



# THE GREAT LAKES SPORT FISHING NEWS

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## On Fabled Au Sable River, A Fight For Soul of Michigan's Holy Waters



Retired Michigan Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Biologist Steve Sendek, right, and son Alex Sendek, of Grayling, push a dead pine tree they cut down into the Au Sable River, which will be used to repair a woody trout habitat first created by the DNR about 50 years ago, in Grayling Township. When the DNR stopped maintaining the habitats in the late 1990s, Sendek stepped in with the help of funding from local organizations to hire a crew to restore them each summer. The woody habitats provide trout with a place to conserve their energy and take shelter from predators. "We're taking care of that original investment the DNR put into the fish habitats and making sure it stays functional for a long time," Sendek said. (Ella Miller/Bridge Michigan)

By Kelly House  
bridgemi.com

generate enough electricity to pay their way.

**AU SABLE RIVER**—On any given summer evening along this storied Michigan river, Tom Buhr can be found fly fishing in cold, rushing water that makes him feel "more complete and better" than anywhere on Earth.

Fifty miles downstream on a pontoon in one of the Au Sable's lake-like reservoirs, Douglas Ridenour can relate to the feeling.

The agreement ends there.

Despite a shared love for the river, the men stand on opposite sides of a struggle for its future, prompted by Consumers Energy's proposal to sell 13 century-old Michigan dams—including six on the Au Sable—to a private equity firm.

For the company, it's a financial decision designed to avoid hundreds of millions in maintenance costs and liability for high-hazard structures that don't

For many residents along the nationally-renowned 138-mile waterway that originates north of Grayling and empties into Lake Huron at Oscoda, a regulatory review of the deal has become a proxy for a deeper battle over whether the dams should exist at all. The struggle for the future of the Au Sable mirrors a national debate. It pits environmentalists and fly fishers like Buhr, who favor free-flowing rivers with colder water and more fish, against flatwater enthusiasts like Ridenour who value the lakefront living created by reservoirs.

Across the country, "you've got old mill dams and old power dams that were important things at the time, but now maybe aren't," said Bob Dalton, a national dam safety expert based in Illinois. The question then becomes "what are we going to do now, and what's it going to look like 100 years from now?"

At stake are not just the environment and ways of life for water users, but public safety, taxpayer dollars and the future of scores of businesses and communities that have popped up along the artificial lakes.

### A Nationwide Issue

Across the nation, thousands of dams have exceeded the standard 50-year lifespan and face mounting maintenance costs.

The average US dam is 65 years old, while Michigan's average is 80.

Consumers Energy's 13 dams on the Au Sable, Grand, Kalamazoo, Manistee and Muskegon rivers average 106 and generate only 1% of the utility's annual power output, while the cost to maintain them keeps growing.

In view of that math, Consumers wants to sell them for \$1 apiece before their federal operating licenses expire in the coming

"AuSable"  
Continued on page 2



Boats line up to fish a walleye tournament in the St. Mary's River. Events like this highlight the importance of recreational fishing to coastal tourism.

Photo: Dan O'Keefe/Michigan Sea Grant

## Recreational Fishing Provides Food, Fun, and Funding for Conservation

By Dan O'Keefe;  
Michigan Sea Grant

Fishing is sometimes thought of as an expensive hobby that drives coastal tourism, but it can also be an affordable way to harvest food and enjoy the great outdoors close to home.

Recreational fishing means many things to many people. For some, casting a line evokes fond memories of quality time spent with family and friends. For others, wading down a remote stream provides a break from screens and a respite from the rhythm

of modern life. The thrill of catching a big one is the draw for some, while others are more motivated by the thought of fresh fillets sizzling in hot oil.

In Michigan, resident recreational fishing license sales rose from 1.1 million in 2015 to 1.2 million in 2025. The Great Lakes State offers anglers over 3,200 miles of coastline, over 11,000 inland lakes, and tens of thousands of miles of streams and rivers to explore. This makes Michigan a popular destination for out-of-state travel, as well. Although tourism is often the focus when

demonstrating the value of recreational fishing, the food value of fish caught and the cultural, social, nutritional, and mental health benefits of fishing are often overlooked.

The term "sport fishing" is sometimes used interchangeably with "recreational fishing," but the motivations of many anglers do not align strictly with sporting or competition-based activities. Some types of fishing are more focused on harvest-

"Recreation"  
Continued on page 6

## Where the Fishing Fun Lasts All Summer...

By Mark Platt  
Metro West Steelheaders

Welcome to Metro West Steelheaders April 7th General Membership meeting.

I figure this is a good place to start my article since my wife and I are back from wintering in AZ and supposedly spring has sprung!

Besides this meeting being our Annual Swap Meet where we also announce 2025 Award Winners for Captain, Crewperson, and River Angler of the Year plus Pier-Beach and Kayak-Small Boat Awards along with the Big Fish Contest Winners. Always

a big fun evening with our Club!!

Our Show Season is done and a HUGE Shout-out to all the chairs and volunteers who helped make it so successful.

Welcome to the 17 new members who signed up at the shows bringing our total membership to 168. Now our new members should jump in and enjoy our club. I jumped in some 20+ years ago; that's how I met Karen and Chuck Westphal. I met them at a boat launch in Sanilac on lower Lake Huron during the wee hours



Search groups for MSSFA

"Metro"  
Continued on page 9

*The Quality of Fishing Reflects the Quality of Living!*

“AuSable”

Continued from page 1

years. The proposition has drawn rebuke from critics, who fear new owners won't pay to keep the structures safe.

A state judge has advised utility regulators to reject the sale in a final decision expected this September.

Consumers officials say such an outcome would lead them to seek removal of all 13 dams — an effort sure to trigger yet more regulatory review and intense public debate.

Federal records show licenses for another 15 Michigan hydropower dams will expire in the coming decade, likely prompting similar debates about whether to keep, sell or remove them.

Nationwide, some 100 dams were dismantled last year, including six in Michigan. Experts expect the number to keep climbing as owners look to avoid costly repairs.

Here on the Au Sable, uncertainty about the fate of its six dams has reignited an age-old debate about what a river should be, and who gets to decide.

“Rivers are defined as flowing water,” said Bryan Burroughs, executive director of the river advocacy group Michigan Trout Unlimited. “You shut that off, and it's going to cause a lot of problems.”

But to folks like Ridenour, who lives near the lowest Au Sable dam and has been recreating in its reservoir for more than 50 years, the impoundments enhance the river's variety in ways too important to lose.

The Au Sable in its current configuration is “100% nature,” Ridenour said, but “I have no interest in being here if the river is only 20 feet wide.”

**The River Of Dreams**

Unlike other regions, where coldwater rivers are disappearing due to climate change, Ice Age glaciers blessed Michigan with a sandy landscape rich in frigid springs that produce blue-ribbon trout rivers.

The Au Sable stands out among them, a mystique owing to good publicity and relative proximity to Michigan's population hubs.

