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Issue 275

February/March 2019



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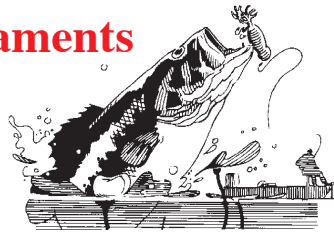
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Cover Photo

Preston Brewer used his bow in Wyoming County for a huge buck. It scored an impressive 169 1/4. This 14 point had long reach for the sky tines.

Go online to see this magazine online every 6 weeks. Back issues are there from 2006. It is www.wvasportsman.net

TEXT, mail or email your large fish or game pictures. Info is on page 38. We are still collecting large buck and big game photos from the 2018 season.

DNR Trout Stocking

ELKINS, W.Va. — West Virginia's trout stocking season is now underway, giving anglers and their families several opportunities to enjoy this exciting outdoor pastime. During the season, which runs through May 31, the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources will stock lakes and streams around the state each week.

A list of stocked waters and the frequency of stocking may be found in the new Fishing Regulations Summary, which also lists regulation changes for this year. Copies are now available at license agents, DNR District Offices and online at www.wvdnr.gov. Anglers can call the Fishing Hotline at 304-558-3399 or visit DNR's website

to find out which streams and lakes have been stocked each day.

Before casting their line, anglers must have a 2019 fishing license, which can be purchased online at www.wvfish.com, by calling the licensing unit at (304) 558-2758 or at license agents around the state.

Beginning in March, the stocking schedule will shift to Tuesday through Saturday, said DNR Fisheries Supervisor Jim Hedrick. Currently, the stocking schedule is Monday through Friday.

"The Saturday stockings we tried during last year's Gold Rush were very popular, so we're going to do it again with regular stockings once the weather warms up," Hedrick said. "Some of the Saturday stockings will be announced in advance, and we think this will encourage continue to the next page



Todd Ware used a bow for a quality 150 class buck. Photo courtesy of Anderson Outdoors in Buckhannon.



Dan Fitzgerald bagged a top class buck in Gilmer County.



Becky Toney got her 1st buck in Raleigh Co - an 8 point.

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more people to get outside to fish.”

Hedrick says the Gold Rush will return April 1-6. During that week, DNR will stock only golden rainbow trout in 55 lakes and streams across the state, including 12 state parks. To ensure families have plenty of opportunities to participate in the event, DNR is planning

a big release on Saturday, April 6, which is the last day of the event. More details about Gold Rush can be found at www.wvgoldrush.com

Anglers are encouraged to access DNR's online interactive map which provides valuable information about fishing adventures in the Mountain State. The map contains

information about which streams and lakes are stocked, special fishing regulation areas and driving directions to those waters. The interactive map has been upgraded to include information about lake depths, real-time stream flows and allows for maps to be downloaded for offline use or for printing.



Boyd Adams went to Logan County for a great archery buck.



Cole Mitchell brought in a good Boone County buck.



Doug Bennett had success hunting this past season.

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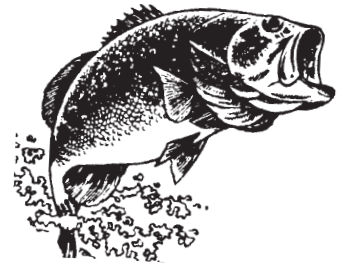
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Conaway Lake Trout Stocking Delayed

CENTERVILLE, W.Va. — Trout stocking at Conaway Run Lake in Tyler County has been suspended until repair work to the dam is completed, the Division of Natural Resources announced on Wednesday. Adverse weather conditions have delayed the needed dam re-

pair work at this facility.

The dam at Conaway Run Lake has been stabilized to ensure safety, proper function and structural integrity, but the boat ramp, parking lot and access road to the dam have been closed to ensure the safety of anglers and the public. Construc-

tion is expected to resume in the spring. The DNR plans to reopen these facilities in the early summer.

For more information, please contact Nate Taylor, District 6 fisheries biologist at Parkersburg, at 304-420-4550 or email Nate.D.Taylor@wv.gov.



This lucky hunter brought in a huge buck.



Dalton Schneider harvested a nice 8 point buck.



Doug Epling used a gun for a fine buck.

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When Do Musky Spawn?

The spawn itself is prime fishing time, but it may be better to head out before that time. The pre-spawn period can make for some great fishing. Check with your local Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to ensure pre-spawn fishing is legal in your area. If you're good to go, consider giving the pre-spawn a try.

As soon as the water temperature starts to rise in spring, muskies begin their migration to the same breeding grounds as the year before. During this pre-spawn period, female muskies are eating as much as they can muster. The female feeds aggressively during pre-spawn, as she bulks up her egg mass. The pre-spawn period tends to be February and March; you can catch plenty of hefty females

during this time.

