours are 7 AM to 4 PM; cash prizes awarded at 4:30 PM. Award categories: musky, pike, walleye, crappie and perch. Absolutely no fishing prior to 7 AM. Get your \$15.00 tickets at Timberland Bait Shop prior to tournament day or on the morning of February 9th. Bait shop will be open for bait and tackle on Thursday and Friday before the tournament and on the morning of the tournament. Questions? Call Jerry at 814-694-3494 or 814-882-8369. As always, ice fishing is at your own risk.”

Conneaut Lake

Scott Lobins (Loby’s Premier Entertainment): “Happy New Year everyone! We are making preparations for the upcoming 2nd Annual “Bluegill Bev Logins” Bluegill and Crappie Memorial Fishing Tournament. The date of the event is Saturday, June 8th, 2013. Walt’s

Tavern will once again be the official hub of activities. We will offer on-line registration again this year, as well as entry forms at Walt's Tavern and other local businesses."

ERIE COUNTY

Presque Isle Bay

Al Nacopoulos (B.A.C. Bait) filed 1/28: "We had good ice in a couple areas over the weekend, but that is in jeopardy with the high temperatures and rain this week. They are fishing off Chestnut Street this morning. Customers had been catching bluegills and a few crappies in Misery Bay. In Horseshoe Pond, they were catching bluegill and steelhead. The rest of the Bay is too thin. Who knows what it will be like by Groundhog Day? Not going to make any prediction."



Thomas Watral (Erie): Thomas supplies frequent updates on PIB and the tributary streams near the bay. He says the week after Christmas, anglers were catching big perch from the docks until ice started to form. Until the streams froze up, he reported seeing fresh steelhead in the lower pools. On January 24th he reported a few huts on Misery Bay, with the ice supposedly 4 to 5 inches. "I like it about 8 inches before I go out on it," Thomas says. On January 25, he reported inconsistent ice depths around other parts of PIB. He also checked Lake Pleasant, Edinboro and Lake LeBoeuf – all around 10 inches according to fishermen on the lakes. Thomas email of 1/28: "With the heat up and rain today, the Bay ice has water on it and cracks running off the shore. With continued heating and rain next couple days, things don't look good for ice fishing on the Bay."

Erie Tributary Streams

Jeff Staaf (Poor Richards) filed 1/28: "The creeks had been locked up with ice this past week – thick enough in some areas that anglers were ice fishing for steelhead on the slower pools. They were also ice fishing in the Walnut Creek Marina Basin. They were catching a few steelheads on either jigs or live minnows. Ice extends about 200 yards out into the lake, but no one thinks it is safe at this point. The rain this week may open up the creeks, but the following days of temperatures in the 20s may only make a mess on the streams."

Dan Seaman (Elk Creek Sporting Goods) filed 1/28: "I predict the rain and runoff will blow the ice out of the streams. The drop in temperatures starting Thursday will not freeze the streams because there will be too much flow. I'm thinking the streams will drop to a fishable level by the weekend – and there should be a bunch of fish in them. So get after them before the streams freeze up again."

MERCER COUNTY

Lake Wilhelm

Bob Mohra (Fergie's Bait) filed 1/28: "Guys were ice fishing on Wilhelm over the weekend, claiming the ice was 4" to 6" thick – I'm doubting 6". They did catch some bluegills on ice jigs tipped with maggots or wax worms. I heard from customers that ice fishing has been good on Sugar Lake for big perch, and supposedly there have been a hundred ice shanties on Kahle Lake each weekend. Safe ice after this warm up? I'm not holding my breath. We will likely need an extended period of low freezing temperatures to make ice safe."

Shenango Lake

Chuck Sari (Franklin) filed 1/15: "Kevin and I with another friend went ice fishing on Shenango a week ago. We caught our limits of nice crappies. Unfortunately, I didn't have a camera. All crappies were caught on small jigs tipped with maggots. Waiting on ice to get safe again!"

