



THE GREAT LAKES SPORT FISHING NEWS

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FishPass Project Update

By Beth Milligan

Work is progressing on two adjacent milestone projects on Union Street in downtown Traverse City. City commissioners received an update Monday on FishPass, the \$23.3 million reconstruction of the Union Street Dam underway – which should remain “fully funded” despite federal funding freezes on various infrastructure projects, according to the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. Meanwhile, downtown officials will host an open house Thursday at the City Opera House to get public feedback on the design for the new Rotary Square.

FishPass

Construction of FishPass is on schedule and set for a spring 2026 completion for the first two phases, covering all in-stream components, according to Principal Engineer and Scien-

tist Dr. Dan Zielinski of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC).

Zielinski appeared before city commissioners Monday to provide an update on FishPass, which has been under construction since May 2024. Phases 1 and 2 include the removal of the existing dam, construction of a new labyrinth weir and dam, and installation of a natural bypass channel and fish-sorting channel. The bypass channel will mimic the natural flow of the Boardman/Ottaway River in its upper stretches where other dams have been removed, Zielinski said. The sorting channel – a 400-foot-long, 30-foot-wide flume designed for adaptability so different technologies can be tested on fish and assessed in real-time – will use barriers like size sorting, lights, bubbles, sounds, and leaping obstacles to allow desired species to pass

into the watershed and keep undesired species (primarily the invasive sea lamprey) out.

Work on the weir is underway now, while construction on the other side of the river – where the fish-sorting channel will be located – is slated to begin later this year. A water main relocation and construction of a new pedestrian bridge are also planned by next year. Phase 1 and 2 has a \$23.3 million price tag, with funding sources including the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (\$14.3 million), GLFC (\$5.1 million), Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR – \$1.65 million), State of Michigan (\$1 million), Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (EGLE – \$1 million), and City of Tra-

“FishPass”

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Roger Hinchcliff to be Honored with Howard A. Tanner Award

This year's Howard A. Tanner Award for outstanding contributions to Michigan's anadromous sport fishery is being awarded

to Roger Hinchcliff. His unanimous selection by MSSFA's board of directors is a testament to his dedication and knowledge

as a featured speaker, a popular blogger, rod designer & Vice President for Lamiglas Rod's and a successful author of many published magazine articles around the country. He provides consulting services to many outdoor brands and retailers on product development, current angling practices, and techniques. Roger also has several instructional videos on his YouTube Channel, Steelhead Manifesto.

Roger Hinchcliff began fishing the banks of the Huron River in Southeast Michigan at age 8, and he continues fishing its banks today—over 45 years later! His passion for chasing steelhead all around the Great Lakes region, he says, started at first bite. Roger spends many days each year—chasing and catching steelhead in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Alaska, the Olympic Peninsula in Washington, and Michigan—which remains his preference.

“Award”

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The Quality of Fishing Reflects the Quality of Living!

“FishPass”

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verse City (\$285,000).

Zielinski said contract negotiations are underway now for Phase 3 – the final phase covering “all the upland activities,” he said. Those include a new research and education center, landscaping, stormwater management, parking and sidewalks, park amenities, boardwalks and river access points, and electrical work. That price tag is still being finalized pending negotiations, but Zielinski estimated it would be \$7-8 million. He noted \$5.4 million has already been committed through the original bid package from GLFC and another \$2.9 million secured in grants, meaning the project should be “fully funded.” Commissioner Jackie Anderson clarified that “none” of the FishPass funding is anticipated to be impacted by federal freezes or cuts. “That is correct,” Zielinski replied.

The entire FishPass site is expected to be fully com-

plete by early 2027, Zielinski said. Project partners – including GLFC, the city, the DNR, and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa & Chippewa Indians – are finalizing an operation and maintenance memorandum of agreement (MOA) outlining who is responsible for which sections of the park once work is complete. Under the proposed terms, the city will operate the dam and non-research components – essentially the “status quo” of what the city’s been responsible, Zielinski noted – while GLFC will operate the research components. However, GLFC will do so under the direction of the FishPass Advisory Board, a group that will include representation from all project partners.

Zielinski added that outreach is a key component of FishPass. GLFC has hired a full-time local public affairs specialist – Leah McCallum – and is in the process of hiring a fisheries technician, he said. Outside groups have been interested

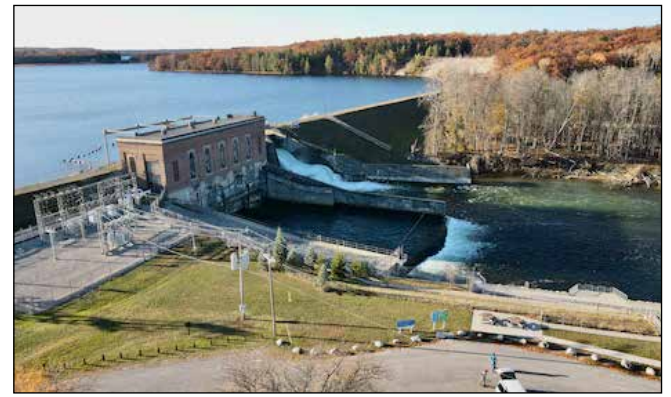
in the work happening at the dam, he noted, as the project is meant to provide research that can be replicated at other sites. There have been 10+ site visits by groups so far, while GLFC has made over 20 presentations on the project – including at a special event at the Shedd Aquarium in Chicago. GLFC will host its annual meeting in Traverse City this year, while the International Conference on Fish Telemetry is also coming in June. The public can watch progress on FishPass from a 24/7 live webcam on the property, Zielinski noted.

Rotary Square

The Traverse City Downtown Development Authority (DDA) and consulting firm Progressive Companies will host a public open house Thursday at the City Opera House from 5:30pm to 6:30pm as part of “Imagine Rotary Square,” a public input process to create a design for the new civic square on the corner of Union and State streets.

Though separate from FishPass, DDA Executive Director Harry Burkholder said that the close proximity of the two projects provides “an opportunity for great collaboration” – a relationship that could be explored in the design process to ideally create a flow between the two properties.

Workshop attendees will get an overview on responses so far to a community survey that’s been gathering design ideas, plus “participate in interactive activities to share their ideas for Rotary Square and ask questions about the site and process,” according to the DDA. More workshops and informational sessions are expected to follow this spring, with a preliminary conceptual design completed by June. Rotary Square has been identified as one of the highest priority projects by DDA board members for the funds remaining in the tax increment financing (TIF) 97 fund before its planned expiration in 2027.



Consumers Energy Extends Decision on Future of Michigan Hydro Dams

By Garret Ellison
gellison@mlive.com

JACKSON, MI — Consumers Energy says it may take months longer than expected to decide whether to sell, remove or relicense its Michigan hydroelectric dams.

Consumers spokesperson Brian Wheeler said in an email this month that the utility “could take all of 2025” to reach a decision about each of the facilities

as it works through proposals.

“I cannot stress enough how complex of a transaction this is,” Wheeler said. “We are dealing with 13 different facilities, thousands of acres of land and regulatory implications within the RFP process. Quite simply, this takes time.”

The utility issued a request for proposals in early 2024 after hosting community meetings in 2022 and 2023 in communities worried about losing their dam. The utility said in September its bid evaluations should conclude by the end of the year.

Consumers announced in 2022 that was evaluating whether to relicense or divest from its fleet of aging dams, which generate renewable electricity but are expensive to maintain.

Together, the century-old dams only generate about 50-megawatts but would cost about \$1.5 billion to maintain through another 30 to 50 year licensing period.

According to a report posted on its website, Consumers told local groups around Michigan that it would announce a decision “near the end of March 2025.”

The new Public Sector Consultants report warns that “if the decision is delayed much beyond the anticipated date, some key stakeholders, community members, and community leaders likely will respond acrimoniously and publicly.”

The utility operates 13 obsolete dams across Michigan, including the Calkins Bridge Dam on the Kalamazoo River; Webber Dam on the Grand River; Croton, Hardy and Rogers dams on the Muskegon River; Tippy and Hodenpyl dams on the Manistee River; and Mio, Loud, Alcona, Cooke, Five Channels and Foote dams on the Au Sable River.

The operating licenses expire between 2034 and 2041.

Over the past three years, the potential loss of the dams has prompted significant outcry in communities worried about lost recreational opportunities and visitors if the dams are removed and the impoundments are converted to a

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“Decision”

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Lake Huron Citizens Fishery Advisory Committee Update

By Dennis Eade

The Lake Huron Advisory Committee met on February 18, 2025 at Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare, MI. The highlights of the meeting included a presentation from Doug Schultz, Lake Huron Basin Coordinator, on the DNR's ability to cooperatively manage double crested cormorants with the federal government, and the process for doing so. Historically, Michigan has been at the top of the annual cormorant take list, compared to other states, because of its proximity to the Great Lakes.

Since 2021, cormorant take has been permitted at sites that fall into three categories: Great Lakes nesting colonies, fish stocking sites, and inland water bodies. Local input is collected on site selection, and justification (including a history of nonlethal management attempts) must be provided for each site where take occurs. In 2024 there were 7,072 adult cormorants killed and 1,300 cormorant nests oiled.

Cormorant control is planned at 7 colonies state-wide during 2025, including the Les Cheneaux Islands, Thunder Bay to Oscoda, and Saginaw Bay on Lake Huron. Hazing is approved at 26 fish stocking sites but the ability to successfully haze birds at some sites will be limited by firearm discharge rules. Requested take for 2025 is 9,445 birds and over 2,700 oiled nests; however, the combination of funding challenges and an aging network of hazing volunteers leads to actual take that is often below the permitted allowance. The

DNR will continue to take a science-based, data driven approach to cormorant management that explores new methods and techniques for control.

increasingly difficult as inflation outpaces revenue. In fact, the last fee change in 2014 decreased the price of an all-species fishing license and, when coupled

and 19th in the cost of a non-resident license.

Ed Eisch, Assistant Chief, noted that the Governor's DNR budget for fiscal year 2026 includes

pletely, or lands somewhere between. More conversations will happen between the Governor's office, the legislature, and the DNR in the upcoming months.

rearing efforts. Hatchery specific updates for 2025 include:

Marquette State Fish Hatchery – Brook trout and splake should be allocated in the numbers fisheries managers requested for stocking.

Thompson State Fish Hatchery – All muskie production has been shifted to Thompson while ponds at the Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery are repaired. Chinook salmon are doing well; steelhead numbers will be short of allocation targets but this will have minimal effect on Great Lakes stocking.

Oden State Fish Hatchery – Brown and rainbow trout allocations are being fulfilled as requested.

Platte River State Fish Hatchery – Chinook and Atlantic salmon are doing well. Coho salmon numbers are down slightly but this won't have a major effect on allocation.

Harrietta State Fish Hatchery – Atlantic salmon will be 10,000 fish short of the 80,000 fish allocation target because of an egg shortage. A plan is in place to prevent this problem from occurring again in future.