Muskies are considered sexually mature somewhere between three and four years of age. When they're old enough, they'll spawn when the temperature hits between 49 and 59 degrees Fahrenheit (9.4 and 15 degrees Celsius). Temperature is key to most fish spawns, so check the weather reports for your area to determine the best time to head out with your rod. Typically, muskie will spawn in April.

After the fish have had their share of the spawn, fishing opportunities will drop off. The female leaves the spawning site as soon as she's finished dropping her eggs, usually around one to two weeks after spawning starts. Male muskies tend to stay at the spawning site for a few weeks after spawning is

complete. Muskie eggs hatch out in as little as 8 to 14 days. To help them grow, the fry first digest their yoke sac, then nearby plankton and then fish.



Timothy Perry bagged a nice buck in Putnam County.

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Striker Dye hunted with a cross-bow in Ohio County for a big buck.



This hunter brought in a quality buck this season.



Jim Dunlap harvested a nice 10 point buck. Photo courtesy of Cross-roads General Store near Newark.

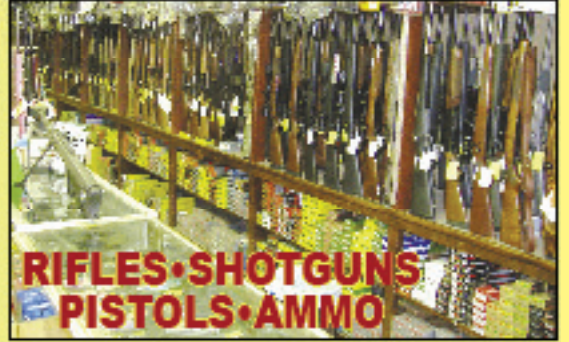
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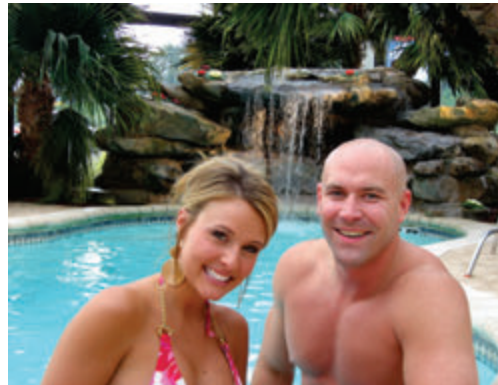
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Intersting Fish Facts

Some interesting facts about fish:

Fish have been on the earth for more than 450 million years.

Fish were well established long before dinosaurs roamed the earth.

There are over 25,000 identified species of fish on the earth.

It is estimated that there may still be over 15,000 fish species that have not yet been identified.

There are more species of fish than all the species of amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals combined.

40% of all fish species inhabit fresh water, yet less than .01% of the earth's water is fresh water.

The spotted climbing perch is able to absorb oxygen from the air and will crawl overland using its strong pectoral fins.

Some fish like sharks don't possess an air bladder to help keep them afloat and must either swim continually or rest on the bottom.

Some fish make sounds by grating their teeth and others like some catfish make sounds from their air filled swim bladder.

Some species of fish can fly (glide) others can skip along the surface and others can even climb rock.

Fish have a specialized sense organ called the lateral line which works much like radar and helps them navigate in dark or murky water.

The largest fish is the great whale shark which can reach fifty feet in length.

The smallest fish is the Philippine goby that is less than 1/3 of an inch when fully grown.

Some species of fish have skeletons made only of cartilage.

Fish have excellent senses of sight, touch, taste and many possess a

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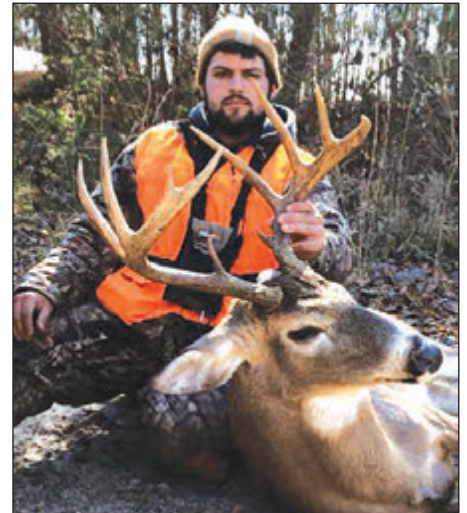
good sense of smell and 'hearing'.

Fish feel pain and suffer stress just like mammals and birds.

Tropical fish are one of the most popular pets in the U.S.

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Zach Horocks hunted in Kanwha County for a great buck.

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Morgantown Outdoor Show

Thousands of outdoorsmen from the tri-state area will be heading to Morgantown's Mylan Park on March 2nd-3rd for the 18th annual WV Fishing, Hunting & Outdoor Sports Show. Recognized as the largest outdoors show in northern WV, the event sells out annually with over 150 booths representing outdoor vendors from all over the US and Canada.

