

On The Water With A Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

Lots to talk about this month. You may recall last month I questioned the reasoning behind the yearly changes on the smallmouth bass starting on Oct 1st on the North Branch, where the minimum legal length on bass goes from 12” to 15” for rivers and streams. Since the older bigger bass are the main breeders and are also less safe to eat because they would have absorbed more of the heavy metals like mercury and also PCB’s from being in the river longer, I just couldn’t see why the Penna Fish and Boat Commission was forcing the anglers to harvest them. I also suggested a slot limit on the smallmouth bass to protect those big breeders and the health of the anglers while giving the trophy anglers a big smallmouth for the wall if needed. I say if needed because the new reproduction smallmouth mounts that I see from my local taxidermist at Just Fish Taxidermy in Stevensville Pa look as good if not better than the original skin mounts. My suggestion was to let anglers harvest the 12” to 14” plus smallies. Have a no harvest for the 15” to 20”, and to let the anglers harvest just one bass over 20” I asked my local WCO to give a copy of my article to our Fish Commissioner for this region, Norman Gavlick. It took Commissioner Gavlick only two days to respond to my article. It seems that there are many anglers that want a slot limit including Commissioner Gavlick who is an avid river fisherman himself .He had already written up a proposal to present to the other Commissioners at their meeting on Oct 5th and 6th before he ever read my article. This is a copy of his proposal. While not exactly like my suggestion it’s close enough to live with and any slot limit is better no slot limit to save the big breeder fish.

PROPOSED REGULATION CHANGE SMALLMOUTH BASS – SUSQUEHANNA RIVER

The following proposal is an attempt to improve smallmouth bass recruitment on the Susquehanna River. The Susquehanna River is a large river with distinct differences from one section to another. However the one common denominator for all sections of the river is the need to protect the larger female smallmouth (all) bass especially during the period from Oct. 1 through mid June, (post spawn). We already have a closed season from mid April through mid-June. That should remain closed.

Currently there are different regulations for different sections of the river. Most of the river is a 12” – 6 fish limit from mid June until Oct. 1. Then go to a 15” min./4 fish limit Oct. 1 till mid April. The special regulation sections are a 15” min. 4 fish limit from mid June till Oct. 1. They go to an 18” min/2 fish limit from Oct. 1 till mid April.

As has been noted by many these regulations not only encourage, but mandate that the larger fish, (which are females), be harvested. Further, these larger females are being harvested during the period when they are most susceptible to being caught, when they are actively feeding up for the winter.

In order to better protect these females we need to change these regulations. What is being proposed is a slot limit for the entire river system for smallmouth/all bass. For example; all smallmouth/bass between 16” & 19” must be catch and release, no harvest. Bass under 16” can be taken with a limit of 5 per angler per day. One (1) bass over 19” can be taken per angler per day. (total 6 per day). These regulations would apply for the entire river for the all periods except the closed period from mid April till mid June.

An exception to these regulations would be made for special use permits such as tournaments. Since fishing tournaments already are conducted with special use permits which allow for "special uses" such as culling, and since all fish caught during a tournament MUST be returned to the water from which they were caught, those participating in a PFBC permitted tournament on the Susquehanna River would be allowed to have bass in their possession only during the hours noted on the issued permit. Harvest fishing tournaments are already unlawful in PA.

These proposed regulations would protect and preserve larger bass all year long. Keeping more of these larger fish in the river will help to continually improve recruitment for the entire Susquehanna River.

Feel free to contact me with your comments, suggestions, and questions.

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Now remember that this is just a proposal and will most likely have several changes to it if it is agreed upon by the other Commissioners. My hat is off to Commissioner Gavlick for introducing the proposal in the first place and it's great to have a Commissioner that will work for not only the resource but also for the sporting angler. This is our chance to save the breeder fish in the Susquehanna River fellow anglers. Please show your support by sending him a note of approval for a slot limit.

By the time you read this, the slot limit proposal will have already gone before the rest of the Commissioners. Lets hope they also show support for this needed regulation change.

We still have a surface bite going on and I told you last month about using the Lucky Craft Sammy that I liked so much but something happened late October that you should know. I got a call from a gentleman by the name of Steve Monoyoudis who just last year bought the machinery and the rights to manufacture the good old Hubs Chubs Surface lure from H.C.Baits again. I believe the original lure was made about 50 years ago. Steve and I talked on the phone for about an hour and I could tell that he was a die hard angler like myself. He was referred to me by Alan Probst of the "All Outdoors With Alan Probst" show. When Alan comes up to do a fishing show, we always try to start off with some surface lures for top water action. If any of you remember Billy Westmorland who had a TV show many years ago who had a theme song that was "I like smallmouth fishing most of all", he used the Hubs Chubs on his show which interested me enough to go buy one. I remember that it worked well and I finally lost it but when I went to buy another I couldn't find one anywhere. I totally forgot about it until Steve called me many years later. The lures are completely made in good old Pennsylvania and they have improved upon the old lure style. The first day that I received my Hubs Chubs lures I tried them out and it was no surprise to me that they worked just fine. This surface lure is

unique in that you can use them three ways on the water. The back of the lure has a prop so you can use it with a constant retrieve like a buzz bait. The nose of the lure is tapered up so you can “walk the dog” like a Zara Spook or a Lucky Craft Sammy, and the sides of the lure has scoops cut in so the lure can spit water when given a sharp jerk. It also has a rattle chamber for more fish catching attraction. When you pause the tail and back hook drops down into the water for a more positive fish hook up when that big one strikes. I personally like to use the short jerk presentation so it spits a little water. They come in ten different colors and two sizes both 3” and 4”. I mostly use the 3” but will switch to 4” when the water becomes choppy or it gets dark out when I need a larger profile, or when I’m in an area where I know there is a good chance of a northern pike or musky lurking nearby. And last they are affordable, about half the price of a Lucky Craft Sammy so when you pitch one into the trees when you’re talking more than fishing like I sometimes do you it doesn’t hurt your wallet so much. You can see and buy the Hubs Chubs lures on their web site at www.hcbaits.com .

We were fishing a few weeks ago when the conditions were just right for surface lures. The morning started off dead calm no wind at all. The sky was overcast and the water was clear down to two feet and only light stained after that. You could see a mayfly hatch coming up and actually see the smallmouth bass on the surface of the water. I quickly tied on a 3” Hubs Chubs lure on all of us and for the rest of the morning we had a fisherman’s dream . Those bass just smashed those lures all morning. We caught 40, 14” to 20” smallmouth in just 3 hours! Then the clouds broke up and let the sun shine through and then the bite was gone. We could have stopped right then, totally satisfied for the day but we went on to catch another 30 bass on a good old fashion 3” grub tail just like the old days.

Well that’s all for this month. For further reports, photos, and booking information, visit me on my website at www.ldguideservice.com .

Good Fishing

Lance