

Kayak Fishing for Smallmouth Bass



by Nathan Wolesslagle

photos by the author

Smallmouth Bass are found throughout Pennsylvania. From lakes and rivers to small streams, Smallmouth Bass thrive in Pennsylvania's coolwater fisheries. Kayak fishing for Smallmouth Bass offers anglers a unique method for targeting fish and often allows anglers to reach fishable areas that boats cannot reach.

Smallmouth Bass are known for hard fights, aggressive strikes, and eating a variety of prey. When heading to a body of water to fish for Smallmouth Bass from a kayak, it is crucial to define areas of interest that will likely hold fish. These areas will be different within lakes, rivers, and small streams.

In lakes, kayak fishing offers a great advantage, as you can reach tighter locations where boats struggle to maneuver, allowing access to fishing locations that see far less pressure than the open sections. Some lakes prohibit internal

combustion engines in Pennsylvania, so kayak fishing may be one of your limited methods of watercraft usage. Be sure to check the regulations of the lake you are fishing to ensure you are in compliance with all watercraft guidelines and policies before launching your kayak.

When fishing lakes for Smallmouth Bass, there are certain features to look for regardless of the time of year. Smallmouth Bass hang out around structure such as large boulders, sunken trees, or manmade fish structures, using these structures as staging areas to ambush prey. Transitions from weed beds to gravel bottoms in water from 6- to 12-feet may also be a great area to find cruising Smallmouth Bass that may be chasing baitfish.

Another aspect to consider when kayak fishing lakes is to find tight coves, backwaters, or any areas that boats simply cannot get into easily. Smallmouth Bass react to fishing pressure, as most fish do, and will actively seek areas that receive less human traffic and fishing pressure. By finding areas of water that not many people can access, you may stumble into your own secret fishing hole. Again, align these hard to access areas with structural

features that will be conducive to Smallmouth Bass.

When fishing rivers, kayak fishing has advantages. Kayaks offer a less intrusive presence than a boat, thus startling less fish. However, Smallmouth Bass in rivers tend to act differently than lake dwelling Smallmouth Bass. When targeting Smallmouth Bass in rivers from a kayak, seek deeper pockets and holes adjacent to or below riffles. Riffles will oxygenate the water, especially during the summer when Smallmouth Bass are seeking cooler areas of water to hold in. Riffles also carry prey directly to Smallmouth Bass that are awaiting to ambush. Structure is excellent as well. Submerged trees, rock outcroppings, and overhanging banks will all contain Smallmouth Bass.

Smaller creeks offer opportunities for anglers seeking adventure and prime fishing opportunities. One of my favorite creeks is Sherman Creek, Perry County. This creek tends to flow fast, so it is best to put in several miles upstream from your desired take-out point to extend your fishing session. Typically, downsized lure presentations are best as Smallmouth Bass in creeks are eating smaller prey than Smallmouth Bass living in lakes and larger rivers. Look for every deep pocket or hole you can find,



Jeff Woleslagle caught this Smallmouth Bass while kayaking on the Juniata River.

as this is commonly where the largest Smallmouth Bass hold. Do not be fooled by smaller creeks, as these creeks still retain substantial opportunity to catch trophy Smallmouth Bass ranging in the 3-, 4-, and even 5-pound range.

When fishing for Smallmouth Bass from a kayak, I only bring one or two fishing rod setups with me. Having rod holders on your kayak is an advantage, especially when paddling. My go-to rod setup is typically a 7-foot medium action spinning rod. I pair it with a 2500 size reel with 8- to 10-pound monofilament line or braided line. Smallmouth Bass in murkier water are not line shy, so I lean towards braided line when fishing murky waters.

As far as lures, the options are abundant. Smallmouth Bass eat prey like crayfish, baitfish, hellgrammites, small catfish, and leeches. I have even witnessed Smallmouth Bass eat frogs. The best lures to use are those that match the prey that resides in the body of water you are fishing. Research the species of baitfish, talk to other local anglers, and experiment with your lures. You will figure out what Smallmouth Bass react to the best.

Smallmouth Bass fishing from a kayak offers abundant fishing opportunities in Pennsylvania. From lakes, to the plentiful rivers the state has to offer, even to the smaller streams, Smallmouth Bass are found in a plethora of waterways. A kayak allows you to access difficult to access spots, flow down rivers with ease, and navigate into prime positions for casting. Kayak fishing offers advantages when planned and executed. Always wear your life jacket. The Smallmouth Bass are waiting for you, and these fish are willing to bite in Pennsylvania. ☐



Grant Commerer caught this Smallmouth Bass while kayak fishing on Sherman Creek, Perry County.