"We are so excited for this year's show," says Labeth Hall owner of PR Plus Events, organizer of the event. "We have the largest show ever with over 53,000 square feet

of everything you need to go fishing, hunting, camping or to just enjoy the great outdoors. In addition to boats, campers, ATV's, trucks, trailers, tractors you can find jerky, outfitters, charter boats, and much more. There are thousands of products and services related to the outdoors and we have added a lot of new vendors also. It is an outdoorsman's paradise!"

For those who are serious fisherman, they will find a variety of fishing trips in the US and Canada, bait, tackle, reels, area fishing guides, as well as numerous charter boat captains from the Great Lakes and Chesapeake Bay. Professional anglers and fishing enthusiast will

continue to the next page



Kyle Warner caught a late season huge spot and a big smallmouth at Sutton Lake.



Kevin Louk brought in an 8 point buck. *Photo courtesy of Middle Mountain Sporting Goods in Elkins..*



Jackson Smith got his first buck in Roane County.



Joey Mahaney harvested a 9 point buck in Marion County.



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The avid hunter can browse through lots of guns, archery equipment, knives, ammo, hunting associations, DNR, taxidermists, camo gear and lots of new gadgets. There will be turkey calls, tree stands, scents and a variety of new hunting products also. Hunting outfitters will be there to book bear, white-tail, wild boar, moose, turkey and game birds trips to a variety of destinations. You can also register to win a hunting Safari in South Africa with Namahadi Safaris. (some

restrictions apply)

A variety of fishing and hunting seminars will be held daily. Attendees can check the website for the updated schedule. Special attractions include the Cabela's Antique Gun Library featuring dozens of unique and antique guns. Also the Magnum Whitetail Deer Display will be at the show.

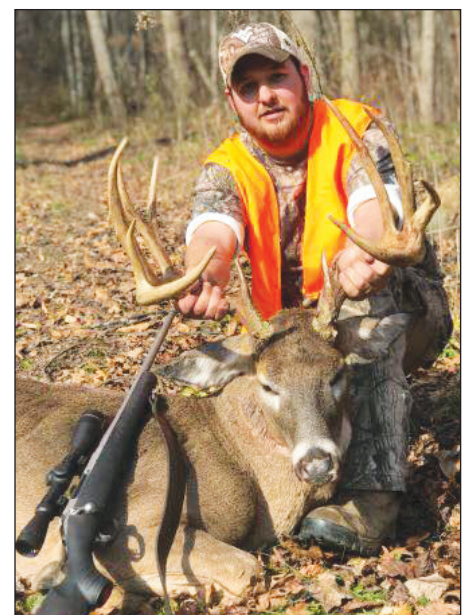
Families are also welcome at the show. You will find something for everyone. Women can shop for camo purses, marinades and spices, unique jewelry and decorative items with an outdoors theme.

Children can enjoy the mountain climbing wall, panning for gold, face painting, Build a Bear, a movie theatre and more.

The Outdoor Sports Show hours are Saturday from 10am-7pm and Sunday 10am-4pm. Tickets can be purchased at the door and admission is \$9 for adults, children 7-12 are \$1, and there is no charge for kids under 6 years. The first 50 people each day will receive a FREE gift. Guests can register at the Info Table to win lots of great prizes given away hourly, as well as the Grand Prize Drawing for a two day fishing charter trip on Lake Erie with Special Eyes Charters. This trip is valued at over \$2000 and sponsored by WKKW.

The "WV Fishing, Hunting & Outdoor Sports Show" is owned and organized by PR Plus Events, co-sponsored by The Dominion Post, WKKW, WDTV, the Greater Morgantown Convention and Visitors Bureau, Candlewood Suites Hotel and Special-Eyes Charters.

For more information visit the website at wvoutdoorsportsshow.com.



Melvin Wood used a gun for a great buck.

ALBRIGHT V.F.D. GUN BASH



SATURDAY - March 9, 2019 CRAIG CIVIC CENTER IN KINGWOOD, WV

\$30 Donation - for tickets. Order Tickets By Mail: send to Albright VFD 127 Bishop Ave. Albright, WV 26519. Include your name, address, & phone numbers. Make checks payable to AVFD.

