

District 2 Spring Fishing Report

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D2 Reservoirs -

Mount Storm Lake is known as a good Black Bass (Smallmouth and Largemouth) and large Striped Bass lake, with Walleye available, as well. It is important to know that Mount Storm Lake receives warm exit water from a coal-fired power plant, frequently allowing lake water to be much warmer than what adjacent fisheries or air temperatures are! This can play to the angler's advantage, as all fish species are much more active throughout the winter and become more aggressive earlier in the spring. Shad and other minnow patterns work well for these species. Considering the schooling behavior of shad in this lake, umbrella lures (those that mimic several baitfish in a group) would work quite well for any of the above species. Crankbaits and swim baits that mimic wounded baitfish are excellent bait choices. Consider the use of live or natural bait for finicky fish. Largemouth Bass will be found along shorelines that are laden with fallen trees, WV DNR supplemented Christmas trees, beaver dams, and aquatic vegetation. Particularly, these habitats are found more commonly upstream into the creek arms of the lake. Smallmouth Bass are more common in habitats where large rock outcrops are common, although they too will sometimes be associated with vegetation and wood that attracts forage fish. The dam wall and creek channels upstream provide complex rocky habitats for Smallmouth Bass. A medium to heavy action would work well. If you target Striped Bass in this lake, it helps to have a boat to get to open water, as well as oversized fishing gear compared to what you would use for bass fishing. Striped Bass do not appear to aggregate seasonally, but seem to stay deep where the coolest, heavier water remains. Stripers have been caught exceeding 35" in this lake! Walleye can also be caught with trolling techniques, using jerk baits, crank baits, and inline spinners rigged with natural baits like nightcrawlers or minnows. Walleye will congregate along drop-offs of submerged rocky ridges and the submerged creek bed of the Stony River arm of the lake during spring. Channel Catfish are numerous and stunted: the harvest of Channel Catfish is suggested there to improve the population. They can be caught during all seasons using baits such as chicken liver, cut bait, and stink baits. The only public boat ramp for this lake is located right off of Route 29. It is certainly ideal to fish Mount Storm Lake with a boat, as very little shoreline access is available for public use.

Jennings Randolph Lake is known for its excellent Smallmouth Bass population, Rock Bass in abundance, and a dense, reproducing Walleye population. It also gets stocked with trout on occasion by the MD DNR in the spring. There is also an emerging Yellow Perch population there. Smallmouth Bass key in on crayfish that inhabit rocky habitat along the lake's perimeter. Weighted soft plastics, crank baits, and jigs that imitate crayfish are great baits to start targeting Smallmouth Bass and Rock Bass here. If you are targeting Rock Bass, size down your baits to focus on this smaller sport fish. Minnows are abundant in this lake, and are prime targets for Walleye. Live or dead minnows trolled on spinner rigs, jerk baits, silver-sided crank baits and swim baits would be excellent for targeting Walleye. Inline spinners work well for catching trout (Rainbow Trout are stocked occasionally throughout the spring and frequently hold over from previous years' stockings). Considering Walleye spawning tendencies, the

upstream end of the lake, where the North Branch of the Potomac River enters, would be a good focus point for anglers targeting them in the months of March and April. Trolling is a particularly good method for hooking up with Walleye and Trout in this deep lake. For yellow perch, focus on woody, rocky, or vegetative structure when they are schooled together early in the year. Typical panfish baits, such as beetle spins, scent enhanced small plastic jigs, nightcrawlers, and live minnows work well for Yellow Perch. There are two public boat launches on this lake that operate daily unless there are poor winter weather conditions: the Howell Ramp on the WV side and the Maryland ramp. The lake's water level is managed by the ACOE. When water levels are drawn low, the Howell Ramp becomes unusable. It is certainly ideal to fish Jennings Randolph Lake with a boat, as very little shoreline access is available for public use.

Please be cautious when fishing for species that are spawning. Mortality and disruption of spawning activities can have significant impacts on the fisheries down the line. Additionally, be aware that Striped Bass and Walleye are vulnerable to high levels of stress when caught in warm water and can have a high chance of dying even when they are released. It helps to target these fish during cooler water timeframes if you plan on releasing them.