The river's easy accessibility from Detroit, Flint or Saginaw has won it some influential boosters, from early 1900s lumber baron William Mershon to the founders of Trout Unlimited, a national river advocacy group that was born on its banks.

Au Sable disciples often describe it in near-spiritual terms: An 8-mile stretch near Grayling is known as “the holy waters.” A sign downtown glorifies it as “the best of all rivers.” People interviewed for this story called it “my cathedral,” “my happy place,” and “the place where I'm most at peace.”

On a late spring evening, it's easy to understand the

**Five reasons to love the Au Sable**

**“Holy,” historical trout fishing grounds:** The river is considered one of the country's greatest fly fishing destinations, a reputation owing to its cold, consistent flows and abundant mayfly hatches. National fly fishing group Trout Unlimited was born on its banks in 1959.

**Ideal for floating:** The springwater-fed river's stable flow and scenic beauty make it a popular choice for kayakers, canoers and tubers. It's home to the annual AuSable River Canoe Marathon, a 120-mile race through the night that's been going strong since 1947.

**Beautiful scenery:** The Au Sable is surrounded by lots of public land, including the Au Sable State Forest and Huron-Manistee National Forest. A 23-mile stretch through towering pines and sand dunes between Mio to Alcona Pond has been named a National Scenic River.

**Quite a variety:** The Au Sable is among the more heavily dammed rivers in the state, with six major hydropower impoundments. The dams divide the river into distinct reaches: Trout-filled coldwater upstream, lake-like environments between the dams and a rivermouth frequented by Great Lakes species. The reservoirs, which collectively cover 10 square miles, are also popular boating and swimming spots.

**Rich history:** Before its present form as a beloved recreational river, the Au Sable was a key food source and navigational route for Native Americans and a prominent site in the fur trade and lumbering eras. Several sites along the river pay homage to its past.

hype.

Bullfrogs bellow in the cedar swamps, trout leap from the water to feed on mating mayflies, loons glide between cattails and wild rice beds in stillwater reservoirs surrounded by towering dunes.

But pristine as the Au Sable may seem, it has been dramatically altered by humans — a period Buhr, the fisherman who has written two books about the river, laments as its “225-year monetization.”

The fur trade virtually emptied the watershed of its beavers. Unregulated commercial and sport fishing drove Arctic grayling to local extinction and dramatically reduced sturgeon, walleye, whitefish and sucker populations. Timber companies razed the pine forests, leaving the Au Sable sunbaked and sand-choked.

The subsequent building of hydroelectric dams fragmented the river into seven sections, submerging 59 miles between Mio and Oscoda under vast artificial lakes and prompting generations of debate about whether it was a good idea.

**Should They Stay Or Should They Go?**

Few along this river seem to be comfortable with Consumers' plan to essentially give the dams away to a Maryland-based private equity firm in a deal that would cost ratepayers \$3.4 billion and leave few guarantees about the structures' future.

Prospective owner Confluence Hydro has vowed to shore up the dams to keep them operating for decades to come, but the deal doesn't hold the company to those vows.

Many, including the judge who recommended denying the sale, wonder how Confluence intends to turn a profit on such costly assets. They fear the answer lies in skipping maintenance required for safety,

or selling off thousands of acres of landholdings that surround the dams.

But given Consumers' vow to dismantle the dams if the sale doesn't proceed, some fans of the impoundments are willing to take the gamble.

“They are the only horse traveling in our direction right now,” said Ridenour, the reservoir resident who co-administers a pro-dams Facebook group that has grown to 3,400 members. “So we kind of feel like the only choice we have is to hop on.”

The environmentalists and trout fishing enthusiasts who oppose dams see that as a perilous choice. In their eyes, removal is the best way to eliminate safety risks posed by the aging structures while righting a historic wrong.

Thanks to decades of tree-planting, sediment removal and other restoration work, the Au Sable has partly recovered from its industrial past, said Karen Harrison, president of the local Trout Unlimited chapter, “but it can come further.”

The dams block migratory fish from their habitat, contributing to sharp declines for a host of species. They trap sediment, starving the river of nutrients while muck piles up in the reservoirs. Fish die in the spinning hydroelectric turbines and the sun beats down on the pooled water, warming it to unsafe temperatures for coldwater fish.

Three of the Au Sable dams warm the river so badly they violate state standards, complicating their path to relicensing.

Were it not for the dams, officials with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources have estimated, the lower Au Sable river could support millions of salmon and steelhead, tens of thousands of lake sturgeon and abundant trout, walleye, whitefish and other species.



Experience with other dam removals has shown changes can happen quickly.

Burroughs of Trout Unlimited recalls a dam removal on another Michigan river, in which “before we even finished with the excavator, we saw trout moving upstream.”

Old dams are also prone to failure without constant maintenance — which Buhr called his primary reason for supporting removal.

“They aren't getting any younger,” he said. “I think getting the dams out — or at least most of them — has to be done from a safety standpoint.”

And then there's the question of cost: By Consumers' estimate, remov-

ing all 13 dams would be tens of millions of dollars cheaper for its ratepayers than keeping them in place and relicensing them, although critics on both sides have disputed that math.

“We have a responsibility to prioritize customer affordability in decisions about the future of the dams,” company spokesperson Katie Carey said.

But in the communities surrounding the dams, removal is seen as a threat to local economies and a way of life.

In their century of existence, the dams have helped cultivate a multi-million-dollar tourism economy in a region with few other economic opportunities.