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- 2:30 \$250 CASH

- 2:45 Henry Golden Boy 22LR
- 3:00 Savage MSR15 Recon .224 Valkarie
- 3:15 Ruger 9mm Compact Semi-Auto
- 3:30 S&W 642 Stainless 38 Special
- 3:45 Springfield Armory XD9 9mm Stainless
- 4:00 \$250 CASH
- 4:15 Stoeger M3020 20 gauge 3" Camo
- 4:30 Kimber 1911 Tact Custom HD II 45 ACP
- 4:45 Remington 700 Tactical 6.5 Creedmore
- 5:00 S&W M&P 15 w/Mag. Pul, Fum. 5.56 (223)

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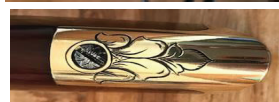
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A. Uberti



2018 Bear Harvest

BECKLEY, W.Va. — West Virginia hunters harvested 2,606 black bears during the combined 2018 archery and firearms seasons. The preliminary harvest for the combined

2018 seasons is 18 percent below the 3,160 bears killed in 2017, but is the sixth highest bear kill recorded, according to Colin Carpenter, black bear project leader for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

Hunters killed 637 bears during the first segment of the 2018 archery season (Sept. 29 –Nov. 18). Bow hunters killed 374 bears, while crossbow hunters took 263.

The top five counties were McDowell (54), Wyoming (49), Fayette (34), Nicholas (33) and Boone (29).

Firearms hunters harvested 1,969 bears during 2018. Hunters took 565 bears in September and October, including 18 bears during the concurrent antlerless deer/bear season. They took 537 bears during the concurrent buck/bear firearms



George Davis brought in a nice 10 point buck.



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season and 866 during the traditional December season. One bear was killed in Preston County during the first Mountaineer Heritage Season (Jan. 10 – 13, 2019). The top five counties were Pocahontas (166), Randolph (143), Nicholas (142), Pendleton (126) and Webster (125).

“When looking at all mast species combined, mast production in 2018 was 22 percent below mast production in 2017,” Carpenter said. “In addition, the mast index for all oak species in 2018 was 24 percent below the long-term average. Historically, a scarcity of mast makes bears easier for archers to target, but these conditions en-

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courage earlier denning and makes fewer bears available for hunters during both the buck firearms and December bear firearms seasons.”

Red oak, black oak and scarlet oak production decreased 64 percent from levels recorded in 2017. White oak production was nearly identical to 2017 and 42 percent above the long-term average, while chestnut oak was 10 percent above

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the long-term average.

“The 2018 Mast Survey and Hunting Outlook predicted an archery harvest similar to 2017 and a decreased December firearms harvest
continue to the next page



Austin Light used a bow in Logan County for a nice buck.



Brandon Perkins, from Uppergrade, shot a high racked 8 point.



Gale Vincent used a gun for a 9 point buck in Ritchie County.



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over the levels observed in 2017,” Carpenter said. “The prediction held true for both the archery and December seasons; however, the overall bear harvest was lower than 2017. The 2018 bear harvest declined during the September/October, buck firearms and December seasons, yet increased during the bow/crossbow season.”

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Pat Casey went to Lewis County to get a good buck



Cecil Whitehouse, from Cottageville, dropped a nice 8 point.



Elsie Kelly, from Mt. Nebo, landed a 27" walleye from the Elk River.






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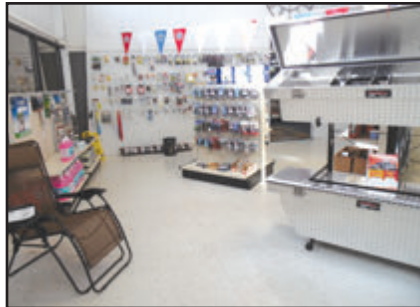
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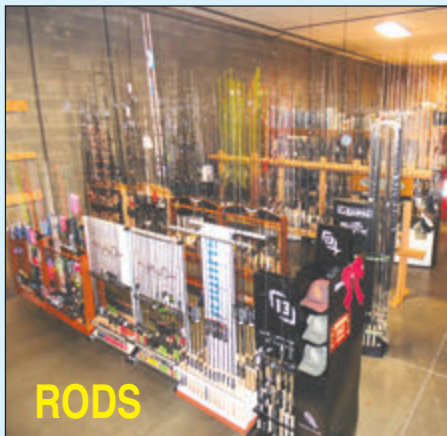


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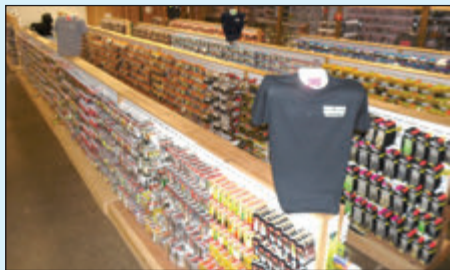
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Catch Stocked Trout

Catching stocked trout is a fun way to spend a morning and afternoon. Even better when you're catching fish! This article will discuss little known facts about the habits of stocked trout. Understanding the habits of the fish you are trying to catch will help you catch them. Important highlights are what trout eat, what triggers them to strike a lure, at what depth they swim at, how they react when freshly planted and how they behave after some time has passed. Knowing these facts will help you catch stocked trout.

What do stocked trout eat?

