

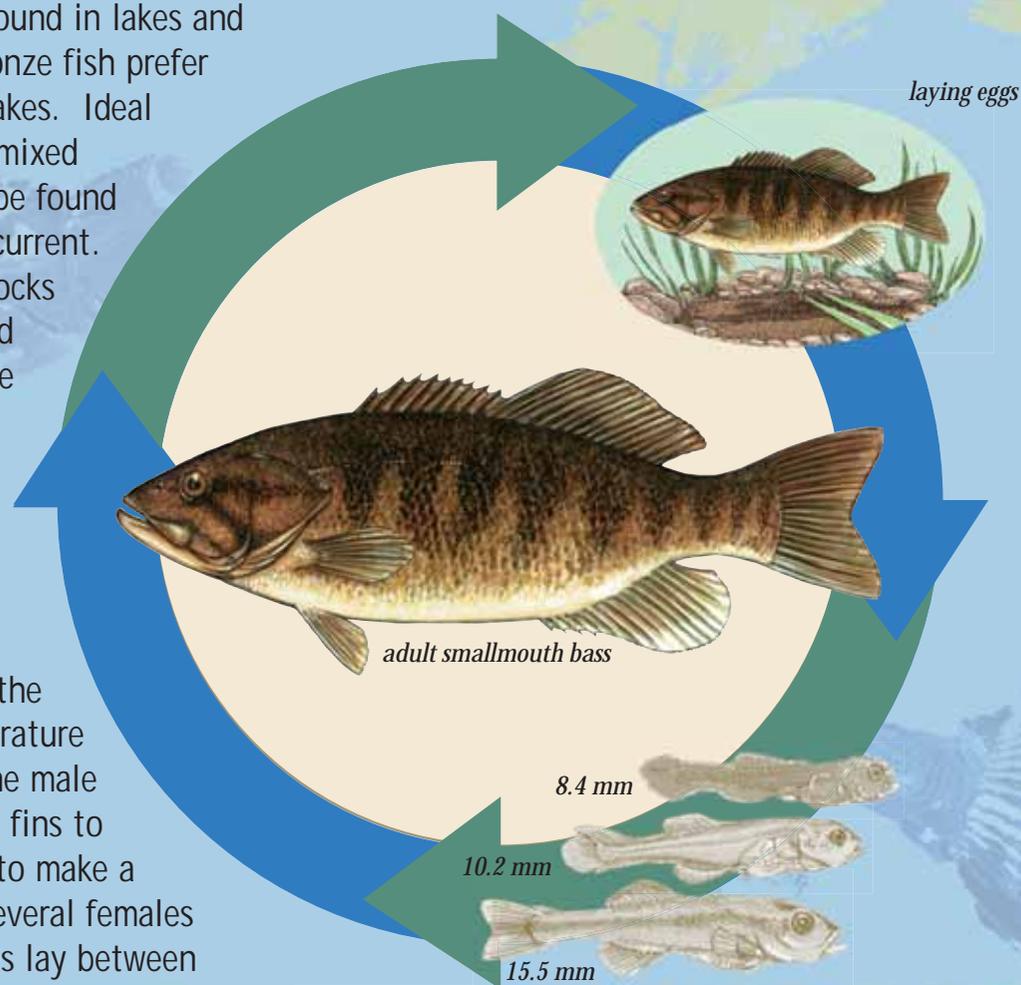
A Bronzeback is Born

Smallmouth bass can be found in lakes and in rivers. These brownish-bronze fish prefer moving water or cool, clear lakes. Ideal **habitat** includes rocky areas mixed with gravel. They can often be found where something breaks the current. These breaks could be large rocks and boulders, fallen trees, and other debris in the water. The dark color and eight to 15 **vertical** bars that run top to bottom along their sides help these fish blend in with rocks and branches.

Smallmouth bass begin to **spawn**, or reproduce, during the spring when the water temperature reaches 60 to 70 degrees. The male builds the nest. He uses his fins to sweep away sand and gravel to make a depression in the bottom. Several females lay eggs in one nest. Females lay between 2,000 and 7,000 eggs for every pound they weigh, each year! The male guards the nest while he waits for the eggs to hatch. Hatching can take two to 10 days, depending on the water temperature.

The young smallmouth, called **fry**, are ready to leave the nest after only five to six days. They are still guarded by the male for a month or more. Zooplankton is their main food from the time they hatch until they are about a half-inch long. When the fry reach between a half-inch to one inch long, they begin to feed on insect larvae. When they grow larger than one inch long, the fry begin to feed on small fish and **crayfish**.

All the smallmouth bass eggs don't hatch. And not all young smallmouth bass survive the



first few months. This stage is important. These fish are called "young of the year" (YOY).

Fish & Boat Commission studies have shown that water flow and temperature are the most important factors in young bass survival. Other things such as **pollution** and predators can affect survival of eggs and fry. Conditions during some years cause few eggs to survive. On the other hand, in the best conditions, many young smallmouth bass survive.

In rivers, smallmouth bass populations change because of the conditions that YOY face. When many YOY survive, anglers can expect to see larger fish in three to five years. If few fish survive, fishing can be poor in three to five years!