

# FISHING ADVENTURES

## 2025



While fishing on the Menominee River is good year-round, summer is unbeatable. The summer of 2024 was particularly excellent, offering great fishing without the distraction of pleasure boaters that you will find on most Wisconsin lakes. Despite needing to adjust for river conditions and weather, we always had a successful day on the water.

By mid-June, smallmouth bass were in their summer pattern. Fishing for smallmouth on lakes can be difficult during the post-spawn period. However, river smallmouth bass quickly go on the feed once spawning is completed. The key is to zero in on available forage—find the food, and you will find active smallmouth bass. With rising water temperatures, river smallmouth will eagerly crush topwater baits.

June 10th and 11th were as good as it gets for Jeff and Ron from Kentucky. Having fished with me a few years back and experiencing an amazing topwater bite, they were eager for a repeat. On the way to the boat landing, I mentioned that the conditions were perfect for topwater fishing: the water temperature was rising, and the weather was stable with light winds. My only decision was choosing which stretch of the Menominee River to fish.

I decided to take them to the same stretch of river they had fished with me in the past. I positioned the boat facing the current within casting distance of a small weed bed on the backside of a point. Ron was using a Whopper Plopper, and Jeff had a three-inch Hubs Chub. When two anglers are casting topwater baits, it is wise for each to use a different bait until a pattern is developed.

Ron scored first with an 18-inch smallmouth on the Whopper Plopper. However, about five minutes later, Jeff connected with a 19-incher on the Hubs Chub. Even though both baits are prop baits, they have different actions. The weed bed produced six quality smallmouths, marking a great start to the day.

Next, we drove upriver and successfully fished another weed bed. We continued with a controlled drift, carefully targeting shoreline wood, weeds, and rocks with positive results. Occasionally, we would see smallmouth rising in the center of the river, and a properly placed cast resulted in a big river smallmouth. The largest smallmouth we caught were off mid-river structures.

The final tally was 58 smallmouths on topwater baits and three on soft plastics. We could have caught more smallmouths with soft plastics, but what sane angler wants to fish soft plastics when smallmouths are hitting topwater?

Given our success the previous day, it seemed logical to return to the same stretch of river. I usually prefer to explore different spots each day, but under the circumstances, I decided to take Ron and Jeff back to the proven area. Despite similar conditions, fishing always comes with uncertainties.

We began the morning with Ron and Jeff fishing topwater baits over the same weed beds as the day before. Ron managed to catch a 14-inch smallmouth, but the action was slower than expected. I handed Jeff a rod rigged with a five-inch Case Sinking Shad, a soft plastic jerkbait, and instructed him to let it sink for a few seconds before giving it a few quick twitches. It wasn't long before Jeff was fighting a 19-inch smallmouth. Ron continued with topwater without success, while Jeff caught two more smallmouths using the Case Sinking Shad.

We had discovered the pattern for the day. We fished the same areas as the previous day, catching smallmouth bass with Case Sinking Shads and only a few with topwater baits. On the second day, our tally was 40 smallmouths, with only 2 caught on topwater. We could have spent more time fishing topwater, but it was clearly a day for soft plastics.

If you want to catch quality smallmouth bass and escape the noise and distractions of lake fishing, treat yourself to a day on the Menominee River. The serene environment and excellent fishing conditions will make for an unforgettable experience.

There were many other exceptional days this past summer. The July topwater bite was good, but on any given day, a wacky worm rig, Case Lil pintail worm, and Case Jacks worm would catch the most smallmouth bass. I would rig one client up with topwater and another with soft plastics. Occasionally, topwater would shine, but it was rare that we did not catch smallmouth bass on topwater.



**Fishing Adventures is published annually**  
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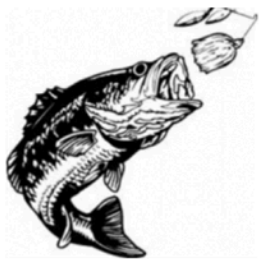
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# GUIDE TALES

I got out of the channel, I hit the throttle, and needless to say, not much happened. The boat did speed up, but I knew we were not going to get it on plane. I told, not asked, the guy to slide over so his butt was on the front casting deck. You would have thought I had asked him to run a marathon. After a few malicious remarks, he moved a bit, and it did help, but we still could not get on plane.

We eventually got to a spot that I felt might hold a musky, and for these guys, that was good enough. They rigged up their rods with baits appropriate for the time of year and water we were fishing and started to make haphazard casts. I tried to explain that we were fishing a weed line and looking for a muskie to be holding either in the weeds or along the weed line. I wanted one of them to cast a bucktail over the weeds and one to cast parallel to the weed line. I might as well have been talking to the weeds, for they did not acknowledge my advice.

