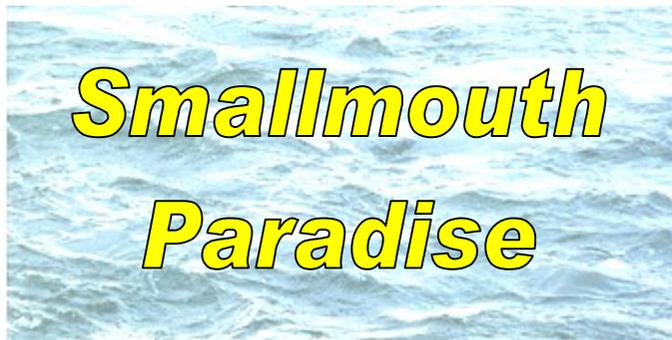




THE SMALLMOUTH HORIZON

Helping to Protect and Preserve Quality Smallmouth Bass Fishing

February 2009



by Matt Straw with Terry Battisti

This article originally appeared in the January, 2009 edition of In-Fisherman magazine and is used with their kind permission. It features four destinations. We will begin with "Sturgeon Bay" and continue

We are now neck deep in the Internet epoch, wherein the information age accelerated to light speed capability. For smallmouth anglers, it means any fishery you haven't heard of by now probably hasn't been born yet. A boat flying past every few minutes is the norm most places these days. Unless you have access to paradise.

Most of us find our own, personal little smallmouth paradise and no, I'm not telling you where mine is. But what would you pay to find a place where big, fat, sassy, bronze bass abound yet haven't been discovered, or just a place where other boats are few and far between, and pressure is low to nonexistent? But wait, that's not all. Throw in a shot at trophy smallmouths, with big numbers of fish over 4 pounds. Still not convinced? What if we offer some of the most beautiful scenery in North America, and a shot at trophy caliber fish of another species or two? Now what would you pay?

Sturgeon Bay

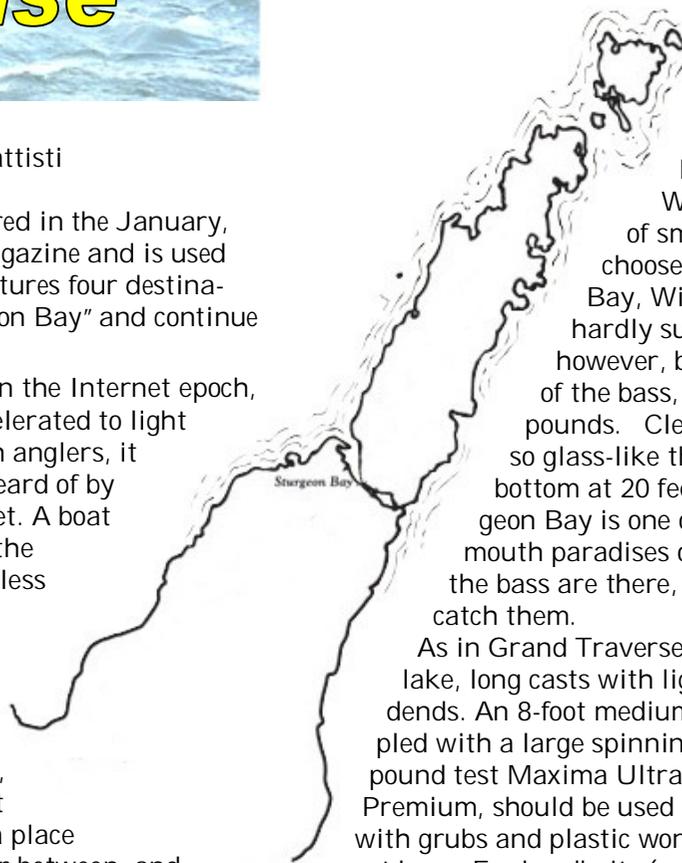
We pulled into the shadow of limestone bluffs, where the wind had been beating the shoreline for several days. We pitched jigs with 5-inch grubs, wacky-rigged Senkos under floats, and jig worms, making contact with bass every other cast. Looking

up after an hour, we could see islands, tree topped bluffs, and azure waters to the western horizon, but no other boats.

With hundreds of miles of smallmouth habitat to choose from around Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin, solitude is hardly surprising. You might, however, be surprised at the size of the bass, which average nearly 4 pounds. Clearly (since the water is so glass-like the fish can be seen on bottom at 20 feet and beyond), Sturgeon Bay is one of the finest smallmouth paradises on earth. No denying the bass are there, so all you have to do is catch them.

