



June 2026 Newsletter

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THE BIG FEED!

THE SPAWN IS OVER AND THE BIG DOGS WANT TO EAT!



LouFly client Joe with a Big Middle Meramec Old Growth Smallie in late May 2026

by **Andy McEwen** on June 16th, 2026

Welcome to the third edition of the LouFly Guide Service newsletter! The feedback from our early spring issues has been incredible, and we can't thank you enough for your support. We've been spending every available hour on the water, but we're thrilled to step off the river for a moment to bring you this seasonal update. Whether you've been out crushing it with us or watching the river gauges anxiously from your desk, we're glad to

have you back in the loop. The momentum is officially building, and the incredible community growing around the Meramec Basin is exactly why we started this journey.

River Report: Conditions Across the Basin

We will always start the newsletter with current river conditions! As of June 16th, some water is low, some water is high. A few stretches of the middle and lower Meramec are still running a little high to fly fish effectively but should fall nicely over the next couple of days!

The Meramec at Cook Station is currently running at **48 cfs** with a gauge height of **2.34 ft.** While this is seasonally average flows for high in the system, the water is low and clear, and it will only get lower and clearer over the next few days. Don't be afraid to go fish it, just be stealthy to not spook the smallmouth!



The Meramec at Steelville is currently running at **440 cfs** with a gauge height of **1.93 ft.** This is a pretty standard flow for this time of year as rain keeps the river nice and steady. These are fun flows to target both smallmouth and trout!

Further downstream in Sullivan, we're seeing a discharge of **860 cfs** with a gauge height of **3.67 ft.** This is prime upper end flows! The Middle sections of the Meramec we really enjoy between 400cfs and 900cfs. The river is dropping quick, and the fishing is solid. Get out and chase them, it is clearing up real nice!



Huzzah Creek is in decent fishing shape right now, currently running at approximately **125 cfs** and a gauge height of **3.46 ft** near Steelville. These flows are on the lower side of what we prefer but are totally fishable and floatable. The creek is low right now and the fishing is technical. It will only get lower and clearer as the summer goes on. Fish small minnows and slow roll small poppers.

The Big River near Richwoods is currently running at approximately **299 cfs** and a gauge height of **2.56 ft.** This is prime flows on the Big to target smallies on the fly! Get out and check out a unique Meramec tributary!

NO MORE SPAWNING, JUST FEEDING!

We have been finding most of our fish over the past month in the Middle Meramec. This is early for us to be able to consistently fish the Middle Mac, which we could not be happier about. Typically, this time of year the Middle Meramec stays pretty flooded out. However, with rains isolated in the Middle and Lower stretches of the watershed, the upper portions have been pushing down clear water, leading to the middle river dropping quick when it gets hit with rain.

With June now well underway, the smallmouth bass have officially wrapped up their annual spawning cycle, and the river is entering an exciting new phase. This post spawn transition is a critical window for the health and future of our local waterways. Having spent weeks defending their beds, these fish are now exhausted and focused heavily on recovery and feeding.

During this sensitive period of recuperation, practicing ethical angling remains incredibly important. While the strict hands off spawning phase has passed, these fish are vulnerable as they regain their strength. We make it a priority to handle post spawn smallmouth with extra care, minimizing fight times and ensuring quick releases.

As they recover, their focus shifts entirely to food, making it an incredible time to target them on the fly. Rather than looking in the ultra-shallow spawning flats, focus your attention on the first major structural "bus stops" just outside those areas.

We have been having our best luck on streamers within a foot of the surface and big topwater poppers. Fish the structure and stay pounding the rocks and willows as this is where we have found most of our quality fish over the past month. These fish are aggressive during post spawn and will come up off the structure to eat a big streamer or meaty popper. Be ready, the fish have been eating hard and are attacking the fly in the blink of an eye. Don't lose focus this time of year!



The Magic of Post Spawn – Mean Aggressive Native Predators on the HUNT!

In mid-June, smallmouth behavior is dictated by the conclusion of the post spawn recovery period and the steady climb of summer water temperatures. With the spawning cycle entirely behind them, fish have completely vacated the quiet shallows and dispersed toward deeper, more oxygenated water. During this transition, smallmouth become highly aggressive and opportunistic feeders, moving away from their spawning flats to establish residency in their primary summer holds. You'll find them heavily utilizing structural transitions, such as deep current seams, rocky drop offs, and mid river boulders where the moving water naturally funnels food right to them. Driven by the need to fully recoup the massive energy lost during the spring, they are hyper reactive to movement and vibrations in the water column as they lock into their peak early summer feeding patterns.



Surface Tension: POPPERS ARE BACK!