After fishing for a few hours, they said it was time for a break. They opened up the cooler and had enough food for ten people, including piles of sandwiches, candy bars, chips, and sodas. After they put a good dent in the food supply, I started up the outboard and attempted to head to the other end of the flowage. A trip that normally would have taken ten minutes took twenty minutes. The important thing was that we made it to the other end safely.

I suggested that they change baits, and they actually listened to me. The father was in the front of the boat, and I explained the direction I would be moving the boat and told him that this was a very good spot. I also told the son to be alert, but I don't think that was in his disposition, since I couldn't even convince him to stand up in order to cast instead of parking his butt on the seat, which made it difficult for him to cast. I kept my eye on the father in the front of the boat and could see a wake following his bucktail. I yelled for him to get ready and make a figure eight, but he said, "I don't see nothing," as a muskie boiled and swam away. I told him that he just missed a nice fish, but he again said, "I didn't see anything."

Following his missed opportunity, he started to complain about my choice of lake, commenting that I was ripping him off. He said that given how much money they had spent on gas, lodging, and my guide service, they should have caught a few muskies by now. He failed to mention their grocery bill, but it must have been like a small mortgage payment! By that time, I really did not care what happened, but I was concerned about the next day since I had another day booked with them.

To break it up, I decided to run back to the other side of the lake, thinking that I would at

least be closer to the boat landing and could make a quick exit before my nerves snapped. The drive to the other end of the lake was a long one, and I had plenty of time to think about all the fish I had boated on this particular flowage over the years. I tried to block these guys out of my mind as much as possible.

We approached a huge shallow bar that topped off at four feet. I never catch big fish off this bar, but I was just concerned about catching a muskie. The father got back up on the deck of the boat, and the kid continued to eat. On the third pass over the bar, the father had a muskie hit his bucktail at the boat side. Of course, he was not ready and yanked the bucktail out of the water, and it flew inches from my head, getting snagged in my duffle bag. I said, "You missed him," and he replied, "That was a northern, not a muskie." I said, "I don't think so." He responded, "I have been fishing muskies for over thirty years and caught more muskies than you would ever think about catching."

Well, that was it. I had had it with these guys. It was a good thing that we were close to the boat landing. I didn't want to see these guys anymore, and they were too big for me to throw out of the boat, or I might have been sorely tempted to try. We got back to the landing, took out their stuff, and hardly a word was said. They walked over and said, "Looks like we aren't going fishing tomorrow." I replied, "I guess not." I did get them to pay the balance for the day but not for the broken seat. I sure was not going to argue with two 350-pounders.



Years back, I had a guy and his son book a two-day musky trip. At the time, I was running a 16-foot fiberglass boat with a 60 HP motor. The boat worked fine for me in every situation until these two guys pulled up in the morning. They got out of a pick-up truck, and my first reaction was instant panic. They were both well over six feet tall and easily weighed over 350 pounds each. The coast guard sticker on the boat said the maximum capacity was 650 pounds. So how do you put 700 pounds of fisherman and a 220-pound guide into a 650-pound capacity boat?

If we had been fishing on the Menominee River where we didn't even have to put the boat on plane and I could idle from spot to spot, it would have been easy to deal with. The problem was that they wanted to go musky fishing on Caldron Falls Flowage. Having a successful day on the water meant fishing the entire flowage and making several runs from one end to the other.

I had met the guys at a boat landing and had the boat in the water before they arrived. Since there was no dock, I had beached the boat. Besides the weight of the fishermen themselves, they had their tackle and, of course, a big cooler loaded with who knows what. By the looks of these guys, I knew they were not going on the water without that cooler, although I did convince them to lighten up on the tackle.

Getting their stuff in the boat was the easy part; now they actually had to climb into the boat. The first thing the father said was, "Pull the boat up closer so I don't have to get my feet wet." I replied, "It is as close as we are going to get it." Eventually, they got into the boat, and the son plunked his butt on the back seat, almost breaking the pedestal and letting out a big groan. The father sat on the gunnel on the passenger side, almost sitting on his rods in the process. Next, I had to try to push the boat off the shoreline and climb in myself. I am a fairly strong guy, and I had all I could do to push the boat off. I asked the guy to move to the back of the boat with his son, and he just looked at me and said nothing. About that time, I was ready to quit and say the day was over, but again, you do what you have to do.

