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Egg collections keep Lake Michigan salmon and trout fishery strong

The Wisconsin DNR utilizes three facilities to collect salmon and trout eggs and keep the Lake Michigan fishery going strong. That's one million eggs.

That's how many coho salmon eggs Howard Tanner and his staff at the Michigan Department of Conservation obtained in 1964 from the Oregon State Fish Commission, according to historical accounts. The eggs hatched and many survived, allowing an estimated 850,000 cohos to be stocked in 1966 at the Platte River, Bear Creek and the Big Huron River, all Lake Michigan tributaries in Michigan.

It was the first time Pacific Ocean-strain salmon were introduced to Lake Michigan. And as hard as it may be to believe now, it was part of an experiment many thought would fail. Coho salmon had never lived in the Great Lakes. The Lake Michigan ecosystem was severely unbalanced at the time, with alewife, also a non-native fish, making up an estimated 90% of its biomass. Beaches around the lake were littered each year with windrows of the dead, stinking fish.

But it worked. Other species were introduced, too, including rainbow trout (steelhead), brown trout and Chinook salmon.

Efforts to restore native lake trout continued, too. And stocking these predator fish became a primary fisheries management strategy used by state and federal agencies around the Great Lakes.

The Wisconsin DNR actually began stocking steelhead (9,000 fish) in Lake Michigan in 1963 and added coho (25,000) in 1968 and Chinook (66,000) in 1969. Over the coming decades the number of fish stocked would increase to more than 5 million a year just in the Wisconsin waters of Lake Michigan.

Though there have been challenges such as bacterial kidney disease in Chinook, keeping a healthy predator-prey ratio overall and controlling the population of parasitic sea lampreys, the Lake Michigan salmon and trout sport fishery has earned the standing as one of the best in the world. And as the year classes of fish come and go, they all start with the egg.

Egg collections keep fishery strong

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Indiana/others adjust '27 Lake Michigan stocking plan to support larger, healthier fish

The Indiana DNR will adjust its 2027 stocking plan for Lake Michigan to ensure anglers continue to have access to healthy, sizeable fish populations for years to come. The modifications will also allow DNR hatcheries to stock larger winter-run steelhead yearlings in the spring and create space to raise an additional 20,000 fall fingerling skamania steelhead.

"With these stocking changes, we are hoping to stave off any further decrease to baitfish populations and maintain a strong and stable salmon fishery into the future," said Ben Dickinson, Indiana DNR's Lake Michigan fisheries biologist.

Biologists with DNR observed an increase in salmon population across Lake Michigan along with a reduction in salmon size and baitfish populations. This raised concerns about the balance of predators and prey in the ecosystem. To address these trends, DNR will be reducing the 2027 Chinook salmon stock from 275,000 to 200,000. This will result in approximately 67,000 salmon placed at each of the stocking locations in East Chicago, Portage, and Michigan City.

Lake Michigan managers have adjusted stocking levels several times in the last 20 years to keep salmon and baitfish populations in balance. For Indiana, the 2027 update amounts to an 11% reduction in fish stocked compared to 2026. This work continues the successful management of sportfish in the state.

More information about Lake Michigan fishing is available at on.IN.gov/lake-michigan-fishing.

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Logbook Learnings: Chasing Smallmouth in Minnesota

Cold fronts roll in. Wind pushes bait toward the rocks. Fall in Minnesota brings smallmouth together to feed hard ahead of winter, and for Brock Bila, a rough forecast can be part of the appeal.

For this edition of Logbook Learnings, we caught up with professional bass angler Brock Bila, the 2026 Bassmaster Opens Angler of the Year. He shares how he finds and catches fall smallmouth in Minnesota, from following the bait to making the most of changing conditions.

WHY FALL SMALLMOUTH?

"In the fall, smallmouth are chasing bait and feeding heavily going into the winter," Brock says.

That feeding activity shapes his approach to the season. Smallmouth often group up and move with the bait, so locating their food can put you around more than one fish.

Follow the Forage

For Brock, the fall bite starts with bait.

"A lot of the time they will school up and follow bait balls around, so finding the forage is one of the biggest things I am looking for."

He pairs that search with a close look at structure. Rocky points, reefs, and isolated rock near deep water are his starting spots, giving smallmouth places to move up and feed.

Look for those features together when deciding where to spend your time.

Let the Wind Do the Work

"Wind is a super important factor for me in the fall," Brock says.

Wind helps in two ways. On the clear water he often fishes up north, surface chop breaks up the light and can make smallmouth less wary. It also moves bait, influencing where fish can set up to feed.

Brock looks for wind blowing into a rocky point, reef, or another area where smallmouth can take advantage of that food. Use the wind direction to help narrow your search before making your first cast.

Bad Weather, Good Bite

A cold, cloudy forecast gets Brock's attention. In his experience, changing weather can make fall smallmouth more willing to chase.

"When the barometric pressure starts changing and the wind picks up, those fish tend to get a lot more aggressive and willing to chase."

For Brock, those conditions are a reason to look forward to a day on the water. "Some of my favorite days are when it is cold, windy, and cloudy."

Read the Water Clarity

Northern smallmouth often favor clean water, but clear water is not always easy water.

"The problem is when that clean water gets dead slick and sunny, those fish can get really smart and hard to catch," Brock explains.

His preference changes with the conditions:

- Calm and sunny: A little stained water can help when fish in clear water are harder to fool.
- Cloudy and blowing: Clean water is usually where he wants to be.

Check the sky and the surface together. Water clarity becomes more useful when you consider how much light and wind are reaching the area you want to fish.

Match Your Tackle to the Moment

Brock keeps two main setups in rotation for fall smallmouth, with a swimbait as one of his favorite ways to cover water and find groups of fish.

To cover water and find schools:

He fishes a shad-shaped swimbait on a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce head, paired with a 7-foot-6-inch medium-light Feather rod. His line setup is 8-pound braid connected to a 6-pound fluorocarbon leader.

