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Issue 270

June/July 2018



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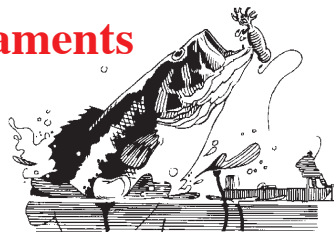
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Cover Photo

Although very uncommon at Stonewall Jackson Lake, there are a few smallmouth bass. JR Hoops, from Shinnston, landed a very impressive 7 1/4 pound smallmouth bass there in June.

It's been a crazy year weatherize in WV. Fishing has been spotty, especially on the Ohio River.

Look for upcoming bass tournament info in this issue.

TEXT, mail or email your large fish pictures. Info is on page 38.

Summer Crappie Fishing

Summer crappie fishing is known to be quite tough by most fishermen standards.

As the weather heats up, so do water temperatures. And when the water temperatures rise, crappie play hide and seek from the warmer water temps and head to deeper water.

There aren't a whole lot of fishermen who are great at fishing for crappies down deep in the water column. It's especially unfortunate for those without a boat and are restricted to fishing from the shoreline.

As you may already know, the best times to fish for crappie are during the winter... Summer Crappie Fishing Tactics, Freshwater Fishing Tips for Hot

Weather Conditions

But, with just a little ingenuity, summer crappie fishing can be just as exciting and rewarding.

How?

If and when all else fails, you have two options...

- 1) Continue with the same techniques that are failing you in hopes of catching crappie, or
- 2) Incorporate the following three tactics into your game plan and go home with a stringer full of panfish and a smile on your face.
- 3 Innovative Summertime Crappie Fishing Tactics

1.) Target Different Locations To Find Elusive Crappie

It's most common to target crappies around brush piles and other types of structure in deep water during those hot days of summer. However, there are good times in the summer when big crappies can be corralled from shallow water flats too.

Shad normally spawn continuously in those shallow flats, and of course, mister crappie will sure be around looking for an easy meal. Look for crappie to be holding on any one piece of cover, at any given time and day. The less cover, the better, and the easier your chances continue to the next page



Rachel Ruble, from Williamstown, got an 8 point in Wirt Co,

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might be at ringing them up.

2.) Select Different Baits And Lures To Entice Crappie To Bite

The normal every day crappie fisherman will often stick to using just one or two of their favorite crappie baits, such as the ever-so-popular crappie jigs, and the all time faithful minnows.

Don't be afraid to try something different or completely new. Drop something else out there, especially if what you're using isn't working. Try small spinner baits, little crankbaits, or switch from a minnow to some freshwater shrimp, or even just a night crawler.

3.) Offer Different Presentations For Finicky Crappie

The crappie summer bite can be a little on the light and finicky side. So, you may have to use a more tactical approach with your presentations.

A super sensitive float, such as a Thill's Shy Bite float, properly paired together with ultra-light tackle rigged with 2 to 4 pound test

fishing line, is one way to detect those little ticky tack nibbles. Add just enough weight below the float
continue to the next page



Brothers Chris & Matt Morris won the April 28th Bass Sportsman event at Burnsville Lake. They had 18 lbs., 12 oz. Next one there is July 8th.

Stonewall Jackson

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to allow no more than half an inch to appear above the water. Awareness and patience is key here. Set the hook immediately at the first sign of the float rising above the water.

You may also want to try an unweighted bait on your hook. I've had quite a bit of success with this presentation, especially in slow moving to stagnant waters. And it's about as easy as it can get. Simply toss it out there into the water around your preferred target area. The minnow will thrash around on the surface for a couple minutes before it begins to settle below. Then wait until you feel anything unusual and set the hook.

Don't let the hot weather discourage you from getting after those fun fighting panfish. Enjoy summer crappie fishing by trying out new tactics and techniques that the average angler wouldn't dare to.



Bruce Clarida, from Marietta, reeled a 52 pound flathead catfish.

