



THE SMALLMOUTH HORIZON

Helping to Protect and Preserve Quality Smallmouth Bass Fishing

April 2009

Are you ready to have some fun?

by Mike Simon

Then plan on attending our fourth annual Trash and Treasure Auction on April 21st at the Maple Tree Restaurant in McFarland.

Registration will begin at 6:30 P.M. and the auction will start at 7 P.M. As always, you are welcome to come earlier if you want to eat dinner before the auction.

Bob Harrison has agreed to be our auctioneer extraordinaire one again this year. With Bob showcasing his knowledge of everything outdoors, and his great sense of humor, there is never a dull moment!

Members and non-members alike have generously donated a wide variety of auction items. Long-time donor members and guides, Kip Vieth and Roger Lapenter, along with new guide/member donors Ron Barefield, Hunter Dorn, and Doc Sabec have donated trips. Ken Kosciak is offering a canoe outing again this year. Woodworking items from Andy and other donors, Stan Nichol's folk art gourd bird houses, along with Tightline's flies, are always popular. The hand-tied fly selections by various members also bring spirited bidding.

We have rods & reels from Sage, St. Croix, Mitchell, Shimano, Orvis, and Diawa. You'll also find gift cards from Cabela's, Gander Mountain, and a host of restaurants.

A list of donated items is on our web site and will be updated regularly. We welcome all donations! This is a great time to clean-out the closet, garage, and basement of unwanted gear. One man's trash is another man's treasure!

This event is open to the public. As important as donations are to the cause, it is equally important that we have bidders/buyers in the audience. Please consider bringing a guest or two to help make this our most successful yet! If you attended before, or talked with someone who has, I'm sure you've heard how much fun we have at our largest event of the year. It's a time when you can help out by simply showing up.

Over the past year, we have contributed to Sauk County Youth Conservation Days, Fishing Has No Boundaries, The Kid's Ice Fishing Day here in Madison, the Pine Island landing improvement, and the Blockhouse Creek project completion.

A special note: in memory of Larry Meicher, who has been a member of the alliance and of special help at our auctions (Mr. "eleven, eleven, eleven"), there will be no bids in the amount of \$11 this year.

WSA, Ltd. wants to thank all donors and bidders for their generosity and support of this club. Without them, our continued growth would not be possible!

Spring Hearings coming in April

by Mike Simon

This year's DNR spring hearings and Conservation Congress meetings will be held on Monday, April 13th at 7 P.M. You can attend and vote in any county of your choosing, and each county has its own location. All counties now use electronic ballots. You must attend to vote, but you can leave whenever you want.

There are plenty of issues to vote on. Of special interest to our club this year is the Congress's Warm Water Committee's advisory question:

Question 90: Would you support separating largemouth and smallmouth bass regulations and management, allowing them to be managed as two separate species?

Continued on next page.

If it passes, this would be a dream for our club and all smallmouth anglers. The possibilities are endless. It's important that you get out and voice your opinion on this and other important questions. A few people statewide make the choice for many at these hearings!

You can get more information, find your county's location, and view the entire questionnaire at: http://dnr.wi.gov/org/nrboard/congress/spring_hearings/index.html

The Spring Smallmouth Bite

by Thomas La Beau

I've been an avid smallmouth fishermen for the last 20 years. About 90% of my time is devoted to fishing rivers for bass, with the remainder fishing shield lakes. The rivers I fish flow into Lake of the Woods which is jointly shared by the state of Minnesota and the province of Ontario. These rivers are primarily boulder strewn with a gravel and sandy bottom. This article will focus on the spring migration of smallies to the many small feeder rivers that have the ideal bottom structure and slack water areas that bass need to spawn.

I can generally count on them to begin their upstream migration when water temps are in the high 40's to low 50's range. This takes place about the end of April into the start of May. Usually by the 3rd week in May water temps have risen to the low 60's and the males are searching for suitable nest building sites. Basically this will be anywhere the current is being deflected by small points that jut out from the bank, which create slack water. Downstream sides of islands

are also prime spawn areas. Stream smallies must have still water for nest building.

Our opener is usually the Memorial Day weekend in the last part of May. I can count on the fish to be shallow from that time until about the 2nd week in June. The type of weather and water levels dictate what kind of presentations I'll use. Usually the water temps are in the low 60's at this time and the bass, as a rule, are not willing to move off the beds very far to strike a lure.

For the last six years I've been using a bait called the IKE-CON pre-rigged worm for this period. For those of you who are not familiar with this lure, it can best be described as a 6" plastic worm with a flat side and corkscrew shape that does just that when you retrieve it. Back in the early nineties when I used to guide, a client pulled this bait out of his box when the action was really slow and I want to tell you I was totally blown away by the fish we caught on it.

We were throwing cranks, plastic grubs, spinner baits and getting ziltch until we started lobbing this bait at 'em. The lure has such an irresistible natural swimming action the bass can't stand not slammin' it. You connect it with a small snap swivel. Having this ball bearing snap is a must or your line will get twisted in no time because of the corkscrew action when retrieved. I prefer to use no added weight, just the ball bearing snap and the weight of the worm work great for the best action.