For a crankbait running 10 to 15 feet deep:

His second setup is a medium-diving, shad-colored crankbait on a 7-foot-3-inch medium baitcasting rod with 12-pound fluorocarbon. ✧

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Position Statement
Representing a major interest in the aquatic resources of the Great Lakes states and the province of Ontario, the Great Lakes Sport Fishing Council is a confederation of organizations and individuals with a concern for the present and future of sport fishing, our natural resources and the ecosystem in which we live. We encourage the wise use of our resources and a search for the truth about the issues confronting us.

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Sea Lamprey populations decline across most Great Lakes in 2026

ANN ARBOR, MI – The Great Lakes Fishery Commission announced that adult sea lamprey abundances declined in four of the five Great Lakes during 2026, reflecting continued progress in the binational effort to suppress populations of this destructive invasive species.

Adult abundance estimates decreased in Lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron, and Ontario, while Lake Erie experienced a slight increase. Based on three-year average abundance estimates from 2024 through 2026, sea lamprey populations in Lakes Erie and Ontario remained below established target levels, while populations in Lakes Superior, Michigan, and Huron remained above their respective targets.



"Sea lamprey control remains one of the Great Lakes' greatest fisheries management success stories," said Earl Provost, chair of the Commission. "This year's results demonstrate that continued investment in control is reducing sea lamprey abundance and protecting fish populations across the basin. These achievements are made possible by the dedication, professionalism, and expertise of the staff—particularly partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Fisheries and Oceans Canada—who work together across the Canada-US border to carry out this critical work."

Sea lampreys are invasive parasitic fish that attack and kill a wide variety of Great Lakes fish species by feeding on their blood and body fluids. For more than 70 years, the Commission has led the binational effort among Canada and the United States to protect the Great Lakes from the destructive impacts of invasive sea lamprey. Sea lamprey control primarily consists of the use of lampricides and barriers, with trapping adult sea lamprey as a means to measure and track abundance. Additionally, the Commission is evaluating new and supplemental controls to further enhance sea lamprey control.

"The pandemic created challenges that reverberated through the sea lamprey control program for years afterward," said Ethan Baker, vice-chair of the Commission. "Because sea lampreys spend several years in streams before reaching adulthood, the effects of missed treatments are not immediately reversed. The good news is that we've returned to pre-pandemic levels of control, and the declining abundance we're seeing in most of the lakes gives us confidence that the program is once again producing the results Great Lakes fisheries depend on."

In 2026, control agents assessed 27 of the 29 streams used to generate adult sea lamprey abundance estimates throughout the Great Lakes basin. Mark-recapture assessments provided abundance estimates for most streams, while statistical models were used in a small number of cases where field conditions limited data collection. A total of 29,206 adult sea lampreys were captured at index sites basin-wide during 2026. No significant five-year trends were detected in any of the Great Lakes, underscoring the importance of continued monitoring and sustained control efforts.

LAKE SUPERIOR: The 2026 adult sea lamprey index for Lake Superior was estimated at 29,767, a decline from 40,610 in 2025 and less than half the abundance observed in 2023. Despite the decline, the lake's three-year average abundance estimate of 41,976 remained substantially above the management target of 10,421. Biologists completed assessments at all seven index streams. The Bad and Tahquamenon rivers accounted for the largest portions of the lake-wide abundance estimate.

LAKE MICHIGAN: Lake Michigan's adult sea lamprey index was estimated at 20,211 in 2026, slightly lower than the 2025 estimate of 21,273 and near the target abundance level of 20,526. The lake's three-year average estimate was 22,094. Adult abundance in Lake Michigan has remained relatively stable and near target levels for much of the past decade. Estimates were generated from six index streams, with most based on mark-recapture assessments and others supplemented through modeling approaches.

LAKE HURON: The adult sea lamprey index for Lake Huron declined to 29,602 in 2026, down from 44,591 in 2025 and nearly 50% lower than the peak observed in 2022. The lake's three-year average abundance estimate was 38,026, which remains above the target level of 31,274. All six Lake Huron index streams were successfully assessed. The Cheboygan River contributed the largest share of the overall estimate.

LAKE ERIE: Lake Erie's adult sea lamprey index increased modestly to 923 in 2026 from 803 in 2025. Despite the increase, the lake's three-year average abundance estimate of 865 remained well below the target level of 3,263. Current abundance levels represent a significant decline from recent highs and continue to reflect strong suppression of sea lamprey populations in Lake Erie.

LAKE ONTARIO: Lake Ontario's adult sea lamprey index declined to 7,281 in 2026 from 11,584 in 2025. The lake's three-year average abundance estimate was 13,747, slightly below the target level of 14,065. The decline continues a downward trend from the elevated abundance observed several years ago. The Black and Humber rivers accounted for much of the adult sea lamprey abundance measured in the lake's index streams. ✧

Angler assistance needed for Muskegon River whitefish study

Do you fish the Muskegon River between Croton Dam and the river mouth at Lake Michigan? This fall you might see in the channel lake whitefish carrying acoustic telemetry tags and acoustic receivers for tracking the fish.

The devices are part of work the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and partner organizations will be conducting to determine whether rivers like the Muskegon could serve as alternative spawning areas for lake whitefish, a species facing steep population declines in lakes Michigan and Huron.

Anglers in the Muskegon River area are asked to release any tagged whitefish they catch and report any they harvest to assist with this effort. Please reach out to the DNR's Scott Heintzelman (HeintzelmanS@Michigan.gov, 231-433-9782) or The Nature Conservancy in Michigan's Matt Herbert (mherbert@tnc.org, 517-316-2283) if you have a tag or if you see damage to one of the receivers.

Anglers, boaters and others on the water should avoid moving receiver stations that are in the river. These devices are strategically placed to collect tag information without creating navigational issues.

Lake whitefish is a native species that is important ecologically, culturally and economically in Michigan and the Great Lakes region. Threats such as habitat loss, pollution and invasive species – especially quagga mussels – have changed the food web in lakes Michigan and Huron, threatening juvenile whitefish survival and causing the recently observed decline in populations.

"Lake whitefish stocks have declined dramatically since a peak in the 1990s, with commercial catches and yield currently at their lowest levels in three decades," said Herbert, senior conservation scientist with The Nature Conservancy's Great Lakes Sustainable Fisheries Program. As part of ongoing efforts to conserve the species, a cooperative project involves evaluating whether lake whitefish are able to use rivers to spawn. If they can, that could open up new habitat for the species and help mitigate decline.

