

Riverbend Park Fishing Report for May 7, 2021

The spring fishing season for smallmouth bass on the upper Potomac River was fruitful as the larger class of fish are active in the dynamic river system. There are also signs of smaller younger fish returning.

Previous years of seasonal flooding had contributed to a disruptive spawn cycle in the spring and potential displacement of some minnow, feeder fishing and predatory fish populations during the summer months.



With the flooding, some of the bottom river sediment and gravel was pushed around, disrupting the river bed and eroding away many small areas of larger islands. This also has reduced the presence of some of the aquatic vegetation, which is a key habitat and feeding area for crayfish, minnows, sunfish, bluegill, catfish and bass. No major flooding events occurred during the spawn cycle this season, however, there were two minor quick flooding events that did occur from rainfall. The flow levels had been lower to average in the winter and spring, which created very clear water conditions at times.

Anglers fishing on the water had more mobility to target areas during the spawn season. Healthy-looking smallmouth bass were caught in the 14- to 20-inch range, many 16 to 18 inches.

The smallmouth bass have entered post spawn mode and can be found in various river locations. This past week, fish were found behind mid-river eddies, close to structure and deeper in the pools. The current seems where aeration and prey may be, and there is slack water on ledges and adjacent to islands.

Water temperatures are between upper 60s and lower 70s, with increased sunlight and rain patterns. River levels at the Riverbend gauge have been between 2 and 2.7 feet, with more abundant rain this week. Water color is darker green to light brown, but can change quickly after rain events and as the river falls quickly.

Aquatic plants are starting to appear in slack water and in the current. Anglers may use cray fish or insect presentations on the bottom. Faster moving minnow or smaller fish, hard or soft baits in the slack water, over current ledges or at eddy lines will create an opportunity for reaction strikes.

Insects have been active on the surface water. Small top water baits should be attractive in the next few weeks, as the water quickly warms.

Brood X of cicadas should provide a special experience to target smallmouth as the river levels drop and slower water can be found.

Panfish activity should be resuming in the next few weeks from the shoreline or by boat. Catfish have been active throughout the river, too. Check your weather reports and water conditions/levels daily before you get to the water. Riverbend Park Boat ramp gauge reads about -1.7 feet below Little Falls/Brookmont Dam Gauge, which is about 12 miles downstream of Riverbend Park.

Please access fishing areas from the trail at Riverbend Park and Scott's Run Nature Preserve, and take home or dispose of waste properly. Always wear your personal flotation device while boating or near the water. Wading and swimming in the Potomac River and other bodies of water in Fairfax County is prohibited. Boat rentals at Riverbend Park will begin on May 27, opening Thursday to Sunday and holidays until early fall.

Fishing programs are listed through Parktakes Online (<https://fairfax.usedirect.com/FairfaxFCPAWeb/ACTIVITIES/Search.aspx>).