Wolf Lake State Fish Hatchery – Steelhead numbers are on target. A backup generator for one of the production wells caught fire during a planned power outage and was destroyed; lead time on a replacement generator is 52 weeks.

The next meeting will be Thursday May 22 at Jay's Sporting Goods in Clare.



Double Crested Cormorant
Photo credit: www.allaboutbirds.org

Doug also provided a PowerPoint presentation on the budget outlook and prospects for generating needed revenue through a license fee increase. Fishing is a \$4 billion industry for the State of Michigan. Fisheries Division is obligated to operate a balanced budget, which is becoming

with commitments to fund the Habitat Grant Program, resulted in less annual revenue for Fisheries Division to work with. The current license structure does not match the Division's needs to manage the resource. Michigan ranks 7th nationally in license sales yet 31st in the cost of a residence li-

cence fee increase that mirrors the revenue which would have been generated had the 2024 license package passed. Now, it is incumbent upon legislature to discuss the merits of the Governor's proposal and come up with a budget that accommodates it as written, erases it com-

Constituent groups can also voice their opinion and that carries a lot of weight. The strong stakeholder support for this effort in 2024 was very much appreciated and is again needed in 2025.

Aaron Switzer, Fish Production Program Manager, provided a brief update on the status of the fish

"Decision"

Continued from page 2

naturalized channel.

On the flip side, conservation groups want to see the dams removed, arguing that dams may boost tourism and property values but they also warm rivers and block fish migration.

While communities may welcome a new operator who would keep the dams in place, some stakeholder groups warn that outcome could have unintended consequences.

Bob Stuber of the Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition, a collection of hunting and fishing groups which advocates for restoring rivers and removing dams, says the group is "adamantly opposed" to Consumers selling the dams as laid out in its request for proposals.

In its request, Consumers indicated a "strong preference" for a buyer who would continue to operate the dams, which would be sold for \$1 apiece. Consumers would then buy their output through a long-term power purchase agreement.

"That has a bad history in Michigan," said Stuber, pointing to the 2020 failure of the Edenville and Sanford dams and subsequent Tittabawassee River flooding disaster after years of deferred maintenance by dams owner Boyce Hydro.

Communities "could end up holding the bag here, just like the folks on the Tittabawassee River ended up holding the bag."

Because it's a regulated utility, Consumers can seek cost recovery for capital improvements and approval for rate hikes from the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC).

However, if Consumers sells to an entity that isn't a regulated utility, "there is no incentive for them ever to put a penny into these dams," said Stuber. "In fact, if anything, it'd be a disincentive, cutting into the revenue stream."

A state task force recommended reforms in the wake of the Edenville disaster that would require potential buyers to prove they could safely operate the a dam, but subsequent dam safety legislation has gone nowhere in the past

five years.

In the meantime, Consumers is "continuing to work with the Department of Energy" on a \$23 million loan for dam maintenance it won under the Biden administration, said Wheeler.

The company was also invited to apply for up to \$749 million from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in September for safety upgrades at several of its dams.

Wheeler did not disclose whether the grant funding was safe or tied-up in a broadly chaotic Trump administration freeze on federal grants that's being litigated in federal court.



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How to Catch Cold Steelhead in Wintering Pools

Tempt winter fish with perfectly placed spawn bags right in front of their noses.

By Matt Straw
gameandfishmag.com

Winter steelhead anglers trod many miles alone when in pursuit of their target. After all, who willingly accompanies the mad? Who goes wading when snow flies horizontally or when immobile fingers turn new shades of purple from freezing temperatures?

Honestly, that's the point. There's beauty in walking to a favorite pool—one that steelhead use every winter—and seeing only your own footprints from three weeks prior in the snow. In winter, cold water concentrates big rainbows in very specific environments. When the water registers 38 degrees or colder, your most important tool resides between your ears, not in your vest or backpack. Good anglers rely on their knowledge of where steelhead congregate in cold weather, and in doing so, they experience more battles with one of winter's feistiest fish.

Steelhead are more aggressive in 33-degree water than almost any other species of fish. On two occasions I've hooked multi-

ple steelhead in 31-degree water that would have frozen solid if not for current. Still, steelies do seek shelter from the cold. If air temperatures remain below 20 degrees for a time, chilling the water down, steelhead often drop downriver to pools more suitable for winter habitation.

PICK A PRIME POOL

Ideal winter habitat during the coldest weather is a pool where the land has no grade. If the bottom is level, the water slows. We humans experience wind chill, and when it's extreme, we try to walk where the wind is blocked. River fish experience current chill, and they seek areas where the flow slows way down.

Perfect wintering pools occur where the river widens and straightens out and depth is moderate. The best winter pools I've found are only 3 to 5 feet deep with dark substrates that absorb solar warmth and provide a sense of security. Even in the shallowest pools, steelhead are difficult to see over a dark bottom. And in shallow pools, steelhead likely feel the sun's warmth

better than in deep pools.

The key areas in a pan-shaped pool tend to be dead center and just above the tail out, where a current void occurs as water sweeps up into a shallower segment. Straight stream segments are key because bends promote swirling, which increases current chill. Boulders and fallen trees also lead to tumbling currents. Although steelhead do use current breaks, they often avoid these spots in the coldest weather. So, the best substrates are usually dark gravel and small rocks, which provide a relatively level floor.

Unfortunately, this kind of pool is often the first to freeze around the edges. However, ice can also slow the current even further, making steelhead highly reluctant to leave the pool in extremely cold weather. Sometimes the ice is thick enough to support your body weight; sometimes you have to break through, spooking every nearby fish in the process. In the latter case, it's best to work another pool for a while and return. When the ice thick enough to hold you, fish can run under it and things get



Clear floats are a great call when float-fishing for steelhead in shallow winter pools where clear water causes fish to be extra wary. (Photo by Matt Straw)

dicey. When it can't hold you up, steelhead might run under and jump, breaking through. Exciting stuff.

Such spots don't necessarily exist in every river. Steelhead do winter in deep bends in a lot of

environments, and in the southernmost rivers of the Great Lakes, or during exceptionally mild winters, steelhead may never need a perfect wintering pool. The tributaries of Lake Michigan in Wisconsin are

so slow we catch them in the same pools in winter as in fall. When it really gets cold, these rivers freeze to

"Pools"

Continued on page 10

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"Award" Continued from page 1

Roger's Social Media pages, of the same name, are very popular. His entertainment and content pages draw around 500,000 visitors each month and has over 180,000 followers on his social media platforms.

Considered an authority on salmon & steelhead fishing, Roger loves to share his expertise with other anglers. He speaks more than 30 times per year, to crowds of 60-400 people, at fishing clubs, consumer shows and retail events. He is also a pro staffer and industry consultant for many fishing companies.

Roger likes to give back to sport by volunteering his time to many river clean-up projects and other conservation projects. He is a Michigan Salmon Ambassador for the Michigan Sea Grant Initiative, developed in coordination with

the DNRs of Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois, and Indiana and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. Roger also serves on the Michigan Coldwater Resources Steering Committee, which provides input, advice, and recommendations to the Fisheries Division on issues related to the state's Coldwater resources—as well as strategies and goals for managing those resources. Roger is also a member of Metro-West Steelheaders, Trout Unlimited, Grand Rapids Steelheaders, Ohio Central Basin Steelheaders, Michigan Fly Fishing Club, Huron River Fishing Association, and the Steelhead Society of British Columbia.

Roger will be honored and presented the award at the Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Presidents' Meeting held at the Michigan Historical Library and Museum on April 19, 2025 in Lansing, Michigan.



Roger Hinchcliffe with a beautiful river steelhead



Dennis Eade, Executive Director
Michigan Steelhead & Salmon Fishermen's Association

MSSFA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dennis Eade



The task of passing a bill to increase hunting and fishing license fees will have to be introduced in the new legislative session. Chief Claramunt presented a strong case for gaining the support of the Natural Resources Commission when testifying before the NRC on February 13th in Lansing. (Former Congressman Dan Kildee has been appointed Chairman with the retirement of Tom Baird in December.) Two legislators have reached out to me a few days ago asking for input on what could be proposed stressing the need for new funding ideas that may be more acceptable to the majority

of representatives and senators. I will be canvassing the walleye groups and the charter boat association captains for their thoughts as well. Though they initially opposed any increase it's likely the daunting possibility of fish plants being canceled, because hatchery operations represents a third of the division's budget, may persuade them to support an increase to preserve their businesses. I strongly believe we can get something passed but it may not be totally what the fisheries division feels it needs to provide the services required.

The NRC Steelhead Task Group will present

its findings and recommendations to the Natural Resources Commission in March. The final draft regarding studying the potential causes of a drop in steelhead returning to the rivers last fall and winter has been completed. I will attend on MSSFA's behalf and share our support for further research of contributing factors.

The Michigan Hydro Relicensing Coalition sent a letter to the Secretary of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) requesting that FERC address the ongoing water quality exceedances at the Hart Project in a timely manner. EGLE had requested that the Commission investigate and remediate ongoing water quality issues at the Hart Project concerned that the project again exceeded water temperature the majority of the time during the summer of 2024 and imperiled

cold-water species. FERC has a duty to enforce remediation efforts.

The Lake Huron Fishery Advisory Committee met on Tuesday, February 18th and a meeting report will be shared on MSSFA's website, mssfa.org when minutes are available.

The Show Edition of Great Lakes Sport Fishing News was mailed to members and distributed at the Detroit Ultimate Fishing Show in Novi. Metro West Chapter did a great job of recruiting new members at the show. Interest in salmon and steelhead fishing remains strong among anglers.

The subcommittee formed to review the clarifications needed in the proposed By-Law changes was composed of Joe Montella, SW Michigan Chapter, Gale Frazee, MetroWest Chapter and Bill Sikkel, Holland Chapter. Joe re-

ported on the subcommittee's recommendations at the board meeting on Wednesday, February 19th. The Board is scheduled to vote on the recommended changes at the Presidents' Meeting on April 19th. The primary goal is being able to find people to serve on the board who have the time and commitment to do so. The current structure requires people to first serve on the board of the local chapter, and then do double duty by serving on the state board. Many local chapters are finding it difficult to find people to even fill the slots on the local board. It is important to streamline things and make it easier for people to get involved. Two thirds affirmative vote is required for the proposed changes to move forward for a vote of the local chapters which would also requires 2/3rds affirmative before the changes are cod-

ified and implemented.

Nominations for the 2025 Howard A. Tanner Award were considered at the meeting and this year's recipient will be honored during the Presidents' meeting. The recipient will have distinguished themselves for contributions to Michigan's anadromous sport fishery.

Our Presidents' Meeting will take place on April 19th at the Michigan Historical Library in Lansing. All chapter board members and officers are welcome to attend. Please reserve that Saturday morning and early afternoon for a full discussion of our priorities for the coming season. Contact your chapter's representative for more details.



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How to Prep and Cook Largemouth Bass Fillets for Fried Deliciousness

By Hank Shaw

Green carp. Ditch pickles. Largemouths. Black bass. No matter what you call this fish, it ain't good eats. Or is it?

