



The Early Bird **Gets the Trout**

by Tyler Frantz

photos by the author

A little preseason planning can help anglers make the most of a busy opening day.

Let's face it. The opening day of trout season can often be a little chaotic. While creekside roadways are parked bumper-to-bumper, eager crowds of anglers sometimes line stream banks like ravenous hyenas ready to pounce on fresh carrion.

The intent is not to compete with fellow anglers but simply to enjoy the long-awaited return of another Pennsylvania rite of passage. However, cabin fever sometimes gets the best of people, giving opening day a bittersweet, congested reputation along some of Pennsylvania's most popular streams.

Some anglers refuse to fish opening day. Instead, they wait until midweek when creek traffic subsides. As a traditionalist, however, I just can't give up that special euphoric feeling of tossing out the first 8 a.m. cast. Beating the crowds is just part of the process.

Through the years, I've learned that being an early bird is the best bet for a successful start to the season. In doing so, anglers can prepare in advance for the mad rush to the waterway, placing themselves in the perfect position to catch plenty of fish once their lines hit the water, regardless of the company they keep.

First and foremost, it is important to know where the fish are located on opening day. A good way to do this is to keep tabs on preseason stocking schedules listed on the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC) website at www.fishandboat.com. All stockings of approved trout waters are posted in advance, showing dates, stream

coordinates, meeting locations and even the species of fish to be stocked in the waterways.

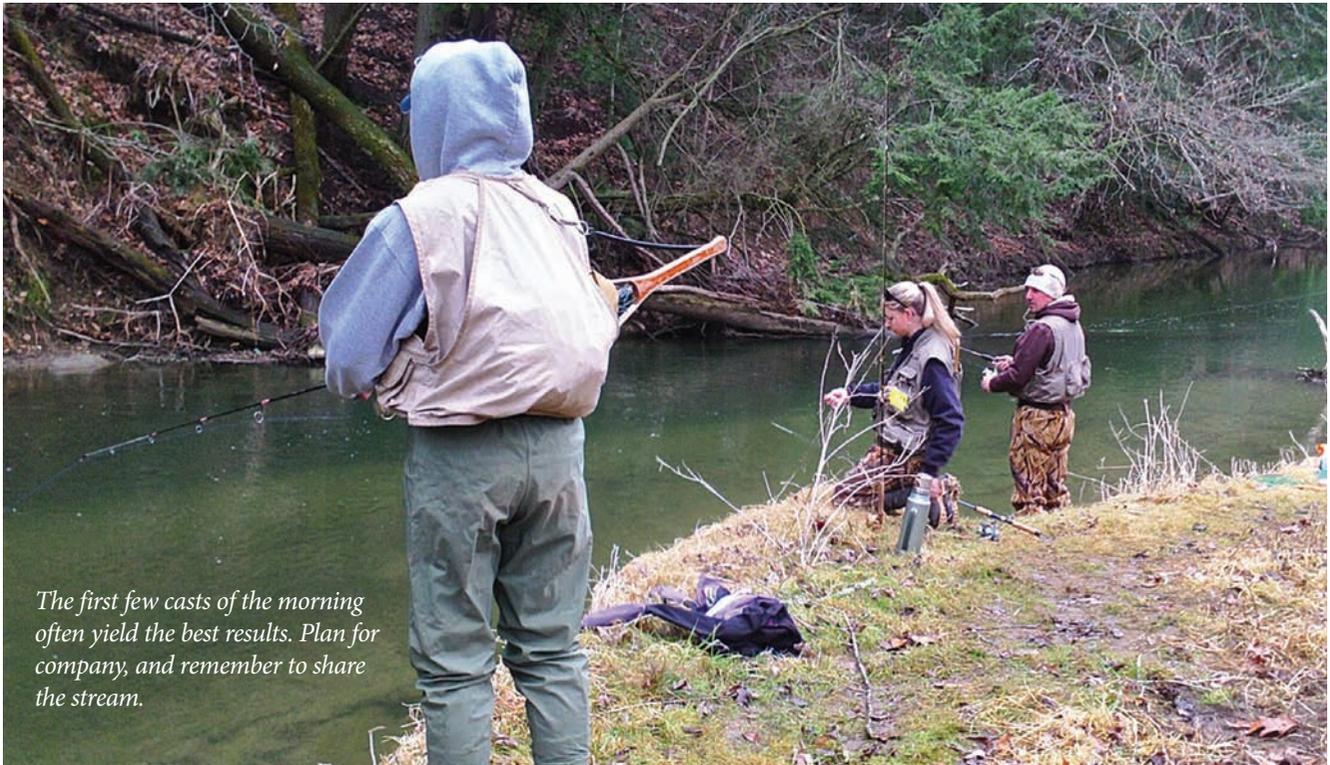
Volunteering to help stock serves a dual purpose. First, it helps PFBC staff save time and effort by providing helpful manpower for transferring fish from truck holding tanks to the water. Secondly, it is a great way to learn more about the streams one eventually hopes to fish.