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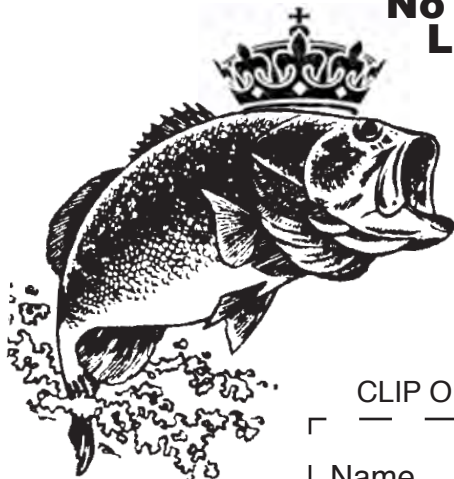
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Little Beaver State Park Lake Approval

BECKLEY, W.Va. — Thanks to its fish-filled waters and family friendly amenities, Little Beaver State Park Lake is one of the best places to go fishing and boating in West Virginia, according to a survey of moms across the country.

The lake is featured on a Top Mom-Approved Places to Fish and Boat list made for moms, by moms and facilitated by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation. The list includes family friendly fishing holes in all 50 states.

Florida.

To cast a vote for Little Beaver State Park Lake, go to www.take-mefishing.org/momapproved/. Voting is open through Friday, June 29. Winners will be announced in July.

Only 10 of the 50 places will earn the honor of being named one of the country's top mom-approved places to fish and boat. Voting is open now, and each vote enters your name for a chance to win a family fishing and boating trip to

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Tom Berga & Bill Kennedy won the initial 1st 33 Bass tournament on May 12 with a weight of 12 lbs., 8 oz. Look for an entry form on page 22 of this issue.

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Leave Young Wildlife Alone

FRENCH CREEK, W.Va. — Spring provides many opportunities to see fawns, cubs and other young animals, but the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources (DNR) would like to remind people that young wildlife should be left alone.

“You should exercise extreme caution and keep a safe distance if you encounter young wildlife,” said Tyler Evans, a wildlife biologist stationed at the West Virginia State Wildlife Center in Upshur County. “And it is especially important that the public understands the need to avoid touching or disturbing these animals.”

Picking up wildlife or getting too close greatly increases the chance of the animal getting harmed. By handling these animals, humans leave behind a scent that may at-

continue to the next page



Mike Long caught a couple of big largemouth bass recently.

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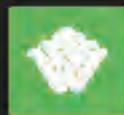


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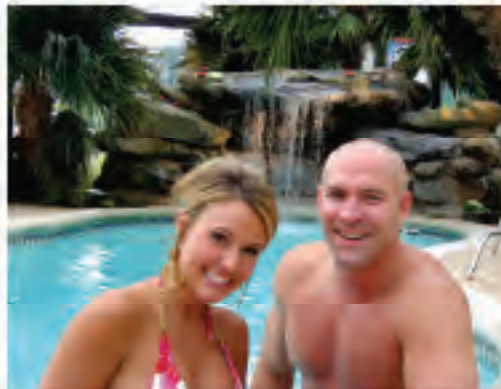
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tract a predator. Additionally, handling wildlife has the potential to expose humans to a variety of wild-life-related diseases and parasites.

“Rabies, ticks, and lice are just a few of the threats humans are exposed to when they handle wildlife,” said Evans.

Removing a young animal from its natural environment will almost certainly lead to the death of that animal.

“Young animals have special dietary needs and must learn survival skills that only a natural setting can provide,” said Evans. “Young animals are hidden while adults search for food, and this separation can last for several hours. Many people will mistake a bedded fawn, with no mother in sight, as abandoned, but that is rarely the case.”

As a final caution, DNR is reminding the public that state law prohibits the possession of wildlife without a permit. The fine for illegal possession of a fawn, bear cub, baby raccoon or any other species during the closed season ranges from \$20 to \$1,000 and could lead up to 100 days in jail.

“We want everyone to enjoy our state's wildlife,” said Evans. “However, for your safety and the safety of the animal, please remember that young wildlife should always be left undisturbed and given the opportunity to remain wild.”



Amelia Smith caught a big largemouth in a pond in Logan Co.

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Joshua Kaplan hunted in Wirt County for a large gobbler.



Billy West, from Barnesville, OH, shot a 23 lb. turkey.

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New “Noodling” Law Approval

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A law passed during the 2018 legislative session will soon allow West Virginia anglers to hand-fish, or “noodle,” in public waters. The annual season will run from June 15 to Aug. 31.

Hand-fishing is permitted between sunrise and sunset. However, it is prohibited in all state-managed impoundments except Stonecoal Lake, Hawks Nest Lake, Mount Storm Lake, Cheat Lake and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes.

