



   

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

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Report from Fletcher's Cove, July 28, 2008





A couple decades hence, 2008 may be looked upon as the beginning of the "snakehead era" at Fletcher's Cove. Or maybe not. Who knows? Certainly there is much wonderment and speculation among fishermen and biologists regarding our new piscatorial partner, the snakehead. From my informal survey, about one-third of the people I've talked to are excited and welcome something new on the scene. Another third are seriously fearful of what the new kid on the block might do. And the middle third are ambivalent.

But one thing I'm sure of... the "demon-fish" is here to stay. And I have to laugh when the snakehead is fearfully described as "an invasive species." Little known fact #1... The small mouth bass, prized fish of the upper Potomac basin, was accidentally introduced into the river when a train carrying a tanker car of the fish de-railed at a river crossing. Slightly more well known fact #2... The walleyed pike, a game fish cherished by anglers, is a non-native species and has been widely introduced into the Potomac by the Maryland DNR since the early 1980's. While not dismissing the change that the snakehead could bring to the Potomac basin, I think the balance of nature has been a bit altered already! So... let's look on the bright side, hope for the best, cross our fingers, whatever. I'm not advocating 'head-in-the-sand' behavior, but the gloom-and-doom crowd might want to expend their energies on other issues, like bringing oysters back to the Bay or getting those hidden sanitary and storm sewers separated. If the herring, white perch, menhaden and crabs are not rescued, there won't be a base to the food pyramid for the entire tidal Chesapeake Bay system. So let's have some fun catching those snakeheads and let the chips fall where they may.

Quite a few snakeheads have been caught around Fletcher's Cove this season. At first, I doubted the reports. In the world of fish tales, seeing is believing. People REALLY get fish species confused. But too many reports from reliable folks have come in to deny the new reality. Snakeheads have come to Fletcher's. Not so much that a pattern is established, but a few things seem to be holding true in the catches: they like fast water, big spinning lures, and I've yet to hear of one caught in the very deep parts of the river. So take that as you may. Suffice it to say, I've ordered some big buzz baits and spinners for sale at our store!

On one quiet Sunday morning in June, an angler whose name we did not get, marched up to the store with a 28 inch snakehead caught on a large spinner. Let's just say he hooked it within a stones throw of the boathouse. Finally, we had a photo to go with all the stories. You can examine the evidence above. Snakeheads are supposed to be good to eat. And as of this time, there are no regulations regarding size or possession. The "authorities" initially encouraged all anglers to keep any snakehead they caught on the theory that we might eradicate them. I think the theory has been eradicated instead. So, for now, do what your conscience or taste-buds tell you if you catch our new friend. I'm sure that regs will be coming downstream in a year or two.

The summer fishing doldrums have been broken a few times by artful anglers. George Furnett, our regular senior fishing friend with the spirit and enthusiasm of a kid-in-a-candy-store, has pulled up many a striper and walleye, and winched in a few monster cats, to boot. Mike Alper, angler-par-extraordinaire, had a beauty of a walleye on his last trip. (Witness the photo) And Alex and Derek Binsted have regularly targeted the largemouth, small mouth and striped bass they both know so well. In the photos, Alex is holding a beauty of a bass and a keeper sized striper, both caught on tubes, July 24th.

If you journey to Fletcher's in the next month or so, take a moment out to stop and admire Ray's famous zinnia patch, located in front of our store and bike shed. He has a green thumb to be sure! Now if I could just get him to share some of those tomatoes...

That's all for now. Thanks for reading... see you at the cove.

Dan

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