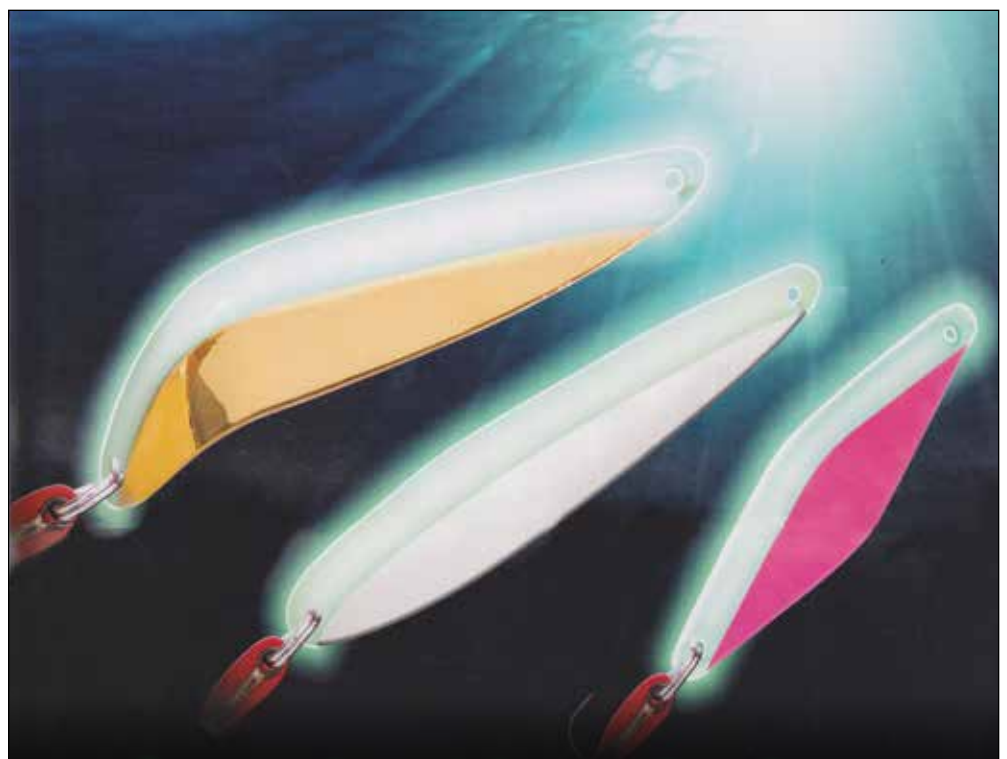
Public boat ramps and

campgrounds have cropped up along their collective 10 square miles of reservoirs, attracting swimmers and water skiers, pontoon cruisers and RVers who supply welcome business to area restaurants, bait shops and grocery stores.

While Consumers owns much of the shoreline and bottomlands, it has leased dock access to hundreds of private residents, making them de-facto lakefront homeowners. It's not clear what would happen to that land if the reservoirs were drained.

Portaging over the dams has become a rite of passage for participants in the river's annual canoe mar-

“AuSable”  
Continued on page 4



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**Alan Douville, President**  
Michigan Steelhead & Salmon Fishermen's Association

As we move through another season here in Michigan, I want to take a step back and speak candidly about where we are today—not just on the water, but behind the scenes where the future of our fishery is being shaped.

Many of you know me well enough to understand that I try to stay grounded in facts and reality, and the reality today is this:

Michigan's Great Lakes fishery is one of the most valuable recreational fisheries in the country. It supports well over a billion dollars annually in economic activity here in our state, and over \$5 billion across the Great Lakes region. This fishery drives tourism, supports charter businesses, sustains local communities, and is part of who we are as anglers.

But despite that, the system that supports it is under real and increasing pressure.

Over the last decade, we've seen a consistent pattern. Funding for the Department of Natural Resources—particularly within fisheries—has not kept pace with the actual cost of maintaining what we have. The DNR relies heavily on license revenue to fund operations, and those dollars have not kept up with in-

flation, increased operating costs, or the growing demands on the resource.

At the same time, we've watched our hatchery system age. Many of these facilities have gone decades without meaningful upgrades. Only recently have we seen significant investments begin to address infrastructure that, in some cases, dates back nearly 50 years. Those investments are critical, but they are catch-up work—not long-term solutions.

We've also seen changes in stocking. Today, stocking numbers are well below historical levels. Some of that is driven by necessary biological management and balancing the ecosystem, but we cannot ignore that capacity, infrastructure, and resources all play a role in what can be produced and stocked.

And behind all of that are the people. Over time, staffing and operational capacity within the DNR have been under pressure as well. The individuals doing the work are dedicated and capable, but they are being asked to do more with less.

So, when we talk about the state of our fishery, we need to be honest:

This is not a failing system—but it is a system that has been stretched.

Now let's bring this closer to today.

Many of you have heard discussion around legislation this year, including efforts like House Bill 5093, which aims to address funding concerns within the Fisheries Division. As of now, that bill is stalled in committee and may be folded into broader legislative negotiations. What ultimately comes out of Lansing is still uncertain.

We also saw a proposal that would have allowed commercial harvest access to game fish. That bill faced strong opposition from stakeholders—including voices from the angling community—and is unlikely to move forward this year. That outcome reinforces something important:

When people pay

attention and speak up, it matters.

And that brings me to the most important point I want to make in this update.

The challenges we are facing are not going to be solved quietly or automatically. They require awareness, engagement, and a stronger, more unified voice than we have today.

One of the biggest concerns I have right now is that many of our members—and many anglers across the state—don't fully see how these policy and funding issues affect the long-term health of the fishery. It's easy to focus on how the fishing is today, but much harder to see the pressures building underneath that experience.

If we want to protect and strengthen this fishery for the long term, we need

to be more active in Lansing. That means:

- Paying attention to legislation
- Supporting policies that sustain fisheries funding
- Engaging when issues threaten what we value
- Helping ensure decision-makers understand the economic and cultural importance of this resource

And just as importantly, it means growing our organization.

Membership matters. Numbers matter. When we show up as a larger, organized group, our voice carries further. It gives us credibility. It gives us influence. And it gives us the ability to advocate effectively on behalf of all sportfishermen in Michigan.

MSSFA plays an important role—but we are only as strong as the people

behind it.

I'm not raising these points out of concern for today's fishing. I'm raising them because I care deeply about where we are five, ten, and twenty years from now.

We have a world-class fishery. But maintaining it doesn't happen by accident.

It happens through informed decisions, sustained investment, and active engagement from people like us.

As always, I appreciate the support, the conversations, and the commitment from this group. Let's continue to build on that—and make sure we're doing our part, not just on the water, but where it matters off the water as well.

Tight lines,  
—Alan



Michigan Department of  
**Natural Resources**

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The Michigan Department of Natural Resources invites you to the rescheduled official dedication and christening of the new Lake Michigan research vessel, the R/V Steelhead.

**Thursday,  
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**Dennis Eade, Executive Director**  
Michigan Steelhead & Salmon Fishermen's Association

HB 5093, the bill that would address the funding concerns of the Fisheries Division, was removed on the Natural Resources, Environment, Tourism and Outdoor Recreation Committee agenda on June 3rd, which typically signals that the votes to pass aren't there. I think the bill will not come out of committee during the next two weeks of session and instead be folded into the reconciliation process with SB 276-277. The resulting legislation is yet to be determined but I do think fisheries will get some of its needed funding.

On a positive note, HB 5801 sponsored by Rep. Jason Morgan and Rep. Dave Prestin which would have allowed the Commercial Fishing Industry access to game fish harvest has been stifled by negative feedback from numerous voices on

social media and rebukes from multiple stakeholders who are not in favor of it. I believe it is buried for the remainder of the year.