The project is led by a team of representatives from the DNR, The Nature Conservancy, Little River Band of Ottawa Indians, Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, Bay Mills Indian Community and Grand Valley State University.

The tagging process

This November, adult lake whitefish will be tagged and stocked in the Muskegon River. The acoustic tags, approximately the diameter of an AA battery or permanent marker, will be attached near the fish's dorsal fin. Receiver stations, which collect data from the acoustic tags as fish swim by, are anchored on the bottom of the river at multiple locations between Croton Dam and the river mouth.

"There are historical accounts of lake whitefish spawning runs in rivers throughout the Great Lakes," Herbert said. "We are trying to encourage the lake whitefish to re-establish their spawning behavior here so that juvenile whitefish can hatch and grow in this environment where they have a more plentiful food supply than in the Great Lakes. We hope this work will ultimately aid in the recovery of the whitefish populations."

If you catch a tagged lake whitefish, please release the fish alive, if possible. This will allow the team to continue to collect data from the fish.

Learn more about lake whitefish and recovery efforts by visiting The Nature Conservancy's Great Lakes Fisheries page or the DNR's lake whitefish webpage. ✧

Illinois 2026 fall trout season opened Oct. 17 at 60 sites statewide

SPRINGFIELD – The 2026 Illinois fall trout fishing season opened October 17 at 60 ponds, lakes and streams throughout the state. An early catch-and-release trout fishing opened at select sites on Saturday, Oct. 3. No trout may be kept during the catch-and-release period. Anglers may begin keeping trout when the regular season opens at 5 a.m. October 17.

The Illinois Catchable Trout Program is funded through the sale of inland trout stamps. The Illinois DNR stocks more than 80,000 rainbow trout each year at waters where trout fishing is permitted during the fall season. An additional 80,000 trout are stocked for the spring season, which begins in April.

For the 2026 fall trout season, no trout may be taken from any stocked site before the season opens. During the season, the daily catch limit is five trout. All anglers must have a valid Illinois fishing license and inland trout stamp. Check the IDNR agent locator website for locations. Fishing licenses and trout stamps are also available online.



The fall trout season offers opportunities for families to get outdoors and enjoy fishing. Resources are available for taking kids fishing online. For more information on trout seasons and other Illinois fishing opportunities, visit www.ifishillinois.org. ✧

Sturgeon Fest releases 1,500 fish with hopes of boosting Lake Erie population

Last Saturday was the annual Sturgeon Fest hosted by the Toledo Zoo and Aquarium. It was a striking scene, with people lining up to collect their six inch sturgeon in tiny buckets. Visitors waited in line for their turn to pour the baby fish into the Maumee River in Ohio.

At the end of the line was a pair of small blue and white waterslides. Each visitor was helped by a teen zoo volunteer, making sure each small sturgeon was released to freedom in the river. Over 1,200 people attended. Live music, food trucks and educational booths celebrated the ancient Great Lakes fish.

This sturgeon restoration program has been going since 2018, the year that Alyssa Cross was born. We spoke to her dad, Matt Cross, about the difficulty of juggling raising a family and baby fish at the same time in our podcast episode for Beyond the Shore earlier this year. You can listen to and watch the full episode here: Restoring the dinosaur fish of Lake Erie.

The sturgeon have a complex life cycle that starts in rivers and moves into lakes as they age. To help give them a head start, the Toledo Zoo and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and their partners work together. They collect the fish gametes during spawning season in the spring, fertilize the eggs, and raise the baby sturgeon in a streamside trailer all summer. Newly hatched sturgeon can be very small, said Matt Cross, the Director of Vertebrate Conservation for the Toledo Zoo and Aquarium.

“They're about the size of little pinheads or tapioca balls, and then they hatch very quickly. So after about three or four days they hatch. They've got a little yolk sac. They feed off the yolk sac for like the first week and a half, two weeks, then they start feeding on decapsulated brine shrimp,” said Cross.

By rearing the tiny sturgeon in their zoo trailer all summer, they are allowing the fish to grow in a protected environment, without predators. Once they're released, they’re about six inches long and much harder for another fish to eat. The program has several goals. In addition to boosting the juvenile survival rate, it also tracks and monitors the fish as it moves through the Maumee River, into Lake Erie, and back into a river to spawn.

“Every one of the fish that are released here today have a tag like you put in your cats and dogs, the little PIT tags. And so if we ever catch it, and we can scan it, and we can say, "Okay, this fish was released this year, and it was this long when it was released. So then we can see how much it grew,” said Cross.

Scientists are interested in tracking the sturgeons’ growth, survival and locations across the Great Lakes ecosystems. The fish get very big, up to six feet long. This year, a new study estimated that the females may also live up to 400 years, which is more than twice as long as previously thought by scientists. The juvenile fish released this year may not return to the Maumee River for another 15-20 years. But scientists think they may imprint on their home waters, so the program hopes to see them return to this historic spawning ground.

1,500 baby sturgeon were released on Saturday, according to Cross. He worked the event and was also joined there by his family. His two children, Ian and Alyssa Cross, have grown up at the zoo, helping their dad.

"We got to feed them sometimes, and we got to pick them up….They're kinda cuter than other fish," said Alyssa, age 8. “Because they're endangered, I think that it's good that the Toledo Zoo is doing this to help bring back their population,” said Ian, age 11.

When asked what they might name the fish they release this year, Ian said, “Bob” and Alyssa said “Squishy Fin.”

Marsha Swanson, an educator at a local school, said she had encouraged the school’s 400 students to attend the event. They created a poster where the kids could all share the names of the sturgeon they released.

Animals that live long need generations of humans to understand and care for them. Sturgeon restoration is a team sport. Sturgeon Fest is just one of many events around the Midwest celebrating the giant fish and its human community. ✧

Sleep in and still catch fall walleye and bass

What’s the best time of day for fall fishing? One question anglers often ask is when is the best time of day for fishing. During fall, the answer is often the middle of the day. That’s right, you usually don’t have to be up at dawn or fish until dark now to catch fish. In fact, the peak bite is often during mid-day.

A reason for a middle of the day peak bite is that the water is usually warmest then, and a spike in water temperature often correlates to a spike in fish feeding.

