



Fishing the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna Lakes

Significant water quality improvement, especially in the Conemaugh is evident by no longer viewing the "orange river" that once flowed past Saltsburg. Today, the point where the Conemaugh River and Loyalhanna Creek converge to form the Kiskimintas River provides canoeists and anglers with fine recreational opportunities. Drastic improvements are linked to acid mine drainage clean-up, the annual Loyalhanna Clean-Up Day, and local watershed clean-up efforts. Fishing highlights in recent months include striped bass caught in the Conemaugh River Lake, a twenty-six inch rainbow trout caught in the Loyalhanna Dam outflow, and angler recollections of northern pike and tiger musky battles. Just recently, an angler landed a forty-three inch musky at the Bush Recreation Area, using a shiner as bait.

The Reel Report serves to provide background information on fish species found in Conemaugh and Loyalhanna, provide

tips for anglers on where to have success, and to provide a record of achievement... the fishing trophy gallery. Boaters should remember Loyalhanna Lake is unlimited horsepower, while Conemaugh River Lake is for carry-in and electric motors ONLY! Disabled fishermen are able to obtain outflow fishing access permits by stopping by the project offices. At Conemaugh, the US Army Corps of Engineers permit disabled fisherman to access the Bow Ridge boat launch. Fishermen are reminded to park in designated areas at all times. Inquiries can be addressed to the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna project offices.

The following fish illustrations and segments of species information have been borrowed from the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Fishes Online, and are from "Pennsylvania Fishes," by Linda Steiner. Illustrations are the works of Commission artist Ted Walke.



Northern Pike:

A Member of the pike family, which also includes pickerel and musky. Pike spawn in early spring, earlier than the musky, and as a result young pike occasionally prey upon musky fingerlings. The Northern Pike is more prevalent in the Conemaugh- Kiski River. Young pike make a quick transition from invertebrates to preying upon fish of all kinds in a couple of weeks. These fish have an extremely large appetite, and prey upon their food by lying motionless before striking. They tend to lurk in shadowy, deep pools with adequate rock cover.

Angler's Tip:

The bait selection tip for landing a pike in the Conemaugh-Kiski River is to use four to ten inch minnows/ shiners. Also, pike prefer a rocky type bottom, which makes the Conemaugh-Kiski River canoe float an excellent fishing adventure. Pike are also found in the lake, but the hot tip for shoreline action on the Conemaugh is to follow the dam site fishing trail down to the outflow tail water. Another excellent suggestion is to float the Conemaugh tail water by canoe, accessing the dam site's outflow canoe launch. Pike fishing is also highly recommended in two spots on the Kiski River, where Blackleggs Creek and Roaring Run flow into the Kiski River.



Musky/ Tiger Musky:

While Conemaugh seems to yield more pike than musky, Loyalhanna Lake is filled with both the musky and tiger musky species. Musky are a member of the pike family, spawn in the spring time, unfortunately after their always hungry and unfriendly relative, the northern pike. Musky are some of the fastest growing fish, with the Pennsylvania state record being fifty-four pounds and four ounces. The hybrid tiger musky is



Angler's Tip:

The hotspots for musky at Loyalhanna are the outflow area, and large pool in boulder-rock type settings about fifty yards down from the outflow area. Here the depth levels vary, allowing for musky access shallow waters for feeding. Anglers have an excellent chance of battling a musky in the lake, where fishermen are able to make use of the Bush Recreation Area boat launch. Hot spots on the lake include taking the boat

distinguishable from the musky because of its exotic stripes, and tendency to be of a stockier build. Tigers are result of natural breeding between musky and northern pike. These hybrids are sterile. Both musky and tiger musky prey upon other fish, including yellow perch, smaller trout, and small bass. A musky's appetite is so large that it pursues fish that are up to one fourth of its size. Typically, deeper pools are preferred by musky, but in the summer time they can also be landed in shallower waters.



Illustration by Ted Walker

Smallmouth/ Largemouth Bass:

Ironically, largemouth and smallmouth bass also vary as musky and pike do when it comes to habitation of Conemaugh and Loyalhanna. Typically, largemouth bass are found in the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna Lakes, while smallmouth bass have established a strong presence in the Conemaugh River Lake. Aside from trout, bass are the most popular sport fish in the eastern United States. Loyalhanna is a targeted hotspot for bass anglers, as tournaments are consistently held by bass clubs. Both bass species are predators and seek smaller fish, frogs, and crayfish for food. A warm water fish, bass are well-established in both the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna. Excellent spots for landing a largemouth include places not exceeding twenty- five feet in depth, where there are abundant logs and tree stumps, which provide excellent cover for bass. Smallmouth bass prefer pools of greater depth, and prefer a faster flowing current. Smallmouth and largemouth bass generally run from nine to eighteen inches, but always be prepared for hooking a lunker, which can exceed five pounds in weight.

up near the dam site to challenge large bottom feeders, trolling the shallow headwater entrance for musky that roam shallow depths for feeding purposes. If trolling, be sure to stay in the channel (twenty yards out from shoreline) because the headwaters have developed into more of a canoe/ small fishing boat area. Recommended uses for musky are jigs and large minnows/ shiners. If a musky follows in your lure, but does not bite, do not give up hope. Options are changing the lure and trying again, or using the same lure, but reeling it by the musky at a different pace.