On June 10th, Michigan Administrative Law Judge James Varchetti issued a Proposed Final Decision (PFD) recommending that the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) reject Consumers Energy's proposed sale of 13 hydroelectric dams on five iconic Michigan rivers — Au Sable, Grand, Kalamazoo, Manistee and Muskegon Rivers — to Confluence Hydro, LLC, owned by Hull Street Energy, a private equity firm based in Maryland. ALJ Varchetti concluded after applying the statutory legal standards to the extensive expert testimony and financial and other documents in the evidentiary record, and the legal briefs, that the

# MSSFA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## Dennis Eade



MPSC should "reject" the proposed dam sales and the related overpriced 30-year Power Purchase Agreement and that the proposed transaction "is not in the interests of public policy or the public interest." The Michigan Public Service Commission will still have the final word when they rule on the matter but Consumers Energy has sustained a major blow to its efforts to sell the dams with this decision. The Commission should conclude that the proposed sale would have an adverse

impact on rates. The R/V Steelhead II will be christened in late July in Charlevoix, MI., replacing the aging survey vessel Steelhead, which has been operating on the Great Lakes for almost 60 years. S/V Steelhead II will conduct surveys using multiple types of gear to inform fisheries management in Lake Michigan. The new 66-foot, steel-hulled vessel will be a vast improvement over the antiquated S/V Steelhead and include upgrades to improve vessel

operation, safety and crew accommodations. In contrast to the original diesel engines that power the S/V Steelhead, the Steelhead II will incorporate rooftop solar panels, reducing its overall carbon footprint, and be powered by two Environmental Protection Agency Tier III diesel engines that utilize high-efficiency emission control technology. It will be conducting field work this fall on Lake Michigan.

It is a very busy time for Steelheaders but the wind

has been a real problem in June for being able to get out on the water. Hopefully July will provide an opportunity to catch some silver fish and maybe some of those 12lb'rs from last year will be much bigger this year. Be safe and tight lines!



### "AuSable" Continued from page 2

athon, which boasts Consumers Energy as its chief sponsor.

And while the dams have displaced coldwater and migratory fish, they've created habitat for lake species like bass, perch and bluegill. The lowermost barrier — Foote — blocks invasive sea lamprey that might otherwise travel upstream to spawn by the millions.

If all that went away, "there goes the summer revenue," said Debbie Sytek, who manages the office at Alcona Park, a 440-site campground on the reservoir created by the thirdmost-downstream dam.

With a summer staff of 23 people, Alcona Park qualifies as a major employer in an area this remote.

"What draws people here is the pond," Sytek said. "The beauty, the slowness ... What does this park look like if the water's not there?"

Economic studies commissioned by Consumers found that removing the Au Sable dams would reduce gross regional product by \$8.7 million while costing 278 jobs.

"It'll be another Air Force leaving the area," predicted 68-year-old Ray Rolwing, who owns a home near Cooke Pond and remembers the boarded up shops and population exodus that followed the mil-

itary's 1993 closure of its Oscoda base.

Fans of flowing rivers have criticized the analyses by Public Sector Consultants, arguing a free-flowing river has greater economic potential than researchers acknowledged.

Upstream of the dams, in the reaches famous for their stable currents and abundant trout, canoe liveries, fly shops, motels and restaurants bustle with visitors all summer. As diminishing snowpack imperils coldwater rivers from Montana to Minnesota, some predict Michigan's reliable springfed flows will become an even bigger draw.

"People will travel from all over the world to fish a run of Atlantic salmon up the world-famous Au Sable, or to fish for trout in sections of river that haven't been fished for a hundred years," predicted Josh Greenberg, a fishing lodge owner who leads the conservation group Anglers of the Au Sable.

### Room For Compromise?

In view of the tradeoffs, some on the Au Sable see room for a compromise in which some dams stay and others go.

Many see Foote Dam — where Ridenour lives — as a strong candidate to stay in place. Beyond its utility as a lamprey barrier, it impounds the river's largest and most popular reservoir, generates more electricity than any of the other five dams, and needs the least near-term invest-

ment, according to 2022 estimates. Consumers shared with area residents.

Many dam opponents see the upper impoundments — Mio, Alcona and Loud — as prime targets for removal. Taking them out would mitigate the river's temperature problems while extending its free-flowing section by dozens of miles.

Savings from decommissioning rather than repairing the dams, Buhr suggested, could compensate residents who'll lose lakefront property while helping affected communities transition to a river-based economy.

"I won't be satisfied unless the local economy and property owners are satisfied," he said.

It's a reasonable prospect to Curtis Township Supervisor Kevin Perry, whose community surrounds the Alcona Dam.

"I would rather not lose the dam, because let's face it, change always hurts," Perry said. But "if you market it correctly," an undammed river could be-

come an asset, just as the reservoirs are today.

Back at Alcona Park, campers Marjon and Michael Jones spent a recent breakfast pondering what such an arrangement would mean for them.

Every summer for the past 16 years, the Detroiters have parked their RV along the shoreline and spent the season fishing, boating and watching sunsets over the Alcona Dam Pond.

Were it to be replaced with a narrow river, Michael said, "we would have to go somewhere else."

Marjon agreed. But noting Michigan has thousands of other lakes to explore, she said she would still support dam removal.

"In spite of how much we love this place," she said, "if you really want things natural, then dams are an unnatural thing."



### 2026 Tentative Print Schedule

Issue	Deadline	Print/Online Date
1	12/19/25	01/05/26
2	02/13/26	03/02/26
3	04/10/26	05/04/26
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The Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association (MSSFA) is a multi-state, non-profit organization dedicated to educating the general public on improving, preserving and promoting sport fishing, the Great Lakes and their tributary streams and rivers. Commonly referred to as *The Michigan Steelheaders*, or simply *Steelheaders*. MSSFA represents sport fishing families in the Great Lakes region. MSSFA encourages the strictest observances of sport fishing laws and ethical fishing practices. [www.MSSFA.org](http://www.MSSFA.org)

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## From Big Red to Big Catches: A Holland Fishing Getaway

Holland Area Holland Convention & Visitors Bureau

Beneath the watchful eye of Holland's iconic Big Red Lighthouse, a tradition began with just 19 boats competing for a pair of wooden shoes. Thirty-five

years later, the Big Red Classic anchors four days of West Michigan premier sport fishing competitions.

Since the beginning, Yacht Basin Marina has hosted the events and will once more welcome competitive anglers July 30 to August 2. The lineup be-

gins Thursday with the Tulip City Tri-Port Challenge, where teams weigh their best seven fish for a chance at the \$10,000 grand prize. Friday belongs to the Save the Ta Ta's ladies tournament, while the weekend features the Big Red Classic itself, two days of pro-

am tournaments giving anglers a legitimate shot at prizes with just a few trophy catches.

All tournaments are organized by the Big Red Foundation, a nonprofit with a mission to strengthen the Lake Michigan fishery, support local youth, and give back to the community. In 2025, \$30,000 in proceeds went to the Holland Hospital Breast Care Fund and \$10,000 to the Boys & Girls Club of West Michigan. The foundation also made its third annual \$3,000 donation to start a local Salmon in the Classroom program, where students raise Chinook salmon from eggs and release them into local waterways to begin their journey to Lake Michigan. Each year, the tournaments generate thousands of pounds of fish donations, with 2026 beneficiaries including The Order

of Naucratius of Holland and West Michigan Adult & Teen Challenge.

While these tournaments are a highlight of Holland's sport fishing calendar, anglers of all skill levels can enjoy outstanding fishing opportunities throughout the year. The action begins in early spring when brown trout and coho salmon move into shallow waters close to shore. Summer is prime time for offshore Chinook and coho salmon, steelhead, and lake trout, while in fall, fish return to the shallows and river mouths for excellent angling opportunities.