The daily creel limit for all catfish species taken by hand-fishing is four. Only one fish may be over 35 inches, and only two may be blue catfish. In waters with special regulations, the more restrictive regulations apply. The daily creel limit for hand-fishing counts as part of any daily limit for hook-

and-line fishing.

“Noodlers” may only hand-fish in naturally-occurring habitats such as hollow logs and cavities in river banks. The placement or use of artificial cavities and nesting boxes for hand-fishing is prohibited.

The use or possession of hooks, gaffs, spears or anything other than hands while hand-fishing is prohibited, as is the use of bait or fish attractors. The use of SCUBA gear or any other artificial breathing apparatus also is prohibited.



Chris Erksine caught a state record length Kanawha blue cat - 54 inches.

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Rick Mayse got a nice Putnam County gobbler.



A 35# catfish was caught at this pay lake. Photo courtesy of Sure Catch Fish Farm in Elkins.



Daniel Hale, from Man, caught a smallmouth from the Guyandotte.

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Deep Jerkbait Evolution

By Mark Hicks

Jerkbait is essential lures for every Bassmaster Elite Series pro, as they should be for any serious angler. Although short-billed jerkbaits are big hitters, deep jerkbaits have been slow to catch on. There are several reasons why.

Early deep jerkbaits cast poorly. They tumbled in the air and were impossible to cast for distance or accuracy in anything more than a mild breeze. Although long-billed jerkbaits get deeper than short-billed versions, some of them produce elbow-jolting resistance due to their long lips.

They also failed to respond with the quick, hard-cutting, strike-triggering action of their short-billed brethren when twitched. Despite these drawbacks, Joe Balog quietly began picking off heavyweight smallmouth bass several years ago with deep jerkbaits.

Before Balog recently moved to Florida, he was one of the most accomplished smallmouth anglers on the Great Lakes. He once won



Roni Huffman caught a farm pond bass. Photo courtesy of PC Outdoors in Hinton.

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a Bassmaster Northern Open on Lake Erie and has finished near or at the top in many other Great Lakes tournaments.

“When I started fishing deep jerkbaits, there weren’t many on the market,” Balog said. “It was hard to get a lot of action out of them.”

The key to success with any jerkbait is its side-to-side action, he emphasized. He tried twitching his early deep jerkbaits with the same downward rod-snapping motion that imparted a lively dance to his short-billed jerkbaits. The deep
continue to the next page

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jerkbaits responded as if they were sleepwalking.

Arm wrenching

Balog overcame this dilemma by first pulling a deep jerkbait down to its maximum depth with long, downward rod sweeps. Then he vigorously snapped his baitcasting rod up sharply over his opposing shoulder. This exhausting technique forced sluggish deep jerkbaits to spring into action.

The aggressive tactic generated so much stress that anything less than 12-pound fluorocarbon could not hold up to the punishment. It's a wonder Balog didn't suffer repetitive stress injuries.

There are two instances in which



A big catfish was reeled in. Photo courtesy of Sure Catch Fish Farm in Elkins.

deep jerkbaits kick bass with Great Lakes smallies, he claimed. One is in the spring when the bass make the first move toward their spawning areas. He often finds them in 10 to 18 feet of water at this time. The bass aren't inclined to come up for a short-billed jerkbait, but they will readily pounce on a deep jerkbait that dives closer to them.

The other situation is in the summertime on Lake St. Clair when the smallmouth suspend in deep water. Balog claimed that St. Clair's smallmouth were dupes for diving crankbaits back when the big lake attracted few bass anglers.

"Once the word got out about St. Clair's fantastic smallmouth fishing, the pressure went from a handful of bass fishermen to hundreds a day," he said. "The bass got harder to catch on crankbaits, but they would still bite a deep jerkbait."

Deep jerkbait evolution

Today there are deep jerkbaits that overcome many of the drawbacks



Kyle Stackpole caught a big Stone-wall Jackson Lake musky.



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with the earlier versions, but their number pales compared to what's available in short-billed jerkbaits. One of the latest deep models, the Strike King KVD Deep Jerkbait designed by Kevin VanDam, was introduced at the 2015 Bassmaster continue to the next page



Doug Johnson, from Buckhannon, went to Texas for a 450 lb. boar.



