

# **Shenango River**

## **Mercer and Lawrence Counties**

### **Summer 2011 Daytime Boat Electrofishing Survey**

The Shenango River is a 110 kilometer long (68 miles) tributary to the Beaver River that originates in western Crawford County. The river is impounded by two large dams, the Pymatuning Dam near Jamestown and the Shenango Dam near Sharpsville. The section of the river downstream of Shenango Dam flows for 56.8 km (35.3 miles) to its confluence with the Mahoning River, thus creating the Beaver River.

This portion of the river below Shenango Dam is designated as Sections 4 and 5 by the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC). Section 4 lies immediately downstream of the dam and spans 2.4 kilometers (1.5 miles). It is stocked annually with adult trout including preseason, in-season and fall stockings. Section 5 includes the remaining downstream portion of the river (54.4 km or 33.8mi.) and is stocked annually with channel catfish and tiger muskellunge fingerlings. These sections were last comprehensively sampled by PFBC Fisheries Biologists in 1991.

Personnel from the Area 1 Fisheries Management office sampled the Shenango River at four sites (~ 1 mile below Shenango Dam, at King Chapel Road, at West Middlesex, and at Nashua Bridge) during the week of August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2011, to assess smallmouth bass, walleye and other sportfish populations and assess species composition using a newly constructed electrofishing boat specifically designed for small rivers. A total of 13 electrofishing runs encompassing 3 hours and 42 minutes of effort yielded a catch of 220 smallmouth bass, 10 walleye and 27 other species (Table 1). Anglers seeking opportunities for smallmouth bass, walleye and channel catfish should consider the Shenango River. Other sport fish species available to anglers include northern pike, flathead catfish and several species of panfish.



*Fisheries Management's new Mini-Boom Shocker in action*

**Table 1. Combined catch summary for daytime boat electrofishing survey at four sites along Shenango River during the week of August 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

| Species          | Size Range (inches) | Number Caught |
|------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| Smallmouth Bass  | 2 - 19              | 220           |
| Walleye          | 12 - 19             | 10            |
| Northern Pike    | 8 - 34              | 5             |
| Yellow Perch     | 2 - 9               | 14            |
| Black Crappie    | 4 - 9               | 28            |
| Bluegill         | 2 - 8               | 44            |
| Pumpkinseed      | 3 - 7               | 20            |
| Rock Bass        | 3 - 8               | 37            |
| Channel Catfish  | 12 - 22             | 17            |
| Flathead Catfish | 19 - 40             | 3             |

**Other Species:** Spotfin shiner, silver shiner, rosyface shiner, golden shiner, striped shiner, bluntnose minnow, river chub, central stoneroller, white sucker, northern hogsucker, quillback, golden redhorse, silver redhorse, common carp, banded darter, greenside darter, rainbow darter, log perch, warmouth.

The Shenango River has an impressive smallmouth bass fishery that is especially good immediately below the Shenango Dam, with many quality sized fish available (Table 2).

**Table 2. Total Catch Per Hour (CPH) and Catch Per Hour  $\geq$  12 inches for smallmouth bass collected by daytime boat electrofishing the Shenango River during the week of August 22<sup>nd</sup>.**

| Site               | Total CPH | CPH $\geq$ 12 inches |
|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Below Shenango Dam | 164.0     | 24.0                 |
| West Middlesex     | 48.0      | 6.6                  |
| Nashua Bridge      | 56.0      | 11.0                 |
| King Chapel Road   | 29.7      | 3.9                  |



*Fisheries Biologist Tim Wilson with 17" Shenango River smallmouth bass (Photo by Gino Collela)*



*Fisheries Biologist Tim Wilson with 19" Shenango River walleye (Photo by Gino Colella)*

Although walleye were not collected in great numbers during the survey, local anglers and PFBC law enforcement can attest to the seasonal quality of the Shenango River's walleye fishery, especially at the base of Shenango Dam. Anglers report catching and releasing substantial numbers of sub-legal walleye and the local Waterways Conservation Officer regularly checks anglers with legal walleye.

Anglers report catching tiger muskellunge, however, we did not observe or capture any during our survey. We will continue to evaluate the tiger muskellunge stocking program and consider what options are available to provide the best management of this species in the future.

The river has few riffles and is dominated by long, slow pools with muddy banks and an abundance of fallen trees. A majority of the game fish we collected were located in association with rocky or woody cover associated with current. Woody debris in areas with slow or no current usually held panfish, but anglers seeking smallmouth bass and walleye should target the occasional areas with rocks and woody debris associated with current.

Access to the river can be difficult. Water craft can launch from the PFBC boat launch located in West Middlesex Township and the PFBC is interested in finding other locations for public access. Otherwise, anglers and boaters need to obtain permission from riparian landowners for access to the river.

Kayakers and canoers should enjoy the Shenango River because of its relatively slow current speed and because of stable water levels due to the control of flow by Shenango Dam. Water levels readings can be obtained from the US Geological Survey website ([USGS Real-Time Flow Data](#)). The river flows through two urban areas; Sharpsville/Sharon and New Castle, but is surprisingly wild and undeveloped between these two cities.

All boaters should be aware of several hazards. Two low-head water supply dams are present near the city of Sharon. There is a lot of large woody debris within the water course and 'strainers' (woody debris pile-ups that span the entire river width) are present sporadically over the length of the river. This woody debris provides good fish habitat but can also be dangerous to those who aren't experienced with boating around these types of obstacles.

Thanks go out to WCOs Joe Morris (Lawrence County) and Jeff Giardina (Mercer County) for their assistance with our survey and to local angler Gino Collela for the pictures used in this report.

***Fisheries Management Area 1***