The cultural taboo against eating largemouth bass is not wholly a matter of tradition, but bass can make fine table fare with a few specific considerations.

Native to the Eastern and Central parts of the United States, and introduced pretty much everywhere else, the largemouth is hardy and full of fight, an icon of pro fishing in Amer-

ica. And as such, catch-and-release is the rule.

But no one ever told me that.

I did not grow up with largemouth bass. I grew up with striped bass. I am a born-and-bred saltwater angler. I didn't even catch my first freshwater fish until I was in my 20s.

Eventually I learned to fish Motts Run Reservoir in Spotsylvania, Virginia, and soon enough became adept at catching bluegills, crappies, white bass, perch, and, yes, largemouth bass. To me, the bass were not

as firm as bluegills, not as crafty as crappies, and most definitely not as tasty as a yellow perch. But, hey, they were easy to catch and tasted just fine fried in cornmeal.

I thought nothing of keeping a few eater bass until one day when I had a few nice ones on my stringer as I loaded up for the drive home. A guy who had just put his boat in the water stopped me: "Whatcha doin' with them bass?" Eating them, of course. "You can't eat bass!" I thanked him for his insight and left.

Since then I've eaten

plenty of largemouth bass all over the country, and I've developed a few tips and tricks on cooking them. First and foremost, let biggest ones go. They tend to be big breeding females, and second, the flake of their meat gets very coarse, which isn't an advantage at the table. Furthermore, large bass are more apt to be wormy than younger ones (though this can depend on the body of water). As a personal rule, I try not to keep largemouth heavier

"Nuggets"

Continued on page 6



Fried bass nuggets taste as good as they look, as long as you prepare them properly. Photo: Hank Shaw

FISH DON'T KNOW THE RULES

By Bob Jensen

People who started fishing at a young age probably were introduced to fishing by a parent, and oftentimes that parent had been introduced to fishing by their parent. One generation learned from the previous one. They learned that when fishing, there are certain ways to fish, certain "rules." Following are a couple of "rules" about catching walleyes that you might want to reconsider.

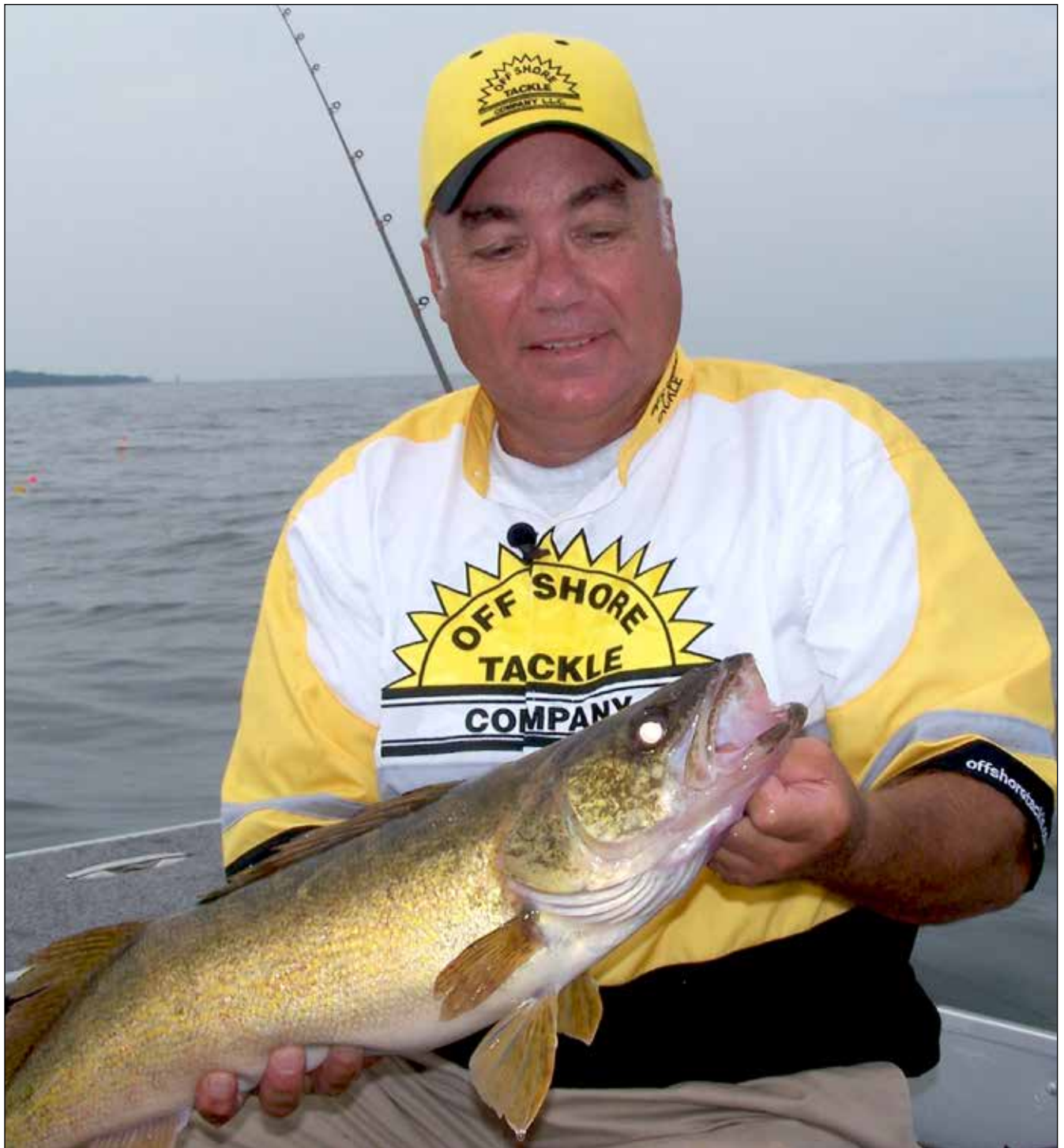
When I was young, I was taught that we should fish on the bottom for walleyes, because that's where they lived. I caught a lot of walleyes while fishing on the bottom, but on one fishing trip I broke the rule of walleye location and was glad that I did.

It was summer in Ontario where I broke the rules to achieve a high finish in a tournament. At the time, I knew that walleyes spent all their time on or very close to the bottom. Or at least I thought they did.

Jigs and rigs on the bottom had resulted in a decent catch of walleyes. I had driven across a large deep

bay several times while traveling to different areas. Each time I saw suspended fish twenty feet down over eighty feet of water. "They couldn't be walleyes," I thought. Eventually I decided to give those fish a try. I tied on a crankbait that ran deep enough to be a foot or two over the marks that I was seeing on the sonar. I quickly realized how wrong the "rules" were sometimes. We trolled maybe fifty yards, had a strike, and brought a six pound walleye to the boat. We did this time and again during the tournament and got a high finish. What was happening was baitfish were suspending over the deep water, and since the baitfish were there, so were the walleyes. In the summer, walleyes and other gamefish will be where the food is.

Another broken rule for walleyes. It was fall and we were casting eighth ounce jigs to water eight to ten feet deep near a wind-blown point. Experience had taught us that on that body of water, in the fall, eight to ten feet was the best depth for walleyes. I



Above: This walleye was about 15 feet above the bottom when it ate Bruce DeShano's bait.

cast a little too far and got snagged in shallow water. The jig broke off so I picked up a rod that had a sixteenth ounce jig on it. I cast the smaller jig into the knee-deep water, caught a walleye. Made another cast, caught another walleye. My partner tied on a sixteenth jig, cast it into the shallows, same thing. We caught more walleyes that day in water shallower than four feet than deeper than four feet. Because of the wind blowing into the shoreline, minnows were there. Because the minnows were there, so were

the walleyes.

Last one for now. This was several decades ago when jigging spoons were starting to become popular for catching walleyes through the ice. It was late summer and we were on a large lake that was known for good walleye fishing. We were again pulling jigs and rigs tipped with live bait. The walleyes didn't know that they should be eating these offerings. One of my fishing partners was one of those guys who didn't pay attention to rules. He had a couple of those jigging spoons that

were made for ice fishing in his tackle box. He tied one on, tipped it with a piece of nightcrawler, and dropped it over the side. Within five minutes he had a walleye in the net. We didn't tear'em up, but that jigging spoon made for winter fishing produced better than traditional walleye presentations on that late summer day.

The most successful anglers have learned that when the fish aren't doing what the traditional "rules of catching fish" suggest they should be doing, doing something different often gets them to bite.

"Nuggets"

Continued from page 5

than about 3 pounds.

In a perfect world, you want to eat largemouth out of a cold river, not a hot farm pond. The meat will be firmer in colder water, and that characteristic muddy taste of a largemouth's skin disappears in river fish—at least in my experience. I scale river bass and skin a pond bass.

No matter where you catch them, bass benefit from an overnight saltwater brine in the fridge. This seasons them and firms the meat. My general ratio is 2 tablespoons of kosher salt to 1 quart of water.

Another note on firmness, which is a main consideration with largemouth bass fillets: You must

handle keepers properly after you catch them. Most bass fishing is a hot-weather affair. It's critical to ice your fish down as soon as they are dead. Otherwise, they'll turn to mush. Toss it in the cooler next to the beer and bury it in ice.

As for cooking methods, nothing beats skinned and fried, whether it's in cornmeal, breadcrumbs, or beer batter. That said, bass are good grilled either

whole or "on the half shell," with unscaled skin left on to protect the meat. Smaller ones are nice whole, scaled, and steamed, with hot chile oil poured over them at the table.

And if you freeze them first to kill any potential parasites, yes, you can indeed pickle your ditch pickles, just like pike or herring.



Fried fish, tatar sauce, and lemon make for the perfect summer entree. Photo: Hank Shaw

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MSSFA chapters have membership meetings with guest speakers to learn about all the aspects of sport fishing. MSSFA chapters also sponsor fishing clinics, seminars, sport-fishing shows, derbies and tournaments. And are active sponsors for fishing outings for kids, seniors, veterans and our handicapped.

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This paper has no paid writers and has a grass roots style. Its writers are the every day fishermen who share their techniques and fishing adventures; and the paper has become well known for its **January Special Edition** or "**Show Edition**" that is seen at all the spring expos and sport, boat and fishing shows throughout the Great Lakes.

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How to Catch Dropback Steelhead in the Spring

Target post-spawn steelhead as they drop back to the Great Lakes

By Jimmy Fee
outdoorlife.com

Based on my first few attempts, I assumed that suffering was essential to catching steelhead on Great Lakes tributaries. Those early trips, made between December and March, left me with numb extremities, ice-clogged guides, and few, if any, fish. That's why, during the first week of May a few years back, I almost felt guilty wearing short sleeves while fighting my umpteenth steelhead. A few months prior, during a frustrating midwinter trip to the Salmon River in New

York, the clerk at Whitaker's Sport Store took pity on me and said, "If you really want to catch them good, come back in the spring for the dropbacks." He was referring to the post-spawn steelhead in the process of returning—or dropping back—to Lake Ontario. After a winter of limited feeding opportunities, these steelhead chow voraciously to regain lost weight, making them much easier to catch. What's not as easy is figuring out when to show up.

