

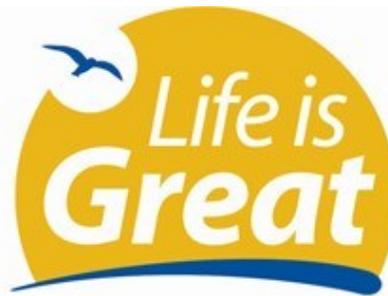
Northwest

Pennsylvania

Fishing Report

Reporting Date:

May 20, 2013



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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 your comments being edited, and posted to websites and distributed electronically.

The Landing Net

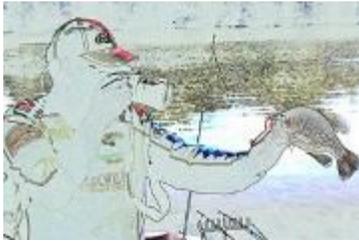
by Darl Black

Well, following the Big Chill that set in May 12 and continued through the early part of last week, the weather has taken an upswing and put fish back in a feeding mode. If the water temperature holds and improves slightly, fish everywhere should be cooperative. With the Memorial Day weekend ahead, everyone will be fishing, especially with Monday the 27th being a Fish For Free Day in PA. With the full moon on May 25, expect lots of crappies spawning. And walleyes should be back on the feed, as well. Be sure to check out the special Crappie Camp Report in this issue to get some tips on catching spring crappies, and read Hooker's Cold Front Tips on the Gamma Page in case the weather dips for Memorial Day.



2013 PA Crappie Camp Report – Fish Don't Come Easy in a Late Spring Big Chill

Unsettled weather made it a test of what it takes to be a Master Crappie Angler



Larry Claypool photo

When Mother Nature threw radical weather changes at NW PA last week, the 2nd Annual PA Crappie Camp became a true fishing challenge. Fortunately Sunday's snow flurries had concluded before outdoor media and professional crappie anglers arrived in the area on Monday, May 13. Nonetheless on-the-water apparel for Tuesday was fleece jackets and stocking caps. But by Thursday, it was shorts and sandals.

The State Park Cabins at Pymatuning served as a base of operations for 20-some anglers and angling writers seeking story material and photos. Guests from Massachusetts, Alabama, Georgia, Ohio and eastern Pennsylvania were teamed up with local volunteer anglers who escorted them to three different area lakes – Pymatuning Lake and Conneaut Lake in Crawford County, and Shenango River Lake in Mercer County.

Given the event was billed as PA Crappie Camp you might expect the specie of interest was crappie. Black and white crappies are perhaps the most popular warmwater fish across much of the United States. Pymatuning and Shenango have excellent populations of both black and white crappies, while Conneaut Lake has primarily black crappies.

The first day of fishing was too cold, the second day too windy and the third day too blue. (Clear blue sky with bright sun is a sign of post-frontal high-pressure conditions which usually gives fish lockjaw.) But hardcore crappie anglers are accustomed to difficult bites, and each day different individuals showed attendees how to handle a particular situation on each lake.



At Pymatuning where water temperatures had dropped almost ten degrees in two days (rapid temp drop is another turn off for fish), Russ Bailey of Midwest Crappie and TJ Stallings of Blakemore Lures schooled the attendees on how to catch tight-lipped pre-spawn black crappies from shallow pad beds. Using 8-foot BnM rods, they pitched a small bobber with either a 1/24-ounce jighead or 1/32-ounce Road Runner Head (for an extremely slow fall) to openings in the emerging pads. The soft plastic bait of choice on the heads was Bobby Garland Baby Shad in white or shad baitfish patterns. They jiggled the bobber, and then let it sit still until a crappie pulled it under.

On the deeper breaks and rock piles, Hooker put his guests on smallmouth bass, walleye and yellow perch using both hand-tied hair jigs, and live minnows with a Garland Minnow Mind'R on a lead-head. Meanwhile, local bass expert Ernie Pate showed his out-of-town guests that Pymatuning was a very good largemouth lake as well, having them pitch to shallow cover with a Larew Biffle Bug and bag some big mouth bass.

Over at Conneaut Lake, crappies were further behind in the spawning cycle than at Pymatuning, so when the bad weather hit these crappies suspended over deeper water beyond the weedbeds. Local angler Bryan Stuyvesant demonstrated how to catch these temperamental fish by drifting a live minnow and bobber outside the weedbeds. Two days later when the suspended crappies became a bit more active, Bryan scored with a 1/16-ounce white Road Runner head and a 2" Garland Slab Slay'R in Double Silver – easily out fishing live minnows.



