District 5 Fall Fishing Report

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District 5 Reservoirs -
As the year progresses into the autumn season and the temperatures begin to drop, this can be an
excellent time to bass fish Beech Fork and East Lynn Reservoirs. The bass have spread out at this point
and are focused on feeding. Seasonal weather patterns can be erratic during this transition time and it
can be difficult to find bass. By adjusting angling tactics and techniques, as well as being adaptable to
the constantly changing weather conditions, anglers will have a better chance at catching bass in these
impoundments.

Water temperature plays a key role in the movements and patterns which bass follow. Keep close
watch on the water temperatures on your favorite lake. As the water temperatures cool to below 70°F,
bass will move back into the shallow waters in search of forage. At this point in the season, bass feed
aggressively to prepare for the upcoming winter months, so it is a great time to be on the water angling
for bass. Anglers should target areas of the lakes where the deeper waters, (8’-10’) meet the flats, (1’-
3’). The bass will stage in the morning and evening hours at the deeper ends of flats. As the day
progresses and the water temperatures rise, bass will move up onto the flats to feed in the shallows.
These are good areas and times to target largemouth bass.

Locating bass at this time of year can be challenging due to the constant change in air and subsequently
water temperatures. The drastic fluctuations in temperatures will move fish from shallows during the
warmer periods of the fall to the deeper waters during the colder times of the season. Finding bait fish
can be key to a successful trip in the fall months. Temperatures changes will activate the bait fish, such
as shad, to move into the mouths of creeks or into shallow coves. The bass will follow their forage into
these areas as well. Spinner baits, spoons and shallow diving crankbaits are a good choice in these
areas, under these conditions.

When trying to locate forage/bass, anglers can practice the ‘run-and-gun’ tactic to cover a lot of water
and locate feeding fish. This tactic can be employed not only from a boat, but also from shore by
moving from spot to spot until you find fish. Once a pattern is established at one location, anglers can
take that information and use it on other areas of the lake. A good pattern to start this fall would be to
fish shallow water, (3’-5’) with heavy vegetation. If that is not successful, perhaps try moving to deeper
water with vegetation, (5’-10’) to find suspended bass. Another productive fall pattern is to target
downed trees at the shorelines. The WVDNR has dropped many trees into both Beech Fork and East
Lynn Reservoirs to provide cover and habitat for the game fish in those lakes. Fish attractor locations
using GPS coordinates can be found at the DNR website, www.mapwv.gov and search fishing maps. The
trees can be identified on the lakes by the signage placed on tree trunks or stumps.

The choice of baits during the fall months will depend on where the bass are staging in relation to the
water temperatures and availability of forage. When fishing in shallow vegetation try throwing a hollow
bodied frog. This bait will stay out of the vegetation and trigger a bass to come out of cover to strike,
allowing you to fight that fish away from the vegetation. A Texas-rigged fluke bait is also a good bait in
these thick vegetation conditions. This rig will allow the bait to slide through the thick cover. When fishing deeper vegetation, a lipless crankbait is a good choice. This bait is fished horizontally above the vegetation in a ripping fashion, allowing the bait to tick the top of the weeds to entice a strike. When targeting downed trees in shallows, anglers might want to throw a square-billed crankbait. This bait will bounce off cover like limbs and brush without getting hung up. Downed trees are also a good area to rig a bait weedless or Texas-Rigged to finesse fish.

District 5 Navigable Rivers -
Fall is a great time to fish the navigable river for all game species in West Virginia. Many game species reside in these river systems. Largemouth bass fishing is limited in these large river systems. The high flows and sediment loads make it difficult for bass to have successful reproductive years and thus resulted in lower numbers throughout the river. **Largemouth bass** can be targeted around deeper backwater embayment’s using shallow running crankbaits, plastic worms, and spinner baits fished slowly and along the main river channels where you should target weed beds, rocky banks, and woody debris. Most bass are caught in under 6’ of water. **Smallmouth bass** are typically caught in the tailwaters and from rocky points in deeper pools. The main forage for the smallmouth bass is the crawfish, therefore they seldom venture far from the primary habitat of this forage species.

