

Finesse Presentations for River Smallmouth

Finesse presentations are not just for clear water smallmouth. On average rivers, smallmouth may be less finicky, but they still are affected by weather and changes in water levels. Forage is another key to both smallmouth location and overall activity levels. One common mistake river anglers make is that they fish too fast. Power fishing might work great when river smallmouth feed aggressively, but when the bite slows down, you need to adapt.

One of my favorite go to baits for river smallmouth when the bite slows down is the four inch Jacks Worm made by Case Plastics. The Case Jacks Worm takes finesse fishing to a whole new level. The unique Jacks Worm spike tail design quivers in the water with even the slightest motion, driving fish crazy! There are many ways to present the Jacks worm but I prefer to either use a split shot rig or partner it with a finesse jig.

I have used the split shot rig successfully for years on natural lakes and reservoirs, and with a few modifications it performs well in rivers when fishing less than 5 feet of water. At first glance the split shot rig might resemble a Carolina rig, but it is different in that you eliminate the swivel and large sinker. I crimp a Water Gremlin Bull Shot weight 18 to 24 inches above a 2/0 wide gap hook. With snags being common on the river it is important to rig the Jacks worm weedless. The Bull Shot sinker is a bullet weight, and as such, it is more snag resistant and picks up less debris than a round split shot. The size of the sinker will be determined by the amount of current.

A six foot six inch medium light Grandt spinning rod is ideal for finessing river smallmouth. I spool the spinning reel with either 8 pound Seaguar InvizX or Seaguar AbrazX. Both lines are 100% fluorocarbon and can be used in both spinning and bait casting reels. This line has exceptional knot and impact strength, and is extremely soft and sensitive for better feel and smoother casting. Seaguar is the only line I trust not to fray and break when fishing snag infested water. Braided line tends to be less effective while using finesse presentations in rivers.

While the split shot rig is deadly in moderate current, it excels in slack water along grass edges, rocks and wood where neutral smallmouth stack up under tough conditions.

Even in slack water there is usually a slight current. Position your boat with the aid of the spot lock on your trolling motor so you can cast parallel to the grass or shoreline. Crawl the split shot rig along the bottom for a few feet and then pause. Smallmouth will follow the split shot rig but on the pause the spike tail of the Jacks Worm will continue to quiver in the slight current and trigger the strike. Continue the crawl and pause retrieve back to the boat. Patience is the key to this presentation. I will often let the bait sit for up to one minute on the pause.



You can't fish the split shot rig too slowly. One day I had a client get a snarl in his spinning reel. He was frustrated to say the least, and the fact that his buddy was catching fish only made matters worse. He was finally back in business and reeled in all the slack line. Much to his surprise, he felt resistance on the end of the line. After a few choice words assuming he was snagged, I pointed out that the line was moving upstream and he had better set the hook. He set the hook and a massive 20 inch river smallmouth rocketed out of the water. We landed the smallmouth, took some photos and released the big smallmouth to swim another day. Proof that you can't fish the split shot rig too slowly.

The Jacks Worm can be very deadly when fished on a finesse jighead, especially around current breaks. I rig the Jacks Worm on a 1/8 or 1/4 ounce mushroom jighead. Make your cast targeting the slack water around the current break. Next, use a slow steady retrieve with no pause. When you feel resistance don't set the

hook and continue the slow retrieve until you feel or see movement of the line, then set the hook. It is important to work different levels in the water column, because on some days smallmouth will not rise to hit your presentation. Oftentimes, this presentation has turned a slow day into a great day.

One early August day last summer, a passing cold front put a halt on the topwater bite. After trying several different lures, I gave one of my clients a 1/8 ounce mushroom jighead rigged with a green pumpkin/gold flake and told the other client to keep casting a soft plastic jerkbait. I positioned my boat over mid river structure so my clients could cast towards the many current breaks. Following a few casts, a 17 inch smallmouth hammered the jig and put a smile on my clients' face. When a second smallmouth hit the jig I gave the other guy the same jig, and the rest was history. We continued to catch quality smallmouth on the mushroom jig rigged with the Jacks Worm and never gave a thought to changing baits.