In addition to Lake Michigan's world-class fishery, there's also peaceful inland lake fishing, and anglers don't even need a boat. Cast from the Holland State Park pier, fish from a Black Lake Boardwalk dock, or try the Heinz

Waterfront Walkway, where scenic shoreline access puts bluegill, bass, crappie, perch, and walleye within reach.

When the rods are put away, Holland offers a full summer getaway. Cruise to Boatwerks for drinks and live music, or head downtown to discover local restaurants, breweries, boutiques, and summer events. Or simply settle into the sand at Holland State Park and watch the sun set over Big Red.

For tournament intel and entry requirements, visit [bigredclassic.com](http://bigredclassic.com). For trip planning information, fishing resources, lodging, and attractions, visit [holland.org](http://holland.org) or call the visitors bureau at 616.394.0000.

**“Recreation”**

Continued from page 1

ing fish for food. Think of smelt dipping, where small, tasty fish are harvested with long-handled nets. Although it does not require much skill, it is a popular pastime that puts food on the table. At the other end of the spectrum, think of competitive events like catch-and-release bass tournaments where fish are not harvested at all.

Both are part of our recreational fishing heritage, and most fishing activity falls somewhere between the two extremes. Fishing for walleye in the Detroit River is a great example. It is certainly considered sporting, but how many people would fish for walleye if there was no opportunity to harvest fish?

**The Rising Value of Great Lakes Fish**

Recreational anglers in Michigan waters of the Great Lakes harvested fish worth an estimated \$67.7 million during 2025, which represents a dramatic increase from the \$40.1 million harvested in 2022. Although inflation and the rising retail price of Great Lakes seafood contributed to this rise in value of fish harvested, increased recreational harvest of key species also played a role. According to a new Michigan DNR report, salmon harvest has been increasing in Lake Michigan in recent years, and both Lake Erie and Lake Huron have seen an uptick in walleye harvest since 2022. The recovery of walleye in Saginaw Bay contributed to making walleye the most valuable fish in terms of fillet harvest, with \$24.3 million in walleye fillets harvested by recreational anglers in Michigan’s Great Lakes waters



**The fish cleaning station at Grand Haven’s Chinook Pier is a testament to the food value of fish harvested under a recreational fishing license. Photo: Dan O’Keefe/Michigan Sea Grant**

in 2025; Chinook salmon were the second most valuable recreationally harvested species at \$20.0 million.

In 2025, the average size of a Chinook salmon caught by Lake Michigan anglers in Michigan waters was 9.7 pounds, with fillets weighing 5.4 pounds. The retail price of Great Lakes salmon available from online retailers in Michigan was \$22.40/lb. in 2025. This means that the average value of a recreationally caught Lake Michigan salmon was just over \$120 last year and a limit of five salmon was worth around \$600. That is a powerful incentive to go fishing!

In southeast Michigan,

walleye provide the most food value to anglers. Although smaller than salmon, they are the favorite table fare for many a fish fry. In Michigan waters of Lake Erie, the average walleye weighed 2.2 pounds in 2025, and an average daily limit of six walleye produced fillets worth \$122.

**Economic Impacts of Recreational Fishing in Michigan**

While the retail value of fillets harvested is impressive, the importance of recreational fishing to coastal communities is more often thought of in terms of economic impacts. These impacts include money spent

on goods and services purchased in the pursuit of fish, and also the ripple effects of that spending. Together, these “total effects” are often used to measure the overall economic output of an industry or activity.

In Michigan, the most recent estimate of economic impacts found \$3.9 billion in economic output attributed to recreational fishing in 2023. This was based on a national study conducted in 2022 and includes impacts from both Great Lakes and inland fishing in Michigan. A different study released by Michigan United Conservation Clubs in 2019 found \$11.2 billion in economic output and 171,000

jobs supported by fishing, hunting, and trapping in Michigan. Since different studies use slightly different methods, the results are not always directly comparable.

For economic impacts specific to Great Lakes fishing, the most recent and most comprehensive information can be found in a Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) study published in 2022 (GLFC 2022). That study, which was conducted by Southwick Associates and collaborators, found an economic impact of \$2.7 billion in economic output attributed specifically to fishing in Michigan waters

of the Great Lakes waters and tributary streams. This is the same study that estimated an economic impact of \$5.1 billion from recreational fishing in all U.S. and Canadian Great Lakes waters and tributaries. Michigan was found to be the regional leader in terms of employment, with 18,700 jobs attributed to recreational fishing in Michigan waters of the Great Lakes and tributaries.

Rob Southwick, Founder and Senior Advisor for Southwick Associates, provided a detailed explanation of economic studies at last year’s statewide Michigan Sea Grant fishery workshop (see video). In short, the GLFC study provided higher sample sizes and more detailed information specific to fisheries of the Great Lakes and tributaries, but it did not include inland fisheries as the national study did.

**What Do Anglers Spend Money On?**

The economic contributions of Great Lakes fishing are substantial – totaling more than the box office receipts for the top 10 movies of 2023. However, these impacts are less obvious than other drivers of the economy because they are spread across sectors.

The GLFC study provided a detailed look at fishing-related expenditures for each of the Great Lakes and each state and province. This included trip-related expenditures from food and ice brought at convenience stores to lodging, transportation, and fees for guides and access sites. It also included equipment expenditures like fishing tackle, rods, reels, and fish finders.

**“Recreation”  
Continued on page 8**

SouthHaven.org



# THE MICHIGAN STEELHEAD & SALMON FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

**THE QUALITY OF FISHING REFLECTS THE QUALITY OF LIVING!**

MSSFA was incorporated in 1971 by a handful of individuals who knew that Michigan's newly formed trout and salmon fishery was something worth working to protect. They were a small group who wanted to not only protect their fishery, but learn how to catch their elusive prey and tell fishing stories.

MSSFA chapters have membership meetings with guest speakers to learn about all the aspects of sport fishing. MSSFA chapters also sponsor fishing clinics, seminars, sport-fishing shows, derbies and tournaments. And are active sponsors for fishing outings for kids, seniors, veterans and our handicapped.

For those who love to fish but have no means, MSSFA chapters sponsor a "Crews" program that allows a sign up as a crew member for a day of fishing.

With a common goal, and a close working partner with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, MSSFA helps to enhance the resource and sport fishing in our rivers, streams, inland lakes, and of course the mighty Great Lakes. MSSFA is a front-runner at all levels of the legislature and in courtrooms, and has spent countless hours working behind the scenes and attending hearings.

So why join the **Steelheaders**... Got kids, love fishing.. **JOIN NOW!** ...and become a member of the largest organized groups of fishermen in the Midwest. There are chapters throughout the entire state. You too can help protect and preserve this world-class sport fishery for you, your children and generations to come.

## THE GREAT LAKES SPORT FISHING NEWS (GLSFN)

The Great Lakes Sport Fishing News is owned and operated by The Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association.

