

Catching fish in high, muddy water

BY PHILLIP GENTRY
FOR THE JOURNAL

The majority of anglers across the Upstate are looking forward to springtime fishing, while at the same time they're wondering when the rain is finally going to let up.

The above-average rainfall has made most area lakes total messes, with flooding, muddy water that looks more like tomato soup than water. Add in large quantities of washed-in debris, and that makes boating even more precarious.

Some anglers may opt to wait it out until normal fishing conditions return, but don't believe that high, muddy water from excessive runoff is a bad thing.

For fish — and that means a wide variety of species from black bass to crappie, bream, catfish and even striped bass — high, muddy water in the springtime is business as usual. But, if fishing in soupy waters throws you off your game, there are some suggestions on where to go and what to do.

Large inflows of water from rainfall increase water levels and current across the board. Higher water levels create more room for fish to feed, and their natural tendency is to move up and in closer to the shoreline. Fish love new water, and they will move up in it and get closer to the bank even if it's still several weeks away from spawning season.

When fish move in with new water, the next thing they look for is some good cover to hold on.

This is often in the form of hardwood trees, especially any hardwood that has tangles of vines or other heavy vegetation



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High, muddy water in the spring often triggers good fishing, if you know where to look.

adjacent to it.

Fish in flooded areas tend to suspend upward in the water column looking for food, so don't be surprised to find even catfish holding just a foot or two below the surface of newly flooded areas. Don't expect the bite to be very aggressive this time of year, as water temperatures — though considerably warmer from the runoff — won't be to springtime standards for a few weeks.

Now is the time to present your bait at a slower pace and give the fish plenty of time to find the bait.

Current and moving water signals feeding time to fish, so fish will be hungry. It's unlikely they will pass up an easy meal, but fish are still kind of sluggish recovering from winter patterns, and it takes them a while to find the bait because the visibility is so poor.

A good tip to help fish find your artificial bait is to use bright colors. The best lure colors will be pink, chartreuse, orange or anything with a bright glow finish that fish can

easily see in the murk.

Adding a spinner blade to your offering will also help fish find the bait because of the vibration of the blade in the water.

Live-bait fishermen should use active live baits or fresh-cut baits to tempt fish, as the smell will bring fish to the hook. Artificial bait fishermen would do well to apply scents to soft plastic baits.

The old adage is to load the boat up and go fishing any time you can, but the best days are often bright, sunny days a few days after rising water. The sun will warm muddy water up faster with the upper levels warming faster than the rest of the lake. Again, expect fish will be holding right beneath the surface.

You won't see those fish on the sonar graph — you just have to trust they're there. Get out there and go get them.

PHILLIP GENTRY is the host of the "Upstate Outdoors" broadcast from noon to 2 p.m. Saturdays on 106.3 WORD FM or online at 1063word.com. This week's guest will be Alison Rauch from Greer CPW.