

North Shore Steelhead Report

A North Shore Steelhead Association Publication
Volume 10 - Spring 2012

Early Season Steelhead

By Tom Armstrong



Here in Northwestern Ontario at this time of year, we would typically expect to be burdened by mounds of snow, with visions of snow shovelling, or making that one last trip out on the ice, and enduring the usual weeks and weeks of cold sloppy weather.

As it looks now, we are weeks ahead of schedule, and find ourselves packing away those shovels and the ice fishing gear, and for those anxious steelhead anglers, watching and waiting for that open water to flow.

Typically, anglers are anxiously awaiting the end of March or early April for those first rivers to crack, but this year anglers are getting early opportunities to run their float, or make a drift through open water on their favourite river.

With this early opened water, come different challenges for anglers. Although rivers are open and flowing, this certainly doesn't mean they will have fish running through them already. There will undoubtedly be fish holed up in some sections of some rivers; many being fish that have made their way into river systems in last fall.

There are some rivers that are typically good rivers to fish early in the spring, but these are generally better when water levels in the fall were high which enabled larger numbers of fish move into the river system and overwinter in the river. With water levels like they were this past fall, this is likely not the case, and although there are

undoubtedly fish in these river systems, they are likely not present in any great numbers.

When looking at fishing early in the season, water temperatures play a key role in fish activity, and fishing success. With water temperatures in the mid to high 30's, and low 40's, fish activity is generally slower. Fish will be moving through rivers, but generally will be a lot more lethargic, and be found in slow moving waters, and not in any hurry to make their way upstream. As temperatures rise throughout the spring, or as the sun warms the water, fish activity will increase, and fish will become more aggressive, and more fish will move into, and through these river systems. With water temperatures in these lower reaches, tactics like slowly bottom bouncing a roe bag or yarn fly through runs can be far more productive than a fast drift under a float, or drifting a fly past a fish; Slow drifts give fish more time to see your offering, and gives them a chance to get at it without a great deal of movement or effort, something they are not likely to do until water temperatures and/or levels rise, or floating your offering through a slow moving, deep pool that is likely holding fish, giving these somewhat lethargic fish a chance to take the bait.

Another factor to consider in a year like this is shaping up to be, is looking at fishing during low water conditions. Likely there will be many go to areas where anglers usually find fish that just will not hold fish, due to low water levels.

During low water years, keying in on different shelter and structure can help you find fish; looking for both physical structure like fish holding behind boulders, under overhanging trees, or below undercut banks, and structure within the river like deep pools, deep tailouts, or deeper stretches of turbulent water for fish to seek cover in.

For float fisherman, you become limited on the water you can fish, with water levels far lower than usual, it becomes more difficult to find places to run a float through, and these anglers may need to consider changing tactics, whether bringing along a rig for bottom bouncing, or packing the fly

rod along for those situations when the float rod won't do it.

When water levels drop, and water remains cold and clear, downsizing and using smaller gear, with slower presentations can be key, as fish will be less active. Using fluorocarbon, clear floats, and lighter weights can all help when looking at low, clear water conditions. Of course, when rivers rise due to rain or major melting, adjust accordingly.

Although it may not be as productive to get out during these first stages of the season, it's hard to beat spending a day on the river, and after a long cold winter, there's nothing like that first drift in your "go to" hole on your favourite piece of water. Even if fishing is less productive, early season can be a scouting mission for later in the season, giving you an opportunity to learn runs, holding areas, and figure out where fish will be as more make their way into the system. Remember to keep track of where you catch, hook or see fish, as you are likely to find fish there again throughout the season.

So as we watch the ice and snow disappear, take advantage of this early opportunity to spend some time on a river, and make the most of this early spring. Just this week, the beginning of March, I have already heard reports of anglers catching steelhead in local rivers.

Our very own Kevin Wilson with a BC steelhead



Inside This Issue

Early Season Steelhead	1
Gone in a Flash	2
McIntyre River Rainbow Trout Population Study after 4 years	3
Fisherman's Park A Work in Progress	3
Portage Creek Steelhead	4
Boulevard Lake Water Management Plan Update	4



NORTH SHORE
Steelhead
ASSOCIATION