

Fall River Smallmouth



Once the water temperature drops below 60 degrees there is no better search bait than a swimbait and they really were a game changer in 2020. In fall, swimbaits are great when smallmouth are scattered, but when they stack up in late fall it can be like catching fish out of a barrel. One late October day I had a first time client who had never fished swimbaits for smallmouth before. It was a learning curve for him to not set the hook immediately when he felt a strike. Eventually he got the hang of the technique and caught about seven smallmouth. Now it was time to move to the honey hole. Just before noon I positioned my boat on the edge of a creek channel and I told him to make random casts in and around the creek channel. My client had lots of fun as he caught 12 smallmouth over 18 inches in one hour with Case Lil Magic Swimbaits.

Live bait catches big smallmouth in the fall, but on many days swimbaits are far superior to live bait presentations. The problem with that day was it was the only place we found smallmouth stacked up. Every other smallmouth we caught was a loner, which is rare for late October on the Menominee River. We returned to that Creek channel later in the day to continue the hot bite but my client only caught one 16-incher.

I returned to that Creek channel a few days later with two new clients. We did not find many smallmouth but caught 4 smallmouth over 20-inches with the largest one just shy of 22 inches. It worked out because these particular clients were interested in catching trophy class smallmouth. Some clients prefer to catch numbers of smallmouth while others are looking for a trophy.

We continued to fish for about 15 minutes without a strike. My locator showed that smallmouth were still in the hole but just not cooperating. Now I was faced with the scenario, should we leave a pile of big fish to search for more fish? I have been here many times over the years and can honestly say it is a 50/50 situation. Half the time I leave fish, and find more fish, while the other half of the time I find no fish. It's especially tough to leave big fish after you've caught some toads. I figured that we seemed to be alone on the river so I took a chance of moving in hopes of finding more fish.

We fished a couple of other spots and we caught a few smallmouth but nothing in the same league as the smallmouth we caught earlier in the day while fishing the creek channel. There were some other spots I wanted to fish but I could sense that my clients were anxious to get back to the creek channel. I was just about ready to make a move when I spotted a boat setting up to fish the creek channel. I recognized the boat; it was a past client who caught a bunch of smallmouth with me years ago. The wind had picked up and we could see that he was having trouble holding his boat in the proper position. It looked like he was trying to anchor but the anchor kept dragging the bottom. The anchor dragging on the bottom would not help the fishing. Eventually he became frustrated and moved back upstream.

I told my clients that we were going to head back to the creek channel, although I mentioned that if there were big fish in the area the anchor dragging on the bottom in seven feet of water was not a good thing. I was right. The fact that the wind had picked up to about 25mph out of the south did not help our efforts. It was impossible to hold my 17-foot G3 boat on the spot. I hit my spot lock on my remote and even with my 24 volt trolling motor on high I could not hold and we had to surrender the spot.

We moved upstream in hopes of avoiding the main force of the wind and while we avoided the fierce wind we did not find another smallmouth the rest of the day. As we were fishing I discussed the scenario of leaving fish to find fish and my clients agreed that it is like playing the lottery. Sometimes you win and sometimes you lose. If I would have known there was another boat on the river and that the wind was going to pick up we would have remained fishing the creek channel for a reasonable amount of time. I told my clients that we could blame the weather man since there were no high winds in the forecast.

Two days later after two inches of rain I returned to the creek channel and it was on fire. Minnows were everywhere and most importantly hungry smallmouth were there as well. I always slow down my boat well short of a honey hole. I'm not concerned about spooking smaller fish but when your instincts tell you big fish are present; proceed with caution and keep your eyes open. As I approached the creek channel I pointed out to my client the surfacing baitfish. I deployed my trolling motor well short of the creek channel and put it on spot lock and rigged up my clients' rods, one with a Case sinking salty shad and one with a swimbait. I told my clients to look for baitfish or surface boil before they made a cast.

If you have a target you have a greater chance of hooking a smallmouth. They listened and the action was hot and heavy as both the soft plastic jerkbait and the swimbait caught fish; lots of smallmouth that ranged in size from 17 to 20 inches. Suddenly the action stopped and we fished for about 20 minutes without a strike. Now I was faced with the same scenario that troubled me a few days earlier, should we leave fish to find fish. Even though it seemed like we were the only boat on the water and we could easily fish the creek channel again, there was no guarantee.

My clients had caught about 12 smallmouth which was already a good day on the water. I told them the reason the smallmouth were stacked in the creek channel was the heavy rain was pushing chubs and other baitfish downstream into the main river. I told them we were in the right place at the right time. We discussed the situation we encountered a few days earlier and how this was different and that we were going to leave fish to find fish.

We took a boat ride upriver about a mile to another creek channel. It was a smaller creek but the water was gushing into the river, and although we did not see any surface activity my intuition told me smallmouth were present. I positioned the boat, clicked on the spot lock and my clients went to work still casting a swimbait and a soft plastic jerkbait. This time the soft plastic jerkbait scored and the swimbait fizzled. Soon, both my clients were casting soft plastic jerkbaits and catching smallmouth. When the action slowed I decided that it was time to make a return trip to the first creek channel that we had fished, which proved to be another good move. No other fishermen were on the river. This time the swimbait did all the catching. Although we did not catch as many fish the second time they were all quality fish.

We spent most of the day going back and forth between the two creek channels and even though the numbers decreased and the fish got smaller we were catching fish. We tried fishing some weeds, shoreline cover and rocks and caught a few smallmouth but the hot spots were the creek channels. I returned to that section of the river a few days later. The flow from the creeks had decreased and evidently the minnow population was depleted. We could only come up with a handful of smallmouth although my client caught one smallmouth over 20-inches. Most of the day was spent casting swimbaits towards wooded shoreline and we picked up several smallmouth, though the bite was tough.



Soft Plastic Jerkbait
Case Sinking Shad & Spearpoint 4/0 Wide Gap Hook
The VGrip holds a big smallmouth in place.



Case Lil Magic Swim