

NORTHWEST PENNSYLVANIA WEEKLY FISHING REPORT



Reporting Date: 2/27/12

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The information in the NW PA Fishing Report is based on the observations and opinions of individuals at the reporting tackle shops and expert area anglers. The information is reliable however it is not independently verified.

If you have current fishing information or a picture of your catch from one of the waters in the counties of Crawford, Erie, Mercer or Venango that you would like to share, please send it to Darl Black at darlblack@windstream.net. In providing a picture, you are agreeing to it being posted in the Fishing Report.

The Landing Net

As I prepare this Fishing Report, the weather outside feels like early April rather than February. This has been an unusual winter. Not a good season for the hardcore ice fishermen, but a near perfect winter for Erie steelheaders. And a great winter for those walleye and musky anglers who like to fish French Creek and the Allegheny River – with perhaps more muskies caught and released from the French Creek drainage than we will see in a long time. Expectation among some anglers is an early movements of fish to the shallows. But my prediction is for cold and snowy March.



Jerry VanTassel at Timberland Bait managed to hold his annual Canadohta Ice Fishing Tournament on February 18 after postponing it from earlier in the month; his Conneaut Lake Ice Tournament was cancelled altogether. Chris Chiesa of Meadville caught the largest pike in the one-day Canadohta contest; it was 29.5 inches long and weighed just over 6 pounds.

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Farewell to ice fishing season! It's the end of February, and all major lakes in PGLR are free of ice – most waterways never achieved safe ice. Open water in February only happens once in a blue moon. In reading the NW PA Fishing Report this week, you will see references to some anglers still ice fishing on a handful of area lakes that have “marginal” ice – just don't call it “safe ice.” Warmer than normal temps plus expected rain this week will likely leave weak, porous grey ice – or wipe it away completely. Don't expect to walk on hard water anytime in March.

French Creek – Meandering through Erie, Crawford, Mercer and Venango counties

Editor's Note: With French Creek ice free and not flooded, the Creek Crew has been enjoying a fantastic time this winter...and the fish just keep coming! Last Sunday, February 19, I met up with Dustin Shay, Justin Shay and Russell Chaney near Meadville for a photo opportunity. Justin caught a wall-eye at the spot before the group had to leave in order to meet Boone Shay further up the Creek. Later I received an email detailing that Justin caught 3 walleyes and a musky; Boone got 4 smallmouths and a musky; and Dustin got 3 walleyes and a musky. All fish came on live creek bait or hair jigs. On February 26, I met the group once again at a different spot, hoping to get a musky picture. Russell landed a single walleye. I may not get an invite again, as it seems I may have a “one wall-eye” jinx for the group when I show up!



Scott Walters (Saegertown): “My son Tyler and a couple of his fishing buddies have had a fantastic February catching muskies from French Creek and deep holes in feeder creeks. He has been using large **Rapala #18 Minnows**, **Sebile Soft Swimmer** and his grandfather's homemade **Shay Slide Baits**. His best day was one of the foulest days of this winter – during the recent snowstorm he landed six muskies and lost several others. All fish were released, but a couple of the muskies were in the low 40s.” Check out a photo of one of Tyler's muskies in the *Livewell*. Filed 2/26/12

Russell Chaney (Meadville): “My best day the last two weeks was landing 10 muskies. Most were smaller fish, although the biggest one was 43 inches. I was fishing deep holes on tributary stream to French Creek just up from the mouth. Muskies have been holding in some of these spots for most of February.” Check out one of Russell's larger musky in the *Livewell*. Filed 2/26/12

John Wilpula (Cochranton): “I floated a section of French Creek last Saturday in my kayak. I ended up with a nice musky taken at the mouth of Woodcock Creek on a homemade black hair jig. It was quite a rodeo getting my kayak and fish to the shore and up on the bank for a photo. I estimated the length at 43” measured against my hip boot. I also landed a 15.5” smallie later that day from an area exactly as Dustin Shay described catching them – a 2' to 3' mud flat. The smallmouth took a small **Yum Craw Papi** rigged on a snagless slider head that I custom pour. This flat looks to have a lot of potential, and I'm sure there were more fish to be had but I was running out of daylight and had to get off the creek.” See photo in *Livewell*. Filed 2/18/12

CRAWFORD COUNTY

Pymatuning Lake

Dave Richter (Richter's General Store): "Pymatuning is ice-free except for some of the bays which have thin covering – keeping several boat ramps closed. A fishing buddy and I launched my boat twice this past week at a main lake ramp in the Snodgrass area. One day we had four walleye and the other day we had seven walleye – all in the 15" to 18" range. There were a few other boats out this past week as well. Boat anglers were catching walleye on blade baits and jig-n-minnow in deepwater structure. One customer reported catching several large crappies in deep water. There have been a few guys wading the shoreline during the evenings already around Tuttle Point and Wexford areas. And anglers fishing the weak ice from the Jamestown Marina docks are catching a few bluegill and crappie. With this mild weather, we expect the walleyes to move early to spawn, and crappies to move earlier than normal to the shallows as well." Filed 2/26/12