Time Crunching

The peak action may



Success with dropback steelhead is all about monitoring river conditions.

Photo credit: Joe Cermele

last a couple of weeks at best, and some years, it doesn't happen at all. An extended period of high, muddy water in spring could send post-spawn steelhead flushing back to the lake in one rapid shot before anglers ever get a chance to target them.

On Great Lakes tributaries, steelhead spawning usually begins in February and can continue into May. Runoff, water levels, and water temperatures all determine when spawning occurs, and that varies from river to river and year to year. The fish linger in the river up to a few weeks after the spawn before warming water sends them to the cool lake depths. This means the best dropback fishing can happen from early April to mid-May.

Joe Diorio, a Connecticut-based charter captain and obsessed steelheader far more experienced with dropbacks than me, watches the water levels above all else. When they return to normal after a spring runoff, he clears his schedule. "I prefer lower water in the spring," he says. "It concentrates the fish in the deeper holes."

In the fall and winter, low water often negatively impacts the fishing, but after the spawn, steelhead are so hungry that even low and clear conditions can't put them off the bite. It also helps that April showers, spawning suckers, and emerging salmon smolts provide a potluck of worms, eggs, and tiny fish to feast on.

While water levels let Diorio know when to go, water temperature determines where he'll find the steelhead. Before the spawn, with water temperatures in the 30s, steelhead spend most of their time on the bottom of deep, slow pools. After the spawn, when the temperatures climb toward 50 degrees, they'll hold higher in the water column and often gravitate to faster water. The heads and tailouts of pools are good places to find feeding dropbacks, but Diorio says not to rule out the deeper holes. There, he says, steelhead will ride out the daylight hours, resuming their downstream swims after dark.

Meal Planning

From the moment they enter the rivers, steelhead have an irrepressible instinct to consume small, brightly colored spheres. So, regardless of the season, Diorio, who predominantly uses a centerpin outfit, fishes egg sacs and beads. In the spring, however, he adds nightcrawlers to his arsenal. It may be strange to think of a steelhead snapping up a nightcrawler like a catfish, but snobbery is a trait of the fishermen, not the fish. Jigs drifted under floats are another spring go-to for Diorio, who prefers light

"Dropback"

Continued on page 14

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The Port Sheldon buoy and the South Haven buoy play a key role in boater safety and successful angler outings on Lake Michigan. The buoys provide real-time data on wave height and frequency, wind speed and direction, and water temperatures from the surface to 70 feet below. Originally deployed in 2014 through a grant from NOAA, these buoys have provided critical life-safety and fishery environment information, enabling us to be better at our sport and to be safer while fishing.

Anyone can access the information generated by the buoys at any time through a text or on the internet. The valuable data created is all free of charge to the public, but each one of these buoys cost nearly \$15,000 per year to operate. There is no longer any government funding for these buoys; all funds to continue their operation come from individuals, organizations, and local businesses passionate about Lake Michigan.

On one hand, the cost to maintain these buoys is significant. But on the other hand we have hundreds of teams and thousands of anglers on the Trail. That means the math is on our side! By working together we can cover at least a big chunk of that cost if not the whole thing! So I'm challenging you to step up and help! Just before we went to print I made a \$50 donation to each Buoy and I hope you'll follow suit.

There is an individual fundraiser for each buoy. They are being run by the South Haven and the Holland Steelheaders - people we know, people who fish the Trail, people we can trust! Donating is simple! In fact you can do it right now! Just use your phone and scan one or both of the codes below.

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“Pools”

Continued from page 4

the extent that we walk on them and ice-fish. But the tributaries of Lake Erie in Ohio have some fast water that steelhead will avoid in harsh winter weather.

Most Great Lakes steelhead run in the fall, and that includes in the tributaries of Lake Superior. They remain in the river from October or November until March and sometimes April. One thing that makes these fish leave a perfect wintering pool is the urge to spawn, and fall-run fish have been observed spawning in water temperatures as cold as 36 degrees. This suggests that day length (which steelhead and many other fish have been shown to respond to) has more to do with defining the spawning window than temperature.

In March 2014, for example, when air temperatures dropped to minus-8 degrees, steelhead incredibly left perfect wintering habitat and moved to faster spawning riffles in the tributaries of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula.

However, during the coldest spells from December to February, some steelhead always drop all the way back to that first mile or two above the river’s mouth if it’s slow and deep. Some call it “frog water.” It doesn’t resemble classic trout habitat at all, but it can concentrate hundreds if not thousands of steelhead, depending on the size of the river.

In winter, steelhead in small- to medium-size rivers prefer flat, low-grade areas where the river widens, flow spreads out and



Spawn bags are highly productive in winter. They can be drifted into the narrow strike zones of fish unwilling to chase baits. (Photo by Matt Straw)

current speeds drop. Good winter pools tend to have roughly uniform depths of 3 to 5 feet in the middle with a dark substrate—dark gravel or small rocks—that’s warmer than surrounding areas. Fish like both this spot and the area just above a tail out. They don’t like shaded areas or those with disturbed flow, like around large boulders and fallen trees or near river bends, in winter.

FLOAT IT TO THEM

Many believe steelhead don’t feed at all after entering a tributary—a belief that extends even to fall-run fish that might be in the river for more than four months. This is a false assumption. Even in 33-degree water, steelhead feed, though mostly on small items like caddis larvae and mayfly nymphs that drift right into their strike zone.

In frigid water, how-

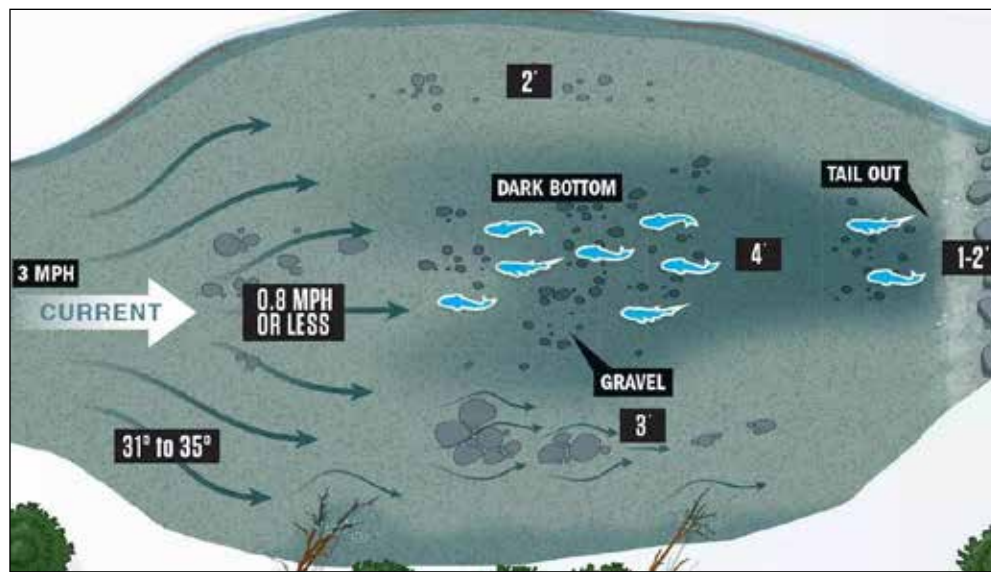


Illustration by Peter Sucheski

ever, steelhead generally won’t move far to intercept a bait. Their strike zone is thus condensed to a tiny area right in front of their face, which becomes the overriding factor determining presentation methods. Spinners work in winter, but steelies won’t chase

much. Rather, it must hit them on the nose, which is tough with a lure that swings in an arc across the flow.

A gaudy fly can make a steelhead move in winter, but usually in the wrong direction. They might simply get out of the way.

incrementally cover every inch of a pool. In a straight, pan-shaped pool, you can hit every current lane in a straight line, rather than an arc, from one end of the pool to the other. Just make each cast slightly longer than the last one.

The most efficient rigs

include a fixed float attached to the line with silicone sleeves that slide up or down the line for quick depth adjustments. Stealth is important in a relatively shallow pool. Clear floats like the Drennan Loafer, Redwing Tackle Blackbird Phantom or clear Eagle Claw Steelhead Float give fish less to see. So too does a fluorocarbon leader, which has almost the same coefficient of refraction as water itself and is, therefore, less visible than other line types underwater.

A small jig, like a Voodoo Tackle custom-painted plated jig with no collar, is far better than a plain hook in winter. Baits on a plain hook waft around. Baits on a jig track straight into a steelhead’s nose. This is important since trout are unlikely to move even a foot to intercept baits in cold water. A 1/64-ounce jig is right on small streams, and 1/32- to 1/16-ounce jigs usually produce better on large rivers.

With a jig, place all split-shot above a barrel swivel used to connect a 3-foot, 5- to 8-pound fluorocarbon leader. Use soft shot from Thill or Anchor to protect your main line. To avoid tangling, place the largest shot highest up and the smallest just above the swivel in a “shirt-button” pattern. Placing the shot above the swivel on the main line instead of on the leader itself helps prevent shot from damaging the leader.

I typically use 5-pound Raven or Seaguar fluorocarbon for the leader. A 12-foot rod can absorb a lot of shock. I’ve banked several steelhead weighing 18 pounds or better with 5-pound test, especially in winter when fish don’t fight quite as hard. I use 8- to 10-pound Maxima Ultragreen mono as my main line to ensure the float and sinkers won’t be lost if a steelhead wraps the leader on wood.

Having fished for these big salmonids for almost half a century, I find steelhead and salmon eggs tied in spawn bags to be the most effective winter bait. Mayfly nymphs, if you can find them, work well, too. Spawn should be collected only from steelhead and salmon that run rivers that are too warm in summer to support young-of-the-year progeny.

BEAT THE FREEZE

Steelhead seem ghostly in winter. The colder the water, the more wraithlike they become. The second you’re convinced a pool is barren from end to end, they appear in solid form, muscling into your physical reality like rod-snapping dynamos. Embrace the solitude, laugh at the horizontal snow and enjoy the contest. While others are warm and cozy inside, you’ll experience some of winter’s most exciting fishing.

The Southwest Michigan Steelheaders



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How Much Fishing Gear Do You Really Need?

By Ethan Dhuyvetter
fishanything.com

Crankbaits, jerkbaits, jigs, swimbaits... The list goes on and on and on. For muddy water, you need to add rattles. For sunny days, you must have this color. When it's summer, you can't live without this weight. The fishing industry is constantly telling us that we need more gear so we can be prepared for literally anything on the water. It's not to say there isn't a value in being prepared, but I think it's safe to say that we all fall for the marketing from time to time.

I've been fishing for well over ten years now, and throughout this time, I've accumulated a lot of fishing gear. I constantly find myself saying "oh this will come in handy for INSERT SPECIFIC SITUATION". Next thing you know, I have boxes and boxes of gear that would help me across a wide variety of niche situations. You want to know the funny part, though? I almost always fish the same 5% of my gear due to my confidence levels and fishing style. Does that mean I don't need 95% of my gear? No, I don't think I'd go that far, but you're darn right I could live without a lot of it.

