

This month with a Susquehanna River guide
Lance Dunham

Will it ever stop raining? I'm about to trade in the jet boat for an ark! Traditionally the month of March is the first month of the year to safely put your boat on the river. I've been preparing my jet boat all winter, doing all the little things that get ignored during the busy fishing season.

One of the items I made was a rod protector. I had personally broke the eyes off two of my custom rods by stepping on them, and one of my customers accidentally stepped on another and broke the rod in half, prompting me to come up with something to protect my rods, but still have quick easy access to them. What I did was I cut a piece of heavy 4" PVC pipe the length of my front deck which happens to be 3ft. Next I cut a 2" strip out from the entire length of the pipe. I pre drilled 5 holes and used some self tapping stainless steel screws to fasten the pipe to my deck along the side where my big feet always broke the rods. I finished it up by gluing a strip of outdoor carpet to the bottom of the pipe over the screws so they wouldn't scratch my rods. It works like a charm, my feet now rest on the pipe and I can easily place up to 4 rods in the pipe for quick easy access. The first week of the month went by with a flood and no fishing. Oh I got to catch a couple of fish on hair jigs from the shore before the flood hit, but that was it. It seems the whole month went that way, just as the river would get down to a safe boating level, the rains would come and up the water level would go.

However, the one type of fishing that the high water doesn't seem to bother is fishing for channel catfish. This is done mostly towards the evening hours, but in times of high muddy water most any time of the day works. I don't bank fish as a rule, but I have plenty of friends that do and they are very successful. A long heavy action rod is preferred along with good strong line. The bait varies among fishermen. It could be nightcrawlers, cut up fish, or prepared commercial bait, but one successful guy I know will buy some chicken livers. He places one or two in a small mesh egg sack used in salmon fishing, freezes it, and uses them that way. As the chicken liver thaws out in the river water, it sends a blood trail down river that the channel cats follow back to his bait. He uses only what is called a circle hook in a large size anywhere from a 3/0 to a 6/0 size. These hooks tend to catch the fish in the lips instead of the fish swallowing it. He releases all his catfish, unless he has one that he doesn't think will survive, then it's table fare. If you eat one be sure to cut off the belly meat and that long strip of dark meat that sometimes is along the back. These locations are where all the bad stuff in the river accumulates such as mercury.

At this writing, my boat has only hit the water once so far this month. I needed to go practice before my first charter at the end of this month so I called up a buddy and away we went. It was also my 35th wedding anniversary so I knew I would be in deep you know what if I stayed out too long. The day was a bit cold but bright out, and the water

temperature only came up to 37 degrees all day. The water was high, fast, and dirty and the fishing was tough going by any standards. The only place we could do any fishing at all was behind the islands in the slowest water we could find. With the water being so cold, a jig fished very slowly on the bottom was our only course of action. The water was dirty so I chose a black crayfish imitation to fish with from a new plastics company in Texas that I pro-staff for called Alluring Baits. Believe it or not, black is one of the easiest colors to see in dirty water and that was the color the company sent me as a sample but I had only one! I would cast it out on a 1/4oz lead head jig and bring it back to me by slowly lifting while twitching my wrist making the lure crawl on the bottom. The bite felt like getting caught in a couple of wet leaves, ever so slight. I set the hook and up comes a trophy smallmouth bass, all 18 inches of her! She was so cold that she hardly put up much of a fight. I used that bait called a 3 1/2" Baby Beaver Crawl to catch another four smallies and two walleyes. All the while I was catching these fish my buddy was going nuts because he had not caught a single fish. Now my buddy knows how to fish, and he does it well so he wouldn't believe me when I told him it was the fisherman and not the lure that was catching these fish. By that time the lure was getting chewed up pretty good and wouldn't stay on the jig anyway so I switched to what I thought would be another good lure, a tube jig and nothing! I fished with it another half hour and didn't catch another fish all the while listening to my buddy say, "I knew it wasn't the fisherman"! To say the least, I was impressed with this lure also so when I got home, I ordered a lot of them and if anyone wants to get some just go to their web site at www.alluringbaits.com to order them. If you mention my name they will also give you a free gift, not a bad deal. As a matter of fact, anytime you see me at the ramp, or at my truck, the Green Weenie, come over and say hi, mention the new lures and I'll give you a couple to try.

While we were out, we saw many ducks and just hundreds of Canada geese all over the area. On the trip back to the access, we were going about 35MPH and came upon a flock of geese that had to be over 300 strong. When they took off they darkened the sky in front of us, quite a sight to see. I backed off on the throttle because as any river fisherman knows, when a startled flock of geese take off they, well lets just say they lighten their load, and those 300 geese carried a big load! I'd be cleaning the boat for a week!

We always release all our bass when we fish. We may keep a couple of the smaller, but legal walleye when they are in season which won't be until May 3rd this year. While April 11th is the last day to keep smallmouth bass until June 14th, please practice selective harvest on smallmouth bass if you plan to eat them. It only makes sense to release the 8yr olds which are 15" and the larger older bass for a couple of reasons. Number one, those older bass are the best breeders for the resource and our children's future and they give us the best the best fight on the rod now for recreation. And number two, from a harvest point of view, the longer a fish is in the river, the longer it has to absorb all the pollutants and heavy metals such as mercury, chlordane, and PCB's in its flesh, yummy! If you

want to eat smallmouth bass, the 12" to 14" are the safer, more logical choice. And for the same reasons, we also release all of our walleyes over 20"

Well that's my report for this month. If you would like to see my daily reports, photo's, and further information, visit my website at www.ldguideservice.com .

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