D2 Rivers/Streams –

The South Branch Potomac, Cacapon, and Shenandoah Rivers are the most popular stream fisheries in D2, renowned for their fantastic Smallmouth Bass, Rock Bass, Redbreast Sunfish, and Channel Catfish populations! However, Patterson Creek, Back Creek, Opequon Creek, Sleepy Creek, and the Little Cacapon should not be overlooked, especially when warm weather brings considerable fishing pressure to the more popular streams. The transition from winter to spring brings larger catches of Smallmouth Bass, Redbreast Sunfish and Rock Bass, as the Channel Catfish fishery emerges later into the spring/summer. Please pay close attention to tagged fish in the South Branch, as many Smallmouth Bass and Channel Catfish have been tagged in order to better understand angler utility, angler pressure, and fish movement in this system. Smallmouth Bass become very active as water temperatures crawl out of the 30's and consistently into the mid 40's, but still maintain position in large, deep pools. Crayfish are the forage of choice for Smallmouth Bass in these streams, making up greater than 70% of the forage items they consume! Jigs, crankbaits, tubes, spider grubs, and other soft plastic baits that mimic this forage is suggested and can pay off during any season. However, don't discount minnows as diet items, as Smallmouth strike higher in the water column at swim baits, surface plugs, flukes, and other baits that mimic shiners! If all else fails, nightcrawlers, crickets, grasshoppers, and other natural baits will certainly catch fish. Considering the different types of baits that you could fish under different conditions; a medium action rod of moderate power would be beneficial. Consider using a light-heavy rod. Six to 8-pound test would work well. Consider using fluorocarbon, as it is difficult to see underwater, and can be useful for enticing fish to bite when using soft plastics.

District 2 has an abundance of public access sites available to the angler's advantage:
<https://www.mapwv.gov/huntfish/map/?v=fish>

D2 Impoundments –

Small impoundments in D2 are some of the most productive fisheries in the region! Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Crappie, Northern Pike, Musky, and quality Channel Catfish (maintained by stocking) can be available in many of these lakes! Spring is the season for catching crappie that school together and spawn early in the spring season with small soft-plastic jigs or natural bait, like minnows or nightcrawlers. Many of our small impoundments offer crappie (Sleepy Creek Lake, Warden Lake, South Mill Creek Lake, Kimsey Run Lake, and Parker Hollow Lake). Crappie set up spawning grounds as early as April in shallow, soft bottoms in our small impoundments. Bluegill are highly sought after in the spring. They begin to spawn in late May and into June. However, they spend the earlier portion of spring feeding at depths typically no greater than 10 feet around vegetation, brush, and other shallow structure as they prepare for their spawning efforts. Large Bluegill offer excellent table fare and high likelihoods of success for spring anglers, both young and experienced! Both Crappie and Bluegill construct bowl shaped depressions in which to lay their eggs. High numbers of aggressive adult panfish (especially Bluegill) can be targeted if these excavations can be found during the spring. A light power rod with moderate action is good for panfish like Bluegill and Crappie.

As the spring season progresses and waters warm, Largemouth Bass become very active, feeding up just before the spawn in early May. Focus on using baits that provide action under the surface of the water. Stick baits, crank baits, weighted soft plastics and jigs work well this time of the year. When water temperatures are cold (40 - 50s), begin your retrieves slow and work up to a faster pace if you are getting no strikes. As waters warm, bass become more aggressive, and retrieves should be worked at a faster pace. Pay attention not to fish too deeply towards the end of spring, as fish stay in shallower water where higher levels of oxygen are available, and forage gathers near shoreline structure. Largemouth Bass feed near the lake perimeters when active and can be caught anywhere along the shoreline. Pay close attention to shifting shoreline depths, aquatic vegetation, and sunken wood to increase your chances of strikes from Largemouth. Fishing brightly colored, darkly colored, sound emitting, and gold/copper bladed baits are more visible to fish when the water is muddy! You can use a variety of fishing equipment styles to fish our small impoundments, considering the species available. A medium power with moderate to fast action is good for bass fishing.

Musky (Kimsey Run Lake) and Northern Pike (Warden and Sleepy Creek lakes) can grow to significant size in our small impoundments. If you plan on fishing for these species, consider a larger, more powerful rod with a fast action. Focus on casting large inline spinners, swim baits, stick or jerk baits along large structures, such as submerged wood or vegetation beds.

District 2 has an abundance of these small impoundments open to public fishing:
<https://www.mapwv.gov/huntfish/map/?v=fish>

District 2 Tip of the Spring Season –

Early spring is the time to catch big Smallmouth from our popular stream fisheries! It is essential to target them when stream temperatures are low, but greater than about 38°F! Although Smallmouth tend to be less aggressive and strike more readily at slow retrieves in cold water, don't be afraid to work bottom fished plastics quick every few casts as the bigger fish can be surprisingly active! Dirty water conditions warm up faster. Evening stream temperatures are warmer due to having been heated by sunlight throughout the day. As water temperatures increase, numbers of Smallmouth caught typically

increase. However, the average size of those caught declines. Quantity vs quality...Why not fish for both as the season progresses! Remember these tips while predicting fish activity and developing a strategy for catching the number and quality of fish that you desire!