



THE SMALLMOUTH HORIZON

Helping to Protect and Preserve Quality Smallmouth Bass Fishing

May 2008

Welcome to the New Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance Newsletter

By Dan Johnson, Newsletter Editor

As of this issue the WSA newsletter will no longer be printed and mailed to our members. You will now find it only here on our website, in an Adobe Acrobat pdf file. You will need to have Adobe Reader installed on your computer in order to access this format. It can be downloaded for free from:

www.adobe.com/products/reader/

The main reason for this change is to save the club the considerable costs of printing and mailing, but there are some advantages to you as well.

We are now able to bring you beautiful, living color. Not just for photos, but in our newly designed graphics too. Plus the efforts and activities of our club and its members will now reach a larger audience and, we hope, help us grow by attracting new members.

Alliance members who have given us their email addresses will receive a monthly notice when the newsletter is available online with a link to the page. If you do not get this notice just send your email address to the editor, Dan Johnson at: johnson7@tds.net Your address will not be shared with anyone else.

As much as we expect these changes to bring you a better looking, more informative and entertaining newsletter, it can be even better with your help.

Everyone is encouraged to send in regular contributions in the way of trip reports and fishing stories, photos and illustrations, news and calendar events, feature articles, book or video reviews.

In short, if you know more than I (and how could you not?) I want to hear from you. Together we can make this one of the finest fishing club newsletters in the country.

When to Leave Smallmouth Alone

By Matt Straw with Gord Pyzer.
Excerpted with permission of the authors
and *In-Fisherman* magazine.

As fishing pressure increases on most of our important waters, the critical question for anglers, from an ethical standpoint, has always been: When should I harvest and when should I release? In the near future, catch and release and selective harvest may not be enough. Soon we'll have to start asking ourselves, when are we going to fish, and when should we leave the fish alone, using science, logic, nature, and conservation for guidelines.

Smallmouth populations in the Great Lakes experience raids on nests from perch, suckers, and darters. Early observations suggest that they can spawn successfully even under the persistent assault of the gobies. Smallmouths seem to be able to adapt to this kind of natural threat.

Smallmouths can fail to adapt to pressure from humans, however. Technology now advances exponentially. The kind of thinking that affords the angler underwater cameras and global positioning by satellite, not to mention an ever-evolving array of lures and tackle, cannot be adapted to without concessions. Man is able to observe and communicate his findings about fish behavior. We know when and where they spawn, hunt, and winter.

Gord Pyzer, a fishing pro and guide who recently retired from a position as fishery manager for the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, believes anglers in northern states and Canada should never target bedding smallmouths. "Once they set up on nests, it's simply not a good idea to fish for them," he says.

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“The impact of angling, even on a catch-and-release basis, for nesting bass can be devastating in the North” Pyzer says. In more southerly locations, the often long spring spawning period is considered by many anglers to be the best time to fish. The spawn is protracted and the fish are less vulnerable. Also, waterways tend to be murkier, helping to hide bedding fish.

Researchers [including Dr. Mark Ridgeway] selected lakes and rivers in southeastern Ontario near the New York border where the bass season is closed in spring, but the season for other species is open. They wanted to assess the impact of pre-season catch-and-release angling on the reproductive success of largemouth and smallmouth bass.

“In one of the lakes (Lake Opinicon) as many as 63% of the anglers on the water were observed targeting nesting bass under the guise of fishing for other species,” Ridgeway says. “When the researchers went under water to count the number of bass with visible hook wounds, they found in the most heavily targeted lake that nearly 100 % of the nesting males had been caught and released. If the bass season had been open, every nesting male could have been killed.”

“Fishing for smallmouths on the beds is a bad idea up here. I don’t know of any serious biologist working with smallmouth bass in the northern tier of states or provinces that would recommend fishing for bedding smallmouth bass.”