That was the easy part; now we had to try to get on our way. It's a good thing it was on a weekday and not on a weekend. On a weekend, the excess boat traffic would have made navigation all the more dangerous. After



# Pre-Spawn Swimbait Bite

Even under good river conditions and stable weather, pre-spawn smallmouth can be scattered, and swimbaits are again the bait of choice. While guiding, I start out the day by having at least one of my clients casting a swimbait. If the bite is slow, I will continue to change baits on one of my client’s rods or mine, but someone is always casting a swimbait until we see a pattern.

Stained water can warm quickly, but the water temperature also drops after a cool spring night or a cold rain. Any drop in water temperature can cause smallmouth to suspend in the water column or hold tight to the bottom. Swimbaits remain productive, but you need to get the swimbait in the right place in the water column. This can be done by letting the swimbait drop and retrieving at a different depth each cast or by using larger jigheads.

Swimbaits are effective after a cold front, even if the water temperature does not rise. I have had countless days when we had to deal with cold front conditions, including high winds and overcast skies. These conditions will push smallmouth tight to the bottom, and they can refuse to move. If this is the situation, try to keep the swimbait as close to the bottom as possible. Use a slow retrieve, just fast enough to keep the paddle tail moving. Try not to pause the retrieve. Smallmouth can follow the swimbait, and if you pause your retrieve, they will turn and move away. You will also have a good chance of getting snagged. In summer, stopping your retrieve and jigging the swimbait will trigger strikes from both smallmouth and walleye.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach when fishing with swimbaits. It's often wise to start with a smaller swimbait under tough conditions. Why waste time using a larger swimbait when you know the bite is tough? After a cold front, I begin with a shorter, slender paddle tail. Despite using a shorter swimbait, continue to use a longer shank on your jighead. When smallmouth are sluggish, it might take a few more seconds to roll the swimbait, and the longer shank hook on the jighead will result in more hook-ups.

Your choice of jighead also plays a crucial role in your success rate. Avoid cheap jigheads with short shank hooks. Besides having a longer shank, the jighead should have a quality, super-sharp hook and gripping power to keep your swimbait securely pinned, minimizing tears or shortening the life of your swimbait. After catching a smallmouth, if the swimbait is loose on the jighead, it

will impair the action of the swimbait, resulting in fewer catches. Even a short strike by a finicky smallmouth can pull the swimbait off the shank just enough to make a difference. A quality jighead will ensure your swimbait has the longest possible lifespan.

On May 10, Mark Erickson experienced an awesome swimbait bite on a less-than-desirable day to be on the water. We were on the backside of a cold front facing 25 MPH northwest wind. To decrease our odds, the water temperature dropped four degrees, which is never good for catching pre-spawn smallmouth.

Our first stop was a rocky shoreline in a shallow stump field where we crushed the smallmouth a few days ago. Swimbaits, soft plastic jerkbaits, swim jigs, and spinnerbaits were all on the menu, but we only caught one 18-inch smallmouth and a few northern pike. Every spot we fished, we managed to catch one lone smallmouth. I was trying to figure out whether these were just scattered fish or whether they had just turned off. Our only option was to keep on the move.

Hopes were high as I approached a small rocky bay on the edge of the main river channel. Mark remembered the spot from past guide trips and couldn’t wait to make a cast. I positioned the boat on the edge of the bay and hit the spot lock on the trolling motor. On the first cast, Mark and his buddy both yelled "Fish On!". On the first cast, Marc's fish measured 21 inches, and his buddy's fish was just shy of 20 inches. Three more big smallmouth followed in a short amount of time. We returned to the small bay three times during the day and caught at least one 20-inch smallmouth each time. Every smallmouth we caught over 20-inches hammered a 3 ½ inch swimbait. Early May might not be a time for catching huge numbers of smallmouth, but it is prime time to catch big Menominee River smallmouth.

A few days later, I picked up Ron and Dave at Popp's Resort and we headed to the Honey Hole. The effects of the cold front had passed, and the water temperature was on the rise. It didn't take long for both of my clients to start catching smallmouth. It looked like another swimbait day.

By late morning, the water temperature had risen by three degrees, and the smallmouth started to hammer the swimbaits. I tied on a Hubs Chub Topwater bait and passed the rod to Dave. Having fished with me before, he knew how to pop and pause the Hubs Chub. Its unique action makes it ideal for pre-spawn



smallmouth. Dave caught an 18-inch smallmouth on the third cast. A few casts later, he landed another smallmouth. At this point, Ron was doing just fine pounding smallmouth with the swimbait, but he turned to me and asked, “Do you have another

one of those Hubs Chubs?” Needless to say, we spent the rest of the day crushing smallmouth with topwater baits. While there were no monsters that day, we caught lots of quality smallmouth!





