

A man with a mustache, wearing an orange cap and a teal life vest, is sitting in a boat on a body of water. He is holding a smallmouth bass in his hands, and a fishing lure is visible near the fish's mouth. The background shows the water and part of the boat's engine.

# Pennsylvania's Most Overlooked Smallmouth Bass Fishing

*by Mike Bleech*

*photos by the author*

A nice Smallmouth Bass appeared where the surface lure had been. Instead of being hooked to the jaw of a bass, the lure sailed through the air about 10 feet before hitting the water again.

My fishing partner in the front of the boat cast his floating stickbait across the ever-widening ring where the bass had broken the water's surface. Three or four twitches, and he set his hook into the same fish. After a spirited battle, fought mostly at the surface, he released a 2-pound Smallmouth Bass alongside the boat.

After three more Smallmouth Bass between us, a Northern Pike broke the rhythm. Somewhere during that time, the sun crawled above the horizon and an overcast sky. It continued to be a good morning for Smallmouth Bass fishing on the Allegheny Reservoir, Warren and McKean counties. The bass ranged in size from 10 to 18 inches. Without actually counting, we must have caught at least 24 fish, and we were off the water in time to cook our usual sausages over an open fire. Rain politely waited until we finished eating before beginning to fall.

We chuckled about our good fortune on the drive home. Even on the best Smallmouth Bass water, that does not always happen. Not to mention the weather generously cooperating.

Even on normal days, though, Smallmouth Bass anglers can anticipate some success. The key to finding Smallmouth Bass on normal days is timing and location.



*All of these lures are effective on Smallmouth Bass on the Allegheny Reservoir, Warren and McKean counties. The range in color patterns, shapes and diving depths cover all conditions.*

Timing is a simple concept. Typically, Smallmouth Bass hit during morning twilight and a few hours after the sun is up. Smallmouth Bass often hit about 1 hour before sunset and through evening twilight, maybe another hour after that time. Between these time periods, the fish may get active two, three or four times per day. It is the length of those periods which makes the difference between good fishing and great fishing.

Nothing works, however, unless the angler is fishing at the right time, in the right place, at the right depth, and using a bait or artificial lure the bass will strike.

Appalachian reservoirs are generally difficult lakes for catching Smallmouth Bass. In most parts of the reservoir, the bottom slopes steeply from the shoreline. This leaves a narrow strip of water that is inhabited by many Smallmouth Bass.

Normally, clear water and Smallmouth Bass using water from the lake shore to depths exceeding 30 feet is what makes fishing challenging. Relatively few anglers have the skill, knowledge and patience to fish for Smallmouth Bass deeper than about 10 feet.

At first glance, the Allegheny Reservoir may seem to be much the same wherever you fish it in Pennsylvania.

From a Smallmouth Bass perspective, though, there are significant differences between sections of its potential habitat. Look for areas where the bottom is rocky rubble,

as opposed to mostly flat shale. Rocks of mixed sizes and shapes have more cover for bass and crayfish, and other things Smallmouth Bass eat. One good fishing tactic in this situation is running the boat about 10 to 20 feet from the shoreline while casting diving crankbaits roughly parallel to the shoreline.

Points are ambush spots where small schools of Smallmouth Bass will wait for baitfish schools to pass by. If the baitfish are close to the surface, the water may boil with bass feeding activity. Cast across the commotion with surface lures or stickbaits.

Cliff faces provide excellent hiding places for Smallmouth Bass, where bass can dart out to attack baitfish. The flat shale breaks away unevenly. This creates numerous overhangs, which can hide bass. Fish these places using deep-diving crankbaits and leadhead jigs.

While we have been looking at approaches to fishing various types of habitat using artificial lures, you can probably catch more Smallmouth Bass using live minnows for bait. Use a slip bobber to suspend the bait in most situations.

If you are taking kids fishing, fish live minnows under bobbers close to fallen trees. ☐



*Live minnows are one of the best baits for Smallmouth Bass. Fish minnows near cover.*

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