

This Month with a Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

This November has been a great time to be out on the river. We got a few days of cold mornings where there was ice on the windshield of the “Green Weenie”. That’s the name of my truck that I bought new in 1994 and now has over 276,000 miles on it. My wife keeps telling me to get another one and that she’s embarrassed to drive it. I tell her the old truck has charisma now and I can’t get rid of it. The motor is still good in the Green Weenie and I literally drive it into the river over 200 times a year so I figure why get another truck to misuse. Besides, now I’m curious just how many miles it will go before it dies. My clients and friends all know it by name now, and it owes me nothing so keep on truckin Green Weenie.

There were also a few days that I didn’t put the boat cover on and I had to shovel some snow out of the boat before I could safely use it. It’s on those days that I sometimes question my sanity of winter fishing.

I’ve been doing a couple of TV fishing shows a year now and I have had fun doing it. When I first started doing them a few years ago I was a bit nervous at the beginning of taping but soon got the hang of it. Now I’m so relaxed that I have to watch what I say so they don’t have to edit so much. I can’t tell you what those words may be because then my newspaper editor would have to take them out also, but you can just imagine.

I got to do a show the 1st of November with Alan Probst of the TV show “All Outdoors With Alan Probst”. If you’ve never seen his show you’re in for a treat. The way you see him on TV is the way he is all the time off camera. There’s nothing phony about him. He’s relaxed, genuine, and wants to have some fun just like the rest of us.

When he gets on my boat he say’s “Lance, just take us fishing and we’ll make a show out of it”. That’s it as far as his direction goes and he always produces a good show.

This time when he came up, the weather and time limit worked against us somewhat. In my mind, I’ve already got a 7 to 8 hour day planned as to what we’ll use in the way of lures, which spots on the river to go to, and how long to stay at each spot just like I do with my daily charters. I know we’ll find some quality fish with that schedule. However, this time we had a cold windy rain and Alan had to get back for an early afternoon meeting. This gave me about 3 to 4 hours to produce some quality fish for this show in tough conditions. My mind was racing on what to do and where to go.

We ended up catching about 35 fish in a short time with Alan getting some nice smallies and a walleye for the day. And wouldn’t you know it, when we were finished the sun came out for a beautiful day. The biggest smallie was only about 16” long for the show .On my very next charter at the same hole, I caught and

released a big, heavy, 20" smallie that would have been fantastic on camera. Oh well, that's fishing. You can see that big fish on my web site.

This latest show will be rather unique in that we also taped a segment at the North Mountain Sportsman Club in Muncy Valley Pa. where I am one of the Directors. Alan wanted to show what I do as a hobby since fishing is my so called work. He came up last August and filmed our 1880's annual "Underwear Shoot" that the Cowboy Action shooters put on. I won't go in to great detail in this column, but if you can visualize guys and gals dressed in cowboy attire wearing holsters with six guns on their sides shooting live ammo in a "Cowboy Town" setting, well you just got to see it sometime. We shoot on the fourth Sunday of each month, March through October. Besides fishing it's about as much fun as one can stand. You can find all the show schedules on his web site at www.alanprobst.com . If you want to find out about a particular show (like mine), send him an e-mail at the address on his site.

Some of my local fisherman friends worry that when I do a TV show on "Their" river that we will, all of the sudden, be swamped with fishermen from all over the country and they will catch all of their fish. Nothing could be further from the truth. When I do a show with Alan we never give our exact location except to say that we are on the North Branch of the Susquehanna River which encompasses many, many miles. We've done shows anywhere from the New York Boarder to 65 miles South of there, always during the week and we seldom ever see another boat. We also always promote catch and release fishing so friends, your fish are safe with me.

The water temperature this month varied from 38 to 47 degrees and this turned on the walleyes and the big hog smallies. If you could take the weather and knew what to do, this was the month to fish. The water was starting to clear up which is great with the traditional overcast days that we had. We caught a low of 35 fish to a high of 104 fish the first week of the month.

In order to be successful in catching a lot of fish, you must first change your fishing patterns from what you were used to using in the late Summer and Fall. The fish were starting to move to the slower, deeper water and you must adjust with a slower presentation. I talked with a gentleman at an access when we were done fishing one day this month and asked how he did. He said he and his buddy just got one fish! I thought he was kidding and he thought the same of me when I told him we caught 80 fish! He asked what I used and I told him mostly Stick Worms today, I asked what he was using and he said Live Bait. He didn't know what a stick worm was so I showed him. He couldn't believe that we caught that many fish on a piece of plastic, but my clients confirmed it. I told him that what he was using would work just fine and he could catch just as many fish as we did but he needed to slow down his presentation. They were drifting the same speed the current was going which was way too fast for that day in the cold water. I used my trolling motor to slow us down, put on a heavier weight to fight the current and just inched my boat along giving the

lethargic fish a chance to bite, plus we fished all day and they gave up in a couple of hours.

The lures that were working for us this month were tube jigs, suspending jerk baits, small crank baits, and stick worms. For those who don't know what a stick worm is, it's basically a plastic slug, a do nothing worm that would make you wonder why a fish would ever bite it, but they do, a lot. I use a 3" or 4" length and the brands I use are Case Magic Stiks, Yum Dingers, and Sencos. I don't name them folks. There are many other brands that I'm sure would work as well but there is only so much room in the boat for lures. Presentation is more important than color or brand name in my opinion, and I don't rig them as most fishermen do. I want them to go to the bottom of the river quick so I put them on a lead head jig. The weight depends on the river current and wind conditions. Fish them as slow as you can without getting caught on the bottom and cast slightly up river because fish most always will face the current. A constant twitching of your wrist will put the life in your lure and help you keep from getting stuck. The bites are going to be slight this time of year, you may only feel a little extra weight on the rod. As I always tell my clients, "When in doubt, set the hook" you may be surprised at how a big fish can bite so light. We've caught and released several thousand fish on this rig just this season and so can you. The walleyes also like stick worms, give them a try .

There are still some eagles around. We saw a pair of mature eagles sitting next to each other on a tree limb the other day. We also saw an immature bald eagle who didn't have his white head or tail yet, chasing an Osprey all around the sky for quite a while. Evidently the young eagle didn't want the Osprey in his fishing territory.

With the water being so cold, you might want to think about wearing that life jacket now when fishing. Even the strongest of swimmers don't last long in water less than 45 degrees. And if you happen to fall in, cover your mouth and nose with your hand. The initial shock of the cold water will make you inhale and you may fill your lungs with cold water thus shortening your chance of survival.

And last but not least, practice Selective Harvest. It's ok to keep a couple of legal smaller fish for supper, but let the big old breeders go for the future of the sport. Remember a 15" Smallmouth bass in the river is on average 8 yrs old.

Well that's my report for this month on the North Branch of the Susquehanna River. Boat safely and I'll see you on the river.

Good Fishing

Lance

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