Chris Hall (Espyville Outdoors): "Not much to report on the North end of lake right now. Over the weekend, there were a few boats launching at Manning and fishing the Hemlock Island shoal, but I didn't get any reports back. The lake is drawn down making launching difficult. There are some anglers hitting the Linesville Spillway area – no one is saying if they are catching walleye yet...but it's one of the first spots every spring for 'eye, crappie and even a musky or two." Filed 2/27/12

Sugar Lake

Chuck Papinchak (Cochranton): "Well, we didn't have a good ice fishing season by any means, with larger lakes never getting safe ice. Even Tamarack only had a small section frozen for a short time. But a couple of the smallest lakes in the county had 4" of fishable ice; Sugar and Canadohta have remained frozen right up through this past weekend. I've been fishing Sugar with friends and doing pretty good. A week ago we had 40 panfish – mix of crappie and perch. On our last ice trip on February 22, we caught another mix of panfish which included some big perch – including a 12" one. We also caught four largemouth bass from 15 to 20 inches." Filed 2/24/12

Canadohta Lake

Jerry VanTassel (Timberland Bait): "We were finally able to hold our Ice Fishing Tournament on February 18. The number of contestants was down from past years but that was to be expected due to cancellation of our earlier date due to lack of ice. We had a total of 110 contestants registered. The winning 29-1/2" pike was caught by Chris Chiesa of Meadville. The winning walleye was a 19-3/4" fish caught by Kevin Ferrie of Erie. P.J. Brenot of Cochranton won in the perch category and Dan Palmer of Parker won for crappie. The winner in the kid category was Bailey Kozalla of Saegertown with a big walleye."

VanTassel continues: "As of Sunday, February 26, there were still anglers fishing on Canadohta, although you could only get on the ice at the PF&BC ramp. With warm weather and rain this week, ice season is over. I'll be closing the bait shop for a few weeks until trout season or when the crappies start biting in the shallows – whichever comes first."

Woodcock Creek Lake

Jerry VanTassel has reports of continuing catches of walleye in the spillway below Woodcock Dam; many of the fish are sublegal size. Dustin Shay and Chuck Papinchak report the occasional sublegal musky caught in the spillway, too. "The fishable area is rather small, and you can quickly get too many fishermen in the spillway to make casting or drifting bait very difficult," adds Papinchak.

ERIE COUNTY

Presque Isle Bay

Al Nacopoulos (B.A.C. Bait – Erie): “It’s like spring in February up here on The Bay! Anglers were out in boats over the weekend. They were catching perch and crappie at the Stink Hole; crappie, perch and bluegill at Waterworks; and perch and bluegill in Marina Lake; the occasional steelhead is being caught, too. One customer stopped in to say he caught two largemouth bass and a 36” inch pike in Perry Monument Bay. Several other customers were headed into the Lagoons to search for pike, too.” Filed 2/27/12

Thomas Watral (Erie) is a regular at the shoreline hotspots on the Bay; here are his reports from the past week:

February 17 – “I caught 25 perch in the 10”

na wall in the morning. In the afternoon, I

caught 8 big ones on minnow-n-bobber

February 20 – “I went perch fishing to the

hitting hard and fast, making it work to

ble headers. I ended up with 25 perch.

getting 8 crappies and 5 perch. I used an

were suspended just off the bottom.”

February 25 – “I went to the docks for a while. Wind was strong and fish were hitting slow. I got 8 large

perch on minnows.”

February 26 – “I went to the Border Patrol Dock about 8 AM but only caught small ones. After 11 AM I head-

ed to Perry’s Landing, and ended up getting 25 large perch on minnows rigs fished very slowly. The biggest

ones came by dragging the bait along the bottom and pausing occasionally.”



to 14” range on minnow rigs on the Mari-
fished for crappies at the Stink Hole –
with bait set 4 to 5 feet deep.”

