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Report from Fletcher's Cove - April 15, 2011

The fishing season at Fletcher's Cove is just entering "prime time." All the spring species that make runs up the Potomac, as well as the resident fish, are here at once. In the past two weeks many hickory shad, stripers, white perch and catfish have been caught by generally happy anglers. American shad are just showing up of late and their run should last well into May. If you haven't fished yet you've missed some good action, but there will be more waves of fish in the coming weeks.

All the fish of a particular species do not come at once. Rather, there are many separate schools, each comprising a "run" for that group. Nature has ordered it so that each group responds to slightly different timing as it relates to water temperature, angle of the sun and the fishes' own internal clock. Thus, the species is protected from a catastrophic loss due to an extreme event such as a major flood, an imbalance in predators or a dramatic change in environmental conditions.

The middle of a seasonal run is usually when a traffic jam of fish can be seen. For example, is herring usually are at their thickest in the Potomac at Fletcher's around May 1st. Hickory shad peak right about now, American shad later in the month and into May. Stripers increase in numbers but decrease in average size as their run progresses into June. My advice... if you like angling, fish when you can and forget trying to time things precisely. Timing fishing is harder than timing the stock market. Worried about the tides, the best lures and so on? Well, you can't catch anything if you're not on or by the water. Fish with your heart rather than your head and most likely you will have a satisfying experience.

Now the bad news. At the moment, the Potomac is experiencing a high water event, which will prevent us at Fletcher's from renting our fishing rowboats through the weekend of the 16th and 17th. If significant rain stays away from the watershed, we hope to be able to rent boats again some time after April 18th. This is the hope. You will have to call for specific information, as conditions change dramatically from day to day. On Monday, all our boats were out and most were having success with shad, perch and stripers. Now, just a few days later, you could not possibly fish in the main river at Fletcher's. There are limited shore fishing opportunities, however, so if you want to get out, please do, but be very careful around water's edge with such high flows!

I want to thank Mike Bailey and Alex Binsted for putting together the [shad identification photos](#). Much confusion exists among anglers over the three different types of shad and these photos should help clear that up. Remember, the American and Hickory come from the Atlantic and are members of the herring family. The gizzard shad are resident fresh water fish here year-round. For you shad anglers... don't despair the high water. There should be plenty of fish to come when the water drops.

Fletcher's has a good assortment of [shad](#) darts to add to your collection. We also are



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[Check out Dan's article on Fletcher's Cove in the March issue of *The Buzz*](#)
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"Our friend Katie, upstaging a beauty of a striper."
(photo by Mike Bailey)



"Meg Ward, proud of her Walker's Point hickory shad."
(photo by Dan Ward)



"Kenny Mendez battles a shad while fishing with Mike Bailey."
(photo by Dan Ward)

open for canoe and kayak rentals on the C & O Canal as well as bike rentals for the canal towpath and the Capital Crescent Trail. Come to our tackle shack for refreshments, basic fishing tackle, bait, and D.C. fishing permits.

Spring along the Potomac Basin is a magnificent thing to behold. The redbud, dogwood, yellow flowered ground cress and Virginia blue bells paint the landscape with colors of new life. The spring peeper tree frogs remind us that the winter slumber gives way to the rituals of creation. A nesting pair of Bald Eagles just downstream from Fletcher's range daily overhead, in search of a meal. I could go on and on, but treat yourself and get out for a day watching the greatest re-run under the sun. Budget battles be gone! Hooray for Mother Natures great balancing act. Welcome, Spring in Washington.

Dan



"Alex Binsted with an early season American shad."
(photo by Mike Bailey)

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