

## Topwater for Post Spawn River Smallmouth

Over the past 40 years of guiding for smallmouth bass I have refined topwater presentations for river smallmouth. If anglers learn to tweak their presentation and adjust to both the conditions and mood of smallmouth they can increase their odds. There can be an awesome topwater bite on the river for post spawn smallmouth if you get things just right.

Last June after smallmouth bass spawning was complete, the water level on the Menominee River started to rise. Rising water will either push smallmouth into deep snag infested holes or tight to shoreline wood. Smallmouth which gravitate to deep water tend to be in a negative feeding mood and hunker down tight to cover. This makes fishing tough and it is not an ideal situation for a guide. The only reliable pattern is to cast a tube, rigged weedless, right in the thick of things. While I have spent many a day on the river dragging tubes over deep cover and caught lots of smallmouth, this can be frustrating for many anglers. There is another option.

A guide has to try to accommodate his clients. I much prefer to search for wood related smallmouth during the post spawn. Wood related smallmouth hold tightly to wood, stacking up as they avoid the current. The good news is that they will respond with the proper presentation. The key is to keep your lure in the strike zone for as long as possible. So what is my go to presentation? Topwater!

Both prop baits and poppers are equally deadly as long as the lure has a vertical drop. When you pause the topwater lure, the rear of the lure drops and triggers the strike. Quite frequently, if a client used a topwater bait that did not have a vertical drop on a pause the result was no strike. Topwater baits with hair dressing on the rear treble can be even more effective. In order to dress up prop baits I will take a few strands of red or white yarn tied to the eye of the treble hook. Do this with caution because if you put too much dressing on the rear treble hook of the topwater bait it will affect the action of the lure.

Boat control is crucial. It is important to position your boat so you can target the wood with multiple casts. In years past this was a difficult task since by the time you got one or two casts you were out of the strike zone and floating downstream. Thanks to spot lock on trolling motors you can now effectively fish shoreline wood. I tell my guiding clients that after 40 years of guiding, spot lock on trolling motors are my favorite new innovation. It has both made my life easier and allowed for more fish to be caught. I recommend that anglers upgrade their trolling motor for more thrust if you fish rivers.

Clusters of wood will not only hold more smallmouth but larger ones as well. Big post spawn females will position on the edge of overlapping wood. After you position your boat facing upstream into the current with your spot lock in place, it's time to make an accurate cast. Look before you cast. Cast your topwater bait tightly to the best looking cover and get ready, because a strike can occur as the lure hits the water. If no strike occurs, give the lure a twitch and let the rear of the topwater bait drop vertically. Next reel up any slack in the line, twitch the lure again and let it drop. Don't reel the lure in too fast, but try to keep it in the strike zone as long as possible.

When the lure hits the seam where the slack water meets the moving water the lure will start moving in the current. At that point speed up your retrieve with a series of fast short pops. Continue with this for about three feet then bring the lure back to the boat. I have caught several huge river smallmouth right on the seam so be ready. Remember, these post spawn smallmouth can be sluggish and will require patience. Last June while fishing with a client we boated 10 smallmouth off one small cluster of shoreline wood. The largest river smallmouth of the day measured 21 inches.



By late June the topwater action on the Menominee River intensified. Once smallmouth recovered from the post spawn, we continued to work wood but adopted a more aggressive presentation. As the summer bite continued, rocks and grass became prime smallmouth feeding areas. We had several days when the topwater bite lasted the entire day while fishing all types of structure.

Quite often we caught big aggressive smallmouth at high noon. We would start out fishing weeds and wood early in the day and move into the rocks by mid morning. Some days the smallmouth preferred a slower presentation, and a lure with a vertical drop was the ticket, while on other days smallmouth preferred an aggressive presentation with topwater prop baits. Many times the mood would change throughout the day so we had to adapt. If the topwater bite slowed we would switch to soft plastics.

Whether you are using a spinning rod or casting rod, braided line is essential due to its lack of stretch. The only drawback to braided line is the fact that it floats which can be a disadvantage. After you make your cast tight to cover the line will float downstream and pull the lure out of the strike zone. Try to minimize slack in the line if possible by avoiding long casts and keeping your rod tip high. Since we

are fishing for river smallmouth in stained or murky water, getting close to cover is not an issue and this will enable anglers to make shorter casts. When using a spinning rod for lighter topwater baits I use a six foot six inch medium action Grandt Rod. When using larger topwater baits I use a six foot six or seven foot medium/heavy action Grandt Rod.

It's hard to beat a day on the river catching topwater smallmouth. The topwater bite can be consistent in the summer barring deplorable weather conditions. Even with high water the topwater bite can be exceptional as long as you adjust to the conditions. For more information on topwater smallmouth or to book a guide trip, go to my website, [bigsmallmouthbass.com](http://bigsmallmouthbass.com). Check out my YouTube channel **SMGUIDE1**