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Classic on Lake Hartwell, S.C.

“I had been fishing that bait for almost a year before we launched it at the Classic,” said VanDam. “I was hoping it would give me an edge at Hartwell.”

VanDam was unable to unleash his Deep Jerkbait at Hartwell because he failed to qualify for the Classic for the only time in his long and illustrious career. However, this lure has helped VanDam win a pile of cash in other tournaments across the country and at all times of the year.

Examples include when he won a summertime tournament on the Upper Mississippi River with largemouth bass, loading up on smallmouth from Lake St. Clair’s deep grass and blasting large-mouth, smallmouth and spotted bass by casting the deep jerker to

windblown gravel points during a tournament at Table Rock.

“The KVD Deep Jerkbait is one of the most special baits I’ve ever designed,” he said. “As far as what I was looking for it to do, it’s the total package.”

What he was looking for it to do was to dive deeper than any other jerkbait with less resistance. It also had to cast well, even under breezy conditions. And most importantly,

it had to perform with an erratic “slashing action” without wearing out your arms.

Although many anglers regard a deep jerkbait as a situational lure for cold water, he claimed that he has had more success with his Deep Jerkbait in the warmer months. He attributes this to the lure’s nasty action and to the depths he can reach with it.

Good luck fishing this year!

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Conaway Lake Ramp Closed

CENTERVILLE, W.Va. — As part of the dam safety program of the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, Conaway Run Lake in Tyler County is undergoing repairs from June 11 through Oct. 31, 2018. The boat ramp, parking lot and access road to the dam will be closed during this time.

A maximum allowable drawdown of 10 feet may occur. Bank fishing will be permitted during construc-

tion; however, boating will be prohibited due to safety concerns. For any questions or comments, please contact Nate Taylor, Acting District Fisheries Biologist – Parkersburg, at 304-420-4550.

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Nicholas Mounts, from Gilbert, caught a Guyandotte hybrid bass.



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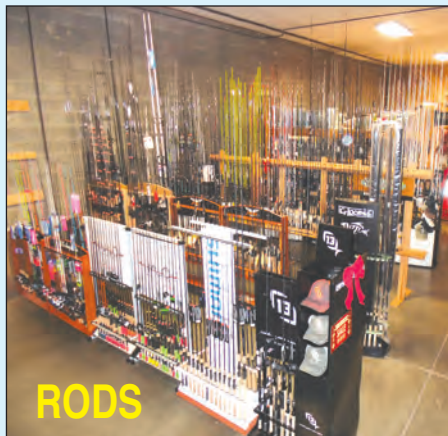


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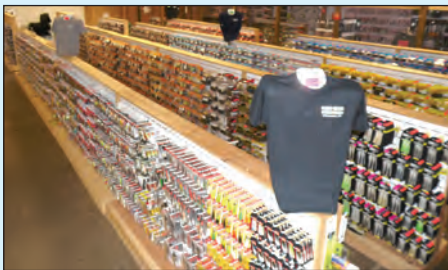


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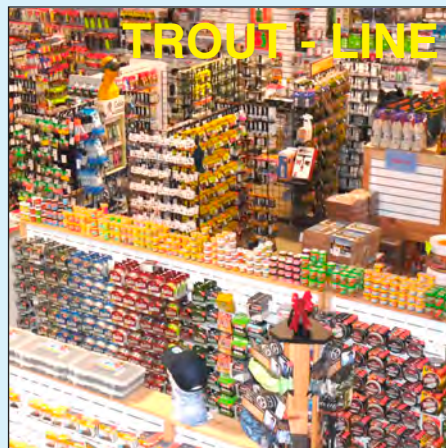
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Gently down the stream...

Well, that sounds easy enough.
How hard can it be to row gently
down a stream?

Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily...
Life is but a dream...

The whole "merrily" and "but a
dream" thing starts to seem more
difficult to achieve as you tussle
with your boat.

As you hum this age-old nursery
rhyme, you can picture yourself
gliding down the calm waters of an
inland stream, the wind blowing in
your face, the palm fronds blowing
in the wind with a clear blue sky
in the background, clouds floating
past.

But if you're unprepared, your
actual boating adventures can be
much different.

Boating of any kind is an exercise
that requires proper training, nav-
igational skills and experience to
make it worthwhile.

