



May 2026 Newsletter

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Smallmouth are SO Back!

SPRING IS HERE!



LouFly client Doug with a 20in, 10+ year old Meramec River Pre-Spawn smallmouth on the fly in late March 2026

by [Andy McEwen](#) on May 11th, 2026

Welcome back to the second edition of the LouFly Guide Service newsletter! It was great to receive such positive feedback on our first ever newsletter we put out in March! While the April newsletter never dropped with how much time we spent on the water chasing pre-spawn bronze, we are back with a spring update! Whether you spent the last couple months on the water, or you've been watching the gauges from your desk, we're glad to

have you back in the loop. The momentum is building, and the community we're 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 May 11th, nearly all our water is floatable and fishable. Some 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 **69 cfs** with a gauge height of **2.47 ft**. While this is floatable and fishable, this is on the lower end of what we like to float up there. The water is low and clear, and it will only get lower and clearer over the next few days!

The Meramec at Steelville is currently running at **521 cfs** with a gauge height of **2.17 ft**. These are very fun flows to go target smallmouth and trout this time of year. The water is moving nicely, without being too quick.

Further downstream in Sullivan, we're seeing a discharge of **1,180 cfs** with a gauge height of **4.32 ft**. This is on the upper end of what we guide. While the flows are safe and the clarity is clearing up, finding larger smallmouth on the fly in these flows can be tricky. Don't be afraid to float and fish it, just make sure to have a heavy sinking line rigged up!

Huzzah Creek is in nice shape right now, currently running at approximately **202 cfs** and a gauge height of **3.88 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. Watch out for spawning smallmouth on beds!

The Big River near Richwoods is currently running at approximately **757 cfs** and a gauge height of **4.12 ft**. This is on the high side for the Big to be fly fished effectively, but it can be done if you utilize sinking lines and big streamers! It is dropping fast, and if we don't receive much rain over the next week, it will shape up nicely for the weekend!



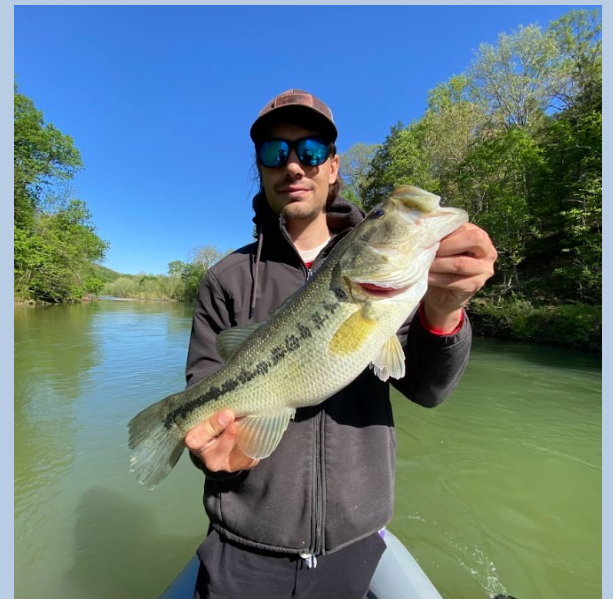
The Bronze Is HERE: Smallmouth Mid Spring Update

We have been finding most of our fish over the past month in the Upper stretches of the Meramec and up the several creeks that feed the Meramec. This is typical for this time of year as the Middle and Lower Meramec tends to stay high until mid-late spring. With the arrival of May, the river has come alive as smallmouth bass began their annual spawning cycle last month. It is a critical window for the health and future of our local waterways, as these fish have moved into the shallows to build and guard their nests. During this sensitive period, practicing ethical angling is more important than ever. We make it a firm policy to avoid targeting actively spawning or bedding smallmouth. Pulling a male off his nest, even briefly, leaves the eggs vulnerable to predators and can jeopardize an entire year's recruitment. By giving them the space they need to reproduce undisturbed, we ensure the continued strength of the population and the long-term vitality of the river system we all value.

As the spawn wraps up and water temperatures continue to climb, our focus shifts toward the more aggressive, post-spawn transition. This time of year, we find success by targeting high-percentage areas like current breaks, rocky points, log jams, and the edges of deeper pools where fish move to recover and feed. Swinging sub-surface streamers through riffles or twitching topwater patterns near shaded cut banks can trigger explosive strikes from hungry smallmouth looking to regain energy. By reading the river's flow and adjusting our presentation to match the baitfish or frogs movement, we can enjoy some of the most dynamic and rewarding fishing the season has to offer.

The Magic of the Warm-Up: Where Smallmouth are Moving

In mid-May, smallmouth behavior is dictated by the tail end of the spawning cycle, the onset of the post-spawn recovery, and the continual increase in water temperature. While some fish may still be guarding nests in the quieter shallows, many are beginning to disperse toward more oxygenated water as temperatures rise. During this transition,



smallmouth often become highly opportunistic, moving between their spawning flats and deeper summer holds. You'll find them hanging around structural transitions, utilizing the current to bring food to them. They are looking to recoup the significant energy lost during the spring, making them increasingly reactive to movement and vibrations in the water column as they settle into their early summer feeding patterns.

