

This Month With A Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

Can you feel it? The fish can and they are reacting to the slight change in the weather and water. The mornings are slightly cooler and the days are mixed with still a little summer heat and a little fall winds. The average water temperature went from the upper 70's down to the upper 60's. The fish are starting to feed a little more aggressively and we are catching and releasing many big smallmouth bass along with the cool water fish such as the walleye, northern pike, and muskie. In the past 30 days we have caught and released over 2,100 fish from my boat. Sometimes we release the fish a little sooner than expected. We were fishing jerk baits the first week of this month in the early morning fog and the topic comes up of do you ever catch Northern Pike and Muskie. I was just saying that we do in the cool water months of spring and fall but I haven't seen one since last May when up comes a decent Muskie of about 40" and grabs the clients lure right by the boat. "Set the hook" I yelled and the fight was on. My client fought the fish well and I realized that my catch and release rubber net that I had in my hands was not nearly big enough to land a fish of that size. Oh, we could have went to shore and pulled the big fish in, exhausted, but I didn't want to kill it. That fish had to be at least 15 years old or better. There was no way I was going to reach down and lip the toothy critter so I tried the scoop method with the rubber net. Well about a third of the big fish fit in the net and the lure got caught in the bottom of it so when it started to thrash about, the net actually pulled the lure out of the muskies mouth and it swam away. That single syllable word I yelled was probably heard in the next county. I really wanted a photo of that fish. My client was much more relaxed than I was and didn't seem to be bothered by the whole situation, but I took some good natured teasing for the rest of the day. Needless to say my big cradle net will be in the boat for now on.

If you recall, the first week of the month would start out foggy and cool, then go to very hot and clear by noon. When the sun would go high over head without a cloud in sight the fish held tight to the structure around them, in most cases that meant the big rocks in the river. You can be catching fish like crazy in the morning on chase baits like a jerk bait or spinner then it gets very slow action or they "shut off" it seems when the bright sun is overhead. This is when you either change tactics or go home for lunch and come back later in the day when the sun is at a lower angle. As a guide you don't have the option of going home so you learn to adapt to the fishing conditions given to you and you learn to catch fish. When the sky is at it's mid day

highest point and the fish are holding tight to the structure you have to finesse the fish out to bite your lure. Try the wacky worming style of fishing. What the heck is wacky worming you say? It's a style of presenting a plastic do nothing worm in a very slow fashion with only the weight of the worm to make it sink. I use Alluring Baits 4" Trick Sticks for this because they have a lot of salt in them to make them dense so they will sink without the use of a weight. I rig them with either a 3/0 or 4/0 circle or worm hook fastened right in the center of the worm so both ends droop down. To fish them the conditions have to be right with light stained water up to 3ft deep with little current and wind over and around rocks where the fish will hold for cover. Cast just up river from the rocks and let the worm "waffle" down slowly around the rocks twitching your wrist now and again to put some life in to the worm. When the fish come out from the rocks and strike the worm, set the hook and the fight is on. You'll be surprised to see how big the old smallies are that come from the mid day sun. Patience is the key to this style of fishing, take your time and don't rush the presentation. You will lose worms rather quickly with this set up because the worm will tear easily when rigged this way. This can be remedied by going to your local hardware store and purchasing some small "O" rings. Place the O rings in the middle of the worm and put your hook just under the O ring instead of cutting the worm with the hook. Also you can put a half inch wide piece of electrical tape around the center of the worm to reinforce it and then put your hook through the tape and worm.

The lures that have worked well for us this month include suspending jerk baits like the Rapala X-Rap, top water lures such as the Storm Chug Bug and the Lucky Craft Sammy. Stick worms and Baby Crawls from Alluring Baits, and the ever popular tube jig.

The wildlife is still very abundant on the river, a couple of weeks back a river otter came up beside us while we were fishing and was real tempted by the fish struggling at the end of my line. He watched as I dropped the fish back in the water and then disappeared not to be seen again. Maybe he tried to do some fishing of his own on the bass I just released, we'll never know.

Everyone has been asking me lately, "Where's the Green Weenie". I have talked and kidded about my old truck, "The Green Weenie" several times in past columns that's been pulling my boats since 1994 when I bought it new. Well at 283,000 miles I had to retire the old truck for good. It was about to go through it's third transmission and I was sure it was going to leave me stranded yet again along the road. When you drive a vehicle that long, you just know when it's going to die on you for good and to replace it soon. Like when you go through a quart of oil every two weeks along with a quart of

transmission fluid in the same time period. Brake fluid is bought by the case instead of by the can. You have to open the drivers window to reach outside to open the door. The tail gate is the only thing holding the truck box together. You don't drive it any farther than you care to walk. You paint it camo to hide the rust once a week. If your wife is forced to drive it on Sunday she will park it a quarter mile from the church because she's too embarrassed to be seen in a truck with the words "The Green Weenie" written across the back window in big bold letters, (ok, I sort of like that one). The fish smell is so strong inside the truck that all the stray cats in town follow it like the Pied Piper. And last but not least you park the truck in your driveway at night only to find in the morning that some parts have fallen off it while you were sleeping! Yep, I'm sure not going to miss that old truck. Enter into the picture "Big Blue". A big blue used Ford Expedition SUV in great shape that I bought at a very reasonable price because it's a gas guzzler and I love it! It has so much power that I can hardly feel the boat being towed behind it. I took it to my local graphics studio, and the ladies there designed some eye catching graphics for the outside. Maybe Big Blue is a little too classy for me right now but I'll get used to it.

Well that's my report for this month on the Susquehanna River. For further reports and photos, visit me on my web site at www.ldguideservice.com . Boat safely and I'll see you on the river.

Good Fishing

Lance