You have to combine physical fit-
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a bit of technical knowledge to
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rience. With this in mind, here are
some vital tips that help beginners
take their boating trips to the next
level.

11 Boating Tips for Beginners

1. Train first

You have to start somewhere,
right?

Proper boating is next to impos-
sible without prior training. It's just
not an exercise which any amateur
continue to the next page



The Priddy team caught the big
bass (4-12) at Burnsville Lake.



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can undertake. You might be thinking that this isn't completely true—after all, how do people usually go about getting started?

Most people don't jump into a boat and take off with zero knowledge. If anything, they start with a boater-friendly, guide or instructor.

Nowadays, finding someone to help you out in the beginning is all too easy. Just start by scouring the internet on where to learn the basics of boating. That's how you ended up here, isn't it? A quick search will show you what establishments are available in your immediate area. There may be boating clubs, marine organizations or groups of boating enthusiasts who provide such training and support. The internet will guide you to them.



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If you live somewhere close to a large water body, chances are that you'll find a boating club or Meet-up with suitable vessels to train in.

The ideal thing to do is to hit the water to learn. And it doesn't matter what type of water you're hitting, whether it be a sheltered bay, a local reservoir, a lake or even the ocean. You'll be taught the basics of boating, and the specific type of boating you're looking to take up—everything including terminology, wind awareness, special skills like steering, knot tying, rigging, preparing boats, safety, equipment use, gybing, downwind sailing, tacking, upwind sailing, recovery of persons overboard.

After the initial training, you could also get your ICC or International Certificate of Competence for Boating.

This more formal training isn't always an option. It might actually be something you need to do

in your region. On a local scale, requirements for boater education vary from state to state, often including the completion of at least one course on boating safety.

continue to the next page



Talia Beto, from Mt. Clare, landed a 6 lb., 3 oz. farm pond bass

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You should have plenty of options though, as online or local community courses can educate you on the basics of the process too.

Don't worry, it's not rocket science! You don't have to be Michael Scofield from "Prison Break" to

figure it out! You aren't breaking out of Fox River State Penitentiary. (Well, I hope you're not.)

2. Get your license and registration This is vital.

Consider what type of boating you'll be doing, and consider where

you'll be doing it. Then ask around or do some research to figure out what's required for this to happen. The paperwork you'll need—and the cost of obtaining it—depends on whether the boat is used on

continue to page 24

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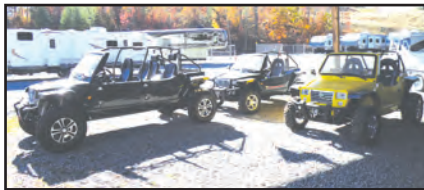


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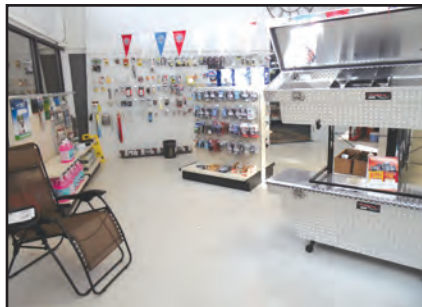
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rivers, canals or other waterways, whether the boat's for cruising or living on as a houseboat, the boat's length and the duration of the license (from one day to one year). The appropriate local boating authority may be approached for this type of license.

For instance, let's say that you'll be sailing on an inland waterway. In most places, you've got to have a license and/or sailing registration issued by the appropriate nav-

igation authority for a fee. Some waterways have special licensing arrangements that grant exclusive sailing rights to local clubs, thus sparing club members the hassle of getting separate licenses.

Facing a fee? The money you'll pay is spent directly on maintaining and improving waterways and on providing services and facilities

for boaters, such as sewage disposal, water supply and electrical charging points. It's not spent on private jets or fancy yachting trips. No one's doing this to become rich and powerful, like politicians who go into office middle class and come out super rich.

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Danny Frazier caught a 6 pound smallmouth. *Photo courtesy of PC Outdoors in Hinton.*

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nas, could also require a license, the cost of which varies based on the amenities and location.

Do the research and figure this stuff out before you begin boating, rather than regretting it later.

3. Get to know your boating gadgets

Your boat, after all, is a mechanical device. Even the smallest, simplest little boat is going to be somewhat gadget-dependent so it can operate smoothly. Therefore, it's imperative to be knowledgeable about navigation, safety and fishing gadgets.

