



March 2026 Newsletter



The First LouFly Newsletter!

We are getting ready for spring!



by [Andy McEwen](#) on March 24th

Welcome to the very first LouFly Guide Service monthly newsletter! We are incredibly grateful to everyone who has signed up to follow our journey on the water. To our previous clients: thank you for being the backbone of this service and for the memories we've already shared on the river. Whether you've been on the water with us for years or you're just joining the community to keep an eye on river conditions, we're thrilled to have you here. Our goal is to keep you dialed in on the Meramec Basin, our latest conservation efforts, and everything happening behind the scenes at LouFly.

Current River Conditions: March 23, 2026

We will always start the newsletter with current river conditions! As of March 23, the Meramec Basin is showing classic spring volatility but is currently in a productive window. Following the early March surge, the Meramec at Steelville has come down nicely, currently flowing around 490 cfs with a gauge height of 2.21 feet. Further downstream at Sullivan, we're seeing a discharge of 1,290 cfs with flows dropping around 200cfs per day. This drop will start to stable out here soon. The Huzzah Creek is also in prime shape, currently running at approximately 530 cfs and a gauge height of 3.97 feet near Steelville. Water temperatures are hovering in the high 40s to low 50s across the basin, and with the visibility starting to clear after the recent rains, the stage is set perfectly for those prespawn smallmouth to start looking up.

The Bronze Is Back: Smallmouth Prespawn Update

The wait is officially over. As the photoperiod lengthens and water temperatures begin their steady climb into the 50s, the native Ozark riverine smallmouth are making their move. We are seeing fish transition out of their winter holes and staged near the first major drop-offs and secondary points leading to spawning flats.

This is arguably the best time of year to find a true trophy. The fish are aggressive, heavy with eggs, and looking for a big meal to fuel the spawn. We've been finding success with slow-rolled streamers and suspended minnow patterns. If you've been itching for that first bronze fix of the year, now is the time to get on the calendar.



The Magic of the Warm-Up: Why Smallmouth Are Moving

With the winter chill finally starting to break, for a smallmouth angler, these rising water temperatures are everything. As the Meramec climbs out of the 40s and into the 50s, the metabolism of these fish kickstarts into high gear.

Why does the warming water help?

- **Increased Activity:** Smallmouth are cold-blooded; as the water warms, they require more calories, leading to aggressive feeding windows.
- **Staging for the Spawn:** Fish are moving out of deep wintering holes and stacking up on transition points. This concentration makes them theoretically easier to target.
- **The Food Web Awakes:** From crawfish emerging from the rocks to baitfish moving into the shallows, the entire river is waking up!

A New Face on the Water: Welcome Jeff Adams

We are beyond excited to announce the introduction of a new guide to the LouFly team for the 2026 season: Jeff Adams.

Jeff is the definition of a "local stick." Born and raised on the banks of the Middle Meramec in St. Clair, MO, Jeff has been fishing these waters since he could walk. His deep-rooted connection to the Meramec Valley and his technical expertise in topwater and streamer tactics make him an incredible asset to our operation. Whether you're a seasoned angler or a beginner, Jeff's local knowledge and passion for the resource will ensure a top-notch day on the water.

He is now officially rolling with a brand-new custom welded raft trailer and our most anticipated addition yet: the new FlyCraft Guide 3-Man setup. This boat is a game-changer for the Meramec and its tributaries. It allows us to access the skinny water where the big creek bronzebacks hide, all while providing a stable, comfortable, and fishy experience for two anglers and the guide. Whether we are dragging over gravel bars or navigating tight timber, this rig is built to put you on fish that other boats simply can't reach.



The Meramec Refaced: Early March Flooding

Mother Nature decided to do some spring cleaning this month. The significant flooding we saw in early March on the Meramec River has fundamentally changed many of the sections we guide.

Floodwaters reached "Moderate" stages across much of the basin, and the sheer force of the water has rearranged the furniture. We've seen:

- New Log Jams: Historic "honey holes" may have moved, while new structure has been deposited in areas that were previously barren.
- Gravel Shift: Several riffles have deepened and several have shallowed. Chert gravel bars have shifted, creating brand new seams and holding water.
- River Access: Be mindful that some access points may still have silt deposits or debris.

The river is a living organism, and while the "old" spots might be gone, these changes often provide fresh opportunities for those willing to read the new water.