Down at Shenango River Lake, the shallow wood cover seemed void of crappies following the cold snap. But spider-rigging expert Dan Dannemueller of Crappie Now Magazine slowly trolled his multiple lines across the large flats near Clark to discover gold mine of responsive crappies around brushpiles in 10 to 14 feet of water. The 14-foot BnM PST Trolling rods were rigged with a red Tru-Turn Crappie Hook attached above a heavy egg sinker and a trailing Road Runner head with soft plastic bait. His soft plastic selection included Garland Stroll'Rs and Minnow Mind'Rs.

Also at Shenango, some guests hooked up with smallmouth and largemouth bass on jigs and Larew Biffle Bugs fished along the rip-rap banks of the bridges and campground area – although the bass bite was not nearly as good as the crappie bite.

Shenango provided me a chance to take a new Garmin echoMAP 50s through its paces. With exceptional sonar reception on the unit, I noted an exceptionally high number of small individual marks suspended throughout the river channel, leaving me suspect as what they were – phantom clutter, baitfish or actual fish. So I made it my mission to find out. Dropping down to 2-pound Gamma Polyflex Line with a 1/32-ounce Road Runner head and a 2" Slab Slay'R, I made repeated drifts across the channel. Once I got the depth zeroed in, I started getting light hits – hooking perhaps one out of four or five strikes. Turns out the marks were fish – very small black crappies. Looks like a tremendous number of black crappies will be entering the 10-inch range in 2014 and 2015!

Yes, the unseasonably down turn in the weather pattern put all species in a no-feeding mood. But with persistence and the right presentation, attendees at PA Crappie Camp were able to figure out how to make them bite. And free-lance writer Jeff Samsel of Georgia proved he had the right presentations for the most species by capturing the Gamma Line Challenge – landing five different fish species! Bill Decoteau of Massachusetts came in second with four species. During their stay, visiting outdoor writers were able to snap photos, obtain interviews and preview new techniques—that's what made the 2013 PA Crappie Camp a success! Go Fish!



NW PA FISHING REPORT for May 20, 2013

What's biting in Crawford, Erie, Mercer and Venango counties?

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FRENCH CREEK (Flowing through all four counties)

Dustin Shay (Meadville) filed 5/20: "I fished the Creek over the weekend for walleye using live creek chubs but didn't score on the 'eye. However, I did catch two big smallmouth bass. Since smallmouths in the Creek are on beds right now, I'm not intentionally fishing for them."

Chuck Papinchak (Cochran) filed 5/20: "One of my fishing buddies, Brian Clark, was on French Creek this past week. He caught a 40-inch musky and a 20-inch northern pike. Last week he also caught a couple small muskies at Edinboro Lake and had five follows on Woodcock Creek Lake. It's start of musky season in NW PA!"

Thomas Watral (Erie) filed 5/15: "I fished the South Branch of French Creek this week, catching a few trout on a Zug Bug, and several small walleyes on live minnows."

John Wipula (Conneaut Lake) filed 5/13: "An evening paddle trip north of Saegertown on Sunday, May 12, produced my 2nd largest creek smallmouth bass ever – along with several others in the 16-17 inch range."

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Dave Richter (Richter's General Store) filed 5/20: "Following a very slow bite at the start of the week due to that cold snap, by this past weekend crappies were again biting everywhere on the lake. Some anglers were catching unbelievable numbers, with black crappies taken from cover in the bays and white crappies on brush in deeper water. The walleye bite is also strong on the southern end; wind-drifting with a nightcrawler-tipped-jig was the number one fish catcher. I have not received any reports on muskies."



Chris Hall (Espyville Outdoors) filed 5/20: "The walleye bite has been HOT on the North End this past weekend. Numerous limits are being caught, along with lots of smaller fish. Small floating jigheads tipped with a crawler seemed to be the ticket. A Lindy Fuzz-E-Grub tipped with a fathead minnow caught fish, too. A depth of 8' to 10' seemed to be most productive. However fish were being caught deeper and shallower, too. Crappies are being taken on 1/8-oz. jigs tipped with a minnow, especially around lily pads and stumps. An 18.5 inch black crappie was brought into the shop over the weekend; it weighed 1 lb. 10 oz. Good numbers of bluegill have been caught from shore at Orchard Launch and off Westford Rd. behind the Welcome Inn."

Dustin Shay (Meadville) filed 5/20: "Over the weekend I made it over to Pymatuning one evening for catfish. I caught a 15-pound channel cat at the Linesville Spillway."