Technology has made it possible to have some very sophisticated navigational tools on board, like gyro stabilizers, magnetic com-

passes, radars, autopilot systems, an ARPA (Automatic Radar Plotting Aid), automatic tracking aids, distance and speed log devices, depth sounders, an ECDIS (Electronic Chart Display Information System), automatic identification systems, voyage data recorder, GPS receivers, navigational lights, lamps for daylight signaling, pilot cards, fore-castle bells and ship flags, to name a few. The list goes on.

Safety equipment includes life-jackets, anchor and line/chain, auto and manual bilge pumps, indicating compasses, smoking orange and red distress flares, fire extinguishers, electronic or paper maps/charts for areas of operation, pad-

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continue to the next page



Eric Johnson bagged a 23 pound gobbler in Wood County.

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It doesn't matter what you're set-up is like. Make sure you're familiar with everything on your boat!

4. Check the skies before setting sail

Checking the weather immediately before boating is critical.

Weather changes are highly unpredictable and an unexpected storm can catch you off guard. For beginners in particular, a sudden squall may prove dangerous.

5. Make a checklist

Don't sit around on the boat ramp squinting at the sky to check the weather or rummaging around in your boat for items.

Boat traffic can build up and you'll be called some names that you don't want to be called. You'll at least frustrate many people, or have fellow boaters looking at you like you don't know what you're doing.

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So, prepare well in advance of launch.

Maintain a pre-departure checklist so that you're prepared for any on-water possibility. The pre-departure checklist will ensure that no precautions or safety rules have been overlooked. For example, your checklist can remind you to keep food and water, a flashlight and first aid items on board with you.

I use my smartphone for this. You don't need another item to carry.

continue to the next page



Mathew & Jessica Berry, from Milton, caught bass on their honeymoon in Florida.

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Skip the clipboard and check off a checklist on your smartphone.

6. Dress appropriately

Since boating is essentially outdoors exercise, dress appropriately to tackle changes in weather conditions both on land and off. And prepare for your own body's needs. Dressing in layers is advisable so that you can take off a sweatshirt if it gets too warm. I know, you're thinking that you probably don't need to bring any extra layers, especially if you'll be boating during the day in the summertime—unless you're thinking of Lake Tahoe. That lake is cold!

I normally have a sweatshirt with me no matter what when I go out on the water. What if it starts to get chillier than you thought? Or you don't make it back before the sun goes down, and that cool evening breeze starts giving you goosebumps?

Apart from that, valuables like keys, cell phones and wallets may get wet or fall into the water, so keep them secured to something or stowed away in waterproof storage.

7. Float plan

Before you leave, keep a float plan on the shore so that, should something go wrong on the water, somebody onshore would know where and when to go looking for you. Here's one example of a float plan you can consult for guidance.

A float plan has saved many a life in the past by bringing back missing boaters and thus has great importance. You don't want to end up doing what Aron Ralston did, having to make an excruciating escape plan because nobody knows where you are or what could've happened to you.

8. Never forget your lifejacket

You might think this is more applicable to those who don't know

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how to swim, but the truth is that most boating-related deaths happen because people weren't wearing lifejackets.

In the summer, wearing a lifejacket may be somewhat uncomfortable, and it might make you feel less intrepid and stylish. But nothing is more important than your life. Your safety at any cost comes first. And when boating with anyone else, particularly someone who can't swim, you need to be extra careful.

If you swim well, well, it's your decision. Perhaps in a quiet lake, wearing the lifejacket isn't always really necessary, but if you're in a fast-moving river or an ocean with huge swells, that's another story.



Derek Williams caught a 45 lb. flathead from the Little Kanawha.



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Spring Turkey Harvest

SOUTH CHARLESTON, W.Va. — According to preliminary data gathered by the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources, turkey hunters in West Virginia harvested 12,274 gobblers this spring, which is a 15-year high and a 6 percent increase over 2017.

This year's harvest also is more than 10 percent above the 10-year average, said Mike Peters, Game Bird and Small Game Project Leader for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

All but two DNR districts reported an increase over 2017 harvest figures. Districts 4 and 5 were the only two districts with fewer harvested birds this year. Counties in District 1 harvested the most birds again this year with 3,416, followed by District 6 (2,651), District 5 (1,811), District 4 (1,515), District 3 (1,805) and District 2

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Rob Pyles caught the big bass at the Bass Sportsman event at Stonewall Jackson Lake (May 26). It weighed 4-12.