I like to drop the bait within a foot or so of a good looking spot, let it sink to the bottom and use light twitch and pause retrieves back to the boat. A steady retrieve works also, but day in and out the crank and pause motion is the ticket. The best colors to use are any with a contrasting color on the tip of the tail. My personal favorite is black with a chartruese tip. This gives a better visual target for the bass to key in on.

The company makes this bait in about 50 patterns. I probably go through a couple dozen of them every spring. Generally one can land about a dozen or so fish before they puke out and loose their action. What happens is the hooks pull out of the plastic and tear up the bait.

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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 to: Dan Johnson, 426 Glenway St. Madison, WI 53711. Word files sent to: johnson7@tds.net are most appreciated.

They're reasonably priced though, at a couple bucks apiece. I purchase them directly from [IKE-CON](#). Remember though, you can't go wrong with any pattern that has a contrasting color on the tip of the tail. Pinch down the barbs and you won't have a problem releasing fish. They'll be hooked most of the time in the lip or roof of the mouth. This is a must have bait when the fishing is tough folks!

Okay, we've covered what I use when the fish aren't aggressive. When I see fish moving water (surface boils) near their nests I'll throw cranks in the three to four inch range at 'em. My personal favorite is the Rattlin' Rogue. Color doesn't matter as a rule unless its dirty, then I'll throw florescent patterns. I do, however, throw the chrome/black back pattern most of the time. The sound vibes these lures put out really seem to irritate bass. I've thrown other brands with rattles on the initial cast to a nest thinking nobody was home then follow up with a Rogue and bingo, fish on! It doesn't happen all the time, but it's proven to be the best triggering crankbait I've thrown under most fishing conditions.

We now come to my favorite presentation for smallies if the conditions are right - topwater. About one out of every three years we'll have water temps in the low to mid 70's around the opener, and when this happens, you can count on a dragonfly hatch. The bass have spawned, but are still shallow, and going ballistic feeding on these 4-winged critters.

This is when I like to work a popper with a fly rod. Back in my guiding days I was amazed at how I would be out-fished by my clients laying a surface popper near a bed, compared to my presentations with a torpedo or chugger. Another observation was that they would rarely ever lose a fish. Obviously, I had to fork out some bucks for at least a beginner's fly outfit, and give it a shot. I'm no expert, but at this time of the year, when you know where the fish are, you don't need to be making long casts.

A surface popper cast within a foot or two of a shallow fish will provoke a strike. Here again I find that color really doesn't matter most of the time. The fish is reacting to this hairy looking bug that just looks too easy to pass up. My favorite brand of cork poppers are sizes 2 and 4. I like to use a 9½ foot, 1X tapered leader for presenting the bug. It lays down nice and can handle a good size fish. I certainly don't want to

give the impression that spin casting surface lures won't catch good numbers of bass.

I've caught hundreds on the Skitter Pop and Tiny Torpedo, but fly rod fishing with a cork or hair, surface bug is something every smallie angler should experience. Pick up a good video or book on fly casting and spend a weekend or two going through the basic fundamentals. Better yet, take some lessons from an instructor, if one is nearby. I found that after my third or fourth float trip, I was feeling pretty confident in placing the fly where I wanted it in the 30 to 40 foot range. That's all the distance you'll need to reach the vast majority of smallies when fishing a river.

Well, there you have it - Spring smallies in shield country. As I mentioned earlier, the bite in this area typically lasts until about mid June. Once water temps get into the mid to high 70's, the bass go into a post spawn funk and move to the deeper channels for a week or so. As the rivers start to drop and clear up around the 4th of July, action picks up again, with about half of the original wave that came up for the spawn hanging around, and the rest migrating back into the main river.

I mainly throw cranks at these fish, and over the summer I'll catch a dozen or two on a float trip. They don't really get too excited

again until the leaves start to turn color. This generally takes place after a couple of frosts and water temps drop into the high 50's.

We're into the middle of September now and the emerald shiners are making a run upriver from Lake of the Woods for their annual spawn. This is when those bronze bombers go on a feeding frenzy that's almost as much fun as the spring bite. It's quite a sight seeing a school of smallies gorging themselves to the point of splitting a gut. Honest to god, when you catch one there's a trail of upchucked shiners from the point of the hit all the way back to the boat.

I hope you've picked up a tip or two and please, don't hesitate to contact me if you have questions, comments, or just want to talk about stream bass fishing.

May your arms go into spasms and your drags smoke for the spring smallie bite, my friend, bye for now.

Thomas La Beau makes and sells hand-crafted lures for muskie, pike, and bass. You can see them at: [Big Fork Lures](#).

A surface popper cast within a foot or two of a shallow fish will provoke a strike.

Our Next Meeting:

Tuesday, April 21st
Mapletree Restaurant
McFarland

Our annual Trash & Treasure Auction

Net yourself a trophy!



Upcoming Events

Monday, April 13th 7:00 P.M
Location varies by county,

Tuesday, April 21st 7:00 P.M
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland

Monday, April 27th 7:00 P.M
Mapletree Restaurant, McFarland

DNR Spring hearings and Wisconsin Conservation Congress meetings
See details in this issue.

WSA Trash & Treasure Auction
See details in this issue.

BFF Monthly Meeting
Brad Bohlen on fly fishing for muskie.