# Summer River Walleyes



One of the best summer walleye fishing days I have ever had was in late July when a few clients and I were fishing a small rock island on the Menominee River. The previous day, I had been catching a lot of smallmouth around the island, but that day my clients wanted walleyes. I positioned my boat about 80 feet from the rocks where my locator showed fish everywhere. Most of the fish were within two feet of the bottom, though a few were suspended higher. My clients were excited when I showed them the locator.

I hit my spot lock on the trolling motor in ten feet of water and instructed my clients to fish on both sides of the boat. One client used a 1/8-ounce orange jig tipped with a leech and cast towards the island, while the other used a Spearpoint number one hook with a nightcrawler and cast on the deeper side of the boat. The nightcrawler quickly produced a 14-inch walleye, whereas the jig and leech brought nothing. After the fifth walleye was caught on the nightcrawler, the other client switched to a nightcrawler as well. The action was so intense that I suggested using half a crawler to conserve bait. The walleyes continued to bite eagerly on the half nightcrawlers, and everything was going great.

As the morning progressed, we began to run short on nightcrawlers. Switching to leeches yielded no bites, and neither did using plastics. It was clear the walleyes were only interested in nightcrawlers. By 11:00 am, we had run out of bait. I told my clients there was a place not far away where we could get more nightcrawlers. We decided to head back to the boat landing to replenish

our supply.

Leaving one client with the boat, I took the other with me to check out a nightcrawler sign I had often passed on the county highway. We drove to a gravel driveway and arrived at an old trailer surrounded by dilapidated farm buildings and logging equipment. The place looked a bit eerie. When I approached the trailer, I was expecting a grizzly old man, but instead, an elderly woman in her 80s greeted us kindly. She brought out two containers of nightcrawlers, the last she had, and I paid her four dollars, giving her a five-dollar bill and told her to keep the change.

With our bait replenished, we returned to the small island and anchored in the same spot. Surprisingly, we couldn't catch anything. The walleyes had moved on. I suggested we move to another location, suspecting that predators like pike or muskies had moved in, or the baitfish had dispersed. One client was hesitant to leave, still thrilled by our earlier success. We tried several other spots but only caught a few small walleyes on leeches. Despite needing extra nightcrawlers, we had already caught over 40 walleyes from that small rock island on the Menominee River.

Submerged rocks on the inside bends of a river, though small and hard to locate, often result in excellent fishing. They are the hidden gems a guide reveals only when fishing is tough, ensuring a reputation for putting his clients on fish. The key is to make clients believe these places are hard to find and that they might not hold fish the next day. After all, a guide has to protect his honey holes.

Live bait is fantastic when walleyes are plentiful. However, swimbaits can be highly effective

when walleyes are spread out. Some of the largest walleyes I caught during the summer were on swimbaits while I was targeting smallmouth bass. In late July, my grandson Jax and I were catching several smallmouths around shallow rocks, but the big bass eluded us. When we positioned the boat along the deeper edge of the rocks, hoping to find a few large smallmouth, Jax hooked a nice 26-inch walleye. If we had some live bait, we probably would have crushed the walleyes. We continued casting swimbaits for the rest of the day and eventually caught some dandy smallmouth. It's typical for smallmouth bass and walleyes to share the same structure, with walleyes holding on the deeper side.

Unknown to many anglers that fish for walleyes on natural lakes, river walleyes can be aggressive around shallow water rocks at midday. This walleye movement peaks on bright sunny days. It is not rare to catch walleyes with soft plastics, and occasionally a topwater bait. Why? The combination of rocks, scattered weeds, and current attracts baitfish and crayfish.

When the wind changes, it can trigger the movements of both walleyes and smallmouth bass, leading to fast and furious action. On

a typical summer morning, the river is often calm or only lightly rippled. While walleyes can be aggressive in the weeds, the bite is usually sporadic, making it tough to find a pattern. This might be ideal for catching smallmouth on topwater baits but not for catching walleyes. Smallmouth bass will hover in the upper half of the water column, while walleyes will hold on the bottom. You will need to fish tight to the bottom with either a jig and live bait or soft plastics.

However, if the wind picks up in late morning, the same weed bed can become very productive. Swimbaits are my go-to bait in such scenarios. Unlike smallmouth, walleyes might be skittish and refrain from rising to hit a swimbait. You might need to adjust the weight of your jighead to allow the swimbait to swim lower in the water column. Once you locate walleyes with the swimbait, try a slip bobber rigged with a leech or nightcrawler. Vary the depth of your slip bobber until you connect with hungry walleyes.

If you are looking for some walleyes for the table during the "Dog Days of Summer," there is no need to be on the water at sunrise. Head for the river, find some weeds, rocks, and current, and have some fun.