Taking note of the stretches that are lightly, moderately or heavily stocked as well as likely holding locations can be very beneficial to choosing a destination for opening day. It's also a great activity for youth anglers, as seeing the fish up close and personal can be an enjoyable experience for both young and old.

Depending on the time span and stream conditions prior to opening day, it is possible that the trout may stray a bit from their original stocking locations. So, it is helpful to scout potential stream destinations during the days leading up to the opener.

All this process requires is a good pair of polarized sunglasses and a willingness to travel. Pull on a pair of knee-high rubber boots and go for a walk along the creek banks, taking extra care to visually survey the deeper pools near undercut banks, spillways and logjams for concentrations of fish, or even trophy-sized fish depending on what is more appealing to one's own standards of satisfaction.

Also, consider the "fishability" factor of each location. How easy is it to cast, retrieve and land fish? Is there overhanging vegetation? How accessible is it? These are all good questions that will likely affect other anglers' willingness or unwillingness to target an area.

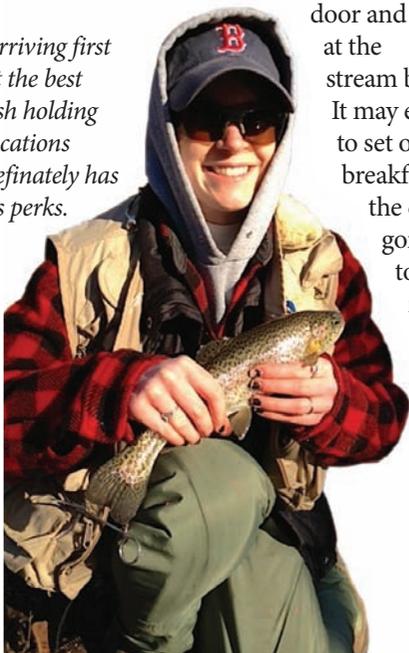


The first few casts of the morning often yield the best results. Plan for company, and remember to share the stream.

Once a preferred destination has been established, as well as a few backups, prepare all gear in advance for an early morning wake up call. Be sure to have vests neatly stowed, licenses displayed, rods, reels, waders and tackle all prepped and ready to go in your vehicle the night before the big day.

Set an alarm clock as early as you're willing to rise in an effort to be out the door and at the stream before anyone else.

Arriving first at the best fish holding locations definately has its perks.



It may even be a good idea to set out clothes, prepare breakfast snacks and fill the coffee maker before going to bed—anything to speed up the early morning routine for a prompt departure.

If arriving at your fishing location before dawn, a compact headlamp can light the way while leaving two hands free to carry gear and safely negotiate



Early bird anglers are often rewarded for their efforts.

brush or other obstacles during your walk to the water. The headlamp can easily be stashed in a vest and forgotten once the sun rises.

The long wait between your arrival and 8 o'clock can be spent rigging up, sipping coffee and strategizing over how to catch the big fish that's taunting you with gentle splashes at the far end of the pool. Bringing a fishing partner or two can also add to the enjoyment of the experience.

Try not to get upset when another angler trounces in at 7:59 and squeezes in right next to you. Though it may not be the most tactful thing to do, he or she has just as much right to be there as you do. Keep your cool, and remember to share the stream. We're all in this together, but when it comes to opening day, it's usually the early birds who catch the most trout. ☐