



July 2026 Newsletter

RECORD BREAKING SUMMER FLOODING!

HISTORIC SUMMER FLOODING AND SUMMERIZED SMALLMOUTH DEFINE JULY



LouFly client Wayne with his first ever fly rod smallmouth, a 19.25in Middle Meramec Trophy!

by **Andy McEwen** on July 27th, 2026

Welcome to the fourth edition of the LouFly Guide Service newsletter and thanks for joining us! There have been a lot of changes to our waters over the past month, leading to new fishing opportunities, and waters that have been reshaped in many ways. Whether you are one of our new readers who used our newly created “newsletter sign up form” on our website, a new client who has been added to the list, or a returning reader from one of the many fishing shows we attend, we are happy to have you here! With record breaking floods

in parts of the basin, sit down and take a moment to read how it has impacted the smallie fishing.

River Report: Conditions Across the Basin

We will always start the newsletter with current river conditions! As of July 27th, 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 **41 cfs** with a gauge height of **2.28 ft.** This is much different than a few weeks ago when a massive summer flood had this stretch over 4kCFS. While today's flows are close to seasonally average for high in the system, the water is low and clear, and it will only get lower and clearer over the next few days. Watch out for down trees and rootwads from the recent flood, some portaging will be required, but big bronze is worth it!



LouFly shuttle driver Jeff with a solid huzzah creek smallie

The Meramec at Steelville is currently running at **303 cfs** with a gauge height of **1.62 ft.** This is actually fairly higher than normal for this time of year. The major flood from a few weeks back really hit the Dry Fork hard, and that flood water is finally now almost all out of the system. These are fun flows to target both smallmouth and trout in the red ribbon and smallmouth special management area.

Further downstream in Sullivan, we're seeing a discharge of **949 cfs** with a gauge height of **3.81 ft.** This is on the very upper end of what we feel confident on! The Middle sections of the Meramec we really enjoy between 400cfs and 900cfs, but fish can be found under 1000cfs using the right tactics. The river is dropping slowly now that most of the flood waters have



LouFly client Alex on his first guided fly fishing smallmouth trip

had a few weeks to recede, and the fishing is getting better day by day. This stretch was running over 30k CFS earlier this month, it is nice to see it back below 1k!

Huzzah Creek is in decent fishing shape right now, currently running at approximately **105 cfs** and a gauge height of **3.36 ft** near Steelville. These flows are on the lower side of what we prefer but are totally fishable and floatable. The creek has been solid over the past week or so! Fish small minnows and slow roll small poppers in the faster water to find the creek bronze!

The Big River near Richwoods is currently running at approximately **185 cfs** and a gauge height of **2.13 ft**. This is on the lower end of what we like to see on the Big, but is a fun time to target smallies on the fly in the faster water!

RECORD BREAKING SUMMER FLOODING IN THE BASIN!

July brought a sobering reminder of the raw power of our local watersheds when record-breaking floodwaters tore down Huzzah Creek early in the month. Seeing the gauge spike to unprecedented levels was wild to witness, tearing up familiar banks and remapping stretches we've fished for years. But the Huzzah was just the fuse. When that massive volume of water dumped into the Meramec, it triggered the worst summer flash flood in modern history along the main stem, pushing water into historical flood stages virtually overnight. While high-water events of this magnitude temporarily toss the system into chaos, they also serve as nature's heavy handed reset button, carving out deep new holding pools, flushing clean gravel, and rearranging the riverbed from top to bottom. As both the Huzzah and the Meramec drop back into their banks and clear up, we're out on the water getting reacquainted with the new contours, and the resilient native smallmouth are right where they belong, ready to crush a topwater popper and smoke a stripped streamer.



The Meramec River near Sullivan, MO during the historic flooding

Summer Smallmouth are Here!

With the river levels finally dropping and clearing, our native smallmouth have fully transitioned into their classic mid summer patterns. As water temperatures climb, you'll find the hardest fighting fish posted up where the water moves fastest and holds the highest oxygen levels, tucked into the churn at the heads of deep pools, along swirling eddy lines, right in the guts of choppy riffles, and in the water just after where the meat of the current starts to slow down. They've been on a solid feed, too. slinging full bodied articulated streamers into heavy current seams has produced aggressive strikes from fish looking for an easy meal, while popping bugs and baitfish fished along shaded banks and tailouts are drawing explosive surface takes when presented with purpose and fished aggressively.

What's been especially interesting about this stretch of summer is how unpredictable, yet rewarding the timing has been. There hasn't been a single "magic hour" dictating the action. Instead of the typical early morning or late evening rush, we're seeing dynamic bite windows open up periodically throughout the entire day. If anything, the action has actually leaned slightly stronger into the heat of the afternoon, when insect and forage activity picks up and gets the fish keyed in. The key right now is staying observant: focus your efforts on fast, well oxygenated water, vary your retrieves, and be ready to capitalize on the moment when one of those feeding windows turns on.