Some of my best walleye catches have come during late October and the fishing was best from noon to 4 PM. And, earlier this week, two partners and I got in on some great fishing for big largemouth bass with a bite that peaked around noon!

That big bass bite occurred as we slow rolled Tungsten Thunder Cricket bladed jigs tipped with Blade Minnows paralleling what was left of the deep weed line while fishing one of my favorite lakes near Alexandria, MN. We chose bladed jigs because they do a great job of mimicking baitfish that bass love to eat and they are great for covering water to find active bass and triggering them to bite. The best part is we got to sleep in and still caught a bunch of fish! ✧

Minnesota DNR, partners develop guide for raising golden shiners

An online guide aims to help Minnesota minnow producers increase golden shiner production to meet angler demand in the state.

The Minnesota DNR partnered with Minnesota Sea Grant, minnow producers and Central Lakes College to evaluate methods to enhance operations and increase production of golden shiners. *A Guide for Increasing Production of Golden Shiner for Use as Bait in Minnesota* summarizes results from a three-year demonstration project conducted from 2022 through 2024. The guide is available on the Sea Grant website. A golden shiner workshop is planned for 2027 to discuss the project results with regulators and producers.

"The Minnesota DNR is excited about the results of the project," said Sean Sisler, DNR fisheries aquatic commercial programs consultant. "The guide outlines strategies for producing golden shiners in several ways and is a great example of a public-private partnership that supports increased production of these high-demand minnows in Minnesota."

Topics covered in the guide include system design, stocking rates, feeding regimens, water quality, fish growth, survival, production and lessons learned from each strategy. It can help producers develop facility plans, budgets and business plans and identify questions to consider before starting or expanding an operation.

Golden shiners are a popular baitfish in Minnesota and production within the state has not kept up with angler demand. However, importing these minnows into the state is prohibited to prevent new introductions of aquatic invasive species, diseases, parasites and other pathogens. Increasing golden shiner production within Minnesota is a priority to meet the demand. Additionally, the Minnesota DNR raised golden shiners at the New London hatchery as part of the project and began using the golden shiners produced as forage for yearling muskellunge raised there.

Additional information about bait supply in Minnesota and a note about the golden shiner project can be found in the 2024 DNR legislative report Ensuring a Viable Minnesota Grown Bait Supply (PDF).

The project was funded by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizen Commission on Minnesota Resources. The National Sea Grant Office provided additional funding.

Other Minnesota DNR efforts related to bait supply include:

- Formation of a Commercial Minnow Fisheries Work Group, created by the Minnesota DNR to increase communication between minnow stakeholders and the DNR. Members of the work group raise, sell, or use minnows commercially in Minnesota.
- Implementation of projects evaluating minnow harvest from infested waters while minimizing the transfer risk of zebra mussels.
- Watershed-based viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus surveillance testing to maintain VHSV-free waterbodies and zones.
- Work with minnow harvesters to review types of harvest gear and configurations and make recommendations to update gear regulations.

For more information on regulations and licensing related to aquaculture and minnows, visit the Minnesota DNR website, or call 651-296-6157 or 888-646-6367. ✧

Minnesota DNR seeks public input on several fisheries rule proposals

The Minnesota DNR is inviting preliminary public input on several proposals that would update fishing regulations in upcoming seasons.

"These proposed changes are intended to bring clarity to complex rules and strengthen fish conservation efforts, which, in the long run, would improve fishing in these waters," said John Dunn, DNR fisheries rules and regulations coordinator.

Regulation proposals include:

- **St. Croix River:** Add consistency between Minnesota and Wisconsin for bass catch-and-release seasons and adjust angling limits for multiple species.
- **St. Louis River:** Add Perch Lake to the boundary waters regulations, establish a bass catch-and-release season and revise walleye size limits.
- **Waters open and closed to fishing:** Open several streams to fishing in Otter Tail County, close waters to fishing including Musky Bay on the Mississippi River, close waters on streams near electric carp barriers, open waters to fishing below Lock and Dam 3 and 4 and allow the Minnesota DNR to close Grand Marais harbor to fishing in the fall when brook trout are congregating in the harbor.
- **Other topics:** Allow additional commercial minnow harvest on lakes previously closed to minnow harvest in south-central Minnesota, remove the special regulations for Crawford Lake in Wright County, clarify boundary water descriptions for tributary mouths along the Minnesota-North Dakota border, correct species names for commercial fishing regulations for Minnesota-South Dakota boundary waters, and adjust walleye length regulations on Saganaga Lake to make the length regulations consistent with statewide walleye rules and reduce confusion.

People can submit their input on the proposals until 4:30 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 19, by using a questionnaire online (engage.dnr.state.mn.us/embeds/projects/7944/survey-tools/30183).

The specific rulemaking changes that are being proposed are available on the Minnesota DNR fisheries rulemaking webpage (mndnr.gov/input/rules/fisheries/index.html). ✧

New Lake Michigan research vessel commissioned in Charlevoix

CHARLEVOIX COUNTY, Mich. – A new 66-foot research vessel designed to improve the safety and efficiency of Lake Michigan fisheries research is now in service after being commissioned in Charlevoix. The Michigan DNR held a commissioning ceremony for the vessel, which will serve as the agency's primary research vessel on Lake Michigan.

The vessel was named the *Research Vessel Steelhead* after its predecessor, the *Survey Vessel Steelhead*. DNR Deputy Director Shannon Lott christened the new vessel, and DNR Fish Chief Randy Claramunt formally commissioned it.

Previous coverage: Michigan DNR's new research vessel enters final testing on Lake Huron

"The importance and meaning of this new vessel to Fisheries Division and the DNR cannot be overstated," Claramunt said. "Lake Michigan is one of the largest freshwater lakes on the planet, and the *RV Steelhead* and crew will serve as the State of Michigan's primary means to collect data and inform fisheries management decisions on this Great Lake."

The *RV Steelhead* was designed by Boksa Marine Design and built by Moran Iron Works in partnership with Superior Boats. Funding came from appropriations in the state budgets for 2023 and 2025, along with grant funding from the Great Lakes Fishery Trust. The vessel includes updated navigation and sampling equipment, a redesigned fish-processing area and a multiuse stern platform for research activities.

