

Pennsylvania ANGLER & BOATER

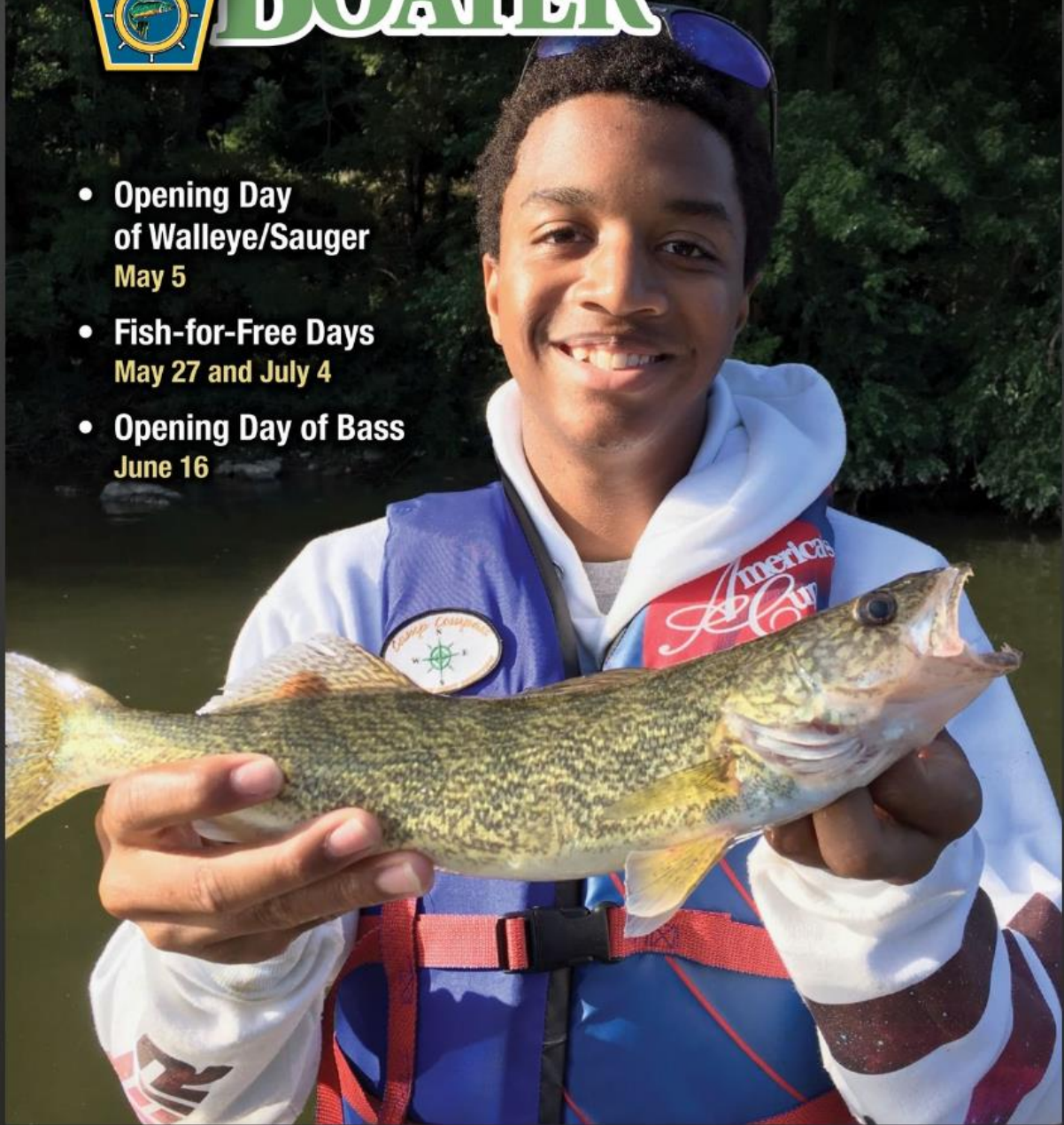


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Boating Magazine

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- **Opening Day
of Walleye/Sauger**
May 5
- **Fish-for-Free Days**
May 27 and July 4
- **Opening Day of Bass**
June 16



