

Noodles and EGGS

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photos by the author

Equipped with a noodle rod, a steelhead angler is ready for just about any situation encountered on a Lake Erie tributary.

If noodles and eggs do not sound like your idea of a good meal, it probably isn't. But, it is a perfect combination for steelhead fishing.

Noodles—noodle rods, of course, and eggs, including egg sacks, egg skein or single eggs, drifted with the current on any of several Lake Erie tributaries in Pennsylvania is considered by many worldly steelhead anglers to be the best steelhead fishery in the world. That claim is not something worth arguing. The fishing is great, so we will leave it at that and get rigged for steelhead.



Eggs can be preserved to use at a later date. Most commercial preservatives add some sort of odor to the eggs.

As steelhead themselves, designs for steelhead tackle, including rods, were brought to the Great Lakes from the Pacific Northwest. Standard steelhead rods were and still are about 9 feet long with fast action and relatively long handles and available in various power ratings. Rods rated for line testing, 8 pounds to 12 pounds, became popular along the Great Lakes. These rods are a great design for steelhead rods.

Although the design has many excellent qualities, it falls short due to the need of a crystal clear Great Lakes tributary. Obviously, not all tributaries fall into this category, but all Great Lakes tributaries in Pennsylvania do at some point in time, from Elk Creek to Crooked Creek.

Noodle rods were developed to satisfy that need, specifically the need for a rod that allows anglers to catch big, hard-fighting steelhead on light line. Light line in our terms means 2-pound-test line or 4-pound-test line.

Serious steelhead anglers, if they use just a noodle rod, should have spinning reels with two spools, one with light line and the other with heavier line, about 10-pound-test line. Heavier line suffices when water has some color but not for finicky steelhead in low, clear flows.

Noodle rods were originally spinning rods build on fly rod blanks. The reasoning behind that design was a long, limber rod that absorbs the shock of big, hard fighting steelhead on light line, just as a fly angler lands big fish on light tippets.

Like so many things, folks who do not understand the principle have often distorted the original concept. However, the original concept, which originated along the south side of Lake Michigan, works out to be the ideal rod for steelhead fishing in Pennsylvania tributaries. These creeks tend to be extremely clear, especially during winter.

Eggs, the second part of our subject, are the universal steelhead bait. Though not always the best bait, no other bait is as effective. If a steelhead angler had to stick with just one type of bait, eggs would be a good choice.



Good pools get crowded, especially on weekends. Wading into the creek when it is not necessary tends to scare steelhead.



This steelhead was caught at Sixteenmile Creek, Erie County.

Eggs used for steelhead fishing come in three basic forms, single salmon eggs, egg skein, which may be steelhead or salmon skein, and egg sacks usually made with salmon eggs.

Some serious steelhead anglers harvest a female steelhead early in the run mostly for the purpose of collecting the eggs or harvest a salmon to collect its eggs. Then, eggs can be preserved by any of several preservatives made for this purpose. Most add some flavor, and some add color. Preserved this way, eggs will last for an entire run if stored in a refrigerator. Some may even carry over to the following year.

Rigging for all three types of skein should be done on single, fine wire hooks. A wide gap hook with off-set point is a good choice. Impaling skein on a single hook is messy and difficult, but it can be done with patience.

Add a splitshot about 6 inches up the line from the eggs to keep close to the bottom. Steelhead often rise to take bait early in the run, but by late November, it is best to get the bait in front of their noses.

Adding a small float above the bait and splitshot has a couple of advantages. If it is set at the right depth, hang-ups on the bottom will be mostly avoided. And, the bobber gives visual indication when a steelhead takes the bait.

A secondary benefit of noodle rods is that the extra length, usually 10 feet to 12 feet, aids in making drifts free from cross currents that cause unnatural drag. Keeping as much line as possible off the water is a basic for drifting baits in current. Often, bait can be drifted right under the rod tip.

Equipped with a noodle rod and eggs, a steelhead angler is ready for just about any situation that will be encountered on Pennsylvania's Lake Erie tributaries. ☐

For more information on Pennsylvania steelhead fishing, go to
www.fishandboat.com/steelhead.htm.