It also features a SeaKeeper gyrostabilizer designed to provide a more stable work platform for crews, along with a bow thruster for more precise maneuvering and an integrated solar-charging system. Captain Pat O'Neill, who will operate the vessel, said the upgrades are intended to give field crews safer and more capable tools for fisheries research and resource management. The *RV Steelhead* will be used for several Lake Michigan surveys, including spring gill net, lakewide acoustic forage fish and bottom trawl surveys.

Those surveys help monitor species including lake whitefish, lake trout, burbot, yellow perch, alewife and rainbow smelt, as well as invasive species. ✧

Big baits for big fish

When we go fishing, we want to catch a fish. Big is better, but in reality, most people who go fishing just want to feel something pulling back. But if you're one of those anglers who prefers to chase the big ones, autumn is the time to do so. And almost all of the time in the autumn, using a larger than ordinary bait will increase the odds for success at catching a big one. You probably won't get as many bites, but when you do get bit, chances are it's going to be a larger than average fish. Following are some thoughts on using big baits for big fish.

First thing, and this is a really important consideration in your search for a truly big fish: If you want to catch a trophy, you've got to be on trophy-fish water. Some lakes are known for producing lots of small to medium-sized fish, others have a reputation for being home to fewer but larger fish. Ask around, do some research, find out which bodies of water you should concentrate on in your hunt for the big one.

Why are big baits more productive for big fish in the fall? First, the days are getting shorter and the water is getting colder. This signals to the fish that it's time to put some fat on. The fish prefer to eat one large meal instead of several smaller ones. It requires less energy for them to eat one big meal than it does for them to chase several small meals. Less energy used means more weight added.

Some baitfish that are fall spawners are more accessible to the predator fish. These are oily baitfish like whitefish and tullibee. They're in shallower water spawning and more accessible to large predators. Also, these are larger baitfish and more appealing to larger fish. Predator fish that eat oily baitfish grow big faster. Walleyes, muskies, and northern pike are especially attracted to these baitfish.

Now about baits. If you're after largemouth bass, many of the most successful bass-catchers will have a rubber-legged jig with a bulky piece of plastic attached. A Hack Attack Jig or Tour Grade Swim Jig tipped with a Rage Hawg is a proven big bass bait. Use the Hack Attack when fishing the deep weed line and the Swim Jig when the bass are active and move into the shallower areas.

When a trophy walleye is the target, try trolling crankbaits at night on one of those lakes that has the fall spawning baitfish. Find a shoreline area with a hard bottom that is close to deep water or a shallow reef that is surrounded by deep water. The baitfish move shallow at night and the walleyes follow them.

If walleyes or smallmouth are your quarry, it's hard to beat a big redtail chub on a live-bait rig. Redtails are expensive, and they can be hard to find, but if you can get some, the walleyes and smallmouth really like them. If you can't find redtails, sucker minnows are probably the best alternative.

Autumn is a great time to be on the water. In many places you'll have the lake or river to yourself. The opportunity to see wildlife is good, and the colorful leaves on the shoreline can be spectacular. And your chances for catching a trophy are perhaps better than in any other season. Head to a big-fish body of water, tie on a big-fish bait, and see what happens. This is an opportunity for a truly memorable fishing experience ✧

Invasive carp threaten Lake Michigan. What happens if they get there?

As invasive carp threaten to move closer to the Great Lakes, experts are raising concerns about what could happen if they reach Lake Michigan. In the places invasive carp are already abundant, they've harmed native fish communities by directly competing for food and habitat, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. If they make it to the Great Lakes, experts worry about what that could mean for food webs and the $7 billion-a-year fishing industry.

In August, the Illinois DNR announced it had found several hundred small silver carp in the Illinois River's Marseilles Pool, about 80 miles from Lake Michigan, as the Journal Sentinel previously reported. The fish ranged from 4 to 6 inches long, the agency said, and the discovery marked the first time invasive carp of that size had been found that far upriver since monitoring began in 2010.

"The Great Lakes states as a whole have been thinking about this issue for a long time," Wade Strickland, program director for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Office of Great Waters, told the Journal Sentinel. "Probably in earnest for about 15 to 18 years, when they first started making their migration northward up the Mississippi River."

More: Q&A: Two 'river rats' recount changes they've seen on the Mississippi

What would happen if invasive carp reached the Great Lakes?

There are four species of invasive carp: black, bighead, grass and silver carp. Many of the fish were brought to the country in the 1970s to control weeds and algae, then found their way to the Mississippi River.

While the consequences of invasive carp have already been observed elsewhere, it isn't entirely clear what would happen if they reached the Great Lakes. Karson Cisneros, the DNR's Great Lakes specialist, said predicting what might happen requires speculation because the Great Lakes are significantly different from inland rivers.

But experts agree on a few things.

All four experts who spoke with the Journal Sentinel expect invasive carp to disrupt the food web and begin to push out other species of fish. That might mean Great Lakes anglers catch fewer salmon because of the disruptions caused by invasive carp.

The carp would likely stay close to shore and avoid the Great Lakes' deep waters, Cisneros said, which means places like Green Bay could be especially affected.

But invasive carp reaching Lake Michigan doesn't mean other native fish populations would be harmed to the point of extinction. There typically need to be multiple factors involved before a species becomes endangered or extinct, Cisneros said.

More: Could invasive carp show up in the Wisconsin River? Middle schoolers learn to test for them.

Brandon Gerig, an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's School of Freshwater Sciences, said the outcome that worries him the most would be the consequences for nearshore environments. The carp would likely stay close to shore, where most lake recreation happens. That could mean anglers have fewer fish available to them.

There are still some reasons to be optimistic, he said.

States have started working together in an effort to address the problem, with cooperation from the federal government, Gerig said.

In early September, the Trump administration lifted a stop-work order that had previously halted work on the Brandon Road Interbasin Project on the Des Plaines River in Joliet, Illinois, The Detroit News reported. The project is meant to prevent invasive carp from reaching the Great Lakes.

"If we can actually get this barrier construction and move forward, we have a good opportunity I think to keep them out," Gerig said.

What could be done if invasive carp make it to Lake Michigan?