# Topwater Smallmouth !



River smallmouth bass will strike a variety of presentations, but given the choice, I prefer to fish them on the surface. I have yet to meet an angler who doesn't enjoy catching smallmouth bass on topwater lures. Aside from muskies, a big smallmouth hitting a topwater lure may be the ultimate thrill in freshwater fishing. Once you've caught a few smallmouth on the surface, it's hard to switch to another type of lure. Some anglers would rather catch one or two smallmouth on top than several fish using other methods.

I began my topwater journey in the early 1980s when I started fishing on the Menominee River. While I had caught both smallmouth and largemouth bass on topwater baits in natural lakes in my area, I was never able to establish a consistent pattern. The old-timers taught me that topwater fishing is only good for bass in the morning and evening. That may be true for some natural lakes, but nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to river smallmouth.

I have had countless incredible topwater days on the Menominee River, including a time when we caught and released 103 smallmouth on topwater baits in one day. Years back, I booked two clients for two days, and they specifically wanted to fish topwater. I suggested they come in early August when the topwater fishing is at its peak during stable

weather. Little did they know they were in for an unforgettable experience.

We were blessed with ideal conditions: hot, humid weather, little wind, and the river at its normal summer flow. We started the day fishing some grass, and my clients caught a few smallmouth on their first casts—one with a popper and the other with a prop bait. It didn't seem to matter which they used.

I pointed out that an insect hatch was causing minnows to surface, which in turn attracted the smallmouth. I had seen this phenomenon before but never to this extent. Looking upriver, all I saw were smallmouth surfacing to feast on the minnows. It got to the point where I told my clients to wait until they saw a smallmouth surface, then cast directly at it. When they hit their targets, they caught a smallmouth.

My clients kept score, and occasionally I joined in on the action. Sometimes all three of us had smallmouth on at the same time—a thrilling experience for any topwater angler. One of the clients even caught two 18-inch smallmouth on each treble hook of his popper twice. By the end of the day, they were worn out from catching so many topwater smallmouth.

Usually I don't fish the same stretch of river two days in a row but with the previous days' results it was a no brainer to return. Besides, my clients would not

have been happy if I would have suggested another alternative. The second day was great but we only caught 80 smallmouth. At 2 pm the bite abruptly stopped. We fished until 3:30 without one strike. No change in the weather or flow of the river. I guess we were just in the right place at the right time and managed to catch and release over 200 Menominee River smallmouth in two days of fishing. When it comes to topwater smallmouth, savor the moment.

However, once you get addicted to topwater river smallmouth it is hard to change your presentation, even when you are having sporadic success. When I fish alone or with a friend I spend most of the day throwing topwater baits. This gives me time to experiment with different topwater baits and to try different retrieves. A smart topwater angler will have rods rigged with different topwater baits and alternate them throughout the day. I learn a lot each day on the water even though I could have caught more fish using different lures.

The best topwater action will occur under stable weather conditions. Simply put, if you have a hot summer with few weather changes the topwater bite can be awesome. However, when we experience a cool summer with continuous cold fronts, the topwater bite can be unpredictable and sometimes non-existent. During an average summer in the Northwoods we see a good topwater bite from late May

through mid-September but it peaks during mid to late summer. A smart angler has to learn when to keep the topwater baits in the tackle box.

While it might seem easy at times, the trick is in knowing when to fish a specific type of structure. On some days it will seem like you can't do anything wrong, and you will be on active smallmouth from the time you launch your boat until you return to the boat landing. However, the reality is that if you count on luck, you might as well play the lottery. Basically, what you need to do is fish topwater lures in high percentage areas at the right time. If you fish smart you can make a habit out of catching big river smallmouth on top during the summer.

There is always a good topwater bite on the Menominee River. Some years if conditions are right, my clients catch smallmouth with topwater baits from spring through early fall. During other years there is a specific window for the topwater bite. Weather and water levels are the prime factors in determining the topwater bite. Fishing with topwater is never a sure thing but it is my preferred method for catching smallmouth bass, while at the same time not being necessarily the most productive. I have experienced many situations where one lure works well while fishing one type of cover and another lure works better while fishing another type of cover on the same day.







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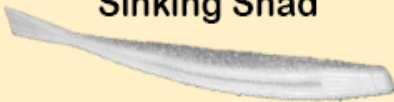


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# Does Color Matter?