Stocked trout are accustomed to eating brown food pellets. They don't generally know to eat anything else. If you cut open the stomach of a stocked trout it is very likely that you will find things like brown leaves, parts of acorns, and bits of twigs. The one thing in common to all of these stomach contents is that they are brown and arrived in the water after having been blown into it. Quite likely the twig or bit of leaf floated in the wind and splashed down on the water. This matches the feeding pattern

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of stocked trout: they are accustomed to brown pellets splashing down over them. For trout, during the first couple weeks after having been planted in a lake, food is something brown that splashes into the water.

Trout identify food with patterns This leads to an important point about how trout (and most fish) identify food. Fish identify food

continue to the next page



Jenifer Armentrout took a nice 10 point in Webster County.



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by their pattern will help you in your selection of lure and the way it is presented. Always keep this in mind: trout are looking for patterns.

An interesting pattern is their association of food with brown things thrown at them by humans. This is why freshly stocked trout do not shy away from humans the way wild trout do. This is also why sometimes freshly stocked trout can easily be caught by casting a dropshot plastic worm at a school of trout. The dropshot artificial worm gives the presentation the trout associate with food (a human casting food at them), combined with the instinctual trigger of a fleeing bait. Fish, like many other



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animals, have an instinctual trigger to chase down something that is fleeing. Casting a dropshotted three inch plastic worm can work insanely well for catching freshly stocked trout. I have even caught stocked trout by quickly jigging back a slip sinker rigged PowerBait worm.

Stocked brown trout & brook trout Patterns can also work against you. For example, even though a worm is brown and is generally considered food, a freshly stocked rainbow trout will sometimes not recognize it as food, probably because it isn't splashing down. It takes time for them to figure it out.

This isn't true for stocked brown trout and brook trout. Brown trout & brook trout respond better to the instinctual trigger of a fleeing bait that is presented by an inline spinner, minow shaped lure or a casting spoon. Brown trout also more readily associate a worm with food than

a stocked rainbow trout. A meal worm or a hook laden with squirming little worms will trigger an enthusiastic lunge from a brown trout or a brook trout. On the other hand, brown trout and brook trout aren't easily caught with artificial worms or trout dough. If trout dough or artificial worms stop working, switch out to lures with a fleeing bait action, especially if all those around

continue to the page 23



Mark Eakle caught and released a 46" musky.

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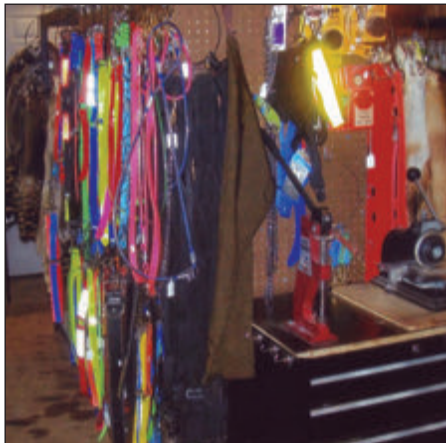
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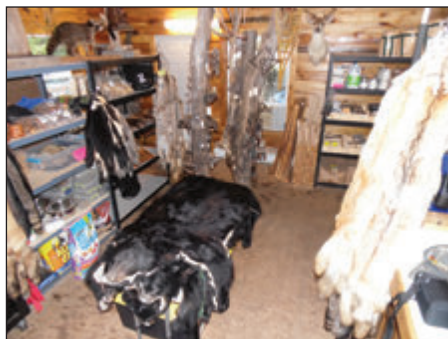
Mike Arbogast brought in a great 12 point buck.

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Mike Whited went to Boone County for a quality buck.



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you that are using dough and artificial worms suddenly stop catching. Freshly planted trout

Notice how I keep repeating the phrase, freshly planted? When you read that phrase, please take it to mean that what I'm writing doesn't

necessarily hold true for trout that have been planted a month or more previously. A rainbow trout that has been in the lake or river for a few weeks will respond to real food like a worm.

How stocked trout behave

Freshly stocked trout tend to swim in schools. If you are at a stocked reservoir, pond or river and see schools of trout swimming by, odds are that the lake has recently been recently stocked. School-

continue to the next page

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ing is a behavior that comes from habit. Trout are raised in long oval shaped pools about two feet high. There is an artificial current in it and they tend to swim in circles, often counter clockwise. There is also netting above their pools to prevent birds of prey from swooping down on them.

The above is important information to know. It explains the behavior of trout after they're planted. Stocked trout tend to keep close to

shore, perhaps seeking the comfort of the edge they had been used to from being in the pool. They also tend to prefer swimming about eighteen inches from the surface or eighteen inches from the bottom

This means that if you are going to float a fishing fly or other bait under a bobber, rigging the lure about eighteen inches below the bobber is a good start. This is true when the temperature of the water is optimal. When it starts to get warmer or time passes, trout tend to hover about eighteen inches to two feet above the bottom of the lake, often just a short cast from shore. If you're fishing a sliding slip sinker rig and are not sure at what depth the trout are holding at, start at twelve inches for one pole and eighteen inches for another pole. Then gradually increase the

continue to the next page

Feb/March 2019 ~ Page 24



Hayden Myer got a 10 point from Ohio County

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length up to about two feet.