Red Ribbon Brownies: MDC Stocking Report

For those who prefer brownies over bronzebacks, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) recently completed two stockings of Brown Trout in the Red Ribbon Trout Area of the Upper Meramec. These fish were stocked at healthy sizes and are currently settling into the cool, spring-fed reaches of the river. This is a great opportunity to target quality brown trout just a short drive from St. Louis before the summer heat arrives.



Surface Tension: Get Ready for Topwater Poppers

There is nothing—and we mean *nothing*—in fly fishing quite like the heart-stopping explosion of a Ozark Smallmouth hitting a topwater popper.

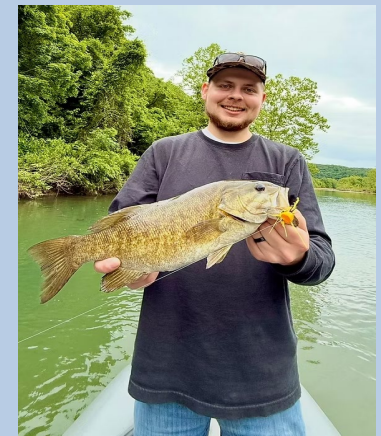
As we transition into spring, we are counting down the days until we can tie on those cork and foam bugs. Watching a 18-inch bronze slab track a popper across a glassy eddy before absolutely inhaling it is an experience that stays with you forever. The aggressive thump of a surface strike is the peak of Ozark fly fishing, and the window for this action is opening soon.



Looking Ahead: What to Expect in April

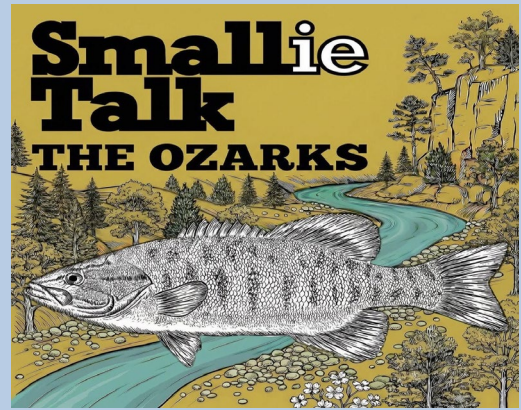
April is the "pivot month" for the Meramec and Huzzah. As we move into the heart of spring, expect water temperatures to consistently push into the upper 50s and low 60s, which officially triggers peak spawning activity.

- The Spawning Shift: By mid-April, smallmouth will move into quieter water near the shoreline, often nesting behind boulders or blowdowns.
- April Showers: Historically, April is one of our wettest months. While the river can rise quickly, the fast-clearing nature of the Ozark tributaries means we can find "magic" water conditions just as the levels start to drop and the clarity returns.
- The Insect Buffet: Keep an eye out for early hatches. While we're focused on smallies, the river's ecosystem is at its most vibrant in April.
- Baitfish will start moving into shallow gravel water more frequently, keep the minnow box stocked.



LouFly on the Air: "Smallie Talk: The Ozarks"

We recently had the pleasure of sitting down with Jake Heppner over at Smallie Talk: The Ozarks Podcast. We went deep into the weeds on Ozark Smallmouth behavior, the history of our local fisheries, and the specific tactics we use to target them on the fly. It was a blast to share our perspective on what makes this region so special. You can find the episode on Spotify or via the link on our homepage.



From the Desk: Protecting Our Natives

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

1. *The Case for a Harvest Ban on Missouri Riverine Smallmouth*: Exploring why a total harvest ban is the only way to ensure the longevity of our trophy smallmouth population.
2. *The Fiscal Ability of the MDC to Implement a Harvest Ban*: A deep dive into the numbers showing that the Department has the resources to make this change happen now.
3. *Why Missouri Trout Should Be Considered an Invasive Species*: A candid look at the ecological impact of non-native trout on our endemic species and why we must prioritize native fish conservation.

The River is Calling

The new boat is rigged, the trailer is loaded, and the Meramec is waking up from winter! Whether you want to witness the power of a post-flood river, chase trophy prespawn smallies with our new guide Jeff, or spend a quiet afternoon on the Red Ribbon section chasing rainbows and browns, there's a seat on the boat waiting for you. The spring window is short, and the best dates are disappearing as fast as a popper on a willow bank. Don't let this season pass you by from the couch – let's get out there and target some fish on the fly!

