

Dirks: In the Delaware, shad can be had

Prime time is coming up in late April

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Gregg Kroner.

Posted: April 07, 2009 - 2:00 AM

No season should pass without mentioning the one body of water that offers the widest array of angling opportunities, the Delaware River.

Few Catskill rivers can match the diversity of fish as the Big D. Trout, shad, smallmouth bass, musky and even some striped bass converge to make the Delaware one of the best bets for all-season fishing.

To put some perspective on fishing the Big D, I asked Tony Ritter, who has guided on this river system for more than 10 years, to discuss the early trout and shad opportunities.

American shad are born in the Delaware River, spend three or four years in the Atlantic Ocean and return to the Big D, as it is popularly known, each spring. Ritter said the best time to catch these strong fighters in our region is from late April through June.

"The males, or bucks, average 2 to 4 pounds, and the roe shad will go up to 7 pounds," Ritter said. "Open-face spinning gear with 4- or 6-pound test line or fly tackle may be used. Lure selection should be shad darts, flutter spoons, spinners and weighted flashy streamers.

"When fishing for shad, watch your water temperature. When the water temperature gets to 55 to 65 degrees, it is prime time for shad on the main stem of the Delaware River. We target shad in the month of May into early June. We also look at the location, which is critical. Shad run in schools, and will hold in spots right before the tailout of any kind of rapids."

Ritter noted that it's critical to watch "the water temperature and find areas where the river pinches up or narrows because that's where you are going to find the shad. Also, don't be in a hurry to move to another spot. You'll have to stay at one spot for at least a half hour to 45 minutes. Once you hit one fish, chances are you'll be into three, four or five fish because these fish run in schools."

"The Upper Delaware River system also supports some of the best wild trout fisheries in the world. Early in the season, when the water may be high and off-color, spin fishermen using spoons or heavy spinners

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will have their day. The best time to target trout will be from late April through early July, and again from September through November."

Starting in mid-April, Ritter starts fishing the West Branch of the Delaware River for trout.

"The West Branch runs from the Cannonsville Reservoir down to Hancock, N.Y.," Ritter said. "Early in the season, the reservoir usually spills over the dam because we've had a lot of ice. You'll have thousands and thousands of alewives and sownbellies from the Cannonsville Reservoir that will spill right over and into the West Branch of the Delaware.

"If you are a spinning angler, you'll do very well using big Rapalas because those fish are hungry and will be chasing baitfish. If you are a fly fisherman, the time to be fishing big streamers will be in late April before the hatches really start going."

For information, check out Ritter's Web site at www.gonefishingguideservice.com.

On DirksOutdoors radio

World-renowned fly tyer Keith Fulsher and Catskill Fly Fishing Center CEO Jim Krul will discuss Fulsher's latest book, "Atlantic Salmon Fly Tyer." Listen in at 99.1-FM, 1110-AM or www.WTBQ.com from 7-8 a.m. Saturday.

David Dirks' outdoors column appears weekly. Contact him through his Web site, www.dirksoutdoors.com, or write P.O. Box 87, Westtown, NY 10998. An archive of his columns can be found at recordonline.com/outdoors.

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