The Challenge

If I'm being totally honest, I recently watched The Minimalists on Netflix and it made me take a step back and consider my own purchasing behavior. Through this personal reflection, I realized that I have a ton of clutter around the house, but especially when it comes to my fishing tackle. At the end of this documentary (sorry for the spoiler), there was a challenge to go through your own stuff and donate, sell, or recycle one thing for the corresponding day of the month (day 1 = 1 thing, day 2 = 2 things, and so on). I promptly decided that I was going to try this challenge for my fishing gear...

Now if you follow me on Instagram, you may have already seen this on my story highlights. Throughout January of 2024, I went through the massive clutter I call my fishing tackle and started to get rid of as much as I could. After 28 days, I am a little bummed to say that I eventually ran out of gear I was willing to part with at this time, so I decided to get rid of higher value equipment over the final 3 days of the challenge (2 reels and 1 rod). While you could say I "failed the challenge", I honestly don't feel that way at all.

This must have been roughly 50lbs of fishing gear!

This challenge was absolutely freeing as I went through it, and it is incredible to look at how much gear I was able to offload



This must have been roughly 50lbs of fishing gear!

I placed on it. A few days later, when I revisited the gear, I decided to take it out and add it to the donation box. So when it was all said and done, I was able to reduce my total tackle collection by 409 total items!

What Is The Point?

At this point, you are probably thinking "that is great, Ethan, but why should I get rid of my fishing gear? I might need it later

and I have the space so it isn't hurting anything." To be clear, there was a time I felt the exact same way, and I would be lying if I said I don't still own a lot of gear

"Gear"
Continued on page 14

Below and Right: Just a portion of what Ethan was able to donate!



LUDINGTONTOURNAMENT.COM



How To Choose A Fishing Kayak

By Ethan Dhuyvetter

Since purchasing my first kayak in 2009, the industry has certainly changed. At that time, I was 16 years old, mowing lawns to reinvest my earnings into my newfound love of fishing. While I daydreamed of the fancy Wilderness Systems Ride 115 advertised in the back of my Field & Stream magazines, I wasn't quite to the point where I could spend \$1,000 on a kayak, so I ended up with a recreational Bic Kayak (yes, the pen brand) which I attempted to fish out of maybe three times before I decided it wasn't meant to be.

Fast-forward a few years, after spending my time in various boats, I was graduating college and moving to California. I couldn't bring my bass boat with me but I didn't want to exclusively bank fish, so... Back to a kayak! That's when I got into a proper fishing kayak (FeelFree Lure 11.5) and the rest is history. I'll spare you all the stories along the way, but we're approaching 2025 and I've now owned over 10 different kayaks across several brands, shapes, and sizes.

In this article, my goal is to share the most important consideration points to think about before choosing a fishing kayak. Each bolded heading below is something you should think about as you shop the current market. My recommendation is to priority-rank this list according to your needs, and by doing so, you're going to make the decision process 10X easier to find the right kayak for you!

Price/Budget

No matter what, you always should be mindful of the price you are willing to pay. It's very easy to continue layering on additional costs in this sport, so if you don't think about this up front, you may end up in a tough position. Aside from the kayak, you are going to need a paddle, PFD, various accessories, potential roof rack, and who knows what else. The costs can add up quickly! I always recommend considering used kayaks if possible, because it can be a great way to make your money go farther.

Ease of Transportation

This is sadly one of the things which people think of last or don't think of at all. In today's age, the average "fishing kayak" is over 100lbs in body weight and well over 10' long. If you have a pickup and ample garage storage, this may be a non-issue, but in a lot of cases we don't have those luxuries. The boat you choose not only needs to fit your fishing style but it also needs to be practical and meet your lifestyle. Make sure to have a plan

for where you will store your kayak and think about the steps needed to get your kayak on the water (the bigger the boat, the longer it will take to load and unload).

Speed/Propulsion Type

It used to be that all kayaks used a paddle exclusively, but over the years, pedals have become more common. Now there seems to be a wave of electric motor options hitting the market. This is all great, as it gives anglers several options which may help meet their needs. The hull design, rigged weight, and dimensions of your kayak can all impact the speed on the water. It's safe to say that pedals or a motor are going to increase your ability to move water as well. Ultimately, depending on the waters you fish, it's really important to determine how



available, but it's how it's configured. These days, I find that most kayaks offer ample storage, but not all of them have it set up in a way which would fit my style on

ing, the more stability and comfort you layer on, the larger the kayak will be and the heavier it will become (reducing ease of transportation and speed). For me, I

am willing to sacrifice a little bit of this consideration point for that reason.

Let's Wrap Things Up With My Example

So... How would I personally priority-rank the above headings?

- 1) Speed/Propulsion Type
- 2) Ease Of Transportation
- 3) Price/Budget
- 4) Storage
- 5) Stability/Comfort



Left: My first "true fishing kayak", the FeelFree Lure 11.5

This is why my current primary kayak is an Old Town PDL 106, which is smaller than my former 120 but still features pedals. I purchased it used from a friend for a great price, and while I am sacrificing some storage/comfort, this boat is much easier to transport and store in my garage. By priority-ranking these, I was able to think very rationally about how I make this purchase decision and I am ultimately better off for that!

I hope these consideration points got your brain working a little bit. It is certainly not my goal to paralyze your ability to make a decision, but rather I'd like to see you get the best kayak from the start so you don't have to bother switching in the next year (or worse yet, giving up on kayaks all together). One last thing to keep in mind - if you can test the kayak first, even better! These aren't cheap, so a test where you can compare them side by side can be a really helpful practice.



Example of pedal drive

fast you'd like to move and how you'd like to get from Point A to Point B. It should go without saying that the more advanced your propulsion type becomes, the more you need to outfit your kayak.

Pedal Drive: you'll have a full pedal system along with a rudder

Electric Motor: you'll have the motor setup, potential steering, along with heavy batteries and wiring

Storage

Depending on how much gear you intend to bring while fishing, this can be a really important factor. It's not only how much space the boat has

the water. The storage needs to be accessible without too much hassle. Attempting to get turned around to access a small tackle box could easily lead to flipping a kayak if the storage isn't set up correctly.

Stability/Comfort

This is probably what most anglers think of first while looking for a kayak because it's the easiest thing to visualize while you're making that decision. If you have a larger build, a history of joint problems, or other health-related factors to consider, it's safe to say you want to ensure the boat has ample space and a good seat. Generally speak-

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The Great Lakes Fishery: A World-Class Resource!

The Great Lakes were formed about ten thousand years ago when glaciers receded from North America at the end of the last ice age. These vast inland seas contain one-fifth of the world's fresh surface water and are home to 177 species of fish. The Great Lakes fishery is a key feature of the region's history, culture, environment, and economy. Fish make the lakes great!

The Great Lakes Fishery

The Great Lakes commercial, recreational, and tribal fisheries are collectively valued at more than \$7 billion annually and support more than 75,000 jobs. Lake whitefish, walleye, yellow perch, and ciscoes are the foundation of the commercial fishery while salmon, walleye, trout, and muskellunge (among many other species) help comprise the world-class recreational fishery. To support the millions of anglers that come to the lakes from around the globe, and to rehabilitate stressed fisheries, agencies stock fish in the Great Lakes each year. A healthy, vibrant Great Lakes fishery is good for

the economy and the environment.

Native Fish Species

The Great Lakes support 139 native species. Sculpins, gizzard shad, several species of shiners, and ciscoes sustain top predators including lake trout, wall-eye, large and smallmouth bass, and brook trout. In addition, some forage species such as ciscoes and yellow perch provide recreational and commercial fishing opportunities.

Four lesser known native fish in the Great Lakes are actually lamprey species. All lampreys have a filter feeding larval stage. All 5 lamprey species found in the great lakes suctioned onto glass showing the differences in mouth and body sizes. The sea lamprey is significantly larger and usually live in Great Lakes tributaries. Native lampreys do not grow as large as invasive sea lampreys and are an important part of the Great Lakes ecosystem. Two of the native species, the American brook and northern brook lampreys, are not parasitic and seldom migrate to the Great Lakes. The other two

native species are the silver and chestnut lampreys. After the larval stage, they metamorphose to a parasitic stage and feed off a fish host prior to becoming adults. The parasitic stage of the silver lamprey can be quite abundant in important fishing locations and the wounds it creates are smaller yet often confused with those from sea lamprey. As adults, neither species feeds; they migrate back up streams and spawn and die. These parasitic native lampreys evolved with the fish in the Great Lakes basin and rarely cause life-threatening damage to fish due to their smaller size.

The four native lamprey species are a natural and important part of the diverse Great Lakes ecosystem. They serve as ecosystem engineers by creating diverse flow patterns through spawning nest construction, which improves stream habitat for many aquatic insects and fishes, provide prey for other fish species, and, when migrating through rivers and streams, carry nutrients derived from larger rivers and lakes to upstream habitats.



All photos on this page are from the Great Lakes Fishery Commission at www.glf.com



Non-Native Fish Species

At least 34 non-native fish species are present in the Great Lakes. These species have been introduced through multiple vectors including migration around barriers and through canals, intentional introduction by humans (most notably, three species of Pacific salmon), discharge of ballast water from cargo ships, escapement from aquaculture facilities, and release of live bait.

Non-native species that proliferate and cause harm to an ecosystem are called "invasive species". Invasive species often have a widely disruptive effect on native fish populations through competition for food and habitat or predation. The result is often a ripple effect throughout the food web that leads to ecological and economic harm. Sea lampreys, alewives, and quagga mussels are among the worst invasive species in the Great Lakes.

Extirpated and Endangered Species

During the previous two centuries, the fish fauna of the Great Lakes has been altered dramatically due

to increasing human populations, the global movement of goods (which has contributed to a rise in the introduction and spread of invasive species), and over-fishing. As a result of these pressures, 18 native species, including several species of ciscoes that historically comprised the bulk of the fish biomass in most of the Great Lakes, have been extirpated from at least one Great Lake. Today, 61 fish species in the Great Lakes are considered to be threatened or endangered.

The Future

The Great Lakes fishery is a Canadian and U.S. treasure. It attracts millions of anglers and continues to

provide jobs, recreation, subsistence, and food. The fishery is also integral to a healthy Great Lakes environment. The future of the fishery looks bright. Management agencies in both nations, through stewardship and rehabilitation efforts, remain capable and committed to addressing and anticipating the challenges that confront this amazing resource.





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ATTENTION MEMBERS AND GENERAL PUBLIC!

Great Lakes Bay Region Steelheaders invites you to join us for our 2025 spring auction. It will be held at the VFW hall in Midland on **Saturday March 22.** Doors open at 11 for viewing and auction starts at noon.