It's difficult to remove any invasive species once it becomes established, and carp in Lake Michigan would be no exception.

Cisneros said removing them would require "targeted physical removal efforts" and extensive collaboration among those involved in managing Lake Michigan.

In the Mississippi River near La Crosse, researchers have tried a different approach: feeding the carp. The goal is to encourage the fish to keep returning to the same place so commercial fishers can catch them, the Journal Sentinel reported.

What have invasive carp done to other bodies of water?

Invasive carp are already established in many places across the southern United States.

The level of spread has been alarming to experts. Titus Seilheimer, a fisheries specialist at Wisconsin Sea Grant, said silver carp make up 80% to 90% of the fish biomass in the lower Illinois River. Some species of invasive carp can grow to be up to 100 pounds. The spread of invasive carp is disrupting the food web, Seilheimer said.

More: Scientists try new way to limit invasive carp in Mississippi River: feeding them

Other fish depend on the same food supply at key stages of their development. Invasive carp eat food other foraging fish also pursue. While those other foraging fish tend to be smaller and susceptible to predators, carp often grow big enough that they don't have many predators.

Not every carp grows to 100 pounds. It depends on food in the area and the abundance of other carp, among other factors. But carp often do grow large enough that they are just too big for pike, musky and bass to eat. ✧

Changes in the volunteer submission portion of the Coded-Wire Tag program

The Great Lakes Mass Marking Program (aka, Coded Wire Tag Program (CWT)) provides valuable information for the management of trout and salmon. Salmonids are tagged by the USFWS before stocking and tags are later recovered by Fisheries Division (FD) Creel Clerks, Research Vessels, weir operations, USFWS personnel, and from heads submitted by anglers through our volunteer submission program.

Fisheries Division would like to thank those anglers that have contributed heads through our volunteer submission program. Through the years volunteer submitted heads have been valuable for answering specific questions at the local level, such as how does survival change with the use of net pens or by stocking different strains of fish? FD feels that those types of management questions have now mostly been appropriately addressed.

Beginning January 1, 2027, Fisheries Division will no longer be asking anglers to cut off heads, fill out forms, and drop heads off in freezers around the state. This decision is based on a recent program review finding that the volunteer submission program creates substantial inefficiencies. Further, the management questions addressed through the mass marking program now require more rigorous supplemental data in addition to snout/tag returns. The inefficiency issues include 1) a large number of submitted heads that lack forms or have forms with missing data, 2) over 30% of submitted heads not containing a tag, 3) the network of freezers maintained by Fisheries Division around the state are often abused and vandalized, which requires continual maintenance and replacement, 4) and CWT data from volunteer submissions cannot be linked to angler effort, which limits its statistical utility for addressing the applied research questions that inform management actions.

FD creel clerks and USFWS personnel will still be collecting heads at Great Lakes ports, and we encourage anglers to provide data and samples if they are approached by them at these ports**.** When a snout is collected by agency staff, anglers will still be able to obtain information about their fish by providing an email address and looking up that address in the Hunt and Fish App to query program results.

The CWT Program will continue to provide valuable information for the management of Great Lakes salmon and trout, and FD along with USFWS are committed to supporting this program. While volunteer angler submissions addressed the management needs at the onset of the CWT program, the shift to relying on Creel Clerks, Research Vessels, weir operations, and USFWS personnel to recover heads will maximize the utility of these efforts.

If you are interested in participating in other citizen science efforts, please visit the link on our website: Community science opportunities. ✧

Ohio River earns Ohio's 18th Water Trail designation

IRONTON, Ohio – The Ohio River is now officially recognized as the state's 18th Ohio Water Trail. Today, at the Ohio River Way summit, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) presented the Ohio River Community with the designation, which establishes the state's longest water trail at 167 miles.

At the summit, ODNR Director Mary Mertz presented the official proclamation recognizing the Ohio River as Ohio's 18th water trail. This achievement follows the National Park Service's 2025 designation of the Ohio River Way as a 308-mile National Water Trail that runs along the borders of Ohio, Kentucky, and Indiana.

"This official designation of the Ohio River is recognition of the communities, partnerships, and people who have committed countless hours, ideas, and energy into elevating one of our region's greatest natural resources," said ODNR Director Mary Mertz. "This designation sends a clear message that Ohio is committed to honoring its natural resources and expanding access to outdoor experiences for everyone."

The newly designated state water trail covers a significant portion of the river but does not include the entire Ohio border. It begins at Ice Creek in Coal Grove and continues to Cincinnati's Shawnee Outlook Park, where it meets the Great Miami River, another state-designated water trail.

ODNR's water trail program is designed to expand awareness of public paddling access while improving safety on Ohio's waterways. Each designation relies on strong community leadership, a shared commitment to safe recreation, and clear, accessible guides that help paddlers find points of access, understand local hazards, and discover nearby places of interest.

Ohio Water Trail designations are one part of a greater mission to improve water quality across the state. With support from Governor Mike DeWine's H2Ohio initiative and grants benefiting Appalachian communities, Ohio continues to make measurable progress in restoring and protecting its waterways.

Ohio River Way has played an important role in strengthening regional partnerships and promoting the river as a corridor of culture, history, pride, and opportunity. The organization's annual summit brings together community leaders, business partners, and conservation and recreation enthusiasts who share a commitment to the river's future. ✧

Record tournament catches highlight Great Lakes Finesse distinctions

The details that set apart the Great Lakes Finesse brand make a very real difference with the toughest fish to fool, and the record books help tell that story.

The Great Lakes are famous for the jumbo-sized smallmouth bass their expansive waters produce, but the fish themselves are famously tough customers, and the bigger they grow, the harder these bass become to fool. Great Lakes waters stay extremely clear most of the time, and with extensive pressure from anglers who possess ever-improving equipment and knowledge sets, the biggest bass in these waters have seen every trick repeatedly.

The entire Great Lakes Finesse brand has been built around catching these most-challenging fish in every type of condition—created by anglers dedicated to finding solutions to every problem big Great Lakes smallmouth bass present. Two exceptional, record-setting tournament performances highlight the deep understanding those anglers possess and the importance of the details of every GLF product. Those distinctions are vital. Several brands' baits and terminal tackle pieces look similar at a glance but are vastly different in real fishing situations.