Oil Creek Water Trail

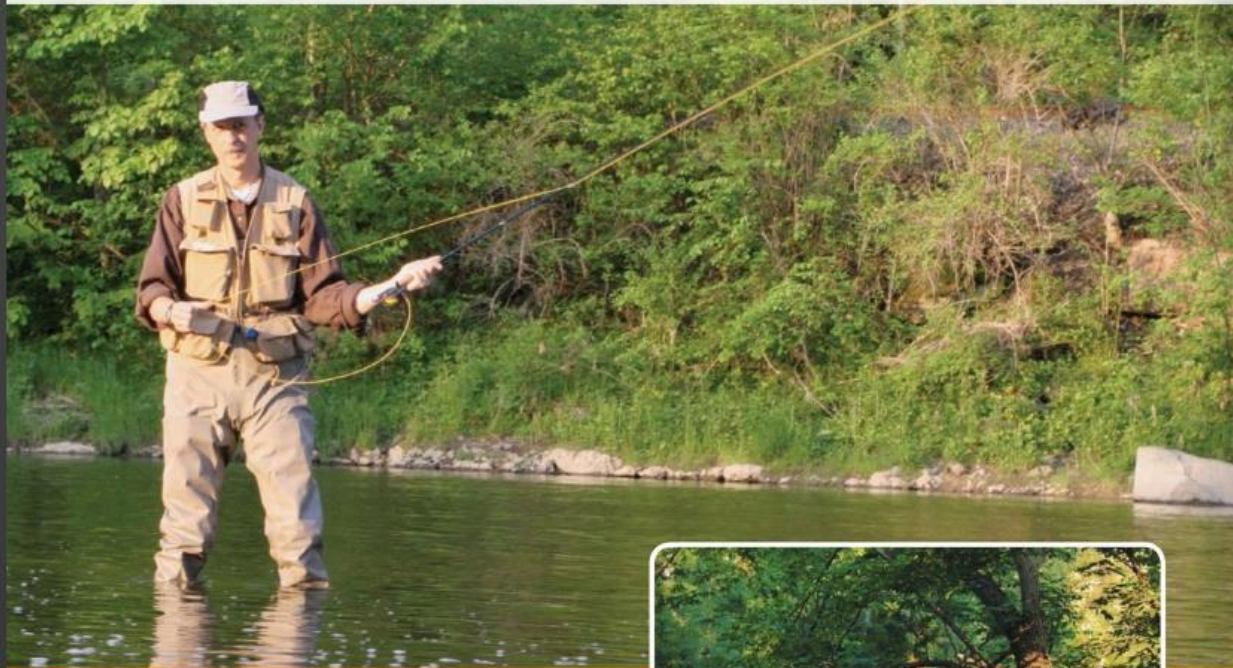


photo-Darl Black

by Marilyn Black

In 2017, Oil Creek, Venango and eastern Crawford counties, was newly designated as an official water trail, joining the ranks of 26 widely varied flowing waterways across Pennsylvania, each offering the public paddling, angling and other outdoor recreational opportunities.

This scenic 20-mile corridor runs through the cities of Titusville and Oil City, with the majority of its length within state-owned land at Drake Well Museum and Park and Oil Creek State Park. This setting blends the historic early development of the petroleum industry, warmwater/coolwater fisheries, kayaking and canoeing. The Oil Creek Valley is also visited by bicyclists, hikers and passengers on a seasonal excursion railroad.

The Water Trail program is jointly administered by the Pennsylvania Fish & Boat Commission, Pennsylvania Environmental Council, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources and National Park Service. Its purposes are to enhance recreation and stewardship on Pennsylvania waterways by supporting trail managers with technical assistance, networking events, funding opportunities and developing a statewide system

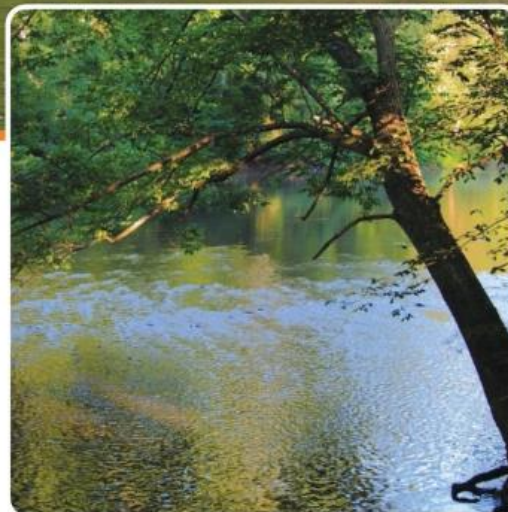


photo-Ronald Wood Photography

Oil Creek State Park, Venango County

of recreational water trails, which are especially inviting to kayakers and canoeists.

The water trail designation process began in 2015 when the review of the topographical, hydrographic, aquatic and cultural characteristics of Oil Creek's overall 47 miles resulted in a preliminary recommendation to conduct a Water Trail Feasibility Study for its lower 30 miles. The resulting Feasibility Study Report was approved by these three



Anglers and kayakers on Oil Creek, Venango County.

agencies which agreed to share the water trail management duties—Crawford County Planning Commission, Titusville Redevelopment Authority and Venango County Regional Planning Commission. In 2017, these agencies created the Oil Creek Water Trail Association.

When the state level water trail groups received the water trail nomination, they designated the lowermost 20 miles as the Oil Creek Water Trail, thus stretching from the O'Rourke Field immediately upstream of Titusville to the mouth of Oil Creek at Oil City as it enters the Allegheny River. For a map of the Oil Creek Water Trail including access points and nearby amenities, visit www.oilcreekwatertrail.org.

