

fishing in

STORY AND PHOTOS BY TOM HUGGLER

Gotta love a glacier. The last mile-high phalanx of ice to visit Michigan left an amazing network of inland lakes, rivers and four of the five Great Lakes. The final ice sheet, which melted some 10,000 years ago, was especially kind to Southeast Michigan, gifting some 1,500 lakes to Oakland County alone, more than any other county in the state. It helped shape the River Raisin and the Huron and Clinton rivers; it crafted present-day Lakes Huron, Erie and St. Clair; and it provided for those busy connecting corridors — the St. Clair and Detroit rivers.



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Fishing guide Gerry Gostenik
(greatlakesbassfishing.com) of
Dearborn helps Lucy Gray of
Flint catch a big smallmouth
bass on Lake Erie.



Clockwise from top:

Fishing guide Don Miller of Saline nets a muskie on Lake St. Clair.

Captain Don Miller successfully guides his client to a trophy muskellunge from Lake St. Clair.

The Huron River produces walleyes, smallmouth bass, rock bass and northern pike, like this five pounder.

Joe Zikewich of Lake Orion catches a largemouth bass from Indianwood Lake.

WHERE THERE'S WATER ...

With so much water, the fishing must be good, right? Wrong! The fishing is tremendous. It is no surprise that Southeast Michigan is home to more than 400,000 licensed anglers, and thousands more live in Ontario and Ohio. People come from all over the country — indeed the world — to fish this region. The Detroit River and Lake Erie serve up some of the hottest smallmouth bass and walleye fishing in North America. Lake St. Clair is home to the world's best muskellunge fishing — toothy, pike-like fish that average 20 pounds and can tip the scales at 50 pounds or more. Steelhead (lake-run rainbow trout) migrate into the Clinton and Huron rivers, along with occasional salmon. Many of the inland lakes teem with panfish, largemouth bass and northern pike.

If it has fins and lives in fresh water, you can likely catch it (and probably eat it safely) in Southeast Michigan. The area is well served by marinas, bait and tackle shops, licensed fishing guides, public boat launches and even public areas (including docks that are handicap-accessible) for fishing from shore. With such a plethora of fish-rich angling opportunities, where does one begin?

LURE OF THE GREAT LAKES

Years ago, I interviewed a Japanese auto executive who packed his favorite fishing rod whenever he visited the Motor City. His favorite species was yellow perch because they were so plentiful and so good to eat, and his quest took him to Luna Pier on Lake Erie, Lakeport on Lake Huron and throughout Lake St. Clair in both American and Canadian waters. He always hired a fishing guide, good advice for first-timers on the Great Lakes because of their sheer size and the skills and experience required for safe boating in rough water. The state licenses the professional guides and the U.S. Coast Guard certifies them and regularly inspects their boats.

The big lakes and their connecting rivers are dynamic zones for more than 60 kinds of fish, many of which migrate for food or to spawn. For this reason, most guides specialize in one species or another. For example, fishing for muskellunge (or "muskie") demands specialized tackle and fishing methods. The better captains are those who fish every day during the summer and fall because they monitor fish movements and the precise tactics for catching them.

Besides perch and muskie, the specialty guides target walleye (St. Clair and Detroit rivers and Lake Erie), northern pike (Lake St. Clair), largemouth bass (Lake St. Clair), smallmouth bass (Detroit River and Lake Erie), white bass (Detroit River) and steelhead (Clinton and Huron rivers).

Fishing for Details: Contacts and Information

- Detroit Convention & Visitors Bureau: 800-DETROIT, visitdetroit.com
- Michigan Charter Boat Association: 800-622-2971, michigancharterboats.com
- Michigan Family Fish Consumption Guide: 800-648-6942, michigan.gov/fishandgameadvisory
- Lakeside Fishing Shop in St. Clair Shores: 586-777-7003, lakesidefishing.com
- Michigan Dept. Natural Resources/Environment
 - Lansing Fisheries Division: 517-373-1280, michigan.gov/dnr
 - Southfield Office: 248-359-9040
 - Weekly Fishing Report: 517-373-0908
- Jeff's Bait & Tackle in Monroe on Lake Erie: 734-289-4901
- KD Outdoors in Waterford: 248-666-7799



If you own a safe boat (minimum 20 feet long with at least a 40 hp engine), you can venture on your own. More than 75 launch facilities, for example, await anglers along both sides of the Detroit River. Shore fishing is available from boardwalks at city parks.