Anglers are consistently seeking the most effective bait to increase their catch. Upon entering any bait and tackle shop, one is immediately confronted with an extensive array of soft plastics. Each angler has their preferred style and color of soft plastic bait, while others are in search of the latest Hot Bait. A common inquiry pertains to the most successful color. However, there is no universally applicable answer as it depends on factors such as whether one is fishing in a natural lake, reservoir, or river, as well as the water clarity. Most importantly, the choice of color is influenced by the primary forage of the smallmouth bass.

On certain days, the selection of color can be critically important, particularly when smallmouth bass are feeding on crayfish. Even minor variations in color can significantly impact success, potentially making the difference between catching 30 smallmouth bass versus only five or six. Conversely, there are days when refining the choice of color is not essential.

July 30th was one of those days when Bill and Tom had booked a trip to pursue topwater smallmouth bass on the Menominee River. As I lay in bed at four o'clock in the morning, listening to the howling northwest wind, I was skeptical about the chances of a successful topwater bite. When I met the guys, it was evident they also knew it would be challenging.

They had booked the trip in winter, and I had assured them that the topwater bite in late July and early August is typically reliable. This period, often called the "Dog Days of Summer," usually brings hot, stable weather with minimal changes. But here we were, in late July, facing an unexpected cold front.

During the drive to the boat landing, we discussed our options. We concluded that we would primarily use swimbaits and soft plastics, with the possibility of trying topwater occasionally. I felt confident since the past few weeks the fishing was great.

We tried swimbaits, soft plastic jerkbaits, Case Magic Stiks fished both wacky style and on a Neko Rig and Ned rigs. In the first two hours all we caught was one 14-inch smallmouth. We had a few bites but nothing to get excited about. It was time to make a move and I knew if we did not catch smallmouth at the next spot it was going to be a tough day.

After a cautious ride upstream, I positioned the boat over a six-foot hole in the middle of the river. I explained to Bill and Tom that during summer cold fronts, smallmouth bass move away from the shoreline and gather in deeper pockets within the rocks. Bill asked, "Why?" I replied, "Because that's where the crayfish move after a cold front." I added that if we find crayfish, we will find smallmouth bass.

After a few casts, we started to get bites on the Neko Rig but could not hook a smallmouth. Due to the conditions, the Neko Rig is my go-to bait. A Neko Rig consists of a floating or sinking worm placed on a 1/0 Spearpoint Finesse Hook. I place the hook about a third of the way from the head of the worm and insert a 1/16-ounce nail weight into the head of the worm. The worm sits perpendicular to the bottom, and I use a slow lift and drop presentation with short pauses.

We tried various plastics of different colors, and finally, Tom caught an 18-inch smallmouth on a Case four-inch Copper Craw Pintail worm. A few minutes later, he caught another smallmouth. When I grabbed the smallmouth, a fat crayfish fell out of its mouth. After releasing the smallmouth, I picked up the crayfish and showed the guys the copper-colored marks. When the bite is tough, you need to match your plastics exactly to the crayfish patterns.

We caught 9 dandy smallmouth in the hole and told the guys we were going to make a move. It was obvious they wanted to remain fishing the hole since it was the only place we caught smallmouth. I told them not to worry as I had a few more spots to fish. I idled my boat about 120 yards upriver and hit the spot lock on another mid-river hole.

Bill cast his line, jiggled the rod a few times, and soon brought a smallmouth to the boatside. This small hole yielded six smallmouths in total. Tom wondered if a different color might work, so I placed a watermelon red Lil Pintail Worm on his hook, but there was no success. I even tried a green/pumpkin gold Lil Pintail Worm myself, but it didn't produce any results either. After Bill caught another smallmouth, he returned to the hot color. On his second cast, Tom connected with a 19-inch smallmouth.

Later, I moved about 75 yards upstream to another spot, where we caught seven more smallmouth bass. Tom asked how I managed to find these holes without using any



**NEKO Rig**



**4" Case Lil Pintail Worm  
1/0 Spearpoint Finesse Hook  
1/16 ounce Tungsten nail weight**

electronics. I explained that it comes down to experience. After 45 years of fishing, I've learned to read the river and don't need electronics to locate fish. I get a feel for the river, and it tells me where the fish are. While I know their usual spots, the real challenge lies in finding the right presentation to catch them. This is what we call "Time On The Water."

It turned out to be a good fishing day even if we did not catch a smallmouth on a topwater bait. Once we found the right color, success followed.





# Fall River Smallmouth

Fall is a transition period as smallmouth bass switch from primarily feeding on crawfish to feeding on minnows. This change requires adjusting both your presentation and location. Once you understand these changes, it can be an extremely productive time to fish a river. Larger smallmouth are starting to school up, cruising grass beds, slough edges, and creek channels to gorge on schools of shiners and chubs.