It was along Oil Creek in 1859 that Edwin Drake's discovery well began producing crude oil. Drake drilled into a well-known oil spring on its east bank. Long before European settlement of this area, Native Americans gathered the crude oil from pits they deepened and then lined with timber. They used the resulting petroleum for ceremonial, medicinal, and waterproofing purposes. Even an early 16th century French-drawn map of the Allegheny River watershed labeled this major tributary "Oyl Creek," using the Seneca term. Additional drillers and producers followed Drake, triggering an oil boom that saw a dramatic influx of population and extensive devastation to the steep, wooded hillsides along Oil Creek, which became the epicenter of "The Valley That Changed the World." Today, this corridor is part of the federally designated Oil Region National Heritage Area.

Most of the segments of Oil Creek are 25- to 50-yards wide, with a wider pool upstream of an ice control dam near the Blood Farm

Day Use Area. Water depths and temperatures enable trout and Smallmouth Bass to survive year-round, augmented by annual trout stockings. There are two special fishing regulation "Delayed Harvest, Artificial Lures Only" sections; a 1-mile segment starting at two green posts near Drake Well Museum downstream to the Oil Creek State Park hiking trail bridge; and 1.55 miles starting from the bridge at Petroleum Center downstream to the railroad bridge at Columbia Farm. Fly anglers and spinning anglers share these areas. For information about the prolific springtime insect hatches that fly anglers love to match, contact Oil Creek Outfitters, located along Route 8 south of Titusville.

Floating 4-inch minnow baits are popular lures used by spin anglers for both bass and trout. Lightweight (1/16- to 1/8-ounce) soft plastic 3-inch tubes inserted on leadhead jigs are used by stream anglers to imitate the abundant crayfish in the stretch. Our family seeks Smallmouth Bass at the Miller Farm Bridge area and below the Rynd Farm Route 8 bridge.

Paddlers planning an outing on Oil Creek Water Trail should check the reading on the single water flow gauge, because conditions change rapidly in this watershed. The U.S. Geological Survey maintains a gauge located

photo: Jim Downing

photo: Darl Black



A Smallmouth Bass from Oil Creek.



photo-Marilyn Black

The Oil Creek Water Trail and Oil Creek State Park Bike Trail run beneath this railroad bridge at Funkville, site of a former oil boomtown within the state park.

in Rouseville. The active webcam and data statistics are available year-round at https://waterdata.usgs.gov/pa/nwis/uv?site_no=03020500. The lowest water level suggested for comfortable kayaking is 2.75 feet, while canoeists typically require at least 3.0 feet. Paddling in water levels above 5 feet are not suggested due to hazardous conditions. Oil Creek State Park staff also monitor creek conditions. For more information, call 814-676-5915.

Access spots for public use by paddlers and anglers stretch throughout the 20-mile corridor. Starting from the north tip of the Oil Creek Water Trail, the public access points are as follows: in Titusville—O'Rourke Field and the Ed Myer Recreation Complex; in Oil Creek State

Park—Jersey Bridge, Fry's Landing and Rynd Farm beside the historic Coal Oil Johnny House; and in Oil City—Oil Creek Memorial Landing and Justus Park.

Debbie Eckelberger, who served on the Feasibility Study work group, said her favorite scenic view along the water trail is Jersey Bridge and its adjacent trailhead, which has a kayak and canoe launch, plenty of parking, picnic tables, restroom, a bicycle Fix-It station and is along the Erie to Pittsburgh Trail for bicyclists. She also enjoys the relaxing float and wildlife viewing in the Miller Farm area and the industrial feel of the water trail from Rouseville to Oil City.

In addition to hotels and bed and breakfast facilities in Titusville and Oil City, lodging is available at Oil Creek Family

Campground and at hike-in adirondack shelters within Oil Creek State Park. Adjacent museums include Drake Well Museum, the exhibits inside Petroleum Centre Train Station and the Venango Museum of Art, Science and Industry in Oil City. Bicycles may be rented at Drake Well or Oil Creek State Park office in Petroleum Center. Other recreational equipment outfitters serving the water trail corridor are the Outdoor Allegheny River Services and Allegheny Outfitters.

For more information, visit www.oilcreekwatertrail.org or call Jason Ruggiero at the Venango County Regional Planning Commission at 814-432-9682 during weekday business hours. The Oil Creek Water Trail Association welcomes volunteers interested in serving on committees to support the eight Pennsylvania water trail principles: partnership, stewardship, volunteerism, education, conservation, community vitality, diversity, and wellness and wellbeing. In the near future, the association anticipates holding organized group float trips, clean-up days and educational programs. ☐



photo-Dave Black

Pete Cartwright releases a Smallmouth Bass into Oil Creek.