Illustration by Ted Walker

Angler's Tip:

The best bet for catching a largemouth is to work stumps and logs near shore in the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna Lakes. A canoe launch at the Blairsville Recreation Area provides access to the Conemaugh backwaters, while the Bush Recreation Area boat launch is provided for anglers at Loyalhanna. Effective strategies include using attractive jigs, plugs, night crawlers, and crayfish. Hotspots for largemouth bass at Loyalhanna are the spacious cove, where Serviceberry Run converges with the lake and the abundant inlets of the headwater. At Conemaugh, an angler can not go wrong, the Blairsville Recreation Area provides anglers with lake canoe access, while the dam site canoe outflow launch provides anglers with the opportunity to float the Conemaugh River as it journeys to Saltsburg. The Conemaugh River is developing into an outstanding smallmouth river for anglers. Disabled anglers are encouraged to use the boat launch area at Bow Ridge.



Illustration by Ted Walker

Brown/ Tiger/ Rainbow Trout:

The brown trout makes its way down both the Loyalhanna and Conemaugh most likely from excellent trout fishing feeder headwater streams in the Ligonier and Johnstown vicinities, when high water occurs. The brown trout, like all trout, require an active insect presence for survival. Also, trout in general are coldwater fish, but brown and tiger trout are able to tolerate warmer water temperatures, where as the brook trout cannot. Brown trout are early morning and late evening feeders that hit hard, and are the most aggressive of western Pennsylvania trout species. The brown trout typically caught in either lake exceeds fourteen inches in length. Smaller trout that make their way down into the lake have the risk of becoming prey for predatory fish such as musky and northern pike. Tiger trout, a hybrid like the tiger musky, have been caught on a more consistent basis in both lakes. Tiger trout are also sterile, with no reproductive capabilities and possess a quicker growth

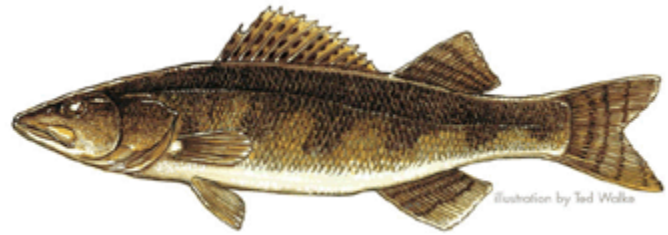
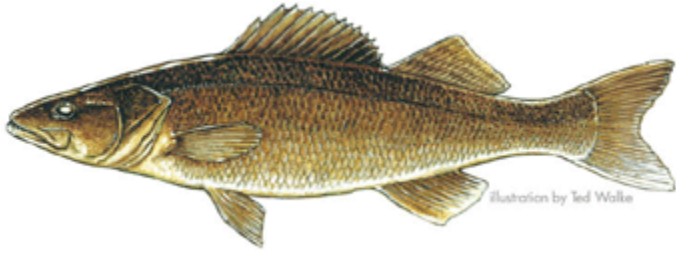


Illustration by Ted Walker

Angler's Tip:

This year, trout fishing success has been more prevalent than in years past. At Conemaugh, the best bet for landing a nice-sized trout is to follow the dam site fishing trail to the dam sites fast- paced tail water areas. Here, the fast- paced waters and rocky bottom provide a fair chance for anglers to land a trout. Fresh water shrimp discovered in the outflow serve as proof of the dramatic water quality improvements. At Loyalhanna, trout have been caught at the Serviceberry Run Cove, where a small stream merges into the lake. Another trout hotspot on the Loyalhanna Lake is the Bush Recreation Area shoreline. Also, try the Kiski River, where Blackleggs Creek and Roaring Run flow into the river. Large Brown and Rainbow Trout have been reportedly caught there on a consistent basis. Success comes with the use of live bait such as red worms, nightcrawlers, maggots, milworms, and attractive lures such as cp swings and rooster tails.

rate. Brown and Rainbow trout spawn in the gravel bottoms of feeder streams during October and November. A majority of trout in western



Walleye/ Saugeer/ saugeye:

Walleye fishing at Conemaugh and Loyalhanna is improving, and current majorities of the walleye being caught are between nine and fourteen inches. However, there are some occasional trophies, such as the twenty- six inch walleye landed from the Loyalhanna outflow on a night crawler last spring in hours past sunset. Walleye spawn in the early spring, when the snow and ice is still melting off the steep Conemaugh River and Loyalhanna Creek hillsides. They prefer gravel and sandy bottoms for doing so. Walleye are distinguishable from the saugeye (a hybrid between the sauger and walleye) because walleye have a whitish tint on their eyes. The tint reflects light during night time. Another unique characteristic of the walleye is that they do everything together in schools. Chances are, when an angler lands one walleye, there are many more in the immediate vicinity. Another unique characteristic of the walleye is that they roam all over the lake and river, not committing to a particular area. Saugeye are also found in both lakes, and have many of the same characteristics as the walleye.

Angler's Tip:

Walleye, sauger, and saugeye are sought after by anglers, especially in the spring and early summer. The best bet for landing a walleye is to try the outflow areas below the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna Dams. Walleye, a predatory fish, feed on other fish, frogs, crayfish, and insects. The best choices for bait include jigs, night crawlers, and minnows.



Additional species found in the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna include Rock Bass, Carp, the Garr, drum fish, Black Crappie, Channel Catfish, and Sheep head.

- Anglers at Conemaugh and Loyalhanna are expected to follow all Pennsylvania State Fish and Boat Commission Rules and Regulations. Come out, have fun, be considerate of others, and know that you can make a difference in future water quality improvement by picking up any litter that you could happen to come across during your fishing adventure. Remember, "Tomorrow's potential is achieved by today's effort."
- For your photo addition to the Conemaugh and Loyalhanna Trophy Gallery, please send your photo and catch information to:

**Loyalhanna Lake
Attn: The Reel Report: Fishing Photo
440 Loyalhanna Dam Rd.
Saltsburg, PA 15681**