Neshannock Creek

Bob Shuey (Neshannock Creek Fly Shop): "Happy New Year from Neshannock Creek. I wanted to let you know about events coming up soon..."

- (1) Annual Pre-Season Trout Stock on Saturday March 2
- (2) We will be open every Sunday beginning March 3
- (3) Lunker Stocking and Rod Raffle on Saturday, March 9
- (4) I am seeking volunteers age 18 and up to help us float-stock Neshannock both March 2 and March 9.
- (5) The Female Anglers Fly Fishing School is on May 4 & 5 this year.

I appreciate your continued patronage. Questions, call 724-533-3212."

VENANGO COUNTY

Kahle Lake

Mike Kuna (Pittsburgh) filed 1/25: "Anglers have been fishing Kahle Lake for some time, and catching panfish. There is a big ice fishing weekend coming up at Kahle on Feb 2 & 3. I'll be helping with a kids' fishing clinic on Saturday the 2nd, and then fishing in the tournament on the 3rd."



Darl Black photo



John Hummel photo of ice-up Allegheny

Allegheny River

Steve Udick (Oil City): Steve continued to fish the Allegheny through Christmas week and into January – and continued to catch smallmouth and walleye! (See Livewell photos)

12/22/12 – I survived the Solstice Apocalypse, so I could fish another day. The river level was 8.2 feet but not too muddy. I managed four bass in an hour of fishing – all on minnows.

12/27/12 – River is down a foot but water is 33 degrees and air is 28 degrees. Fish were hungry – landed three bass and a nice 23” walleye, but left camera at home. All fish taken on minnows.

12/28/12 – River is down to 6.28 with water temp of 33 degrees and clear. Sun came out and put on a Rapala SR7 Helsinki Shad Rap. First two casts landed a nice bass. Ended day with 9 smallies coming from 4 to 6 feet of water.

12/29/12 -- River was windy and choppy, and the fish were finicky – barely picking up bait. I managed five bass in two hours. WD40 squirted in the rod guides kept them free of ice.

12/31/12 – Final day of year with goal to hit double digits on bass. Water temp was showing 35.5 to 33 degrees, and air temp was 29 degrees. Started at 1:30 PM. Threw a Shad Rap but no takers. Switched to minnows and caught nine beauties in two hours. My tenth bass came on a Shad Rap. Fish were aggressive on the live bait. Got to mention what a great job the Owner Mutu Light Circle Hooks #4 did on hooking the bass in the lip.

1/7/13 – Headed to river with air temp at 25 degrees. Sun broke out as I arrived. Could not get a bite on Shad Rap. Switched to minnows, and caught an 18” bass and a northern pike.

1/12/13 – River was on rise so Pat Murray and I headed to upper Rockmere. We anchored up just below Monkey Face Rock and jigged minnows. Pat landed two big egg-laden walleyes at 23” and 25“. I got a 35” musky. All fish came on big minnows, and were released. Forgot the camera of course!

1/13/13 – Water is bank full with little room to walk. Above Oil Creek, color not bad. Water temp 38. I caught 4 nice bass and a 21” walleye all on minnows.

Gene Winger (Oil City): Gene hung in there fishing the river into January using only jigs, soft plastic and swimbaits all from Winco’s. (See Livewell photos)

12/31/12 – My son-in-law Chris Wehr and I fished the Oil City eddy and laded some nice walleyes, smallies and a 40” musky, which fell for a Winco’s Baby Predator Craw.



1/14/13 – It was a tough day on the river. We only boated tow bass and no idea how many we missed. With water temp at 33 degrees, the bass were sooo sluggish. We just could not get the feel for things. I caught both fish on Winco Swim Bait.

1/19/13 – Darl Black joined me for this outing. Air temp was nice, but it was very windy, leaving few places to fish. I caught a nice walleye right off the bat on a Winco Swim Bait on darter head, but no fish the rest of the. Darl dropped a walleye at the boat. We failed to hook a smallmouth. I think it may be time to winterize the boat.