The thing about trout swimming counter clockwise is also important, particularly to anglers who are trolling bait. If you want to trigger an instinctual chase response, try circling your boat or kayak in a counter clockwise direction, that way your lure will pass them from behind. If you are drifting bait with a current, particularly in a river, then the natural movement is casting upstream and allowing the bait to float and tumble downstream to where the stocked fish are holding.

How stocked trout behave after time has passed

After time has passed, rainbow trout begin to regain instinctual behavior such as shyness, staying close to the bottom, feeding on insects and relating to structure. Examples of structures that fish seek



Grace Wigal hunted in Wirt County for this 8 point buck.

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are steep drops from shallow to deep, boulders, underwater trees, underwater currents, breaks in currents that create an area of calm water, shade etc. After time has passed, a rainbow trout will be able to be caught with lures with lively action and live bait. Stocked brook trout and brown trout consistently respond to movement, the action of a lure, as well as to the size.

What flies to use when fishing for stocked trout

For fly fishing, flies such as the Cove Pheasant Tail, brown Woo-



Young Blake Lilly went to Raleigh County for this nice 8 point.

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ly Bugger, natural colored Gold Ribbed Hare's Ear fly, AP Emerger and other similar nymph type flies will take trout. I think it's because, combined with the way they are presented in stillwater (i.e. lakes and ponds) they resemble the general profile of trout food. Both the Cove Pheasant Tail fishing fly and the AP Emerger are well regarded flies for stillwater, with the Cove having been created specifically for stocked trout in reservoirs. In my opinion it's no coincidence they resemble in color, size and presentation the general profile of trout pellets splashing down, particularly when two or three flies are

tied in tandem.

What stickbait lures to use to catch stocked trout

Minnow shaped lures from two inches to just over three inches work well for catching stocked brook trout, rainbow trout, and brown trout. Two to two and a half inches is the general sweet spot. Color is generally important insofar as calling attention to itself. There are situations when bright colors might spook fish, such as in clear water, but in general colors such as firetiger, white, pink, translucent pink, gold and translucent gold will all work well. Colors like firetiger are especially useful during overcast

Bass Sportsman 2019 Events

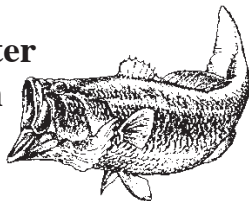
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or murky water conditions. Translucent colors (see-through) are great for trolling or retrieving the lure near the top during bright sun/clear water conditions. If I had to pick just two minnow shaped lures, a two and half inch lure in firetiger-continue to the next page



Levi Kessler bagged a big buck in Cabell County.

ger and translucent pink would be my choice for stocked trout. But really it's the action, the depth, and the speed that catches the fish. The lure color mostly serves just to catch the trouts attention. Rapala and Mirashads by Owner work well trolled in reservoir lakes. Rapala minnow shaped lures and DynamicLures HD Trout work well in rivers and brooks. These aren't the only good brands. There are many. Those are just a few of my favorites that I have had success with, two well known and the other (HD Trout) better known in Colorado than elsewhere.

Spoons work great on stillwater

The Thomas Buoyant in gold, either all gold, gold-red or with spots, is a popular color, particularly for brown trout. Acme Kastmasters and Johnson Splinter spoons in the 1/4 ounce size work well too. Gold is a good color to use when the sun is out. Another color that catches rainbow trout on sunny days is silver/blue. Not so good when the skies are overcast because there is no sunshine to create a fish attracting flash. In overcast weather and less then crystal clear water switch to a brighter flourescent color such as Firetiger. The only reservation I have with the Kastmasters is that I

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(and many other anglers) have experienced lost fish due to fish shaking off. This happens often with Kastmasters and if you don't believe me search your favorite fishing forum and see how many anglers complain about this problem. I prefer to switch the treble hooks out for something reliable like an Owner Stinger 36 treble hook (ST-36BC) in a size 8. There are many other high quality hooks, so don't obsess about it. The important thing is to not get the extra strong type hooks because they are thicker and this could lead to a more difficult hook set. The thinner the diameter of the hook, the easier it cuts.

Inline spinners

Inline spinners work well in moving water. They work in stillwater too. The way they work is through the vibrations sent out by the spinning blade. the middle of their sides that they use to locate prey.



Charles Grossa caught and released a 49" musky.