Chuck Sari (Franklin) filed 5/19: "On Sunday, May 19, my son Kevin and six-year-old grandson Reece went to Pymatuning for walleye. The walleye fishing was very slow. I talked to several fishermen at the Linesville Boat Launch and only heard of one walleye caught. We did manage to catch some nice crappies while drifting for walleye, including a 14 incher caught by Reece." (See Livewell photo)

Norman Brakeman (Hills Country Store) filed 5/17: "Lesley and I wanted to share this picture of C.J. Helarie with a 28" walleye; he caught it on the 16th with a jig and nightcrawler fishing the southern end of the lake. Other customers are catching walleye on Hooker Bugs tipped with a nightcrawler on break-lines in 6 feet of water. Mike Curran and Dick Thayer caught a total of 30 fish, including 9 good-sized walleyes plus perch, bluegill and crappies – all on a jig tipped with nightcrawler." (See Livewell photo)

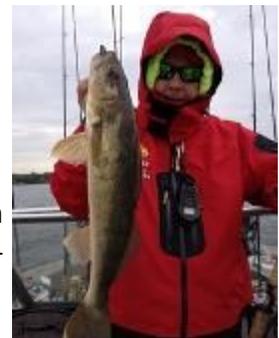
Conneaut Lake

Bryan Stuyvesant (Meadville) filed 5/20: "I fished Conneaut for a couple hours this evening for bass. Northern pike were chasing everything; caught more pike than bass."

Dustin Shay (Meadville) filed 5/20: "My dad and brother have been fishing Conneaut for bluegill and crappie the past couple weeks, and doing very well. This past week they got into some bull bluegills and big crappies in about 17 feet of water."

Jim Hall (Meadville) filed 5/19: "I spent 8 hours on Conneaut Lake on Friday, 5/17, catching 12 bluegills, 1 crappie and a 17" white bass – not a good bite. With water temp climbing back to 62 degrees, I thought the fish would be back on the feed. I fished a bluegill tournament on the lake on Saturday and caught some nice bluegills – but not big enough to win."

Chad Templin (Meadville) filed 5/19: "On May 13 while fishermen were chasing crappies at Pymatuning, I spent the day at Conneaut Lake with my fishing buddy trying to catch bass and pike. We managed a few of each on spinnerbaits, tubes and BS Jigs. But the real catch of the day was a rare and elusive Conneaut Lake walleye. As you tell by the attire, this was a cold misery day more like late fall; fish were deep. With warmer temperatures by the weekend, Conneaut Lake temperature rose from the mid-50s to the mid-60s. The water is very clear."



Chad Templin photo

ERIE COUNTY

Presque Isle Bay

Al Nacopoulos (B.A.C. Bait) filed 5/20: "It was a beautiful weekend for fishing in PIB. Bass are biting all over the bay – both largemouth and smallmouth. My customers are catching nice bluegills in Horseshoe Pond, Misery Bay and Head-of-the-Bay. A few crappies are being caught in Misery Bay. Perch are being taken off the North Pier, as well as out in the main lake at 35 to 40 feet of water off The Point. And northern pike are hitting in Thompson Bay."

Joe Nichols (Pleasantville) filed 5/19: "We fished PIB on Saturday. It was very busy. We managed to catch 15 smallmouth bass and a couple largemouth bass – nothing over 3 pounds. The fish were taken on crankbaits in 6 to 12 feet of water. Orange seemed to be the color for some reason." (Orange? Maybe due to the funky water color of PIB – editor)

Bill Logsdon (Pittsburgh area) filed 5/17: "Dave Gallocher and I fished Erie on the 16th. We caught a total of 26 smallmouth bass. The Bay's color is strange to say the least. We managed to catch one smallmouth out on the lake with a XD Pointer. The rest of our catch came on Rattle Traps in the Bay. Water temperature on the lake was 53 degrees and in the Bay it was 56 degrees. The new Garmin depthfinder is AWESOME. We marked a spot in the Bay, and all the fish came from that one structure area."

Thomas Watral (Erie) filed 5/13: "The Bay bite has picked up; I've been catching good perch, sunfish, crappie and smallmouth bass, plus there are reports of lake trout taken at 45 feet in the main lake."

Lake Erie and Tributary Streams

Dottie Heuble (Poor Richards) filed 5/20: "With the high winds recently and drop in lake temperature, there isn't a lot to report from up here because it has been tough to get out on the Lake. When boats can get out, they are catching perch in 35 to 40 feet off Trout Run and off the Cribs."

