

# On The Path For Big Fish

## Leaving the Runts Behind

For many anglers there is a progression in their attitude towards fishing. When they were young, most anglers were happy catching fish, any fish. It didn't matter if it was a bass or bluegill, and it didn't matter if it was big or small. As they get older, sometimes much older, the desire to mostly target larger fish can take hold. Many years ago, I found myself on the big fish path. For those looking to join the big fish chase, there are some things that can help one to succeed in getting more of these larger fish in the boat.

The most important suggestion is that you have to fish waters that routinely produce big fish. As much as I enjoy fishing many of the local waters, if I am interested in just going after larger fish, most waters will be bypassed for more productive locations. The reasons are simple, most fish in our waters end up in a frying pan before they make it to large status and most of our lakes do not have the right ingredients to produce numerous big fish.

If you are searching for bodies of water to start on, look for those with special regulations. These regulations protect fish from harvest, at least until they reach respectable size, and make it more likely that a few will slip past harvest orientated anglers to reach large proportions.



Beyond those waters, you should think about lakes or ponds that have restricted access or are difficult to get to. These waters are less likely to have been beat down by harvest. The only drawback is that since most of these waters are small, it doesn't take much harvest to drive down the size structure of the fishery. You may find a gem or you may find a lake full of runts.

The last set of recommended waters is those that get socked full of weeds. Heavy weed growth makes it difficult for anglers to get to the fish and also make it easier for the fish to get off when hooked. Those looking for big bass should not ignore these waters.

Devin holding a 46 inch muskie caught on Silver Lake

If you want to land big fish, use quality equipment. It is possible to land a big fish on questionable equipment; however, if you want to repeatedly land big fish, you need to upgrade. You don't have to spend a fortune to find quality gear, but you shouldn't rely on a 20 dollar rod and reel combo either.

Speaking of reels, you should learn to use a baitcasting reel. It is true that spinning reels are the equipment of choice for many presentations. However, if you are going to be throwing heavier baits with thicker line, baitcasters are often a better choice due to their line handling capabilities and traditionally better drag systems.

When it comes to your fishing line, you should give serious consideration to leaving everything below eight pound test at home. Unless you are fishing gin clear water (like Geneva Lake), line diameter does not impact the bite as much as anglers think. Some will disagree with that previous statement, but unquestionably, light line is a huge liability when trying to pull large fish out of the weeds, stump fields or snag filled rivers.

If you still have doubts, take a look at what the professional bass tournament anglers use. These people often use monofilaments in excess of 14 pounds or braided lines rated over 20 pounds.

When in big fish mode, I commonly use 10 pound monofilament and 20 pound superline on my spinning rods and 20 to 35 pound superline on my baitcasters. Muskie fishing, however, calls for braided lines of 50 to 100 pounds because of the use of big, heavy lures and the associated thick hooks.

Lastly, you need to modify your fishing tactics and your attitude. Big fish are not nearly as abundant as their smaller brethren and they often will not be in the same locations. This is especially true of species like northern pike where the big ones, big meaning pike over 34 inches, have different food and water temperature preferences than smaller pike.

Spend some time reading about where bigger fish prefer to hang out, what their preferred forage is and the presentations and tactics that exploit those preferences. Apply what you read and try to discover new tactics on your own.

You will also need to change your attitude about catching numbers of fish. Muskie anglers will fish all day for the chance at one nice fish; it's an attitude all big fish anglers should develop. Often the hunt for big fish may mean you catch less fish overall; however, when you do catch a big one, it is often worth the wait.

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