As in Grand Traverse Bay, across the big lake, long casts with light line pay big dividends. An 8-foot medium-light action rod, coupled with a large spinning reel spooled with 5-pound test Maxima Ultragreen or 4-pound Ande Premium, should be used to pitch tubes or jigs with grubs and plastic worms of subtle, translucent hues. For hardbaits (suspending baits excel here in spring and fall), spool up with 10-pound superline like Berkley FireLine and a 9-foot, 8-pound fluorocarbon leader.

The Sturgeon Bay Canal offers access to both Lake Michigan and Green Bay, which surround the Door County peninsula. Rare to find poor fishing conditions on both sides of the peninsula, but when it's



rough, Sturgeon Bay itself offers protected water somewhere, and the fishing will make you wonder why you wanted to go out on the big water anyway.

The fishing heats up in May, when pitching suspending baits to shallow shoreline flats not only produces monster smallmouth, but hooks the occasional 8 to 15-pound brown trout and sometimes boats a bunch of walleyes averaging over 7 pounds. Shallow fishing remains hot through early June. Smallmouth move deeper in summer, but come up to feed along rocky bluffs and points when the wind is blowing in. During fall, the best fishing can be found near bottom in 20 to 40-foot depths, where dragging a tube or slowly working a suspending bait on a 3-way rig reaps big rewards.

During last year's Sturgeon Bay Open (held during the middle of May), three smallmouths over 6 pounds were weighed in. The bass just keep getting bigger here. The place to call for up-to-date information, tackle, and lures is Howie's Tackle in Sturgeon Bay, 920/746-9916.

Traverse City, Michigan

The sandy beds of ancient, forgotten seas, glaciers, and wind conspired, over millions of years, to create some of the biggest dunes on earth along Michigan's western shoreline. Three steps up, two steps back, clawing to the top, you stand and look out over a world of turquoise water and perfect sand beaches that stretch to the blue horizon in both directions. The far horizon is blue. No land in sight.

This is what paradise looks like in the story books, but instead of palms you find massive white pines and cedars along the creeks and rivers. Oak, maple, and red pine forests crest the now-stable dunes that roll inland for miles. Vineyards producing some of the finest wines in North America have appeared here, many in the past decade. This is a paradise for hikers, campers, sightseers, bird watchers, and of course, fishermen.

Fishing for salmon last August from the piers of Manistee Harbor, we watched anglers all around landing smallmouth bass on live alewives meant for kings. My companion lamented, "Smallmouths are never here when kings are in. Looks like we're in for a tough morning." Nothing tough about this, I

thought. I was buoyed up, my spirits high. Big, fat, sassy Manistee smallmouths, almost nonexistent in the national press, were flopping all over the pier.

Things like that make you smile —make you wonder what's out there when you top that dune. Somewhere in that expanse are smallmouths unknown to the world at large, nestled into little rocky enclaves, harbors, and wrecks along an endless shoreline extending much farther than the eye can see — all the way to Manistique in the Upper Peninsula, and on to far Green Bay, some thousand miles of shoreline away. Very few venture far from the harbors in search of smallmouth here, but the know fisheries within this massive area encompass fine fishing for 4 to 6-pounders among the many islands, bays, connected rivers, and familiar wrecks. But what's out there on those not-so-familiar wrecks and yet-to-be discovered rockpiles? Nobody knows.

Grand Traverse Bay in Michigan and all its surrounding habitat have been explored, yet remain lightly fished for smallmouth. Kevin VanDam, for instance, knows some of the best wrecks and other hot spots in that area, and he claims it's one of the best un-kept secrets in all of fishing. North of Traverse City, primary shoreline substrates gradually make the transition from sand to rock. Up in Charlevoix, the bays are floored almost entirely with rock. And between Manistee and Petoskey, many long stretches of wild shoreline exist between boat ramps. With no protection from a sudden westerly, it would be a daunting and risky endeavor to explore that entire 100 mile shoreline for smallmouth bass.

But, fishing in the shadow of impossible sand bluff, forested hills dotted with vineyards, and peach orchards rolling away into the distance, you'll find connected inland lakes beckoning with winks of aquamarine. Streams roll in from cedar glades, and Lake Michigan is clear as air. North America's best shot at finding trophy smallmouth habitat known to nobody else is found right here, but that's not all you'll catch. Throw a suspending bait, or troll a minnow bait, and the next fish could be a steelhead, a world-record brown trout, a laker, or a king salmon ripping line off your reel.

And that, in our minds, adds up to a smallmouth paradise unparalleled in the known universe. Of course, the weather could turn rough. The tiny ship

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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.

could be getting tossed. If not for the efforts of the fearless crew. . .