This Mid-Winter's Best Bets

Safe ice usually forms first and remains longest on certain small lakes in the NW PA that are nestled in valleys. These include Canadohta, Kahle, Sugar, Two Mile, Edinboro and Pleasant. Canadohta in particular seems to be in a unique deep freeze location. These would be the places to check for safe ice after the warm up. Conneaut Lake and Wilhelm would likely be next to freeze.

Pymatuning's large acreage will freeze later than most area waters. But the impoundment most likely to not to have safe ice is Shenango – due to the strong river current flowing through the drawn down lake. At Shenango, you want to stay away from the main channel on this lake even if it appears iced over. Unlike Pymatuning where anglers fish everywhere on the lake, there are only three or four areas that anglers ice fish on Shenango: Golden Run Access, Celery Farm (from old RR Bed near Game Commission building on Lake Rd.), Chestnut Run Access and behind the islands at the Rt. 846 bridge.



Woodcock Outflow

The Allegheny River and French Creek will like remain open for a period of time after this warm up. Walleye and musky will be the focus of anglers.

If the ice isn't safe on lakes and the Allegheny & French Creek are too chunked up to fish, you can almost always find fishable water at the outflow areas at Pymatuning Dam, Shenango Dam and Woodcock Dam. Walleyes are available at all three, along with possible musky, pike, crappie and perch.



Dustin Shay of Meadville
Continues to make spectacular
Catches from French Creek
Right through the winter...
Carp and musky love his hair jigs



The Livewell

Brought to you by:



Winter on the Allegheny— Hummel photo

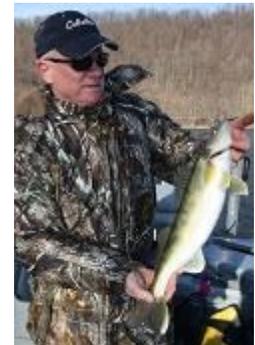


Boat of the Month: Fish the Allegheny River in comfort in this Rouge from Wiegel's

Before the ice on the River, here's some Christmas & January catches



Steve Udick of Oil City fished the river frequently until the mid January freeze



His first year on the Allegheny, Gene Winger of Oil City fished with friends until mid Jan

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Gamma Line's Fishing Tips

Bill Logan of Pleasantville offers this winter steelhead tip: For steelheading, pre-rig double fly rigs at home. With pre-tied rigs you tie only one knot instead of three when in the field. Double fly rigs cover more of the water column often resulting in more strikes. I use a leader folder to hold egg and nymph rigs. Each one is wrapped around thin cardboard strips that I cut from cereal boxes. Streamers like wooly buggers will be crushed in the folder, so they go in the smallest clear tackle box you find.

Thomas Watral of Erie offers ice fishing safety advice: According to information from the SONS of Lake Erie's ice recommendation chart, ice that is only 2 to 3 inches thick is unsafe. Safe ice minimum is 4 inches for foot travel and 5 inches for one snowmobile, and at least 12 inches for a medium size truck. Carry a spud bar with you to test thickness as you go across the ice. Also, have a long cord running up your jacket sleeve, across the shoulders and down the other sleeve; tie your hand spikes to each end of the cord and stuff up the sleeve – these spikes can help pull you out of the water should you go through. Wear a PFD, carry a rope with a float and never go alone. Remember, no ice is completely safe.

Bill will receive Gamma Steelhead Leaders, and Thomas will receive a spool of Gamma Ice Line.

Fish and Boat Commission Announces Erie County Stocking Changes

Staff from the PFBC will stock brown trout into East Basin Pond, West Basin Pond, and Upper Gravel Pit on one day only – February 5, 2013. The meeting location will be at Upper Gravel Pit at 1:00 pm. Anglers can easily search the trout stocking schedules for locations and dates of interest by going to www.fishandboat.com, click on the link for 2013 Trout Stocking Schedules and select a county.

Prize Pack for this issue of Fishing Report is being supplied by: Gene Larew Lures

The winning contributor of the prize pack is: Steve Udick

Obtain the PGLR fishing brochure "Reel It In!" at www.pagreatlakes.com