Weeds are first on my list during the fall. Even though weeds can hold smallmouth in the summer, the bite can be unpredictable. One day you might find active smallmouth, and the next day they're nowhere to be found. This unpredictable bite is due to the forage. In summer, food is plentiful, and smallmouth schools will migrate as they feed on a variety of smaller baitfish, insect larvae, and plankton. Smallmouth are simply following the food chain.

The key to the weed smallmouth river bite is a significant drop in water temperature. Cool nights can cause a sharp drop in water temperature, pushing scattered baitfish out of the decaying weeds and causing them to school up along the weedline. On a cool, crisp frosty fall morning, it's not unusual to connect with a load of spirited bronzebacks foraging on an easy meal.

September of 2024 presented an intriguing time on the Menominee River. The weather remained warm, and the river levels were low, diverging from the usual fall pattern. The water clarity was exceptional, thanks to the dry spell. Some of my early fall guide clients were worried that these conditions might hinder our ability to find large river smallmouth bass. However, I reassured them that my 45 years of experience on the Menominee River had equipped me for any challenge. I emphasized that the excellent summer fishing was set to persist into fall. The clear water would increase the range within which smallmouth could strike at bait. The low water levels would deter less experienced anglers from venturing too far, leaving us to fish without concern of others trailing us.

On the 4th, I went fishing with George, a first-time guide client. We had been in touch via texts and emails over the past couple of years, but George had been unable to set a date until now. Finally, he got his opportunity to fish for smallmouth on the Menominee River. Our initial spot was a weed bed along the edge of the main river channel, close to the landing. I equipped George with a 6-foot-6 medium action Grant Rod, set up with a 3.5-inch minnow pattern swimbait. I advised him to maintain a

steady retrieve and not react too quickly to strikes. I explained that continuing to reel for a few seconds before setting the hook would decrease the chances of missing fish.

George cast several times and then shouted, "Fish on!" Following a brief struggle, I netted a hefty 19-inch walleye. Since George was traveling, he opted not to keep the walleye. I considered keeping it for dinner but, anticipating it was just a stray, decided to release it back into the river. After a few more casts, George caught another legal-sized walleye.

I took a rod equipped with a Hubs Chub Topwater Bait, and on my third cast, an 18-inch smallmouth bass burst through the surface. I handed my rod to George, and he joined in on the topwater excitement. The smallmouth bass were clinging to the weed edges and were elusive. The Hubs Chub topwater bait, especially with its vertical drop, is lethal in such conditions. George landed ten smallmouth bass using topwater before we decided to move. Meanwhile, I switched to the swimbait rod and succeeded in catching a few walleyes to keep in the livewell for dinner. It was a fantastic day catching walleyes on swimbaits and smallmouth bass on topwater.

By early October, the water temperature had dropped to 54 degrees, and smallmouth bass were transitioning into their late fall pattern. I was joined by long-time clients Charlie and Keary, who had fished with me many times over the years. As usual, they wanted to catch big river smallmouths, and I assured them that not much had changed on the river since their last visit. We met at Popp's Resort, picked up a few dozen red tail chubs, and headed for the river.

Our first stop was a rock ledge that dropped from three to six feet in the middle of the river. After cautiously positioning my boat, I deployed the trolling motor. Facing the current, I hit the spot lock, allowing us to hold our exact position. My electronics showed a pile of smallmouth stacked tightly against the drop-off, raising our confidence.

The guys knew the routine: hook a red tail chub on a 1/0 circle hook, add a small split shot on the line, and let it drift over the drop-off. Keary connected first with a fat 18-incher, followed closely by Charlie. After catching several quality smallmouth, I decided to move to another spot with plans to return later in the day.

I chose to fish my favorite rock ledge that runs through the center of the river. On one side of the river is a rock shelf with scattered grass and boulders, averaging 2-4 feet of water. The ledge then drops abruptly to 6-9



feet of water with scattered boulders and logs. This area produces lots of action for me in summer but is incredible in fall.

I positioned the boat parallel to the rock ledge, about six feet away from the drop-off. My hotspot did not let me down. This time, Charlie scored first with a huge 21-inch smallmouth. A few casts later, Keary connected as well. I moved slowly upstream and downstream, and everywhere I positioned the boat, we caught smallmouth. That stretch produced over 20 smallmouth between 18-20 inches, plus several smaller ones.

To add icing on the cake, later in the day, we returned to our first stop and caught more quality smallmouth. We stopped and checked out a steep rock shoreline on our way back to the boat landing and managed to put one more 20-inch smallmouth on the clicker. It was a superb day on the Menominee River. We had the river to ourselves, and the smallmouth were biting.