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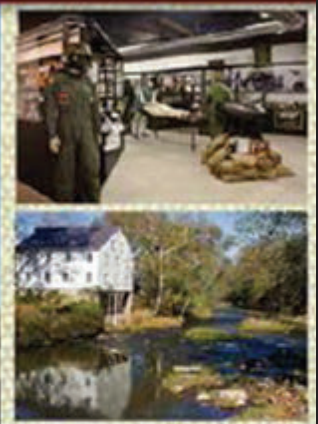
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Habitat Enhancement Area

ACKSONBURG, W.Va. — A large-scale, cooperative wildlife habitat enhancement project has been initiated on the Lewis Wetzel Wildlife Management Area in Wetzel County with a \$75,000 donation from Eureka Midstream.

This joint project involves the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources' Wildlife Resources Section, Mountaineer Branch and Mid-Ohio Branch of the Quality Deer Management Association and Eureka Midstream. The project will include herbicide applications in pre-timber harvest and post-timber harvest units to control the undesirable vegetation and promote productive woodland regeneration for wildlife. The project will also include the planting of persimmon trees for wildlife habitat. Additionally, existing wildlife openings will be enhanced by establishing legumes.

"We are excited about giving back to the community and, more specifically, directly benefiting the areas where we operate our gathering and compression facilities in West Virginia," said Chris Akers, president and CEO of Eureka Midstream.

"These invasive species affect the regeneration of native plants and provide little benefit to wildlife species," said District Wildlife Biologist Steven Rauch. "The DNR is actively managing the forests on Lewis Wetzel WMA to create young forest habitat for a wide array of wildlife species that depend upon early successional habitat. During this process, it is important to control the non-native species such as autumn olive, tree-of-heaven and Japanese stiltgrass, through the proper use of herbicides."

Members from both branches of the Quality Deer Management Association will assist with the tree planting and seeding projects.

"Our QDMA members are excited about the opportunity this cooperative project provides to get involved with enhancing the habitat on Lewis Wetzel WMA," said Camron Stover, president of the Mid-Ohio Branch.

Greg Dotson, director of environ-

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mental health and safety for Eureka Midstream, presented the \$75,000 to the Mid-Ohio Valley Branch of QDMA at the 2018 Mountaineer QDMA banquet in Morgantown, West Virginia

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Spring Musky Fishing Tactics

Most muskie anglers automatically grab their go-to summer and fall lures when they hit the water in spring, but that's not necessarily your best bet so early in the year. Right after the season opens, smaller baits tend to outproduce larger offerings. Like # 5 bucktail spinners, rather than double-bladed #10s. Six-inch crankbaits, rather than 10-inchers. Three-quarter ounce bass spinnerbaits, rather than larger muskie tandems, and so on. Keep things modest, size-wise, until the water warms and fish really go on the chew. Right now, with water temperatures barely cracking 60 F, they're barely off the spawn in some areas, beginning to feed, but not voraciously gobbling their way through the biomass. Spring Muskies Bucktail

Smaller is usually better early in the muskie season.

In most waters, two types of patterns dominate early in the season. Oddly enough, many anglers miss out on both, focusing on drop-off areas in between—classic spots in summer, but perhaps not during the transition from late spring into early summer. Reason—deep weedgrowth is still sparse, generally until after the 4th of July. With little cover and even less food there, muskies seldom use such areas until the weeds begin to flourish.

Basically, spring muskies are usually either in...or out...depending on where the bulk of their food lies.

INS — In lakes where the fish chiefly dine on warm- or cool-water baitfish like suckers or large minnows, plus an array of unfor-

tunate bass, small walleyes, hammer-handle pike, panfish and such, most of these species are still shallow. Often, really shallow—like 2 to 6 feet—running inside weedlines, spread across emerging weed flats,

continue to the next page



Steven Caron hunted with a recurve in the new Mountain Heritage season in Wyoming County.



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even roaming the centers of bays with fairly sparse cover. If they haven't moved out to the first drop off to deep water, there's no reason for muskies to leave these areas, either.

Cover the shallows with a series of fairly steady, modest-speed retrieves, usually without a lot of dramatic changes. Use polarized sunglasses to look in the water for followers—or non-followers. Much of the time, lazy muskies will just lay there, sunning themselves, showing no interest in your lures. Come back and re-fish the same areas at low light, hopefully when the fish turn on a bit more.

OUTS — And now, for something completely different!



Chad Wallbrown landed a 40 pound blue catfish on the Kanawha River last fall.



Martin Kline used a muzzleloader for a Hampshire County buck.

Crankbaits for Spring Muskies
Ditto for crankbaits!

In lakes with cold-water, suspended forage like ciscoes, tullibees, whitefish, etc., the bulk of the big, tasty baitfish are likely already suspending in open water at this time. Rather than remain shallow and going on a low-cal diet or fast, muskies simply shift out of their shallow spawning bays and suspend over the nearest available deep-water
continue to the next page

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basin. Key areas have little or nothing to do with structure, although fish may be near points or humps that funnel baitfish between them. Basically, the presence of the forage fish is foremost on their minds.

