








4940 Canal Road, NW
Washington, DC 20007
202-244-0461

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Report from Fletcher's Cove - April 28, 2010

April has been a kind month to anglers at Fletcher's Cove. On many days, shad fishing was "as good as it gets." Buckets and baskets of white perch have been hoisted onto our dock, headed for the frying pan. Catfish as big and strong as bulldogs were boated in the past three weeks. A few snakeheads, caught right in the cove, added spice to our Potomac River stew.

A bit of a lull has set in and catches are spotty at the moment. That's normal, as nature hedges its bets and spreads the runs of fish over a long period of time to insure some prime spawning conditions for each species. Perch will run until mid May and the shad run, while less consistently good from day to day, will continue until early June.

For those wondering about stripers, yes, some large rockfish have been caught. Remember though, striped bass are not in season until May 16th in D.C. waters. You should release (as quickly and with as little handling as possible) any striper caught before they are in season. After the 16th of May, two fish over 18 inches can be kept per angler, with only one of the two measuring over 28 inches. Fishing regulations are like taxes, they get more complicated each year!

The *Jim Range National Casting Call*, held this past Thursday and Saturday, was an unqualified success. Conditions were great for fishing and the shad were most co-operative. On Saturday the 24th, many enthusiastic youngsters lined the C&O Canal, rods in hands, hoping their bobbers would disappear below the water's surface. Thanks to the National Park Service and all the volunteers who helped with this event.

Sad news found its way to The Cove this week. Billy Collins, a beloved Fletcher's "old-timer" and fisherman extraordinaire passed away early Monday morning. Billy was a fixture at Fletcher's Boat House way back to the 1960's. Along with Joe Fletcher, "BC" (as he was affectionately known) was one of the best white perch anglers ever. If you don't think there is skill and finesse in perch fishing, well, you should have sat next to Billy while he loaded the boat with jumbos. I have, and there is something to it that just can't be learned.

When Billy would show up for the early spring perch run, folks would say "the hat is back," referring to his trademark assortment of baseball caps covering his prematurely balding head. That shiny head was the source of many a joke by BC. He would remove his hat, run his hand over his skull and pronounce "I've got a lot of face to wash." Billy had the uncanny ability to throw his voice, and (always in a lighthearted manner) tricked many people into turning circles to see who was calling to them. Billy had us Fletchers folks bent over with laughter so many times.

Dickie Tehaan was Billy's most frequent fishing partner and his dear friend. They spent countless hours on the water together. If those guys didn't catch-em, they were not biting. Dick and Bill were the gold-standard in both friendship and fishing.

Billy's wife Getty was his anchor on this earth and I know that through the sadness she is comforted in her knowledge that he is in a more peaceful place with a fellow fisher. Our condolences also to Billy Jr. and daughter Cindy, whose happy faces would light-up the boathouse when BC would take them fishing.



Virginia, the youngest and cutest angler at the "Jim Range National Casting Call". Her Papa Dan, of Orvis at Clarendon, is the instructor. (photo by Dan Ward)



Dick Tehaan, Billy Collins (center), and Frankie Holt, Fall, 1994. A light and loving moment on the water at Fletcher's.

To the extended Collins Family... we share your sadness, yet our memories of Billy make us smile.

Dan



A 50 pound blue cat caught at Fletcher's, April 27
Photo sent by Andrew Marfull

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