**VFW Hall
3013 Bay City Rd,
Midland, MI 48642**

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- ★ Captains Meeting at 7:00pm
- ★ August 8th - 10th Free Hamburgers and Hot Dogs at Weigh-in and Awards Ceremony
- All Provided by Coral Gables Restaurant**



"Gear"
Continued from page 11

which I could probably get rid of. I am not going to tell you to take this challenge, but I am going to tell you to be mindful about how much gear you keep in your arsenal. More doesn't always mean better; in fact I believe it may actually lead to catching less fish in some cases.

Keeping your fishing tackle organized to the most simplified system you can get away with will allow you to keep a very clutter-free mind on and off the water. It will help you stick to your gut and fish freely without constantly second-guessing if you should try another color, technique, or lure type. That will inevitably lead to you focusing on the gear you are most confident in, and if there is anything I have learned about fishing over all these years, you are only as good as your confidence on the water. I can be using the "right lure at the right time", but if I am not fishing it with confidence, I am generally not catching as many fish as I could be

by using the "wrong lure" with confidence.

Minimalist Fishing
I don't think there will ever come a time in my life where I only own one small tackle box and a single rod and reel, but throughout this year, I am going to keep a heavy emphasis on maintaining a clutter-free tackle system. Lastly, I should point out that I test a lot of gear, so you may be thinking "this guy is a total hypocrite", however it should be noted that after testing gear, I almost always give away duplicate gear to someone who will put it to good use. The goal with testing gear and posting that online is to position myself as a resource so I can help you make the best choices from day one. That will ultimately lead to us all spending more time catching fish and less time messing with our fishing tackle.
Tight lines!



"Dropback"
Continued from page 8

colors such as white and peach. Tipping the jigs with waxworms can help tempt steel, but fallfish and sunfish often beat the steelhead to the bait.

Nymphing or swinging with a fly rod is also very effective for dropbacks. Egg imitations fished under an indicator or ticked along the bottom are as effective now as they are in winter, but in the spring, sucker spawn and San Juan Worms often get hit faster. Ornatly tied salmon flies will move spring steelhead, but so will Woolly Buggers and Mud-dler Minnows. Streamers that imitate salmon smolts are a good match-the-hatch

option on rivers with natural salmon reproduction, but overall, the actual fly choice is less important than covering water to find an active pod of fish.
Spin fishermen throwing stickbaits and spinners have a leg up because they can cover lots of water quickly, and both lures will trigger fierce strikes from dropback steelhead. There's also a strong possibility that these offerings will draw out some bonus smallmouths. In fact, if you're taking a shot at dropbacks, it's wise to pack some tubes or Senkos. If you show up late and find the river void of steel, most Great Lakes tributaries provide excellent bass action in spring.

Fishing Tips Gleaned Over the Years

By Jack Payne
midwestoutdoors.com

"Hey Payne, what the heck are you doing?" asked my fishing partner. I had pulled out to a nice lead over him. I went with a slip float while fishing for suspended fish over a depth of 30 feet.

This was payback time, because the previous December, he cleaned my clock and forgot to pass on what he was doing. Keeping a detailed logbook really helps.

There are two very important tips to start off with. First, keep a detailed logbook. What is the water temperature, the wind direction and the air temperature? Are the fish suspended or on the bottom? What baits were used? What techniques were used?

Next up, carry your key tips with you. I have a printout of the little things with me at all times in the boat. It becomes very easy to fish memories or to get stuck on what worked last week or a month back. A printout becomes a fast reference when things are going slowly.

Please learn how to use side scan. I can't remember the last time we stopped to fish without first spotting them on side scan. Almost every graph sold today has a side scan feature. You will need to verify if you have the proper transducer.

Panfish will look like a huge cloud of white rice flecks. Spotting a school of panfish 80 feet away from the boat is easy. Eighty feet is my self-imposed range limit when targeting open-water panfish.

I set my range to 100 feet, and only for one direction, when targeting spawning fish or fish working a weed line.

Charge your glow baits, glow beads, glow flies and such. If your panfish bait does not have any glow, add a soft glow egg onto the shank of the hook. It pays dividends.

When you want to repeat the exact depth each time with your lure or bait, try using the little "heart" clip on your spinning reel spool when vertical fishing. Pull out the amount of line that you need, slip the line under the heart, and the next time that you drop down, just open your bail.

Use the smallest sinkers possible. The lighter that the fishing rigs are, the more fish that you will catch. Of course, this will depend on how fast the boat is moving.

Very small tungsten jig heads work well on all species. A smaller profile often puts more bluegills in the boat. A light jig head results in more crappies.

Move, move and move again until you find the right fish. If the size or quantity is not what you desire, move. We rarely stay more than 15 or 20 minutes in one spot unless we are



happy with the results.

Learn to fish the thermocline during summer and fish near the bottom once the thermocline disappears. Fish the bottom once the thermocline disappears, even if this is 30 feet down.

Open the hook gap slightly on your jig heads. You want the point of the barb pointing slightly outward.

Sharpen all hooks regardless of species. You would be surprised how quickly a teardrop or a crappie jig head hook gets dull. Just a few swipes on a diamond file and you are back in business.

I was and still am a big fan of plastics for crappies and 'gills, but recently have incorporated the use of chenille and marabou. This material works great on all panfish; just size it down for 'gills. A Bully Bluegill Buster fly pattern is great on 'gills and perch.

I use rod holders, but there are days that a rod in hand pays dividends. Our favorite bluegill and crappie rods were built on a fly rod blank. This soft design casts lightweight baits like a dream and works perfect-

ly as a dead or second rod. Some days, the bite is so soft that holding a rod is the only way to detect the bite.

I love casting for all panfish, and a mini worm harness rig is a favorite for 'gills and perch. We build ours using a size 8 hook and a size 0 Colorado blade. We use two hooks about an inch apart. You can cast or slow troll/drift this rig.

Learn to use your down scan and blow up the view of the bottom portion. Down scan is far better than traditional 2-D. In many cases, we are targeting fish within 5 feet of the bottom. Down scan shows the smallest of changes on the bottom, and will identify a log, rock or other objects that fish might relate to. Often, I see a fish rise up to my bait when using the down scan mode.

Whenever you find yourself vertically jigging for walleyes, keep the rod tip within a foot of the water for a better hookset. I lost countless fish when vertical jigging on the river; I found that keeping my rod tip close to the surface provided a better hookset and fewer fish coming unbuttoned halfway to the boat.

Whenever we fish vertically with a jig, we use a stinger hook. According to our records, 80 percent or our fish are caught on a stinger hook. I also add a stinger hook when working a floating jig head on a dead rod. They really work.

A tip on stinger hooks: I like the stinger hook to be longer than the plastic bait that I am using. I also use a stiff leader material so that the stinger lays out straight and does not drop down below the jig.

A floating jig head worked well 35 years ago and still does today. I use a floating jig head on a dead rod when vertical fishing a river. I also enjoy a floating jig head when drifting in a lake while casting for whatever species that I wish to cast to. Floating jig heads tipped with a minnow or a leech land plenty of fish.

Some days, we use an in-line float. You can easily slide one or two onto your line. This lifts your bait just off bottom. Try it with a plain hook or even a spinner harness rig.

I enjoy pike fishing. I started using the old Daredevil spoons when I was

eight or nine. Two things have changed with the spoon for me. First, I remove the treble hook and replace it with a large single hook. I end up with a better hookset and it works better around weeds.

Second, nearly 90 percent of the time, I add a 3- or 4-inch Mister Twister tail. The first color would be a white. Pike and white go well together, as will a black plastic tail.

A longtime favorite bait of mine is a sleeper on wall-eyes: the Johnson Silver Minnow. I use this spoon for pike and bass as well. Years back, I tipped this bait with a chunk of Uncle Josh pork rind. Today, most often, I use a Mister Twister tail or a Charlie Brewer grub. This is one lure that you really need to sharpen well. It can be fished in slop, weeds or timber.

Slip floats are becoming more common with inland anglers and guides. I carry an assortment of slip floats for all species. Slip floats catch fish. I know an angler who fishes a slip float between 15 and 30 feet down over 40 to 50 feet of water. He lands a lot of nice wall-

eyes.

This past summer, we enjoyed many days fishing slip floats for suspended fish above the thermocline. Some of our larger fish that we caught would stay 30 feet away from the boat.

One last tip: Use a Hali Jig in place of a sinker when targeting suspended panfish. It makes a huge difference.

For more insight and tips for fishing throughout the year, check out the articles in every issue of MidWest Outdoors, available by subscribing on our website.

Jack Payne is an accomplished angler and hunter who enjoys teaching others as much as learning from others. Seminar speaker, outdoor photography enthusiast, hunter safety instructor and volunteer at many events for both kids and adults as an instructor.



2025 Battle Creek Steelheader's Calendar of Events			
Month	Date	Event	Location
March	8	KALAMAZOO RIVER TROUT QUEST	ALLEGAN DAM
March	22	KALAMAZOO RIVER SPRING STEELHEAD	ALLEGAN DAM
March	29	TRADE A TRIP DETROIT RIVER	LAKE ST CLAIR CLUB
April	26	TRADE A TRIP SOUTH HAVEN	RIVERBEND BOAT CLUB
May	31	CONNIE MCGOWAN INVITATIONAL CAPTAIN MUST BE MEMBER	LAKE ERIE/ DBBC
July	12	PORTAGE LK PANFISH/FAMILY PICNIC	PORTAGE LAKE
August	16	VETERANS OUTING	SOUTH HAVEN
October	25	KALAMAZOO RIVER SALMON SLAM	ALLEGAN DAM
November	8	KALAMAZOO RIVER TROUT QUEST	ALLEGAN DAM
November	15	KALAMAZOO RIVER MEMORIAL	ALLEGAN DAM
November	29	ST.JOE RIVER TUNE-UP STEELHEAD	I-94 BOAT RAMP
December	6	ST.JOE WINTER CHALLENGE	BENTON HARBOR
December	13	CHRISTMAS PARTY	KALAMAZOO EAGLES

Meetings are held every 3rd Tuesday of the month. 6:00 pm Social, 7:00 pm Meeting
Meeting Location: (In process of finding a new location)
FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Joe Foy at 269-303-1894 / Dan Foster at 269-370-3693
battlecreeksteelheaders.com

2025 Great Lakes Bay Region Steelheader's Calendar of Events			
Month	Date	Event	
March	22	Auction at VFW	11:00 am (Doors open at 10:00 am)
April	12	Manistee	7:00 am
April	26	Statewide	7:00 am
May	3	Linwood	7:00 am
May	17	Linwood	7:00 am
May	31	Sebewaing	7:00 am
June	14	Sebewaing - Kids Day	7:00 am
June	28	Linwood	7:00 am
July	12	Manistee	5:30 am
July	26	Ludington	5:30 am
August	9	Frankfort (Gary Decker Memorial) (2-Day)	5:30 am
August	23	Manistee (2-Day)	5:30 am
September	6	Linwood	
December	13	Banquet at VFW	5pm

Membership meetings are the first Tuesday every month (no meeting in August)
 Meetings held at: 3013 Bay City Road, Midland, MI 48642 Phone: 989-496-3410

Board meetings begin at 7:00pm. **Please call the Port Chairman no later than Monday prior to the outing whether you plan on attending or not attending.** On the day of the outing, call in on Marine Radio, Channel 72.