Better than fifty years ago, The Michigan Steelhead and Salmon Fishermen's Association began to publish a magazine called the "Guide to Great Lakes Sport Fishing". Five years later the magazine became a monthly format called "The Great Lakes Steelheader". Today the newspaper is called "**The Great Lakes Sport Fishing News**".

This paper has no paid writers and has a grass roots style. Its writers are the every day fishermen who share their techniques and fishing adventures; and the paper has become well known for its **January Special Edition** or "**Show Edition**" that is seen at all the spring expos and sport, boat and fishing shows throughout the Great Lakes.

Information in the paper covers the entire Great Lakes Basin region from Minnesota to New York including all five of the Great Lakes and their tributary streams.

Chapter members receive the paper as part of their membership. And because of the diversity of fishing in the Great Lakes, the information covers everything from river fishing, big lake fishing to inland lake fishing. The paper also offers a direct route for all new products and techniques on the market offered by our advertisers.

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For questions email: [mssfamembership@charter.net](mailto:mssfamembership@charter.net)  
MSSFA ~ PO Box 926 ~ White Cloud, MI 49349

The following Chapters accept online payments via Credit Card and/or PayPal.  
A PayPal account is not needed-use the option credit card. Note: some Chapters charge a small fee for processing.

Battle Creek [www.battlecreeksteelheaders.com/membership](http://www.battlecreeksteelheaders.com/membership) • Holland [www.hollandsteelheaders.org](http://www.hollandsteelheaders.org)  
 Metro-West (Livonia) [www.metroweststeelheaders.org](http://www.metroweststeelheaders.org) • Southwestern( Saint Joseph) [www.swmisteelheaders.com](http://www.swmisteelheaders.com)  
 South Haven PayPal Link: <https://www.paypal.com/ncp/payment/2GKMZWTWRTFZG>

**“Recreation”**

Continued from page 6

The study also captured major expenses for boats, trailers, vehicles needed to haul boats, motor homes, campers, cabins, and real estate. These big-ticket items were only counted if they were purchased for the primary purpose of fishing, though. The family SUV repurposed to transport a

fishing kayak wasn't counted, but the one-ton pickup truck bought to specifically to haul a salmon trolling boat was.

In Michigan, big-ticket expenditures like boats, vehicles, campers, and real estate accounted for 77% of angler spending. For some people, these investments are a lifestyle choice that brings them closer to high quality fishing and the

enhanced quality of life. Beyond that, these purchases allow an individual to share fishing experiences with others. Owning a large fishing boat, a tract of wilderness land along a trout stream, or a camper at your favorite fishing port provides a place to invite others to share your passion for fishing and the great outdoors.

**Fishing On A Budget**

The flip side of this is that fishing does not have to be expensive. A starter rod-and-reel combo can be purchased for under \$50 and last for a decade or more. Fishing tackle and bait doesn't usually last as long, but they don't compare to the expense of a pickup truck or real estate. The GLFC study found that the average Great Lakes angler

Photo credit: unsplash.com



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John Watson at [1137watson@gmail.com](mailto:1137watson@gmail.com)  
Or Call Tournament Director at 616-218-6686
- For Deck Space contact:  
Sergeant Marina at 269-857-2873  
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in Michigan spent about \$265 per year on fishing equipment, bait, and tackle (including rods, reels, fish finders, lines, lures hooks, sinkers, etc.).

Fishing can actually be a very affordable outdoor activity – particularly if you live close to quality fishing water and don't need a boat. An Illinois Natural History Survey study of Chicago-area anglers found that the average angler fishing from shore spent only \$6.96 per trip on fishing-related expenditures (excluding travel) while boat anglers spent \$124.07. It is often true that boat anglers have higher catch rates than shore anglers, but when fish are abundant shore anglers can also catch plenty of fish for a fraction of the cost.

**Ensuring Abundant Harvests**

People in the Great Lakes region are well aware of how important fishing is to local economies and quality of life. The 2022 GLFC study found that Great Lakes residents were willing to pay a median of \$83 for a one-time fee that would prevent even

a modest 10% reduction in sustainable harvest of fish. One unique aspect of this study is that it included recreational anglers and nonusers who did not participate in fishing or have close friends or family who fish. Nonusers were willing to pay a \$43 one-time fee to prevent a 10% decline in harvest, while those who had fished recreationally on the Great Lakes within the past year were willing to pay \$476.

The study demonstrated broad-based support for sustaining Great Lakes fisheries and also highlighted the critical role that recreational anglers play in supporting conservation efforts. Recreational fishing license sales fund fish stocking efforts, habitat improvement, and the research that is necessary to ensure sustainable harvest by setting appropriate limits and fishing seasons. Excise taxes also provide funding for the Sport Fish Restoration Program through a 10% tax on most fishing tackle (and a lower 3% tax on certain items like electric trolling motors, tackle boxes, and bait containers).

**Costs and Benefits**

In Michigan, recreational anglers may soon be required to pay a bit more for a fishing license. While rising costs are rarely celebrated, it is undeniable that recreational anglers benefit tremendously from Michigan's bountiful waters. While an extra \$4 to \$7 in your pocket might buy you a new lure or a fast food value meal, it isn't much compared to the value of a single salmon in the box or a limit of walleye on your stringer. Beyond that, the satisfaction of contributing to conservation of our world-class freshwater fisheries may help to soften the blow.

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**“Metro”**

Continued from page 1

of the morning for a MWS tournament. It turned out to be a great day and my involvement with MWS expanded just from a simple phone call. Twenty years later, I obtained the award that was given to Karen for all she's done for MWS - amazing lady -thanks SOOO much Karen.

Lakes - WIND. Turned out to be a picture-perfect day but water temps were still too cold so lack of fish was the story. Even the Kayak folks struggled as they scheduled a tournament the same day which made the camaraderie all the better at the weigh-in/dinners.

When our schedule switched over to Lake Huron the Kayakers got cancelled due to the wind

is thinking of heading back to New Buffalo on Lake Michigan to feast on some of those delicious Coho next year; we have done that in previous years. When Chris Thompson moves us up the coast to St. Joe a month later, that tournament did good as well as the turnout but it usually does. Middle of April the Kayak Group starts their monthly Tuesday evening outings - something for everyone. We also do our civic duty by cleaning up our rivers starting with the Clinton in the spring and The Big Manistee July 11th. Our Walleye schedule on Lake Erie has not fared well - only getting in 3 of 5 tournaments. I thought the sandwiches were GREAT!! I also thought it was GREAT being part of the Dave Strunks crew that took first place!! Dave Strunk's Walleye tournament also had a great lunch - hot dogs with ALL the FIXINS plus a wonderful fruit salad.