Surface Tension: POPPERS ARE BACK!

With the warming air and water temperatures, topwater season is officially here, and the popper fishing has been nothing short of electric. We have found the most consistent success lately by sticking to a two-tone strategy: yellow and white. The yellow poppers have been particularly effective in the early mornings, evenings, and overcast periods, perfectly mimicking the spring peepers that are active along the grassy banks this time of year. On the other hand, white poppers have been our go-to for imitating the silver flash of panicked baitfish in the swifter current. There is nothing quite like the heart stopping surface explosion of a smallmouth committed to a topwater fly. Having both a "froggy" yellow and a "fishy" white option on hand ensures you're ready for whatever the smallies are keyed in on.



Red Ribbon Trout Report

For those who prefer trout over bronzebacks, the red ribbon section of the Upper Meramec provides great access to brown and rainbow trout less than two hours from downtown. The trout fishing has been solid so far this spring with several nice bows and browns being found. We will be guiding trout on the red ribbon until Mid-June, then it is all smallmouth until late fall. We have been finding trout on Sparkle Minnows, Hares Ears, and Stone Flies. Don't be afraid to throw a squirmy wormy around when the trout get slow, you can usually find a few to gulp the worm.



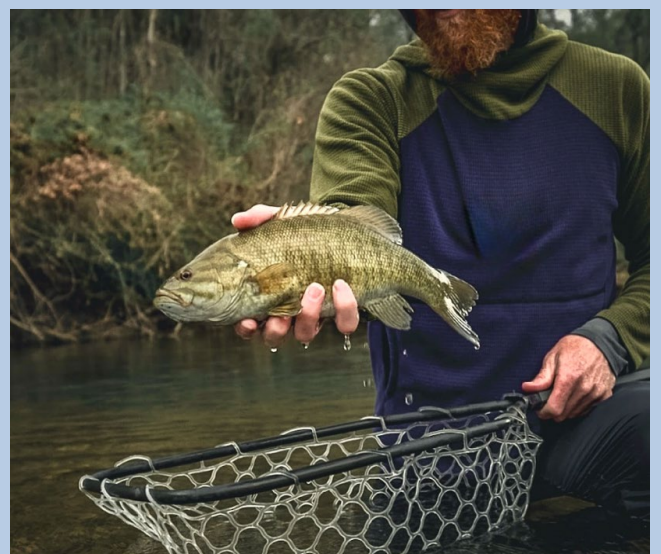


Looking Ahead: What to Expect in June

As we move into June, the river stabilizes into its early summer rhythm, and smallmouth behavior shifts into high gear. With the spawn fully in the rearview mirror, fish become more predictable and aggressive, spreading out into their primary summer haunts. You can expect to find them holding in "heavy" water, look for oxygen-rich riffles, deep ledge holes, and the shaded pockets behind mid river boulders. The rising water temperatures kick their metabolism into overdrive, leading to extended feeding windows and more frequent surface activity. June is a premier month for covering water; as the aquatic vegetation thickens and insect life peaks, the smallmouth are dialed in on high-energy prey, offering some of the most consistent and hard-hitting action of the entire season.

A Short Film: The Guide Series Episode 2 - LouFly Guide Service

We are thrilled to highlight our recent involvement in The Guide Series, a project that goes beyond the surface of a typical fishing video to explore the deeper connection we share with our local waters. The film captures the technical challenges and the daily rewards of navigating the river, but its true heart lies in the philosophy of conservation and "radical stewardship" that guides everything we do. It serves as a visual testament to the importance of protecting our river basin and ensuring that these vital ecosystems remain healthy and vibrant. We hope this film inspires a greater appreciation for the resilience of our smallmouth populations and reinforces the collective responsibility we have to defend the habitats that sustain them.





From the Desk: Protecting Our Natives

We've recently updated our website with two more 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 Against Bed Fishing for Riverine Smallmouth: A biological and ethical examination of why targeting spawning bass threatens recruitment and the future of the fishery.*
2. *Why the Public Needs to Say No to Meramec Basin Data Centers: An urgent call to protect our local aquifers and river health from the massive water and energy demands of industrial data centers.*



The River is Calling

As the spring rains chill out, and the waters in the basin clear up, we are entering the premier window for chasing trophy riverine smallmouth. The coming months represent the absolute peak of the season, where the water temperature, frog and baitfish activity, and predatory aggression align perfectly for the dedicated angler. Whether you're looking to sharpen your technical skills or simply want to experience the raw beauty of our native fisheries at their most vibrant, there is no better time to be on the water. Space for our early summer floats are filling up fast; book your trip today and join us in defending and enjoying some of the finest smallmouth water Missouri has to offer.