Weigh-in follows each outing. Picnics follows weigh-in on Saturdays only.
 Outings: All Steelheader members pay \$5.00. All non-Steelheaders pay \$10.00 to participate.
 Children 16 and Under are free. Picnic is \$5.00 for everyone.

If interested in fishing with us please contact: Mark Trudell (989) 839-4920
 Visit our web page www.steel-headers.com

2025 Grand Haven Steelheader's Calendar of Events			
Month	Date	Event	Contact Info
TBD	2025	Net Pens	
April	24	Spring Meeting	
May 29 - June 1		GH Offshore Challenge	
August	1-13	Week-Long Plus Tournament	
August	14	Chapter Picnic	
September	6	Sportsman For Youth	
December	10	Chapter Christmas Party	

Other Events TBD
 For information on these events and other information on the Grand Haven Steelheaders contact GHS President and State Director Paul Zelenka at pbzfarm@gmail.com
www.ghsteelheaders.com

2025 Holland Steelheader's Calendar of Events			
Month	Date	Event	
March	3	Board Meeting	
April	7	Board Meeting	
April	17	Membership Meeting	
May	2-4	Michigan City Tournament	
May	5	Board Meeting	
May	8-10	St. Joseph Tournament	
May	16-18	South Haven Tournament	
May	17	Spring Challenge	
May	20	Tuesday Night Leagues Begin	
May 29-June 1		Grand Haven Tournament	
June	2	Board Meeting	
June	20-22	Manistee Tri-Port Tournament	
June	28	Kids & Kings Tournament	
July	7	Board Meeting	
July	12	Fishing With Veterans	
July	14-20	Ludington Tournament	
July	24-27	Muskegon Tournament	
July	26	Summer Challenge	
July 31 - August 3		Holland Tournament	
August	4	Board Meeting	
August	8-10	Saugatuck Tournament	
August	15-17	Manistee (Monster) Tournament	
August	16	Ladies Tournament	
August	21-24	Frankfort Tournament	
August	26	Tuesday Night Leagues End	
September	8	Board Meeting	
September	9	Tuesday Night League Banquet	
October	6	Board Meeting	
November	3	Board Meeting	
December	1	Board Meeting	
December	4	Membership Meeting	

Board meetings held at: TBD Locations
 General Membership: Bayshore Yacht Club at the Yacht Basin Marina
 Doors open at 6 pm., Dinner at 7 pm, speaker to follow

For event information, go to hollandsteelheaders.org, or call Jimmy Van Brocklin 616-240-7017
 or email Brad Stephenson at brad.stephenson32@gmail.com

2025 Grand Rapids Steelheader's Calendar of Events			
Month	Date	Event	Information
March	13-16	Outdoor Sports Show	DeVos Place, GR
March	TBD	Spring River Fishing Outing	
March	31	Chapter Meeting	
April	1	Update of GRSH Membership, pay dues at meeting.	
April	28	Chapter Meeting	
May	TBD	Big Lake Outing	
May	19	Chapter Meeting & Awards	
June	TBD	Summer Fishing Event	Wabasis Lake
June	6-9	Lake Erie Walleye Contest STC	
June	30	Chapter Meeting	
**July	14	Chapter Family Picnic	Johnson Park
August	2	Chapter Challenge/Double D Event	
August	25	Members Meeting	
September	6	Sportsman For Youth	Muskegon
September	29	Members Meeting	
October	1	Chapter Archery Buck Contest** pre-entry required	
October	TBD	Fall River Contest	
October	27	Chapter Meeting	
November	8	Fishing Partners Manistee Contest	
November	15	Chapter Firearm Buck Contest** pre-entry required	
November	24	Chapter Meeting	
**December	TBD	Christmas Party, watch for details	

** Fishing Outings are subject to change based on weather conditions**

Events open to the public
 Meeting Location - Elks #48, 917 Bridge St NW, Grand Rapids
 Time: 6:00pm-7pm Social Hour with food and beverage followed by Speaker
 Board Meetings will take place after the regular Member Meeting
 Email Grand Rapids Steelheaders: fishgrsteelhead@gmail.com
 Dates with "***" are for members and family only

New address:
 P.O. Box 140198
 Grand Rapids, MI 49514

2025 Metro West - Livonia Steelheader's Calendar of Events			
Month	Date	Event	Contact
March	4	General Membership Meeting	
March	15	MWS Banquet	MWS Board
March	22	MI Steelhead Challenge Manistee River/Pier	Adam Trenz / Eric Braden
April	1	General Membership Mtg - Swap Meet/Awards	
April	14	Clinton River Clean Up	Jay Labban
April	14	Brown Trout Tournament Ludington	Dave Zawacki
April	19	Walleye Tour Det R/Erie	Robert Grech
April	26	L. Huron Lexington Tournament	Bob Schulz
May	6	General Membership Meeting	
May	10	Lake Erie Walleye Tournament	Bob Schulz
May	17	Pt Moule' Kayak/SB SM Bass/Walleye	Keith Childs
May	17	Howard Tanner Salmon Tournament Benton Harbor Sat	Chris Thompson / Dennis Kelley
May	18	Howard Tanner Salmon Tournament Benton Harbor Sun	Mark Platt / Dennis Kelley
May	24	Bruin Lake Kayak/Small Boat	Chuck Davis
May	25	Carp Fishing Event	Gale Frazee
June	3	General Membership Meeting	
June	7	Kids Fishing Outing at Kensington Park	J Somers/M Apostolopoulos

Metro West calendar continued on page 17

Join a Chapter, Join the Fun!

**For more information,
 contact your Chapter Membership Director
 or mssfamembership@charter.net**



mssfa.org
 We'll *HOOK YOU UP* with the latest news!

2025 Metro West... continued

Month	Date	Event	Contact
June	14	Sterling SP Walleye Tournament	Fabian Sepulveda
June	21	Lake Erie Walleye Tournament	Bob Schulz
June	22	Lake Erie Walleye Tournament	Fabian Sepulveda
July	8	Club Summer Picnic	Mark Platt/Dave Zawacki
July	8	Manistee River Cleanup Day @ High Bridge	Roger Hinchcliff
July	24	Ludington Salmon Tournament – Thu	Gale Frazee / Tom Abdelnour
July	26	Ludington Member Memorial Tournament – Sat	Dave & Kim Zawacki
July	27	Ludington Salmon Tournament – Sun	TBD
August	2	Erieau Tournament – Sat. Erieau, Canada	Henry Nabors / Ron Belemore
August	3	Erieau Tournament – Sun. Erieau, Canada	Ron Belemore / Henry Nabors
August	6	General Membership Meeting	
August	9	Salmon Tournament – Manistee – Sat	Mike Hartrick
August	10	Salmon Tournament – Manistee – Sun	Marc / Kirk Traver
August	16	Lake Tournament – Frankfort	Robert Grech / B Dodge
August	17	Salmon Tournament – Frankfort	Bill Dodge / R Grech
August	23	PM Lake Kayak/Small Boat	Eric Braden
September	2	General Membership Meeting	
September	6	Manistee Kayak/SB & Pier Tournaments	Eric Braden
September	27	Manistee River Tournaments	Fabian Sepulveda
September	28	Muskegon Lake Salmon Camp out Kayak/SB	Keith Childs
October	7	General Membership Meeting	
October	11	Lake Erie Perch Outing	Dave Zawacki
October	15	Captain/Crew/River Angler 2023 Calendar Mtg	Kelley/Trenz/Nabors/Henderson
October	18	Ludington Pier/Beach Event	Eric Braden
November	1	Manistee River/Pier/Shore Tournaments w DS	Zawacki/Trenz
November	11	General Membership Meeting 2nd Tue. Election Day Room at Senior Center Nov 4	
November	29	Ohio Walleye Tournament	Dave Zawacki
December	2	CHRISTMAS PARTY - HAPPY HOLIDAYS	
December	6	PM & other NW Mi Rivers Tournament	Marc Traver/Adam Trenz
December	13	Huron River Tournament	Roger Hinchcliff

2025 South Haven Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event
Note: SH Steelheaders (SHS) Chapter Events in BOLD * = Not Confirmed		
March		South Haven Steelheaders Spring Kick Off Party
March	13-16	Ultimate Sport Show – DeVos Place, Grand Rapids
March	20	Fishing Seminar – Speaker TBD - South Haven American Legion Post 49*
April	17	Lake Michigan Fisheries Workshop – South Haven American Legion Post 49 *
May	3-4	Horizon Bank Quake Coho Classic - Michigan City, IN
May	9-10	St. Joe Tourney/SW Chapter
May	16	South Haven Pro Am Tournament Captains Registration
May	17-18	South Haven Pro Am Tournament – South Side City Marina
May	24	Merle Morris Tournament – River Bend Boat Club
June	7	South Haven Steelheaders' Harbor Light Brewery Ladies Tournament
June	7-8	Free Fishing Weekend
June	13-15	South Haven Harborfest
August	9	SHS Fish Boil (Blueberry Festival - August 7th-10th)
August	16	SHS Operation Injured Soldier/SH Salute to Veterans
August	30	Labor Day Weekend
November	29	South Haven Steelheaders River Tournament
2024 South Haven Steelheaders Membership & Board Meeting Dates Note: All Board and membership meetings are generally held the third Thursday of each month except for special circumstances such as Pro Am Captain's Meeting set up in May, Fish Boil organizational meeting in August and prior to Deer Season in November. Meeting Location: South Haven American Legion Post 49, 129 Michigan Avenue, South Haven, MI 49090 Board Meetings start at 5:45pm and membership meetings at 7:00pm. For more information email: president@southhavensteelheaders.com		
NO JANUARY MEMBERSHIP MEETING FEB 20th – 3rd Thursday, Guest speaker – TBD MAR 20th – 3rd Thursday (week after GR Ultimate Sports Show, 3/13-3/16) – Fishing Seminar APRIL 17th - 3rd Thursday – Southern Lake Michigan Fisheries Workshop – Dr. Dan O'Keefe presenting MAY 15th – 3rd Thursday *prior to SHS Pro/Am – Membership meeting. JUNE 19th - 3rd Thursday JULY 17th - 3rd Thursday AUG 7th – 1st Thursday – *Prior to the Annual Fish Boil SEP 18th - 3rd Thursday – Regular & Board meeting to prioritize & set next year's events. ID event chairs. OCT 16th - 3rd Thursday –Regular and Board meeting to finalize next year's events and set calendar NOV 6th – 1st Thursday – Regular and Board Meeting to finalize budget and calendar December 18th – 3rd Thursday – Regular Meeting, Election of Directors The 2025 Pro Am Tournament Committee Kick-off meeting is the 2nd Monday of November (11/10/25)		

2025 Southwest MI Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event	Information
Membership meetings and board meeting are held the second Thursday of each month but please confirm online for the most updated information. www.swmisteelheaders.com www.facebook.com/southwestmichigansteelheaders			
March	1	Tackle Palooza (Stevensville, Legion)	
May	8-10	Schu's Summer Challenge Tournament (Tournament Trail Event)	
June	12	Club Meeting – Summer Run Steelhead & Offshore Fishing the Thermocline	
June	20-21	Trolling with the Troops Fishing Event	
September	11	Club Meeting – Fall Run Salmon and Steelhead	
December	6	Winter Challenge River Fishing Tournament	
Meeting Location: Elks Lodge, 601 Riverview Drive, Benton Harbor MI 49022 Southwest Michigan Steelheaders swmisteelheaders.com			

2025 Thumb Chapter Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Time	Event	Location / Information
April	17	7:30 pm	Regular Meeting	Harbor Beach American Legion
May	3	6:00 am	Can2Can Fishing Tournament	Need Workers! Harbor Beach Marina
June	7	6:00 am	Veterans Fishing Outing	Contact Kevin Ramsey for details. Harbor Beach Marina
June	19	7:30 pm	Regular Meeting	Harbor Beach American Legion
August	21	7:30 pm	Regular Meeting	Harbor Beach American Legion
October	16	7:30 pm	Regular Meeting Election of Board/Officers	Harbor Beach American Legion

Contact Paul Neikoski at 810-300-1561 for inquiries.