Marina under light winds. Fish were
keep fishing 3 rods at a time; several dou-
Then I went to Dobbins Landing until dark,
ice fishing jig under a bobber – crappies

Erie Tributaries

Jeff Staaf (Poor Richards): “Anglers are catching steelhead but it has slowed down some with the water clearing. The best area seems to be the mid and upper section of Elk. Fish the deeper holes toward the bottom of the hole. Single eggs are working for spin fishermen, and black or white Woolly Buggers, light color Sucker Spawn and small nymphs for the fly guys. With expected rain this week, things might pick up for the weekend. Usually when we have a mild winter with fresh fish moving in during January and February, our March/April run is hurt. Time will tell.” Filed 2/27/12

Mike Tome (B.A.C. Bait – Fairview): “It’s been a darn good winter for steelheading, and we still have fresh fish moving in. Just this morning, a customer dropped off an 8-pound fresh run male. A friend witnessed an angler catch a 32 inch, 12-13 pound fresh-run trout from Crooked Creek over the weekend. The drawback I see to this open water in the winter is possible lack of a spring run of additional fish. But with the forecast of relatively mild temps and some rain this coming week, streams should be in decent shape for the first weekend in March – and there will be fish in them!” Filed 2/27/12

Bill Logan (Pleasantville): “Last week I caught two steelheads in high water on Elk. Three days later, I fished the Legion hole. Not many fish, but I watched a 5-year-old boy hook and land a five pounder. The next half mile upstream held only 2 fish!” (See Logan’s photo in *Livewell*) Filed 2/2/-12

Last ice on Lake Pleasant and Eaton Reservoir

Jerry VanTassel (Timberland Bait) reported that as of this immediate past weekend, anglers were still ice fishing on Lake Pleasant and on Bull’s Dam (Eaton). “They were catching nice trout at Pleasant, and some bluegills at Bull’s Dam. Most likely this was the last weekend of ice fishing on these lakes.” Filed 2/27/12

MERCER COUNTY

Lake Wilhelm

Bob Mohra (Fergie's Bait): "Although the ice is gone on the main lake, no boats are out fishing yet. A few anglers have been fishing from shore or in kayaks around the Sheakleyville causeway. Some days they are catching bluegills and crappies, and some days not. A bit inconsistent until water warms a tad more." Filed 2/27/12



Shenango Report

Laurie Frantz (R&L Bait): "Shenango Lake is ice free, but the water level is so low no one can launch a boat. I had reports of perch and crappie being caught in the Shenango River below Pymatuning Dam. My daughter caught a 36" musky in the Shenango River below Shenango Dam. Another customer brought in a 12" crappie. Not a lot of people fishing yet, but guys have been stopping in at the shop to buy their tackle for the summing season – worm rigs, jigs and bobbers are flying off the shelves." Filed 2/27/12

Neshannock Creek

Bob Shuey (Neshannock Creek Fly Shop): "The stream has been fishing well when the conditions are good. March 3rd is the pre-season stocking at 12 noon, plus an All You Can Eat Pancake Breakfast at the Volant Fire Dept. Bring the kids and they can help carry the buckets!" Filed 2/25/12

VENANGO COUNTY

Allegheny River

Steve Udick (Oil City): "I caught a beautiful walleye on February 21; it was 29 inches and weighed 8.5 pounds. Looking at torn fins, it appears to be a very old fish. I got my pics and released it. Bass have been biting also – got four hook-ups on Sunday, February 19th, landing two of them – both over 16 inches. Also caught a nice bass same evening I got the walleye. All fish have been hitting at twilight." See a photo of Steve's walleye in the *Livewell*. Filed 2/22/12



Kneal Wiegel (Wiegel Bros. Marine): "Customers are telling me it's been a great February for walleye on the river. I haven't been out myself due to work load at the shop, but anglers have been by with catches so the fish must be hitting pretty good." Filed 2/22/12

The Livewell



Bill Logan with steelhead

Justin Shay



Steve Udick



The Livewell: French Creek Muskies for February



Russell Chaney



Tyler Walters



Justin Shay



John Wilpula's kayak musky



Winners

This week's photo winner of Gamma Ice Line is Dustin Shay.

Contributor winner of Yum F2 Baits is Tom Watral of Erie .

Bulletin Board

- Monthly Free Fly-tying Classes; 2nd Tuesday; 6 PM to 7:30 PM; 814-590-1366 at Farrell's Hook, Line & Stitch (At the Bank Mall) , Meadville
- Weekly Free Lure-Making & Fly Tying Classes; Every Saturday; 6 PM to 8 PM; Jigger Wholesale on Georgetown Road; info at cltackle@hotmail.com
- Weekly Fly Tying Class, Tuesday evening; 724-533-3212
Neshannock Creek Fly Shop, Volant
- March 10 Neshannock Creek Fly Shop Luncheon Stocking and Rod Raffle
Call 724-533-3212 for information



Crawford County Convention & Visitors Bureau at www.visitcrawford.org

Oil Region Alliance at www.oilregion.org

VisitErie at www.visiterie.com

VisitMercerCountyPA at www.visitmercercountypa.com