THREE'S A CHARM

Three key rivers with three different personalities offer great inland fishing opportunities. The 130-mile-long **Huron River** meanders through several metroparks in Oakland, Livingston and Washtenaw counties before emptying into Lake Erie at Flat Rock. In many places you can wade, canoe or fish from shore. The State of Michigan stocks the river with brown and rainbow trout in the Proud Lake State Recreation Area, off Wixom Road east of Milford. Good walleye fishing shapes up below

Kent Lake, and the Delhi Rapids area upstream from Ann Arbor is famous for smallmouth and rock bass. Flat Rock Dam is popular with panfish anglers in summer and steelheaders in fall.

The **Clinton River** comprises three main tributaries (Main Stream, Middle Branch and North Branch) that originate respectively in Macomb, Lapeer and Oakland counties before joining just west of Mt. Clemens to flow about five miles before ending at Lake St. Clair. Upper stretches of the Main Stream and North Branch offer good fishing for rock bass, smallmouth bass, northern pike and walleye. The Yates Dam area at Dequindre Road, between Rochester and Utica, is a good spot for steelhead. There is much public land in this stretch, which is also popular with canoeing fishermen. The Paint Creek tributary between Lake >>

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Howell's Kim Stricker, a professional bass angler and host of the Hook-N-Look TV show, catches a Lake St. Clair smallmouth.

More than 300 years ago, the founder of Detroit, a French explorer named Cadillac, noted the abundance and diversity of fish. Were Cadillac to visit the region today, he would file the same report.

>>> Orion and Rochester is the best trout stream in Southeast Michigan, thanks to work by Trout Unlimited and state releases of hatchery-reared brown trout.

The **River Raisin** rises from a network of lakes in Lenawee County. Upstream from Tecumseh, the North Branch yields smallmouths, northern pike and panfish to wading anglers and those with canoes. The South Branch, which flows through Adrian before collecting the North Branch, and the middle section between Tecumseh and Dundee, provides some decent fishing. In particular, though, the lower river, from Dundee to Monroe (where it enters Lake Erie) supports a fine smallmouth fishery and also offers walleye.

A LUNKER IN EVERY LAKE

Although many of the area lakes are either small and/or privately owned, opportunities abound on larger lakes with public access for yellow perch, bluegill, pumpkinseed sunfish, black crappie, northern pike, largemouth and smallmouth bass and — in some cases — channel catfish, walleye and even trout. Many yield fish large enough to qualify for the state Department of Natural Resources Master Angler Award Program. Some of the top locations, with good to excellent fishing for species mentioned, appear on the right. 🎣

Where's the catch?

LIVINGSTON COUNTY

- Chemung Lake** (310 acres): Bluegill, largemouth and crappie. Access on the east end off Hughes Road.
- Bishop Lake** (119 acres): Pike, sunfish, bluegill and largemouth. Access off Rolison Road at the south end of the lake's east basin.

MACOMB COUNTY

- Stoney Creek Lake** (489 acres): Walleye, crappie, catfish, largemouth, pike and bluegill. Access within the Huron-Clinton Metropark on the southeast side.

OAKLAND COUNTY

- Cass Lake** (1,280 acres): Largemouth, smallmouth, walleye, pike and bluegill. Public launch on the north side at Dodge No. 4 State Park.
- Kent Lake** (1,000 acres): Walleye, northern pike and largemouth bass. Access within Kensington Metropark. T-shaped piers on the west side are handicap-accessible, and boat rentals are available.
- Oakland Lake** (735 acres): Largemouth bass, bluegill, crappie and pike. Access on the southwest end off Sashabaw Road.
- Lakeville Lake** (460 acres): Largemouth, bluegill, crappie, perch and pike. Access on the southeast side off Lakeville Road.
- Maceday Lake** (419 acres): Rainbow trout, lake trout, pike, bluegill and largemouth. Access at the south end off Williams Lake Road.
- Pontiac Lake** (585 acres): Largemouth and channel catfish. A fishing pier with handicap access is available. Access on the southeast side north of M-59 and west of Williams Lake Road.
- Union Lake** (465 acres): Pike, bluegill, crappie and largemouth. Access on the northwest side off Union Lake Road.
- White Lake** (540 acres): Largemouth and bluegill. Access on the southwest side off Duck Lake Road.

WASHTENAW COUNTY

- Big Portage Lake** (644 acres): Walleye, largemouth, smallmouth, bluegill and crappie. South-end access on the outflowing Huron River.
- Ford Lake** (975 acres): Bluegill, crappie, largemouth, catfish, walleye. Access on the south side off Huron River Drive.
- Silver Lake** (204 acres): Bluegill, largemouth, pike, sunfish. Access the fishing pier on the southeast side off Dexter Townhall Road. Small boats may be carried in to the public park on the southwest side (no developed launch site).

WAYNE COUNTY

- Belleville Lake** (1,270 acres): Crappie, largemouth, bluegill and walleye. Access on the south side off Huron River Drive.