2025 Thunderbay Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Time	Information
March	8	4:00 pm	Annual Meeting / Dinner
April	7	7:00 pm	Monthly Meeting
May	17	5:30 am	Alpena tournament
June	14	5:30 am	Presque Isle tournament
June	28	5:30 am	Presque Isle tournament
June	29	5:30 am	Presque Isle tournament
July	7	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting
August	23		Rogers City Tournament
September	1	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting
October	6	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting
December	1	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting

2025 White River Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Time	Event information
Note: All meetings will be held at 6:30 pm at the VFW, any changes in location will be decided a couple of days before the meeting. – Any questions or to verify dates/times please call Clint Pollock at (231) 893-0210 or Terry Clark at (231) 893-6805.			
March	6	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
April	3	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
May	1	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
June	5	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
July		6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
August	7	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
September	4	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
October	2	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
November	6	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW
December	4	6:30pm	Meeting at the VFW

For more information, contact your Chapter Membership Director or email mssfamembership@charter.net



MSSFA Board of Directors Meetings 2025

Saturday April 19
at the Michigan Historical Library and Museum - 10:00am

Wednesday June 18
Via TEAMS - 6:00pm

Wednesday August 20
Via TEAMS - 6:00pm

Wednesday October 15
Via TEAMS - 6:00pm

Wednesday December 17
Via TEAMS - 6:00pm



Illustration from pngtree.com



Metro West Steelheaders Events A Success!



The Ultimate Fishing Show (UFS) and Out-DooRama Show (ODR) are trade shows held in Novi Michigan with hundreds of vendors and organizations represented.

Metro West Steelheaders (MWS) in conjunction with Michigan Salmon and Steelhead Fishing Association (MSSFA) have booths at these two shows each winter (over 30 years). MSSFA provides the Great Lakes Fishing Newspaper that is shared with visitors. MWS participates to educate the public about fishing and conservation in Michigan AND to recruit new members! Usually, the main attractions to MWS' booth at the UFS are fish cleaning, crawler harnesses for kids and distribution of GLSFNewspapers. ODR attractions are the Fishing Simulator machine, crawler harnesses and the GLSF-Newspapers.

UFS Show Chair Marc Traver organized the UFS this year! This included booth setup and takedown, the recruiting of volunteers and booth operation for the weekend. Thirty-one members worked in shifts of 5 or so during the four show days. The booth, as usual, was located by the Bass Anglers' "Trout Pond". Marc managed the fish cleaning station with the help of volunteers that cleaned the fish for the young anglers.

Other experienced members helped young anglers learn how to tie wall-eye crawler harnesses! This year, Keith Traver managed the Fishing Simulator ALL FOUR DAYS! He had kids smiling from ear to ear ev-

ery day. The three attractions kept the visitors near the booth all weekend!

Yes, the Great Lakes Sports Fishing newspapers was provided for lots of visitors.

The MWS volunteers talked to hundreds of show visitors about fishing and conservation in Michigan - the Great Lakes, rivers, inland lakes, piers and beaches. They recruited twenty-one new members and helped eighty-six visitors register to get MWS news electronically. Many visitors showed interest in joining MWS.

It was rewarding to see members talk to show visitors; they got to tell stories about Metro West and all the things they have been doing as a fishing club! The next general meeting should be very exciting with all the new faces. We will be ready to welcome the new members and talk to visitors about future events. Metro West members should be proud of

their participation at the Ultimate Fishing Show!! Great team work makes for great results!

Marc said "I would like to thank everyone who worked at the fishing show this year. We had 31 members step up and work the show for the club. Thanks folks! I couldn't chair this event without you. We picked up 21 new members. We also picked up \$1000.00 dollars in donations for our fish cleaning efforts, the fishing simulator and the tying of crawler harness's for the kids. We cleaned well over 130 fish. I would like to say a special thanks to brother Keith Traver for taking on the surprise availability of space to run the club's fishing machine; Keith was at the simulator every hour of the show. The kids loved fighting the fish and the parents were excited as well. Lots of donations were contributed there as well. Again, thanks everyone one for your efforts."



'Zombie' Crappies

By Brian 'Bro' Brosdahl
midwestoutdoors.com

One of my favorite things about midwinter is the accessibility of fishing spots that I didn't have during early ice. Machine travel allows me to cover two to twenty miles fast on the numerous 2,000- to 50,000-acre lakes—and some even larger—in northern Minnesota.

A large percentage of these lakes have basin-dwelling crappies during winter. They move away from hard-bottom shoreline edges and weed beds to deeper holes with mud bottoms. The mud in the basin is fertile and teeming with life, such as young-of-the-year hatches from every species of fish and minnows, plus blood-worms, mayfly larvae and zooplankton.

Black crappies are designed to survive in deep, dark, snow-covered lakes all winter long, having the ability to eat minnows or sift out micro insects and zooplankton with fine gill-rakers that turn tiny things into a fat belly full of tiny things.

Sunset cruise

When the sun sets, crappies rise up in the water column, following the insect life that swims up, darting and floating. Crappies unhinge their jaws wide and swim forward, mouth open, cruising around while slowly gathering piles of micro insects, then swallowing to ingest. You can really gauge a lake's crappie population on your Humminbird MEGA Live at dark when they seemingly come out of the woodwork and are sometimes hard to coax to bite.

I find that a little noise can get their attention. Small spoons with a rattle or flicker blade will draw their attention and bring them to bite. Many times, I have had crappies in this zombie state swim up and appear to fall asleep next to a set line with a minnow. I have dropped a small spoon in the hole next to it and immediately got a reaction strike from the crappie. A couple of wax worms or a small minnow head seems to be the trick. Glow colors like wonder bread or red glow can help, but on gin-clear lakes, anglers should try other colors and patterns at night. You might be surprised how they react!

The Tungsten Slim Spoon drops fast and has a small flicker blade; when the horde of zombie crappies come through, you must get down there fast and entice them with shimmy movements and light, flicker-blade clicks. Day-time crappies sometimes make anglers with forward viewing electronics chase them around on the ice, sometimes in giant circles. But at night, in the muddy holes, the zombie horde

of crappies cruises in slow semi-circles through the insect-rich area. They are less spooky, so anglers can set up a blockade of fishing lines to coax bites.

Best basins

Look for deeper holes or basin areas adjacent to expansive weed flats. Basins can vary in depths from lake to lake. For example, one lake I fish has a maximum depth of 19 feet and the crappies hold in 16 feet. That being said, we are not always fishing the very bottom of the basin. We are fishing the part of the basin that has the most insect-productive mud. I have seen lakes that chart as deep as 90 feet, but the crappies

catch for a meal and move on to another bite such as perch or walleyes.

Larger lakes with good crappie populations have fish that hold to the basin around multiple humps and bars, especially if these structures hold vegetation during summer. When weeds die in late summer through fall, they pulverize and sink to surrounding basins, creating food for insects to eat. A lot of insect life feeds on decaying matter in the basin; they are like little janitors cleaning up the mess. Plus, this matter is the best natural fertilizer. Some lakes have a great nighttime crappie bite on basin flats in the low 20s, even though the lake

ter home. At times, crappies show up at other parts of basin holes, but that's a temporary holding pattern as they swim the expanse to find the best possible hangouts loaded with forage.

Crappies consistently show up in the same basin hotspots year after year. Sometimes, it takes a few extra days or even weeks to get there as the midwinter settles in.

Bro pro tip

I use a St. Croix Panfish Ice Combo Ultra Light rod with 1- or 2-pound test Sunline FC Ice, a split-shot, a Gamakatsu Micro V hook, and one or two wax worms deadsticked at the level of the zombie crappies without



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hold in basins from 28 to 38 feet. On a few lakes, anglers find them in the 40s to over 50-foot depths. I avoid barotrauma (aka exploding crappies) as much as possible by staying in the low 20-foot range. Anglers fishing deep shouldn't sort caught fish. Keep what you

may hold super deep depths even over 100 feet.

Timing is everything

If crappies don't have to drop deep, they hold along an edge that has cover. But the cold fronts that created all the ice will push them down into their basin win-

jigging or moving. Leave it in a rod holder or iFish Pro rod tip-up, spreading extra lines within legal distances for more bites. Do not set the hook; don't tear their paper mouths. They will hook themselves.

Get better results from the time you spend fishing.

Use information from the pros found in every issue of MidWest Outdoors, available by subscribing on our website.

Outdoor communicator Brian "Bro" Brosdahl lives in northern Minnesota. He is a walleye guide in the Cass Lake, Lech Lake and

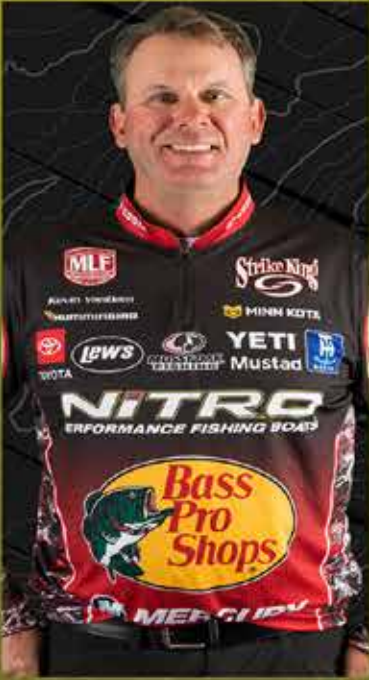
Lake Winnibigoshish areas. He is sponsored by Northland Fishing Tackle, Frabill/Plano, Aqua-Vu, Humminbird/Minn Kota, St. Croix Rods, Ranger Boats, and Evinrude.

Spring Fishing & Boat Show

April 18th & 19th

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