The fall of 2024 was a banner year on the Menominee River. Besides catching lots of quality smallmouth bass, for the most part, we had the river to ourselves.





# Fishing The Crivitz Area

The Crivitz area offers a classic Northwoods environment with excellent fishing opportunities. Anglers can enjoy a variety of waters, from the Peshtigo River Flowages to small natural lakes, the 2,400-acre Lake Noquebay, and the Menominee River. Whether you prefer fishing from a large boat, canoe, kayak, or wading along the shoreline, there's something for everyone.

In central Marinette County, the main attractions for anglers are the Peshtigo River Flowages. Both High Falls Flowage and Caldron Falls Flowage provide a quality fishing experience. The land surrounding these flowages is part of the Governor Earl State Forest.

Caldron Falls Flowage, the first flowage on the Peshtigo River, covers 1,100 acres and has a maximum depth of 40 feet. It features a typical northern Wisconsin flowage environment with plenty of shoreline wood cover, submerged stumps, weeds, and offshore structures. Caldron Falls is best known for its quality musky fishery, but it also has a good population of walleye, bass, and panfish.

Musky hunters can expect excellent action on the Memorial Day season opener. The back bays of the flowage warm quickly, and musky are on the feed. The two most productive baits for early-season musky on Caldron Falls are bucktails and twitch baits. In summer, as the water temperature rises, muskies become more aggressive. They will move into the same cabbage beds that attract walleyes. If the walleye bite suddenly stops, it usually means muskies are present. Fish over the top of the weeds with bucktails or topwater baits, and if you don't get a bite, concentrate on the weedlines. Jerkbait and crankbait work best for weedline muskies.

Fall is an excellent time to fish for Caldron Falls muskies. The weedlines remain productive, but the largest muskies will be found on offshore humps. There is a good sucker bite in mid-October that lasts right until the ice forms, making this the prime time to land a trophy musky.

Caldron Falls also has a good crappie population which becomes active in spring. By early May, the many shallow, stumpy bays begin to warm, and crappies move into these bays, feeding well before spawning. They will spawn on the edges of a bay and remain there through the summer. Small jigs with plastics or minnows are the best presentation. Crappie can provide plenty of action when other fish are less cooperative.

High Falls Flowage is the second flowage on the Peshtigo River. Covering 1,500 acres, High Falls has a riverine nature with a higher percentage of deeper water compared to Caldron Falls. The many rock outcroppings resemble a Canadian Shield Lake. High Falls offers a diverse fishery with trophy musky, smallmouth, walleye, largemouth, and panfish. Here, anglers can experience a mixed bag while still having a chance at a trophy fish. If action is slow with one species, switching to another will often result in a catch.

May is an excellent month to fish High Falls Flowage. The walleye population is increasing, with reports of higher catches each year. By the season opener, walleyes have completed spawning and are ready to feed. Look for walleyes on the edge of the river channel, tight to rock humps, and shoreline points. Use a jig and minnow with the lightest possible jig. A 1/16- or 1/8-ounce jighead



works well at depths of up to 12 feet. Orange and chartreuse are preferred colors. The best walleye action is in the morning, but on overcast days, walleyes bite throughout the day.

By mid-May, smallmouth bass start cruising along the rocky shorelines, providing fantastic action. Smallmouths stay close to the shorelines until about mid-June, when they move to deep structure and weedlines. For big smallmouth bass, fish rocky shorelines near the main river channel. Small points that drop sharply into deep water may not hold high numbers of smallmouths, but the ones you find will be big. For action, search out a shallow rocky flat on the back side of one of the many islands. If you time it right, you will catch both numbers and big smallmouths. When fishing deep structure, a large jumbo leech rigged on a jighead or a number four hook with a split shot is hard to beat.

High Falls Flowage also boasts an exemplary musky fishery, producing trophy-class fish annually. After the season opens, most anglers find success using bucktails and twitch baits in the

shallow bays. As summer progresses, muskies move to the weedlines and offshore structures. In the fall, fish the weedlines, points, and structures with jerkbaits and crankbaits. For those seeking a 50-inch plus musky, try fishing suckers over the deep flats and around structures.

Both High Falls Flowage and Caldron Falls Flowage host abundant largemouth bass. Fishing the wooded shorelines and weeds with soft plastics is a reliable strategy on either flowage. Largemouth bass can provide plentiful action throughout the summer day, especially when walleye and smallmouth bass head for deeper waters.

The Crivitz area offers quality angling regardless of when you plan your trip. Whether you fish for musky, bass, walleye, or panfish, anglers will find a welcoming home.



High Falls Flowage Walleye








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