

## District I Spring Fishing Report

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### **D1 Reservoirs –**

District 1 has two large reservoirs, Cheat Lake near Morgantown and Tygart Lake near Grafton. Cheat Lake is a hydropower lake and its levels are permitted to fluctuate differently depending on the season. It's important to understand these water level fluctuations not only for angling, but for boat access. In April, water levels fluctuate seven feet daily, from May through October levels fluctuate two feet, and from November through March daily water levels fluctuate 13 feet. Sunset Marina is the only public boat ramp available during the recreation season of April through October. The minimum lake level for the Sunset Marina to be used is 865 feet. Prior to fishing in April, it's advisable to check Cheat Lake's water level at the following USGS website: <https://waterdata.usgs.gov/wv/nwis/current/?type=flow>. A winter boat ramp is available through the end of March at the Cheat Lake park near the dam. Early spring is an excellent time to target Walleye and Yellow Perch in Cheat Lake around the I-68 bridge area and upstream to the head of the lake. Walleye are reproducing with some success in Cheat Lake, but the population is supplemented every other year with stockings from the WVDNR. Walleye in this lake are not overly abundant but grow fast and large. The Ices Ferry Bridge fishing access site is a good shoreline area to catch both Walleye and Yellow Perch using minnows throughout the spring. As the water temperatures increase heading into spring, Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass, Crappie, White Bass, and Channel Catfish will become more active. Largemouth Bass seem to be more common in embayments and will often be located near woody structure, whereas Smallmouth Bass tend to be found throughout the main lake and up into the riverine section in rocky areas. Channel Catfish are common and provide very good fishing in all seasons. However, as temps increase in the spring, catfishing gets better and cut bait, stink baits, chicken liver and worms are all productive. White Bass are typically in schools moving throughout open water. Once the schools are found, jigs, spoons, small crankbaits can be very effective at catching several fish in a short amount of time. As the water temperatures continue increasing into the spring, Crappie and other sunfish will move closer to shore throughout the lake. Small jigs, in-line spinners, and minnows fished around downed trees can be very effective for these tasty gamefish. A fishing pier in the tailwater area just below the dam provides excellent fishing opportunities for Walleye and Sauger during the spring when water temps are in the 45 – 50F range.

Tygart Lake is a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers flood control lake having extreme water level fluctuations. The winter drawdown is 60 feet below summer pool. Typically, summer pool is reached by April 1<sup>st</sup> for the summer recreation season. Tygart Lake is known as a very good Walleye and Smallmouth Bass lake, with Crappie, Channel Catfish, White Bass and Musky also available. Tygart Lake has an excellent reproducing Walleye population with most being "pan-sized". As the water temperature approaches 40F, walleye will start staging toward the upper end of the reservoir and will typically spawn in the riverine section when water temperatures are between 45 – 50F in mid-March through April. If one does not have a boat, shoreline access can be found at the head of the lake at Cove Run. Tygart Lake is steep sided and has lots of shoreline rocky habitat for Smallmouth Bass where they feed on crayfish and shiners. During early spring, use slower moving lures such as small plastic worms hooked wacky style and progress to

faster crankbaits and topwater lures as temperatures increase. Night crawlers, minnows, crickets, and crayfish are very good Smallmouth Bass baits when artificial lures aren't producing. White Bass typically spawn when water temperatures range from 57 – 68F. Prior to this, they will be in large schools waiting to make their spawning run to the head of Tygart Lake. White Bass can often be seen chasing shiners near the surface, and this is a great time to cast small spoons for some fast action. As the lake fills and water temperatures increase, different fish species will move closer to shore and use fish habitat structures that have been placed by the WVDNR and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers near Tygart Lake State Park and at Pleasant Creek Wildlife Management Area. These are good places to cast small jigs, in-line spinners, minnows, or meal worms to catch Crappie and other sunfish. The tailwater area just below the dam is stocked with trout from February through May. Additionally, loads of Walleye are found in the tailwater as they move through the dam during winter and spring water releases. A boat ramp is available in the tailwater, and anglers can use the shoreline also. The shoreline provides very good access but can be difficult to navigate due to large rocks and sometimes slippery conditions. Daily lake and tailwater conditions can be obtained by calling the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers at: 304-265-5953