On to one of our BIG EVENTS - The Kids Fishing Outing at Kensington Metro Park. 100 kids were supplied with new rods, tackle boxes and worms compliments of MWS; plus, an all-inclusive lunch was served. There were a couple first-time things for me: 1. shopping for the food - holy cow - that's A LOT of food and 2, the first time

**“Metro”**

Continued on page 11



Our fishing season starts with a mixed bag of events, one of them being a tournament hosted by Dave Zawacki in Ludington looking for some of those tasty Brown Trout. Timing is essential first off for the trout to be there since lake temps makes a huge difference and naturally when you're dealing with mother nature on the Great



while the big boats had no interest, so it got cancelled. Robert Schulz who chairs the Lexington Tournament

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Above left & right: Enjoying the day at Metro West KIDS Fishing Outing  
Below: Tournament winners view the board!



### 2026 Battle Creek Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event	Location
July	12	PORTAGE LK PANFISH/FAMILY PICNIC	PORTAGE LK
August	15	VETERANS OUTING	SOUTH HAVEN
October	24	KALAMAZOO RIVER SALMON SLA	ALLEGAN DAM
November	7	KALAMAZOO RIVER TROUT QUEST	ALLEGAN DAM
November	14	KALAMAZOO RIVER MEMORIAL	ALLEGAN DAM
November	28	ST.JOE FALL STEELHEAD	I-94
December	5	CHAPTER CHALLENGE	TBA
December	12	CHRISTMAS PARTY	KALAMAZOO EAGLES

Meetings are held every 3rd Tuesday of the month. 6:00 pm Social, 7:00 pm Meeting  
 Meeting Location: (In process of finding a new location)  
**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**  
 Joe Foy at 269-303-1894 / Dan Foster at 269-370-3693  
 battlecreeksteelheaders.com

### 2026 Grand Haven Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event
July 31 - August 13		Week Long +
August	13	Picnic
September	12	Sportsman for Youth
December	10	Christmas Party

Other Events TBD  
 For information on these events and other information on the Grand Haven Steelheaders contact GHS President and State Director Paul Zelenka at pbzfarm@gmail.com  
 www.ghsteelheaders.com

### 2026 Grand Rapids Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event
July	13	Chapter Picnic @ 6pm, Johnson Park Shelter House**
August	1	GR/GH Chapter Challenge & Double D Tournament*
August	31	Membership Meeting
September	14	Board Meeting
September	28	Membership Meeting
October	5	Board Meeting
October	24	Fall Outing / Buck Contest**
October	26	Membership Meeting
November	2	Board Meeting
November	7	Fishing Partners*
November	30	Membership Meeting
December	7	Chapter Christmas Party**

\* - Times/Events subject to change, watch facebook & email blasts  
 \*\* - Members and Member's family only event.  
**NEW MEETING LOCATION:**  
 Jackson Street Hall, Polish National Aid Society  
 921 Jackson Street NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504  
 616-774-9011  
 Events open to the public  
**Meeting Location** - Elks #48, 917 Bridge St NW, Grand Rapids  
**Time:** 6:00pm-7pm Social Hour with food and beverage followed by Speaker  
 Board Meetings will take place after the regular Member Meeting  
 Email Grand Rapids Steelheaders: fishgrsteelhead@gmail.com  
 Dates with \*\*\*\* are for members and family only

### 2026 Great Lakes Bay Region Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event
July	7	Meeting
July	11	Manistee
July	25	Ludington
August	8	Frankfort
August	22	Manistee (2-Day)
September	1	Meeting
September	12	Linwood
October	6	Meeting
November	3	Meeting
December	1	Meeting
December	12	Banquet at VFW 5pm*

**Contact Port Chairman no later than Monday prior when attending outings**  
 Pull lines at 1:00pm on Saturdays, 12:00pm on Sundays (2-Day Outings). Port chairman will call the end of the outing on Channel 72 all Boats must check in.  
 Board/Membership meetings at VFW Hall in Midland at 7:00 pm (No Meeting in August)  
 On the day of the outing, port chairman will call the outing start on Marine Radio, Channel 72, All Boats must confirm they are fishing.  
 Weigh-in follows each outing. Picnics follows weigh-in on Saturdays only.  
**New Rule: Weight in is at 2:00pm "Sharp" No Exceptions**  
 Outings: All Steelheaders members pay \$5.00. All non-Steelheaders pay \$10.00 to participate. Children 16 and under are free.  
 Banquet: Drinks at 5:00pm Dinner at 6:00pm (Potluck Style)

### 2026 Holland Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event
July	11	Fishing With Veterans
July	13	Board Meeting
July	13-19	Ludington Tournament
July	23-26	Muskegon Tournament
July	25	Summer Challenge
July 30 - August 2		Holland BRC Tournament
August	7-9	Saugatuck BLC Tournament
August	10	Board Meeting
August	14-16	Manistee Monster Tournament
August	15	Ladies Tournament
August	25	League End
August	27-30	Frankfurt Tournament
September	8	League Dinner
September	14	Board Meeting
October	12	Board Meeting
November	9	Board Meeting
December	3	Membership Meeting
December	14	Board Meeting

Board meetings held at: TBD Locations  
 General Membership: Bayshore Yacht Club at the Yacht Basin Marina  
 Doors open at 6 pm., Dinner at 7 pm, speaker to follow  
 For event information, go to hollandsteelheaders.org, or call Jimmy Van Brocklin 616-240-7017 or email Brad Stephenson at brad.stephenson32@gmail.com

### 2026 Metro West - Livonia Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event	Contact
July	7	Club Summer Picnic	
July	11	Manistee River Cleanup @ High Bridge	
July	11	Saginaw River Catfish Kayak/SB	
July	21	Kensington Kayak/SB Monthly Tue Outings	
July	23	Ludington Salmon Tournament - Thu	
July	25	Ludington Member Memorial Tour - Sat	
July	26	Ludington Salmon Tournament - Sun	
August	1	Erieau Tournament - Sat. Erieau, Canada	
August	4	General Membership Meeting	
August	8	Salmon Tournament - Manistee - Sat	
August	9	Salmon Tournament - Manistee - Sun	
August	15	Salmon Tournament - Ludington	
August	16	Salmon Tournament - Ludington	
August	18	Kensington Kayak/SB Monthly Tue Outings	
August	22	PM Lake Kayak/Small Boat	
September	1	General Membership Meeting	
September	5	Manistee Kayak/SB & Pier Tournaments	
September	15	Kensington Kayak/SB Monthly Tue Outings	
September	26	Manistee River Tournaments	
September	26	Revisit PM Lake Salmon Kayak/SB	
October	3	Harrisville Area kayak/SB/shore	
October	6	General Membership Meeting	
October	10	Lake Erie Perch Outing	
October	14	Captain/Crew/River Angler '26 Cal. Mtg	
October	17	Ludington Pier/Beach Event	
November	3	General Membership Meeting 2nd Tue.	
November	7	Manistee River/Pier/Shore Tour. w DS	
November	14	Ohio Walleye Tournament	
December	1	CHRISTMAS PARTY - HAPPY HOLIDAYS	
December	5	PM & other NW Mi Rivers Tournament	
December	19	Huron River Tournament	