**Walleye and sauger** are a sought-after game species in the Ohio and Kanawha Rivers both. When the water temperatures fall into the 50’s, walleye and sauger begin to congregate at stream confluences and move to tailwaters in numbers. The most popular technique for walleye and sauger fishing is using a 1/8 to 3/8-ounce jig head with a white or chartreuse twister tail fished at the bottom. Sauger can be caught at this time of year using small crankbaits during the evening hours as well. Target these species on overcast days for the best results.

**White Bass, Striped Bass and Hybrid Striped Bass** are an abundant sport fish in the navigable rivers system. These bass are attracted to the highly oxygenated waters below dams. They seek the slower flowing waters adjacent to the fast-moving sections where they can ambush prey such as gizzard shad and emerald shiners. Anglers may use cast nets to catch forage species but must not move these bait fish as that is against the law in West Virginia. A good practice to keep when fishing for white bass is to have two rods rigged, one rod for top water and the other set up with a jig to fish deeper in the water column.

**Channel, Blue, and Flathead Catfish** can be caught in the navigable river systems at any time when the water temperatures are above 50°F. Tailwaters produce many fish but warm water discharges, stream confluences, and gravel flats near deep water have been proven to produce large catfish. Live or freshly cut bait such as gizzard shad, or skipjack can be fished off the bottom with heavy tackle. Barges get tied up along the rivers and are moved constantly. Catfish, especially blue catfish take advantage of these barges and use them as cover and relief from the current. When fishing below tied up barges, and below the mooring structures within rivers for barges to tie to anglers are encouraged to take all safety precautions. This pattern becomes even more prominent during higher flows due to the relief these objects provide from the current to catfish.

District 5 Rivers/Streams -
Rivers and streams can be overlooked at this time of year with all the focus on the upcoming whitetail deer season soon approaching. Fishing on the rivers and streams in District 5 during this time of year can be very productive. The fall season has lower precipitation levels which in turn cause lower water levels in the rivers. Fish will concentrate in the main river channels at this point. Focus on fishing these
main river channels for increased success. While in these areas look for boulders and log jams which create current breaks, these breaks provide cover and ambush sites for smallmouth bass to attack their prey. Small crankbaits are an excellent choice for fall smallmouth.

As the water clarity increases in the fall, color becomes a more important factor in choosing your bait. In clearer water, choose a bait that has a natural color such as green pumpkin, watermelon, or a shad color pattern. Conversely, if the water is more stained go with a bright color bait like orange, chartreuse, red, or white. When choosing lure color in relation to water clarity, anglers should try to create a contrast between your bait and the background your fishing. For example, if you are fishing heavily vegetated waters throwing a green bait may not contrast enough with the background of the vegetation causing it to become less visible to the fish. In this situation, a bait that contrasts the background vegetation that makes your bait standout is a better choice.

While water temperatures remain above 57° and food forage is becoming rare, the lower light intensity can make for an excellent day on the rivers in District 5. One of the biggest factors of smallmouth bass fishing during the fall season is the change in preferred forage. Smallmouth will switch from a crawfish-based diet to foraging on minnows. The switch from crawfish is due to the fact these crustaceans tend to become less active and less available. Additionally, the crawfish stop their molting process and become hard-shelled, therefore more difficult to consume during the fall season. The minnow forage however is at a prime time to be taken as forage; as they have grown to an eating size. During these conditions, a darting-minnow bait will produce more results.

Once the water temperatures are consistently below 57°, smallmouth will begin to concentrate in slow pools and slack water eddies. As the temps continue to fall, day-to-day weather can play a major factor in fish activity and therefore result in your fishing success. Try fishing for a smallmouth after a few sunny days, they will be more aggressive on these days as the water temperatures have risen a few degrees and these fish far more active. Conversely, on a day when the weather is overcast and grey, the water temperatures are not conducive for a productive day on the District 5 rivers. Fish can be highly concentrated during this time of the year, when you find a few there may be a dozen or more.

**District 5 Small Impoundments -**
Many small impoundments are located throughout District 5. These small impoundments are: Hurricane (Putnam), Laurel Lake (Mingo), Chief Logan Lake SP Pond (Logan), Rockhouse (Logan), Krodel (Mason), Coonskin (Kanawha), Lick Creek Pond (Wayne), Millers Fork Pond (Wayne), and Pettigrew (Kanawha). Many of these waters are stocked with catchable catfish during the summer months and there will be holdovers into the fall season as well. Fish for catfish in the small impoundments by fishing on the bottom using liver-based baits or simple hot dogs soaked in anise (licorice).