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Tony Crumbliss, from Brigeport, went to Lake Erie for this giant.

(1,076). The five counties with the largest harvest were Preston (553), Mason (468), Jackson (460), Harrison (440) and Marshall (417). Youth hunters harvested 431 turkeys during the one-day youth season on April 14. Those numbers, along with county totals, are included in the table below



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Restoring Brook Trout In The Panhandle

ROMNEY, W.Va. — West Virginia Division of Natural Resources biologists recently released fingerling native brook trout into a tributary of the Cacapon River in Hampshire County with the help of students from Slanesville Elementary School.

The eggs and milt were taken from native brook trout in a nearby stream, after which the adults were quickly returned to the water. Biologists took the fertilized eggs to Reymann Farms, a facility near Wardensville affiliated with West Virginia University. Staff at the facility raised the young trout to fingerling size over several months.

The decision to stock fingerlings has been a well-thought out process and part of an effort to restore native brook trout to the

Eastern Panhandle. DNR initially stocked hatchery-raised trout, but they didn't reproduce well., DNR also tried taking adult native brook trout from one stream and putting them in another, but this depleted the trout population of the donor stream and increased the chance of transferring harmful bacteria to the new stream. Stocking fingerling trout appears to have been successful.

"To get to this size, they've proven themselves to be pretty hardy, and they are more likely to survive high water flows," Keplinger said.

"One of the keys to this method's success is that these trout come from parents genetically adapted to the local stream conditions," Keplinger said. "The hardest part of the process is finding females

and males right when they are ready to spawn."

Keplinger said what DNR has learned from this year's process will be used next year so more native brook trout can be raised for release in nearby streams with similar elevation, water temperature and water quality.



Joe Kessler caught a 21 1/2" new River smallmouth bass.



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Dial In With Swim Jigs

Folks in Wisconsin seem to have an affinity for swim jigs. While Tom Monsoor is pretty much the world authority on the method, that doesn't mean there aren't other ways to do it. Matt Stefan has made the Forrest Wood Cup three of the last four years, and each year he's put at least a few in the boat on a swim jig no matter where the season has taken him.

"The swim jig would definitely be my go-to bait if I could choose one bait," says Stefan. "That's because it's such a versatile bait that you can really use it through any level of the water column. You can use it in a foot of water through thick grass. You can use a heavy swim jig

on ledges. You can fish suspended fish with it around docks and over deep water. It's really a bait you can utilize at all different levels of the water column and through all different types of cover."

Through his love of the bait Stefan has formed several opinions about it, from what makes a good swim jig to the best times to put
continue to the next page



Sam Greenwood, from Newport, OH, bagged a 24 lb. turkey.



Lon Wright, from Waverly, caught a 7 lb. 9 oz rainbow trout.

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one into action.

Before signing on with Dirty Jigs, Stefan made most of his own swim jigs, and would probably still do so if he weren't satisfied with what is commercially available.

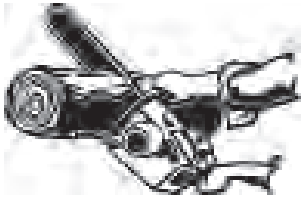
For the actual jig, the meticulous pro likes a bullet-shaped head and a vertical line tie – one that is in line with the hook. He believes that combination produces the most weedless jig possible. Stefan also likes to thin out the brush guard, sometimes taking out as many as one-third of the strands. He often thins the skirt as well, both shortening and removing some of the strands. Finally, Stefan prefers a jig with a good trailer keeper, be it a nice molded-in barb or a wire keeper. Though he sometimes uses

continue to the next page



Kansas Caldwell & Luke Loughery caught bass in an Ohio County farm pond.

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Super Glue to lock trailers in place, he doesn't like the buildup that can occur overtime.

"The majority of the time I'm throwing a 3/8-ounce jig," Stefan says. "If I'm in super shallow water I'll switch to a 1/4-ounce, and up north here we have a lot of deep weedlines, and I'll switch to a 3/4-ounce in that respect. That can really be a killer in the summer when fish are grouped up in like 14 feet of water."