### 2026 South Haven Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event
Note: SH Steelheaders (SHS) Chapter Events in BOLD * = Not Confirmed		
AUG	8	SHS Fish Boil (Blueberry Festival - August 6th- 9th)
AUG	15	SHS Operation Injured Soldier/SH Salute to Veterans
SEP	5	Labor Day Weekend
NOV	9	2027 Pro Am Tournament Committee Kick-off meeting
NOV	28	South Haven Steelheaders River Tournament

**2026 South Haven Steelheaders Membership & Board Meeting Dates**  
**Note:** All Board and membership meetings are generally held the third Thursday of each month except for special circumstances such as Pro Am Captain's Meeting set up in May, Fish Boil organizational meeting in August and prior to Deer Season in November.  
**Meeting Location:** South Haven American Legion Post 49, 129 Michigan Avenue, South Haven, MI 49090  
 Board Meetings start at 5:45pm and membership meetings at 7:00pm.  
 For more information email: rachapman1@comcast.net

JULY 16th - 3rd Thursday  
 AUG 20th - 3rd Thursday  
 SEP 17th - 3rd Thursday - Regular & Board meeting to prioritize & set next year's events. ID event chairs.  
 OCT 15th - 3rd Thursday - Regular and Board meeting to finalize next year's events and set calendar, nominations for Board of Directors.  
 November/December - No membership meetings

### 2026 Southwest MI Steelheader's Calendar of Events

Month	Date	Event	Information
Membership meetings and board meeting are held the second Thursday of each month but please confirm online for the most updated information. www.swmisteelheaders.com www.facebook.com/southwestmichigansteelheaders			
SEPTEMBER	10	(Club Meeting) Fall Wrap-Up - Happy Hour Discussion	The Buck & Brew, St. Joseph MI
DECEMBER	5	Winter Challenge River Tournament #1	The Sandbar, St. Joseph MI

**Meeting Location: Elks Lodge, 601 Riverview Drive, Benton Harbor MI 49022**

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mssfa.org

We'll HOOK YOU UP with the latest news!

### MSSFA Board of Directors Meetings 2026

August 19th  
 Via TEAMS -  
 7:00pm

October 21st  
 Via TEAMS -  
 7:00pm

December 16th  
 Via TEAMS  
 7:00pm

**2026 Thumb Chapter Steelheader's Calendar of Events**

Month	Date	Time	Event	Location / Information
August	21	7:30pm	Regular Meeting	Harbor Beach American Legion
October	16	7:30pm	Regular Meeting	Harbor Beach American Legion - Election of Board/Officers

**Contact Luke Gehring at 989-550-3121 for inquiries.**

**2026 Thunderbay Steelheader's Calendar of Events**

Month	Date	Time	Information
July	6	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting
August	22		Rogers City Tournament
September	14	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting
October	5	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting
December	14	7:00pm	Monthly Meeting

**"Metro"**  
Continued from page 9

I didn't work the outing in almost 20 years. Instead, I had my two granddaughters fishin' in the outing!! They are naturals just like GRANDPA, oh - Mom and Dad too.

You may ask how does MWS support a FREE Kids Fishing Outing for 100 kids each year, well we hold an annual banquet for 250 anglers and friends. This banquet also supports up to six (6) Salmon in the Classroom programs, a free kids crawler harness tying program and sending numerous kids to summer camp each year. We would love to have you be part of our banquet that includes dinner, open bar, tons of raffle prizes, gun raffles and 50/50 drawings during the night. For more information on the banquet, check

out our website at Metroweststeelheaders.org and Metro West Steelheaders Facebook page starting in January 2027.

Attendance for all events this year has been just over one thousand. Next up comes our annu-

al club picnic, which replaces our July General Meeting. Here we feast on that scrumptious Wally the Walleye that we spend our precious time catching before heading over to the West Coast to battle King Salmon.



**2026 White River Steelheader's Calendar of Events**

Month	Date	Time	Event information
<b>Note:</b> All meetings will be held at 6:30 pm at the VFW, any changes in location will be decided a couple of days before the meeting. Any questions or to verify dates/times please call Clint Pollock at (231) 893-0210 or Terry Clark at (231) 893-6805.			
July			No meeting
August	6	6:30 pm	Meeting - Montague Boat Launch
September	3	6:30 pm	Meeting - Montague VFW
October	1	6:30 pm	Meeting - Montague VFW
November	5	6:30 pm	Meeting - Montague VFW
December	3	6:30 pm	Meeting - Montague VFW



This mid-summer largemouth liked the looks of the Ned Ocho that Mike Frisch was using.

**Catch'em In the Summer**

By Bob Jensen

Crazy isn't it? It seems like not so long ago we were wading in the cold water of rivers in search of early season walleyes and now we're thinking about catching fish during the hottest weather of the year. Fishing can be like the weather in the summer. Both can be very hot. To take part in this potentially fast action, you'll need to do things a little differently than you would at other times of the year. Following are some of those things.

Generally, in the summer when the fish want to bite it works well to use faster moving baits and fish through areas quickly. If the fish are going to bite, they'll let you know right away.

However, if the bite is not so good, you might be better off fishing slow and really working an area thoroughly. If you know the body of water well, concentrate on spots that you know hold fish and work them over.

Let's say we were fishing for largemouth bass. In the summer, early and late in the day are usually when the fish go on a good bite. This is when you'll want to use a faster moving bait. Buzz-baits, spinnerbaits, or crankbaits are good options.

When the sun gets up higher and the bite slows down, try a plastic bait rigged on a jig or weedless. Work your bait around vegetation or shaded areas

where a bass might be.

There will be times when the fish will eat almost whatever you're using. However, we can up the odds for big fish by experimenting with different bait styles. I recall a mid-summer day when this was particularly noticeable. We were fishing for largemouth bass. It was overcast, so the bite was good throughout the day. It was better for the big guys though, if we gave them what they wanted.

Plastic baits were the hot set-up. We started with small Ned Ochos on jigheads. We had good action. In our search for bigger fish, we went to the larger KVD Perfect Plastics Ochos in the six inch length rigged the same way. Fewer strikes but larger fish. We then got really creative. We switched to bulkier baits like Rage Hawgs. We attached them to rubber legged jigs. They were much bulkier and they appealed to much larger bass. We didn't catch as many bass, but on that day we preferred size to numbers.

Lure color is another consideration that can be important. Start with a color that you have confidence in, but don't hesitate to try a variety of colors. Give the fish plenty of options until they show you what they want at that time.

Much of the time in the summer, the fish will prefer a faster moving bait, and also one that is moving erratically. Along the weedline, when you feel your bait hang up on a weed, give it a sharp rip. When a bass, walleye or pike sees that bait struggling on a weed, then rips free and appears to be escaping, a strike will often be triggered.

Mid-summer fishing is heating up. It's fun to be on the water when the sun comes up, catch some fish, then take a mid-day break. Maybe go to the turtle races in town or do touristy stuff. But be back on the water in the late afternoon or early evening. You'll catch fish, and you'll be taking full advantage of all that summer has to offer in the way of fish.



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