Mike Tome (Trout Run Bait) filed 5/20: "It's a beautiful day up here right now, and the perch fishing is just getting ready to break loose. However, the creek mouth and launch area on Elk Creek is silted in and you cannot get a boat out of it right now. That needs to be remedied as soon as possible. Smallmouth bass are on fire in the creeks right now; many anglers are buying crayfish and leeches to fish for bass. I have only heard of sporadic reports of boat anglers trolling the shoreline for walleye at night. Remember, Trout Run Bait is now open seven days a week right through the summer and fall."

Becky (Elk Creek Sports) filed 5/20: "Elk Creek and other tributaries are low and clear – we need water. There are still a few steelhead and brown trout in the lower end of Elk, but the warmwater species are more prevalent. Bass moving in the stream is peaking, along with catfish. Perch out in the main lake are a little slow, but when anglers have been able to get out, the magic depth seems to be 37 feet."



Ed Lawrence photo

Ed Lawrence (Corry) filed 5/20: "We focused on lake trout this past week. They are out in deep water and we caught several by trolling spoons." (See photo)

Thomas Watral (Erie) filed 5/18: "I went to 4 Mile Creek on Thursday and slammed stocked trout on a fly with 2-pound tippet; caught and released 32 trout. Went back on Saturday to fish live nightcrawlers on 6-pound line and caught nearly a 100 trout. The creek is low and clear, so you need to stay way back from the water's edge so not to spook the fish."

Lake Pleasant

Thomas Watral (Erie) 5/15: "I caught some trout and jumbo perch in the weedbeds at Lake Pleasant this week."

MERCER COUNTY

Shenango River Lake

Laurie (R&L Bait & Tackle) filed 5/20: "Another terrific week at R&L. Lots of people are fishing and lots of fish being caught. But most of my customers are releasing their fish, so I don't have photos to send. I did include a picture of Joe Minto with a 15-3/4" 2 lb. 4 oz. crappie caught on a live minnow at Shenango

Lake. Joe was using a Shakespeare light action rod with 6-pound Trilene Line. By the way, we will be open Monday May 27th – Memorial Day – so stop by for you fishing needs.” (See Livewell photo)



TJ Stallings photo

Larry Claypool (editor of Ohio Valley Outdoors in East Liverpool, OH) filed 5/17: “The weather improved greatly for Thursday morning’s fishing at Shenango River Lake. I fished with crappie experts Dan Dannenmueller and TJ Stallings – both from Alabama. We used a spider-rig trolling system, which was new to me. Dannenmueller has this system down – even when fishing a new lake so far from. First, we ran boat passes with the fishfinder in search of an old road-bed east of the marina. Once identified, we caught about 45 crappies on both sides of the extended road-bed, but only a few were keeper-size. The baits on the rig were set near the bottom in about 12 feet of water. Dealing with a slight wind challenged us to keep the boat under 3 mph. During the afternoon session I fished for bass with Dale Black and Mark McQuown. We focused on the rip-rap west of the ramp because they had caught three nice largemouth bass there in the morning. But all I managed in the afternoon session was a channel catfish!”



Larry Claypool photo

Kevin Austin (Sharon) filed 5/11: “I included a picture of my girlfriend JoAnn’s first crappie of the season. She had just picked up her fishing license, and on her first trip out caught this nice 14-1/2 inch crappie at Shenango Lake.” (See Livewell photo)

Lake Wilhelm

Bob Mohra (Fergie's Bait) filed 5/20: “Anglers are catching a lot of small crappies and bluegills from shore. One customer caught a bunch of bluegills in the 10” to 11” range. I’m not hearing any reports on walleye being taken.”

Steve Fleckenstein (Clarion) filed 5/17: “My girlfriend and I went to Wilhelm on May 8, hitting a couple spots before the rain chased us out. We caught a bunch of small ‘gills and crappies on my 1/64-oz. hair jigs under a bobber. I caught the only nice crappie – a 13-inch white crappie on a black hair jig. In one cove we caught crappies on every cast – but they were only 6 to 7-inches long.”

VENANGO COUNTY

Oil Creek

Mike Laskowski (Oil Creek Outfitters) filed 5/18: “After a cold spring with lots of high water, Oil Creek is now low and clear – and the fishing is very good. There are numerous Mayfly and Caddis hatches coming off, and that is providing excellent dry fly action. The next two weeks should provide some of the best dry fly fishing of the season. So get out there and take advantage of it!”

Allegheny River

Gene Winger (Oil City) filed 5/20: “I’ve been out on the river several times with friends in the past two weeks. Here is a rundown on what we’ve done.