Stefan throws the Dirty Jigs Swim Jig or the Finesse Swim Jig 95 per-

cent of the time, relying mostly on the standard model. He also occasionally uses the No-Jack Swim Jig.

"I utilize the finesse one when I'm fishing smallmouths, which is usually in rivers," says Stefan. "I do that because the hook is substantially smaller on it. It's still extremely stout. You don't have to worry about bending it on a fish, but they get it in their mouths better. The smallmouths have a bad habit of just coming up and grab-

continue to the next page

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ing the tail, and I think that a bigger hook has prevented some fish in my past from getting the bait.

"For the most part I don't feel like I need to throw the No-Jack too much, but if I'm down in Florida and using braid I will switch over. It's such a stout hook that you need something to drive the hook home, and you'll be using it in cover that's so thick that you need braid anyway."

Stefan usually opts for 15-pound-test Seaguar InvizX line and sometimes drops down to 10-pound test in wicked-clear water. He sticks with a high-speed reel and usually uses a custom-built rod made on a St. Croix Legend Tournament finesse swim jig rod blank. The blank is a 7-foot, 1-inch, medium-heavy power with an extra-fast action – heavy enough to manage around cover but light-duty enough to present and work some fairly small baits.

For his trailers, Stefan prefers a swimbait.

"I'm a big fan of boot tails," he says. "I feel like the bait wobbles side to side, and it allows the bait to have more action."

Most of the time his swimbait of choice is a Reaction Innovations Skinny Dipper, and he starts the process by cutting the head off. Then, he trims up from the bottom to make the bait a little more streamlined before rigging it on he jig. When finished, the process cre-

ates a really nice package that will come through grass very easily.

continue to the next page



Kathy Dunlap bagged a gobbler.
Photo courtesy of Crossroads General Store near Newark.



Logan Utt caught a 52" musky in the Little Kanawha. *Photo courtesy of WV Wild Outdoors in Birch River.*

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Chucking and winding a swim jig through shallow vegetation is probably the most common way to fish one. It's also one of the simplest techniques because once you have a good swim jig combo you're basically set to start winding it back through the grass.

Two ways that Stefan likes to make use of the swim jig's versatility are in shallow river situations and on deep weed edges. Both require a bit more refined technique.

1. Cut bank swimming

One of Stefan's favorite times to fish a swim jig is when he's keying up shallow in rivers such as the Mississippi and the Wolf in Wisconsin and Minnesota.


"I love it for fishing cut banks and current-type conditions where I've got some wood up against the bank and a little bit of depth," he says. "I'll throw it up to the cut bank or the log and let it drop to the bottom and then slowly start retrieving back. It's a killer for smallmouths or largemouths."


Stefan says the key to finding cut banks is using your eyes and looking in places that have or had cur-

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"It doesn't have to be main river; there just needs to be current at some point in the year," says Stefan. "In the spring there may be a lot of current that shoots through a backwater, but in the summer there may not be. The biggest thing is you want to find those undercut banks. A lot of it is visual. You'll go down the bank and see sand, and then there will be a 10-foot stretch where you see black water. It may only be a foot deep, but they will get under that little bank."

The season and target species determine whether he focuses time in the main river or the backwaters.

"The main-river stuff is usually better for a mixed bag, and the stuff

in the backwater is usually more of
continue to the next page



Isaac Williams bagged a HUGE 29 lb. 6 oz. gobbler. *Photo courtesy of Holbert's Store in Big Bend.*



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largemouth deal,” Stefan says. “If it is mid- to late summer when largemouths are usually winning in the Midwest I’ll fish the backwaters. If it’s the fall of the year or the spring I’ll usually fish the main river.”

Stefan mostly targets cut banks that are 2 to 3 feet deep and likes the 3/8-ounce Finesse Swim Jig because he wants to be prepared for smallmouths, and he wants the bait to fall fairly quickly and not be swept away like a ¼-ounce bait would. He likes chartreuse and white for smallmouths or a mixed bag and black and blue or green pumpkin when he’s more dialed in on green fish.

“If they bite it on the fall, that’s like if you are throwing any pitching jig,” says Stefan. “But especially when you have smallmouths, quite often you’ll get bit on the way back, and the swim jig allows me to get those bites in between the fall and the boat.”

Regardless of where they bite, Stefan likes to put the bait right up on the bank, with about 90 percent of his casts being some kind of underhand pitch or skip.

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