“A bit of knowledge can be a dangerous thing,” Ridgeway notes. “Anglers hear that smallmouths produce more fry than the system can handle. That may be true in some systems, but in the North, the strong year classes are the exception.”

“The late spawning period means that the fish are still tiny when winter arrives, subjecting them to a long period of virtual starvation. First-year mortality can be close to 100% in some years due to weather factors and a scarcity of prey for the small bass in these typically infertile waters.”

“Why would any serious bass angler fishing for northern strains of bass want to threaten an entire year class?”

High grade smallmouth bass fisheries teeter on the ability of the population to maintain as many large fish as possible.

Below are some of the findings of Pyzer and other biologists that support his contention:

- Smallmouth repeatedly home to the same specific nesting site year after year.
- Nesting sites are critical and need protection from shoreline disturbance.
- Northern smallmouth don’t mature to spawn for the first time until they are between 5 and 9 years of age and between 10 and 16 inches.
 - Big bass are critical for spawning success. They nest earlier and recuperate faster, and their offspring are more likely to survive the winter starvation period.
 - Force a small bass to spawn and its remaining lifespan becomes less than two years. Such is the cost of reproduction.
- Targeting nesting males, even when a catch-and-release spring season allows it, affects recruitment. When a male takes 10 minutes to return to its nest, 90% of such nests are abandoned. When males return to the nest in just two minutes, more than half the nests are still abandoned.
- Excellent year classes are the exception and not the rule, and winter determines everything. If a cold fall arrives early and winter drags on for an eternity, the previous spring’s hatch could be lost.
- High grade smallmouth bass fisheries teeter on the ability of the population to maintain as many large fish as possible.

Says Pyzer, “We’ve hammered the smallmouths in many waters. We call it the myth of sustainability. The fishery will always be there. But do we really want to go out and catch 12-inch bass all the time? We need to be leaders and demand quality fisheries from politicians.”

Consider the idea of laying down the rod in some situations. Is the fun of railing on dozens of fish worth the chance of hurting populations in the long run? We think not.

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Articles, photos, information, and calendar events for the newsletter are encouraged and should be submitted by the 1st day of the month of issue to: Dan Johnson, 426 Glenway St., Madison WI 53711. If possible, MSWord files sent to: johnson7@tds.net are most appreciated.

\$5,172 = UNBELIEVABLE!

By Mike Simon, Auction Chairman

Every now and then, several different factors come together at the right time. If you were at the annual WSA Trash and Treasures Auction, you know what I mean. A magical combination of the largest turnout for *any* event in WSA history — 50 plus people in the mood to have some fun. Some great trips, rods, reels, great fly selections, nets, clothing, baked goods, maple syrup, artwork, and gift certificates were among the numerous items for sale.

The presence of Bob Harrison as our auctioneer, with his great sense of humor and ability to keep things moving, and Larry Meicher (aka Al Linder) for getting us past the \$11 mark, contributed greatly to our success. And, thanks to the generosity of both donors and bidders who, without them, this truly special event would not have been possible.

Special thanks: To those who helped set-up and clean-up. To the Maple Tree Restaurant for accommodations. To Jack Browning for inviting so many people. To Susie Bredeson and Kathy Simon for handling the registration and cashier duties. To all who donated — please patronize these businesses and individuals. To all guests and members for your continued enthusiasm and generous support of this club. Thank you, everyone!

Auction proceeds

Gross Auction Night Sales: (including clothing sales)	\$5,497.00
Expenses: (Signs and purchases)	(\$403.21)
Post-auction sales:	\$79.00
Grand total:	\$5,172.79



Auction chairman, Mike Simon and auctioneer, Bob Harrison did a great job in keeping things lively .

Our Next Meeting:

There are no monthly meetings from May through August. Call a friend, go fishing, catch, photograph and release, and send us a picture.

See you in September!

Upcoming Events:

- **Monday, May 26th 7:00 P.M.**
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland

Badger Fly Fishers monthly meeting.
Bob Harrison, "North Country Pike"