In June, smallmouth spawn in depths of 4 to 16 feet, and can be found in the protected bays and coves of Grand Traverse area. August, when winds are lightest, is the time to explore the open seas for hidden rockpiles and forgotten wrecks. As far as we know, nobody guides for smallmouth here, and what could be a better recommendation? For fishing information, contact the Traverse City Chamber of Commerce, 231/947-5075.

Notice of change in meeting dates

Due to a scheduling conflict at the Mapletree on St. Patrick's Day, we have moved our March meeting to Monday, March 23rd. We will hold a joint meeting with our fellow club, the Badger Fly Fishers. Our program has yet to be determined.

We're looking for a few good men and women

Currently the board of our club consists entirely of the four officers. (You will see them listed on page two) The officers are responsible for all functions of the club.

We're seeking additional board members to help with acquiring speakers, overall feedback on projects or programs that support our cause, and to help out with maintaining the functions of our monthly meetings, annual auction, and The Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance in general.

Our board has room for four additional board members. Current officers will remain intact for 2009 unless other members are willing to fill some of those positions. The board welcomes your help.

If you would be willing to serve as a member of the board, please contact one of the officers.

The Menominee River: the good, the bad and the ugly.

The current online edition of Grays Sporting Journal has a pretty good article on the Menominee River and its renowned smallmouth fishery. The best way to find it is to go to their website: grayssporting-journal.com and then click on: "Hiding in Plain Sight."

And speaking of The Menominee River, mining exploration company, Aquila Resources is expanding their Back 40 Project, and is drilling test holes in Menominee County Michigan outside of Stephenson, near the river

This bears watching, and you can learn more and keep informed by visiting the website: <http://www.menomineeriver.com/>

Send Larry a card

Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance member Larry Meicher is now back at home while he continues to battle serious illness.

If you would like to drop Larry a card and tell him that he is in your thoughts, his address is:
5258 Salisbury Rd.
Rio, WI 53960

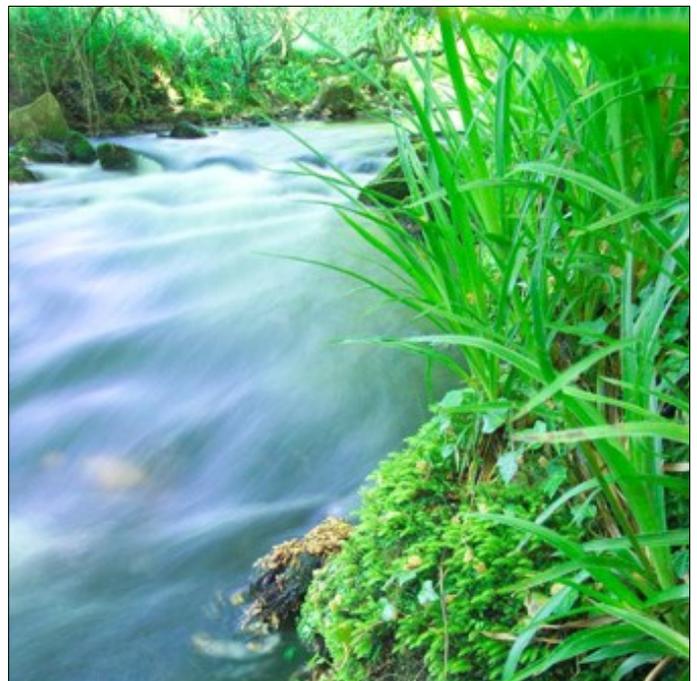


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Our Next Meeting:

Tuesday
February 17th
Mapletree Restaurant
McFarland

Karl Scheidegger, Warmwater Rivers Management Biologist for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, will update the club on the Wisconsin small-mouth streams project.

Karl first told us of this effort at one of last year's meetings. The results of this project could eventually be a better classification of Wisconsin's smallmouth streams and rivers, which would allow the angler to find exactly the fishing experience that he wants.



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Upcoming Events:

- Saturday, February 7th 9:00 A.M.
Turners Hall, Madison
BFF Spring Opener. Terry and Roxanne Wilson, "Catching More and Larger Bluegills" and "Largemouth Bass, Beyond the Basics." Tim Landwehr, "Smallmouth Fishing in Wisconsin."
- Tuesday, February 17th 7:00 P.M.
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland
WSA monthly meeting.
Karl Scheidegger on the Wis. SMB streams project
- Monday, February 23rd 7:00 P.M.
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland
BFF monthly meeting.
Bob Harrison, "British Columbia Cutthroats"
- Monday, March 23rd 7:00 P.M.
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland
WSA and BFF monthly meeting.
Due to our normal Tuesday meeting date coinciding with St. Patrick's Day, we will hold a joint meeting with the Badger Fly Fishers on the fourth Monday in March.