LouFly client Jesstin with an Upper Meramec Old Growth Smallie



LouFly client Josie with her first ever smallie, a streamer eater!

The River is Alive

Despite everything nature has thrown at our watershed this month, one thing is abundantly clear: these rivers are vibrantly, undeniable alive right now. Below the surface, the aquatic ecosystem is buzzing, crawdads are crawling, baitfish are schooling in the fresh gravel, and the hatches are popping off as the sun warms the water. You can literally watch the river ecosystem resetting and thriving in real time. Birds are diving, topwater blowups are echoing off the bluffs, and every pocket of fast water feels like it's holding an eager smallmouth. It's a powerful reminder of just how resilient these Ozark streams really are. There is an absolute pulse to the river right now, and there's no better time to be out on the water experiencing it firsthand.



LouFly client Derrick with a Meramec Special Management Area Smallie

Stacked in the Current: Opportunism & Competition in the Heat of Summer

In the heart of summer, a stream smallmouth's feeding behavior becomes a high stakes balance of calorie driven opportunism and territorial competition. With their metabolic rates revved to max capacity in the warm water, these fish simply can't afford to waste energy darting across slow pools for small, low yield snacks. Instead, they become hyperaggressive impulse hunters keyed in on substantial meals like large crawfish, big frogs, and larger sized baitfish. They expect their prey to move fast through the current, which is why an articulated streamer with a thick body stripped aggressively through a chute or a topwater popper chugged erratically over a shaded pocket triggers such violent, instinctual strikes.



LouFly client Jared with a Middle Meramec Summertime Bronzeback

Because prime real estate such as a single oxygen rich riffle head, a current swept boulder nook, or a tight shade seam is limited, summer smallmouth abandon their spread out spring habits and establish very compact, densely populated holding areas. Multiple quality fish will stack tightly together in these micro habitats, actively jockeying for the front row seat on the current's conveyor belt of food. That intense competition works heavily in an angler's favor: when you hook a solid fish in a fast water slot, the commotion often gets the rest of the pod riled up rather than spooked. You can almost guarantee another hungry fish is sitting mere feet away in that same lie, allowing you to pick apart small pockets of water and repeat that exact same pattern from run to run all day long.



LouFly client Hans in town from Louisiana with a Mid Mac smallie

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. While we have not targeted trout specifically in the red ribbon since our last newsletter as the smallmouth bite has been in full swing, we have floated this stretch a couple times as it is also a smallmouth special management area. You might be asking, wait the MDC has two special management areas overlapping on one stretch of river? Actually no!..... it is 3! What most people know as the Meramec Red Ribbon Trout Special Management Area is also part of the Meramec Smallmouth Special Management Area and Goggle-Eye (Rock Bass) Special Management Area! The smallie and goggle eye fishing up in this stretch is very unique as the water is much different than what most would consider



LouFly client Phil and his son, doubled up on Meramec Smallmouth!

typical bass habitat! It has saved us a few days this month when the Middle Mac was running high and dirty!

Looking Ahead: What to Expect in August

As we move into August, expect mid-summer patterns to reach their absolute peak. With water levels typically at their lowest and clearest and temperatures hitting their seasonal highs, smallmouth will be fully locked into their most predictable holding zones. The name of the game this month is precision and finesse in the fast water. Early mornings and late evenings will offer fantastic topwater action along shallow ledge rock and gravel bars, but don't pack up when the sun gets high! August afternoon heat often triggers intense, localized feeding sprees in the heaviest water. Because the water will be low and gin clear, stealth and long casts become critical to avoid spooking fish in tight slots. Expect the smallmouth to be fairly selective about presentation, but incredibly aggressive once you land a fly in their strike zone. Focus on skinny water riffles, shaded pocket water, deep current seams, and be ready for some of the hardest, most explosive fights of the year.

From the Desk: The Sunfish Blueprint

We've recently updated our website with another piece relating to our unique Meramec Basin ecosystems and the native smallmouth that call them home.

- *The Sunfish Blueprint*: This paper explains how anglers can use the visible behavior of smaller river sunfish as a real-time indicator to predict the movements and feeding habits of elusive smallmouth bass. Because smallmouth and panfish share the same genetic family, stream anatomy, and energetic constraints, observing how sunfish react to river current, weather shifts, and flies reveals exactly where and how aggressively the larger bass will be feeding.



LouFly client Jacob with a solid topwater creek smallie



LouFly client Jason with a walk/wade trip creek smallie

The River is Calling

As July winds down and the summer heat settles in, there's still plenty of prime water waiting out there. Pack extra water, keep an eye on river levels, and take a moment to appreciate the quiet mornings before the midday sun kicks in. Thanks as always for reading, staying connected, and caring for our local streams! See you out on the water, keep those lines and loops tight!



LouFly Client Mark with a native largemouth and native smallmouth out of the Middle Meramec