In 2023, GLF brand manager Dan Miguel and Matt Dobson won the Douglass Bass Opens event on the St. Lawrence River with the largest five-fish bag ever brought to the scales from this world-class smallmouth bass fishery. This year, GLF pro staffer Evan Kung won the Bassmaster Elite Series season finale on the St. Lawrence/Lake Ontario with the largest smallmouth-exclusive catch in Bassmaster history.



Miguel's and Dobson's 32-pound, 4-ounce smallmouth bass limit came in an event where anglers were not permitted to run to Lake Ontario, which is where the largest bags come from in most St. Lawrence River tournaments. They outpaced a field of many of the region's best anglers by nearly 5 pounds, which is an extraordinary margin in a single-day tournament on smallmouth waters.

That weight represents nearly a 6 1/2-pound AVERAGE. All five fish weighed 6 pounds or more. Any angler who has spent time around the Great Lakes understands that while large smallmouth are plentiful, genuine 6-pound-plus fish are special and far more difficult get to bite (and to land) than 5-pound fish.

"If a 4- or even 5-pound smallmouth is near or on a bed, you can throw almost any bait in there, and it' s probably going to bite," Miguel said. "Six- and 7-pound fish are different. They're old, super smart, and hard to fool."

The record catch came neither from a single spectacular spot nor from an area Miguel and Dobson had to themselves. They moved around throughout the day and were often in the same areas as competitors who were not finding the same success.

Miguel is certain that the shaping and specific attributes of their GLF baits and their total finesse approach were the difference makers. They caught their fish on GLF Drop Minnows fished on drop shot rigs, and on GLF Snack Craws and Flat Cats fished on Stealth Ball Head Jigs.

Notably, the heaviest St. Lawrence River tournament catch of all time could have been even larger! The first hooked fish that day, which Miguel said was the largest smallmouth he has ever seen hooked, made a huge initial surge, bent the hook out slightly and came unhooked. Miguel has no doubt it weighed more than 8 pounds ✧

Minnesota DNR seeks input on winter trout season in lakes

The Minnesota DNR is evaluating winter angling season dates for trout in lakes. Public input will help guide whether to maintain or modify the structure of the winter trout season.

The winter trout season in lakes applies to both lake trout and stream trout (brook trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, and splake). The season currently includes different opening dates for lakes within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and those outside the BWCAW.

"We want to hear from people while we consider whether to make future adjustments to the winter trout season dates," said Beth Holbrook, DNR fisheries research scientist.

Interested individuals can submit comments in one of three ways:

- Accessing a short five-question questionnaire online (engage.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries-public-input-wildlife-public-input/surveys/winter-trout-season-dates-questionnaire). People can also request a paper copy be mailed to them by contacting Beth Holbrook at beth.holbrook@state.mn.us or by calling 218-203-4312.
- Emailing comments to beth.holbrook@state.mn.us
- Mailing comments to:
  - Beth Holbrook
  - Fish and Wildlife Division
  - 1601 Minnesota Drive
  - Brainerd, MN 56401

Responses will be accepted through January 31, 2027.

Changes to the season would go into effect no earlier than March 2028.

For more info on trout fishing: trout fishing webpage (mndnr.gov/fishing/trout). ✧

The best way to catch a bunch of fall walleyes?



Many years ago, I started fishing a bottom bouncer weight with a plain snell and a night crawler for summer walleyes. The rig quickly became a stalwart in my guiding and walleye tournament arsenal. Over time, however, I discovered the rig also catches fish during the cooler water periods of spring and fall.

Now, the "plain rig" as my fishing buddies call it, is often my "go to rig" regardless the season.

During summer I like to target traditional walleye holding structure like underwater points, humps, and sunken islands. Walleyes often hold in water depths ranging from 12- 28 feet depending on the lake. I scan these structural elements using my sonar unit looking for the presence of fish. When fish are found, I employ the plain rig at about .8 mph to quickly work through the fish to trigger bites. A 2-ounce bottom bouncer is my preferred weight for this fishing.

During fall, many of the deep, clear lakes that I fish have walleye populations that slide into much deeper water, sometimes 40-feet of water and even deeper! These fish are often found along steep breaks that plummet into very deep water. Because of the deeper waters being fished, I upsize my bouncer to 3- and even 4-ounce models. Again, I quickly work through marked fish.

A key to plain rig fishing regardless the season is to keep the bouncer on bottom but fishing as vertical as possible to avoid snagging and bottom debris. Plus, a nearly vertically fished bouncer has a stuttering action that is key to triggering bites.

Here's more about the specifics of the plain rig. As mentioned, it starts with a heavy bottom bouncer. To the bouncer, I attach about a 40-inch snell of 10-pound fluorocarbon line. Tied to the end of the snell is a pair of hooks. The lead hook is often a fluorescent orange #4 bait hook and the trailing hook, a few inches back, is a #4 red metal bait hook. I nose hook the crawler with the orange hook, leave some slack, and embed the trailer hook into the crawler's body.

I use baitcasting tackle for this fishing. My rod choice is a 7-foot Speed Stick designed specifically for bottom bouncer rigging. It's got a light, sensitive tip but with a good amount of backbone to fish a heavy bouncer. This past summer, I started fishing this rod paired with an Accel baitcasting reel. This is a lightweight, smooth reel that I spool with 15-pound braid. Not only does this rod and reel combo do a great job, but it's a very affordable set up too.

If your fall plans include walleye fishing, consider the plain rig using the tips just offered and you just might find a fall walleye fishing bonanza! ✧

Egg collections keep fishery strong

Continued from page 1

While some of the fish reproduce naturally—mostly lake trout on reefs and Chinook, coho and steelhead in streams on the Michigan side of the lake—most still need to get their start in a hatchery. In Wisconsin, fisheries managers rely on three egg collection facilities to supply state fish hatcheries.

There's Strawberry Creek near Sturgeon Bay, the C.D. "Buzz" Besadny Anadromous Fish Facility on the Kewaunee River in Kewaunee and the Root River Steelhead Facility on the Root River in Racine. Money from Wisconsin fishing licenses and the Great Lakes Salmon and Trout Stamp fund the egg collection, hatchery and stocking activity.