Thursday May 9th – George Sisul and I spend the day on the Oil City and Reno eddies, landing 22 bass and a 30” northern pike. Most fish were caught mid-day in 2 to 6 feet of water using Winco Solid Body River Darters. A few bass were landed by working steep drops near shallow flats with a Winco C.W. Smallie Jig.

Friday, May 10th – I had the privilege of fishing the Oil City eddy with my friend Mike Cook and his daughter Kyla, just home from college. With morning thunder showers predicted and cold front moving in we anticipated a short day on the river. To our surprise the storms held off and we fished the entire day – catching 40 smallies and Kayla’s first northern pike. All fish were taken on Winco 3.25”, 3.75” and 4.75” Solid Body River Darters fished in two to six feet of slow moving water and current breaks. This was Mike and Kayla’s first experience fishing the Allegheny with Winco River Darters!



Gene Winger photo

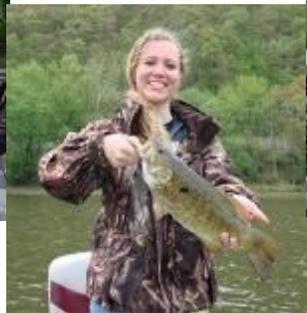
Thursday, May 16th – George and I spent the day on the river landing 35 bass, all on the 3.75” Solid Body River Darter. Most of the action was in the two to six feet of shallow, slow moving water around emerging weedbeds.

Saturday, May 18th – I talked my wife Peg into going out a few hours. Sticking to the shallow water, we landed 25 bass on River Darters. My wife caught her best smallmouth ever – an 18” 4.5 pounder. For a Saturday morning, I was surprised to see only one other boat on the river – figured everyone must be crappie fishing on the lakes.

Sunday, May 19th – I found a few hours on Sunday to some fishing. With the water temperature around 65 degrees, I started out with a Winco Wacky Worm but switched back to a River Darter resulting in 8 bass from shallow water near the shore.” (See Livewell photos)

Livewell Overflow Photos

Allegheny River



Kayla Cook, Mike Cook and Gene Winger having a great day on the Allegheny River

Kahle Lake



Duff Kerle with very nice Kahle Lake largemouth

The Livewell

Brought to you by:



Conneaut Lake



Lou Consoli



Boat of the Month:

Pymatuning Lake



6-yr old Reece Sari

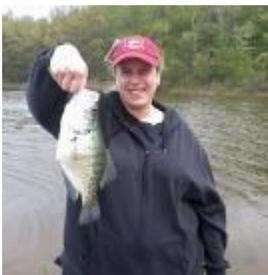


Ernie Pate



C.J. Helarie

Shenango River Lake



Joann's first crappie



Joe Minto's BIG crappie



Crappie Camp anglers on Shenango



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Gamma Line's Fishing Tips

Gamma Contributor Tip

Hooker says: Spring cold fronts that cause a dip in the water temperature can be very disruptive to fish in the late spring. The bluebird skies in days immediately following the passing of a front can make for difficult fishing even if the water temperature does not actually dip. If you fish frequently, you may decide to wait for better weather. But if you have a vacation planned, such as an extended fishing weekend for Memorial Day, then you must deal with the hand dealt. Fish-catching may have been great days before, but bluebird skies and bright sun can put a damper on your trip unless you adjust.



Sometimes if the fish had been hitting in the shallows, they may remain there and simply shut down. Or in some cases, they may abandon the shallows dropping back to the next breakline towards deep water.

In shallow water, fish the thickest cover, and slow the presentation down for crappies and bluegills; going to the smallest jigs or switching to live bait can be helpful. If out deeper for walleye and smallmouth, the same advice works: go to the smaller baits, fish slower and very precisely on isolated structure. One of the best baits for tough conditions is the hand-tied hair jig, such as the Hooker Bug, tipped with a minnow or piece of nightcrawler.

Note: Hooker provided one of his special Pymatuning Lake maps printed on weatherproof paper as a drawing prize. The name drawing from among this issue's contributors is Chuck Sari of Franklin.

Also, to celebrate a successful media Crappie Camp, every angler contributor to this issue of the NW PA Fishing Report will receive two packs of Bobby Garland crappie baits.

Winner of the Prize Pack of Baits for this issue of the Fishing Report: Bill Logsdon

Lures for the Fishing Report Prize Pack supplied by: Case; Gene Larew; Get Bit Baits; Road Runner; Venom; Yum; Zipper Worms.

Follow Darl as he fishes with angling experts around the country at
www.darlblack.blogspot.com

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