

## This Month With A Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

It was a long winter and now March has arrived with open water on the river. Open water means we get to fish from the boat which we did on the very first weekend. There was still some ice in the coves but we got around it. The water temperatures at the start of the month were 36 to 38 degrees which means cold water tactics and hair jigs. Hair jigs do work year around but because of their construction they are especially more effective than plastics in cold water. Jigs with plastic worms, grubs, ect have a tendency to stiffen up slightly in the very cold water stifling their action where a hair jig will move freely with the current even if it's sitting still. On my first trip out in early March I was with two client/friends and we were testing out the hair jigs that my newest sponsor manufactures and I pro-staff for. The company's name is JJ's Jigs and they hail from Towanda Pa. Check them out at [WWW.jjsjigs.com](http://WWW.jjsjigs.com). These jigs are unique in the fact that they are not the typical hair just tied around the base of the lead head that we bass and walleye fishermen are used to seeing but instead are close to works of art that look like trout flies on a very large 2/0 jig hook, just what we need for bass and walleye. But a good looking lure may only catch the fishermen and we were out to see if they would catch the fish. My suspicions were soon confirmed as we went on to catch and release 1 walleye, 1 big channel cat, 3 carp, and 46 smallmouth bass, 24 of which were over 15" and went up to 19". Now this is very good action for such cold water and I believe the hair jigs had a major part in catching them.

The next week we saw flooding on the river and the high water didn't come down for a good week to ten days so no fishing for me but by the middle of the following week we were on the river again doing a R&D test for the new hair jig company. I asked two veteran river anglers that were very good at jig fishing to come along. The water was 43 degrees on average and dark stained with a fast current. I used nothing but the JJ's hair jigs and they brought what they knew to be proven cold water spring lures from their tackle boxes. We started out at 9:00AM and by noon time I had caught more fish than my two friends put together. Then I gave them each some JJ's Hair Jigs to use and the story changed dramatically. By the time we finished they had almost caught me in the fish count. We ended up with a new one day March record with 81 fish being caught which included smallmouth bass, walleye, a couple of hog nose suckers, and a quillback. We have caught several quillback this spring so far. Some people call them fresh water drum. They have an unique dorsal fin that goes straight up from their back and comes to a point. They are mostly silver in color, and we've been catching them in the three to five pound range. They seem to like those big hair jigs we are using. They are a very strong fighter darting in all directions as you bring them in. You can see a picture of one on the photo page of my web site.

The most common way to fish the hair jig is to cast up river slightly and move it as slow as you can without getting caught on the bottom. As you lift your rod and pull the hair jig, the hair will pull back against the lure. When you stop the current pushes the hair back out to the sides and fluffs it up so to speak giving it a pulsating, living effect. The bass and walleye go nuts over it. As I have said before and it's worth repeating. Where to fish in cold water is a

key element to catching cold water fish. The fish are a bit lethargic and do not attack the lure in fast water where they would have to work for it. Instead look for the fish to be inside current breaks, in coves, and slow but deeper water. The bite will be slight like getting hooked on a couple of wet leaves. Lift slow, feel the slight weight of the fish, then set the hook keeping pressure on the fish all the way to the boat. If you set the hook too hard when you feel the fish, (like trying to cross it's eyes as we say), many times you will pull the jig right out of the fishes mouth because of it's lethargic state. Other baits you can use and catch fish but are not as efficient in cold water are the plastic trick sticks, tubes, and smallie craws. The suspending jerk bait such as the #8 Rapala X-Rap will also work if you use it with a very long pause between jerks say at least 5 seconds. That doesn't sound like a long time but try it. It feels like forever.

The wildlife on the river is starting to come alive now. We've been seeing mink hunting along the banks, a woodchuck or two, some muskrats, and a few beaver. Plenty of ducks and geese are seen everyday and there was a day I remember where there was a blue sky and several flocks of white snow geese cutting a white V through that vivid blue sky, a simply beautiful sight to see. There are turkeys everywhere along the river. We were going up river in the jet boat and a flock of turkeys fifty or sixty strong flew right in front of us, some passing no more than 10ft from the boat. Boy, I'd hate to get smacked in a jet boat going 35mph by a flying turkey. That would truly ruin your day. Then there was the single majestic eagle sitting on her giant nest as we motored by keeping an eye on us.

Have you ever heard of putting headlights on a boat? Well you have now. I saw them at Snake Creek Marine when I did their open house on the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of this month and thought that they would just be the ticket for night travel on the water. I first checked with my local WCO who said it was indeed legal to use lights to see where you were going as long as they didn't obstruct or interfere with the navigational lights on the bow and stern. And that I didn't leave them on or flash them at a house or cabin, similar to the law that pertains to deer spotlighting. I mounted them under the rim of the bow of the boat well below the bow red and green navigation light. They have a yellow tint to them so they won't attract as many bugs and they won't be the same color as the stern light. I wired them to one of my trolling batteries so if the lights drain the battery I can still start the big motor to get back to shore. I plan to do some summertime night fishing with big top water lures this season for big bass, northern pike, and musky. It should be a lot of fun if it doesn't get too buggy at night.

Well that's all I got to report this month. For further reports, and photos visit me on my website at [www.ldguideservice.com](http://www.ldguideservice.com) . Fish safely and I'll see you on the river.

Good Fishing

Lance