Strawberry Creek is designated as the state's primary Chinook egg collection site. In many years, it's the only one as it commonly meets the entire Wisconsin Chinook egg quota. There also have been years when the DNR has donated Chinook eggs from Strawberry Creek to Illinois, Indiana or Michigan when the hatcheries supplying those states encountered shortfalls.

The Kewaunee facility is a back-up for Chinook and also used for coho, brown trout and steelhead. The Racine site is mostly for steelhead, brown trout and coho. Crews of fisheries biologists, fish health specialists and fisheries technicians work the facilities during spawning runs, often fertilizing the eggs on site and transporting the eggs to hatcheries.

Since 2023 the Wisconsin DNR annual Lake Michigan stocking goals have been 1.2 million Chinook, 500,000 coho salmon, 460,000 steelhead, 450,000 brown trout, 50,000 brook trout and 45,000 lake trout. To meet those numbers the DNR has egg collection goals typically of about 3.5 million Chinook eggs, 1.2 million coho eggs and 1 million Seeforellen brown trout eggs, according to the DNR.

Recent rains have raised water levels and helped draw salmon into the tributaries. The next step is for them to enter the egg collection facilities. And the DNR fisheries staff will take it from there. All egg, no chicken. ✧

SONS get recognition

The SONS of Lake Erie were among other organizations honored for their longevity in service to the fishermen and the fishery of Lake Erie at the PA Steelhead Associations Fall Run Picnic. The SONS reached their 45th anniversary this year while 3-CU Trout Organization and the Northwest Chapter of Trout Unlimited both have served 60 years. The PA Steelhead Association achieved its 30 anniversary. It was a great honor to be included with these other great organizations. ✧



Second Amendment issues

Federal Court Strikes Down New York Body Armor Ban in Historic Second Amendment Victory for FPC

The Firearms Policy Coalition (FPC) secured a historic victory in Heeter v. James when U.S. District Judge John L. Sinatra, Jr. struck down New York's 2022 body armor ban, holding that defensive body armor is constitutionally protected under the Second Amendment. The court granted FPC summary judgment and issued a permanent injunction against the state's restrictions on purchasing and selling protective armor. ✧

Other Breaking News Items:
(Click on title or URL to read full article

9,000 muskies stocked in Wisconsin waters after tribal, club, state collaborate
A new partnership between tribal, state and private entities resulted in nearly 9,000 muskies being stocked in mid-October in northeastern Wisconsin waters.

Microplastics trigger inflammation linked to disease and death. Now scientists appear to have discovered why
A new study found that chemical reactions between water and six types of fossil fuel-based plastic created particles that damaged red blood cells and proteins in laboratory tests. The study comes amid increasing concerns about plastic pollution in the Great Lakes, the source of drinking water for 40 million people in the U.S. and Canada

A year into reintroduction, no grayling seen in Michigan wild. Hope remains
Northern Michigan tribes are releasing Arctic grayling into waterways for the second year in a row, in hopes of restoring the native freshwater species

Minnesota's golden shiner shortage is pushing the bait industry toward fish farming
Minnesota faces an annual shortage of approximately 10,000 gallons of golden shiners, a popular baitfish, as declining wild supplies, changing weather patterns and habitat pressures make traditional harvesting more difficult.

Great Lakes lab hit by DOGE is hanging on — for now
The Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has survived the Trump administration's efforts to eliminate it, but staffing cuts under DOGE have reduced its workforce by about 35%. Former employees warn that the loss of expertise threatens the lab's ability to forecast harmful algal blooms, monitor ecosystem health, and anticipate environmental crises affecting Great Lakes communities.

SONS of Lake Erie work with state nature groups on Presque Isle fish habitat
The SONS of Lake Erie are working with the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission and Department of Natural Resources for the annual fish habitat placement, assembling 60 wooden habitat structures and bringing the total number of habitats placed to over 800 since 1995

Michigan DNR to track fish stocking using 23andMe-style gene testing
The Michigan DNR has begun using genetic testing to track the success of some of its fish-stocking operations. The goal is to find out if fish living in a particular water body descended from the parents of stocked fish.

Senate passes bill to funnel billions toward Great Lakes Restoration Initiative
The U.S. Senate recently passed legislation that would reauthorize the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, sending the measure to the U.S. House of Representatives, which passed a different version of the bill in March

[Lake sturgeon released into Saginaw River system in hopes of restoring population]
Nearly 100 young lake sturgeon were released into the Tittabawassee River Saturday, in efforts to restore the species' population. Three similar releases were held later in the day on the Shiawassee, Flint and Cass rivers; all four rivers connect with the Saginaw River, which then flows into Lake Huron's Saginaw Bay

[Nearly 700 sturgeon released into St. Louis River on Treaty Day]
The Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa recognized Treaty Day on Wednesday, in part by releasing nearly 700 sturgeon fingerlings into the upper St. Louis River. Treaty Day marks the 1854 treaty signing between the United States and the Anishinaabe people

[Water agencies talking with Chicago, but moving forward with $6B plan to sidestep city]
Suburban water agencies in northeastern Illinois are continuing to advance a proposed $6 billion regional water system that would reduce their dependence on Chicago's Lake Michigan water supply, even as they remain in discussions with the city

[Senate advances bills on game warden warrants, snagging fish in Pa.]
Pennsylvania lawmakers advanced bills that would require game wardens to obtain a warrant or meet a recognized exception before entering private property and would establish penalties for illegally snagging or foul-hooking fish. The measures aim to clarify enforcement authority and strengthen rules against unsporting fishing practices

[Michigan researchers make breakthrough that could advance lake sturgeon conservation efforts]
Michigan researchers have refined genetic testing that can more reliably determine the sex of lake sturgeon, particularly in young fish and outside the spawning season. The breakthrough could aid conservation and fisheries management by reducing handling time and allowing researchers to analyze archived samples.

[Soo Locks expansion hits halfway point in latest construction phase]
The Soo Locks expansion has reached the halfway point of its third and final construction phase, marking a major milestone in the $3.2 billion project to build a second Poe-sized lock in Sault Ste. Marie. The new lock is expected to improve the reliability of Great Lakes shipping and is on track for completion in 2030.

End