#### **D1 Nav Rivers –**

Both Ohio River and Monongahela River are within District 1. Several dams on both rivers provide good shoreline fishing access and boats are not needed or permitted in these areas due to safety. In late winter and early spring, Walleye and Sauger congregate in tailwater areas below dams and large riffles in tributaries of the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers to spawn typically from mid-March to mid-April when water temperatures reach 40 to 50F. Jigs tipped with minnows fished near the bottom or along rocky banks in low light conditions can be very productive for Walleye and Sauger. As spring progresses, White Bass and Hybrid Striped Bass move up into the tailwaters and can be caught using spoons, jigs, or surface lures. Channel Catfish can be caught during all seasons but will become more active as spring brings warmer temperatures. Monongahela River has an excellent Channel Catfish population as they are very abundant and reach large sizes. They can be caught using live bait, cut bait, and stink baits. Flathead Catfish are less common on Monongahela River but can reach good sizes of 40-inches or more. For those targeting large Flathead Catfish, Ohio River is the place to go as it holds lots of large Flatheads. These fish are much less active during winter but will become much more active during spring. Good techniques to catch Flathead Catfish are to bottom fish or drift circle hooks baited with live near creek mouths, in eddies and off rocky banks.

#### **D1 Rivers/Streams –**

Cheat, Tygart, and West Fork Rivers are perhaps the most popular warmwater river fisheries in District 1. Upper Cheat River offers very good Smallmouth Bass fishing and some bonus Rock Bass. The Cheat River water trail offers very good access to this beautiful river for either float or wade fishing. Tygart River provides opportunities for Smallmouth Bass and is becoming well known for its Musky fishery. West Fork River has been known as a very good Musky stream, but the Smallmouth Bass, Channel Catfish, and Flathead Catfish are all abundant. Other notable Smallmouth Bass and Rock Bass streams within District 1 are Buckhannon River, Fish Creek, Fishing Creek, Buffalo Creek (Brooke County), Dunkard Creek and Dry Fork of Cheat River. Three-inch twister tails, crankbaits, crayfish imitations, small spinners, plastic baits such as flukes or dingers, or buzz baits can all be excellent Smallmouth Bass lures. However, simply using live bait such as nightcrawlers, crayfish, or minnows can be just as and sometimes more effective. Smallmouth Bass usually are not as active in March due to cool temperatures and large numbers are not

caught, but this time of year often yields the largest fish. As spring progresses and water temperatures increase, more fish can typically be caught. Adequate gear for catching Smallmouth Bass in these smaller rivers would be a six-foot medium action rod and spinning reel spooled with six to eight-pound monofilament line. Streams throughout District 1 such as Blackwater River, Fishing Creek, Horseshoe Run, Kings Creek, Paw Paw Creek, Whiteday Creek, Wheeling Creek and many others receive trout stockings and provide excellent fishing opportunities. Use the WVDNR fishing map to gather information of streams and fishing opportunities near you: <https://www.mapwv.gov/huntfish/map/?v=fish>

### **D1 Impoundments -**

Sixteen small impoundments are stocked with trout providing several cooler weather fishing opportunities in District 1. Early in trout season, try slower fishing methods such as salmon eggs, power bait, and worms. With increasing temperatures, pick the pace up with spinners or fly fishing. Many of these same small impoundments that receive trout stockings, also have excellent Largemouth Bass and Bluegill fisheries. Panfish are popular with both seasoned and novice anglers as they can provide hours of fun and are excellent table fare. Bluegill typically can be found near brush, downed trees, or shoreline vegetation during spring in our small impoundments. Fancy and expensive equipment is not needed to enjoy catching Bluegill this time of year. Crickets, meal worms, and red worms floated under bobbers on a 10-foot cane pole can be extremely effective and enjoyable. Bluegill can also be caught with small in-line spinners and small plastic or hair jigs on typical spinning or spincast reels on a light to medium action rod. Small impoundments such as Dents Run Lake, Teter Creek Lake, Fairfax Ponds, Mason Lake, and Dixon Lakes are known to have good Bluegill fisheries. Our small impoundments also provide excellent largemouth bass fishing, often better than our large reservoirs. Prior to spawning, anglers should concentrate fishing around fallen trees and stumps, especially along points. Largemouth Bass typically spawn in water temperatures between 68 and 72F. During this period, they usually will be found on mud flats along creek channels and coves constructing nests, which can be close to cover. Dunkard Fork Lake and Curtisville Lake are known for exceptional largemouth bass fisheries. Use the WVDNR fishing map to find new places to fish near you: <https://www.mapwv.gov/huntfish/map/?v=fish>