Expect muskies to be roaming the basin at modest depths, maybe 10 to 15 feet down in clear lakes—shallower in darker water ones—near schools of baitfish. The best ways

to target them is to troll modest-sized crankbaits at their level, in and around baitfish you spot on your electronics. Again, modest speeds are best—rather than high speed burns—at least until the water warms into the 70 Fs. Criss-cross potential areas, near structure, off structure, some of both, until you get bites.

If you can't, or prefer not to

troll, try drifting over these same areas in the evening, toward sunset, when ciscoes rise toward the surface, following light-sensitive plankton upward as the sun dips over the horizon. Fancast cranks, even topwaters—out over 40- to 70 feet—which seems weird. Just remember, if they're not IN...they're OUT. If no one is catching muskies in the shallows, that's your key to head out to no man's land and fish over open water.

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Marina Purvis, age 9, brought in a good buck.



Cypress Purvis, age 8, harvested a nice buck.

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Cold Weather Drop Shotting

A lot of anglers don't think about a drop-shot rig when the water's cold. That's too bad because late winter and early spring are good times to use this technique. The bass tend to be deep, and they're often schooled up tight. That makes them a good target for this technique.

One of the things I've learned over the years, though, is that this is not the time for light weights. They're good, and frequently produce more bass, when the water's warm, but when it's cold you need to get your bait down fast and be able to hold it in a fixed position to make them bite.

I typically go with a 1/4-ounce to 3/8-ounce weight. That does exactly what I want it to do but it's still light enough to be handled on lighter tackle, and it lets me fish slowly and hold a fixed position.

Winter water tends to be clear, which makes a drop shot shine. Something in the 18- to 24-inch leader range is usually about right. Bass are keying on baitfish right now, and they are all the way around slower. The longer leader

mimics those dying bait that are in the middle of the water column. The bass have time to decide whether or not to bite your lure, which can be good and bad.

Clear water also means anglers think they need super light line. continue to the next page



Dave Calebaugh brought in an 8 point buck. Photo courtesy of Crossroads General Store near Newark.



Theron Smallridge got another nice buck. Photo courtesy of Anderson Outdoors in Buckhannon.

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That thinking is right. Lighter line will always get you more bites with a drop shot, but not because the fish see the line. The lighter line lets the bait swim and act more naturally which generates more bites than a bait that's being restricted by heavier line.

I like to fish with 6- or 7-pound test Sunline Super FC Sniper Fluorocarbon as my leader in the clear water.

The key to not breaking off with that light line on a drop-shot rig is having a longer spinning rod with a soft tip. It'll flex and give you some forgiveness.

Some rods with a parabolic bend will work since they bend throughout the middle of the rod and give a lot. However, I prefer a 7-foot or a 7-foot, 6-inch spinning rod with a little backbone but a soft tip. I call it a medium-fast action.




I actually designed a 7-foot, 4-inch counter balanced rod for Cashion Fishing Rods. I call it my Perfect Drop Shot Rod. If you use something else, though, be sure it has a soft tip and plenty of give or you'll break your line sure as the devil.


The trick with the drop shot in the winter is to locate the fish and then drop your bait vertically down to them. As a practical matter this means that you'll spend more time looking around and watching your electronics than you will fishing.

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Don't waste time searching with a drop shot. Since those fish are usually grouped tight using your Lowrance units to find them is more productive.

In some cases, dropping a bait right in front of their nose is the best way to catch them. But at other

times holding a bait 3-5 feet above them will get you more bites. For some reason bass at this time of the year like to move up to feed. They don't always feed horizontal, and they rarely feed down.

One problem that you'll likely encounter is to the next page



The Cottrill hunting party used dogs and brought in 4 black bears

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with this style of fishing is line twist, especially if your leader is fluorocarbon. There's no way to totally eliminate twist, but you can lessen it to a great extent by using a tiny SPRO Power Swivel about 3 feet above your bait.

Another trick is to nose thread your bait. Just run the hook in the throat under the nose and make it come out the nose. That'll make it sit straight on the hook's point. It won't twist and turn so much when sinking or retrieving. Check out the photo above to see what this looks like.

Bait colors are critical. Crayfish are dormant or hibernating. Crayfish colors tend to be less productive in the winter. Instead, go with something that resembles a baitfish. When the water's real clear and the sun's out I fish a Missile Baits Bomb Shot in fishalicious. I go with bombshell when it's cloudy or if the water's slightly stained.

It's a mistake to neglect a drop shot just because the water's cold. Don't do it.



Jesse Hatfield used a bow in Logan County for a 150 class buck.



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