With the steady heat of June firmly established and water temperatures climbing, topwater season is operating at peak volume, and the popper fishing has been nothing short of electric. We have found the most consistent success lately by shifting our strategy to match the early summer menu, dialing in on frog patterns and loud chartreuse poppers.

The frog patterns have been absolutely deadly along the shady, overhanging banks and shoreline structure where real frogs are active in the summer heat. Meanwhile, loud chartreuse poppers have been our absolute go to for cutting through the glare of bright June days and triggering violent reaction strikes from aggressive fish holding in the swifter current seams. That said, standard color lines are producing beautifully right now too! Traditional white poppers are consistently tricking fish keyed in on the silver flash of panicked baitfish, while bright yellow and high vis orange patterns are tearing it up during overcast periods and the magic evening hours. There is nothing quite like the heart stopping surface explosion of a native smallmouth completely committing to a topwater fly. Keeping a box stocked with a "froggy"



imitation alongside a steady rotation of fishy white, yellow, orange, and chartreuse ensures you're ready for exactly what the smallies are keyed in on right now.

Red Ribbon Trout Report

For those who prefer trout over smallies, the red ribbon section of the Upper Meramec is still a viable option for the trout enthusiast this time of year. The trout fishing has been decent over the past month with our biggest brown of the year coming in May! While we are finished guiding trout this season, the wade possibilities for the recreational fly fisher are endless. Cardiac Hill and Woodson Woods are great MDC trout access on the red ribbon this time of year. As the water warms, play the trout quickly and get them back as fast as possible. This is the best time of year to target Meramec trout on dry flies. Keep the hoppers and caddis patterns ready to go!



Looking Ahead: What to Expect in July

As we head into July, the river settles into its peak mid-summer pattern, and smallmouth behavior becomes strictly dictated by water temperature and oxygen levels. The predictability of early summer gives way to a distinct daily routine, with fish locking into their deep water sanctuaries and high velocity current seams.

To find success in July, focus on "heavy," well oxygenated water. Target the fastest riffles, deep ledge holes, and the highly shaded pockets behind mid river boulders where the water stays coolest. The blazing July sun kicks their metabolism into overdrive, but it also compresses their feeding windows. Look for explosive action during the low light hours of early morning, late evening, and on overcast days.

With aquatic vegetation now fully mature and baitfish schools thriving, smallmouth are laser focused on high energy prey like crawfish and fleeing minnows. It's a month of tactical fishing. Match the midday heat by throwing heavy deep running streamers, or bottom bouncing craws, but be ready with topwater patterns when the sun dips, offering some of the most thrilling, hard hitting surface strikes of the year.

Our Journey into the Missouri Smallmouth Alliance.

LouFly has exciting news to share on the conservation front: I have officially stepped into a new leadership role with the Missouri Smallmouth Alliance as their Conservation Co-Director! I could not be prouder to team up with this incredible nonprofit organization,



which has been an absolute force for protecting our state's world class river systems. Our Ozark streams are home to something truly special, and the Alliance has spent years proving exactly what dedicated advocacy can achieve. Moving forward, protecting our native smallmouth bass remains our absolute, uncompromising priority. These hard fighting, endemic fish are the lifelines of our running waters, and defending them, along with the fragile river ecosystems and aquifers they depend on, is a responsibility we take seriously. There is a lot of critical work ahead to insulate our native fisheries from modern pressures, and I am fired up to help lead the charge. If you want to become a member of the Missouri Smallmouth Alliance, check out the website <https://www.missourismallmouthalliance.org/> we highly recommend joining!



From the Desk: Radical Stewardship

We've recently updated our website with another critical piece regarding the future of our fisheries. If you care about the health of our Ozark streams, please take a moment to read:

- *The Architecture of Radical Stewardship*: This piece argues for a critical paradigm shift from traditional, bureaucratic sustainability models to a framework of "Radical Stewardship". This unyielding environmental philosophy rejects superficial compliance metrics, urging instead that human economic behavior and regional governance adapt strictly to the uncompromisable limits of our local watersheds, aquifers, and native ecosystems.



The River is Calling

With the spring rains behind us and the river basin clearing, we're entering prime time for trophy riverine smallmouth. The upcoming months represent the absolute pinnacle of the season, offering the perfect alignment of water temperature, baitfish activity, and aggressive topwater action.

There is simply no better time to be on the water, whether you're looking to elevate your technical skills or immerse yourself in the vibrant, raw beauty of our native fisheries.

Don't wait: Space for our early summer floats is filling rapidly. Book your trip today and join us in enjoying and defending some of the finest smallmouth water Missouri has to offer.

