

Fishing and Outdoors in WNY

The best fishing action is right here, right now

BY CAPT. FRANK CAMPBELL

As the reel screamed out line and the rod stressed to the point of almost breaking, the anticipation was high as the angler battled what was for sure a giant Lake Ontario spring salmon. The net man was perfect. Over the transom of the boat came the silver fish, and everyone's thought was confirmed – a king salmon!

The big question was now: Is it big enough?

Big enough for what you say?

The Lake Ontario Counties Salmon and Trout Derby was in full swing, and the heaviest salmon worth \$15,000 to the lucky angler.

This scenario plays out each year repeatedly off the shoreline of Niagara County in Lake Ontario. These productive waters are well known as the place to be to cash in during the spring LOC derby. As a matter of fact – on average – better than 75% of the winning salmon are reeled in by participants that target our local waters of Lady O.

The derby will take place May 5-14, with the open contest waters in all of Lake Ontario. Eligible species include salmon, brown trout, lake trout and walleye. The overall grand prize goes to the angler who presents the largest salmon by weight, which is normally pushing 25 to 30 pounds. Each other division winner receives \$2,000, with an additional 19 spots paid out in each division.



Fishing is alive and well in Niagara County. The Niagara River has become a feeding frenzy this year for cormorants.

The most important thing to remember is you must be in it to win it; so, if you are going to try to target salmonids or walleye on Lake Ontario during this timeframe, check out www.loc.org to find details or how to register. Don't be the person that says, "I should have entered."

Remember: Someone must win.

Good luck to all who enter.

The annual Niagara media event will take place the first week of May in and around the Niagara Region. It is a yearly gathering of the best the outdoor media world has to offer, with representatives from Bassmaster

Magazine, In-Fishermen Magazine, Outdoor Life, On The Water Magazine, and others present to sample WNY waterways to target salmon, lake trout, walleye, steelhead and smallmouth bass. The draw for the attendees is the ability to pursue these numerous species with multiple presentations, which lead to great story opportunities.

I have said multiple times that we enjoy the best freshwater sportfishing in the country. Nowhere else can the size, diversity and numbers of fish be matched. Through these media visits, that message is spread nationwide.

During last year's event, James Hall, who is the editor of Bassmaster Magazine, enjoyed a banner day on the water, throwing jerk baits along the shoreline of the upper Niagara River. The outing yielded a 70-fish day for the bass guru. The result of the exceptional adventure was the upper Niagara being ranked as the eighth best bass fishery in the United States (along with Buffalo and Lake Erie).

Bassmaster Magazine is delivered to over 500,000 members of Bass Anglers Sportsman Society every month, and is viewed as the bass fisherman's bible.

We will receive numerous guests this year as a result of this article. With a little help from Mother Nature on the weather front, the Niagara Region will once again shine.

A few weeks ago, we talked about stocking and the important role it plays in keeping the area a world-class fishing destination. We are close to the end of stocking season, except for the Niagara River Angler's Association's pen project in Youngstown. I would like to think that all of these efforts will pay off, but this year we have seen several stockings become a feeding frenzy for the cormorants that are migrating through or setting up nesting colonies along the Niagara River. Every person that I have spoken with on this topic has the same reaction: Never has anyone seen

the numbers of birds as this year.

A cormorant can eat a pound of fish per bird per day and, when there are in the neighborhood of 5,000 birds passing through per day, that's a massive amount of fish/baitfish being consumed. The average direct stocked salmon is stocked at roughly 125 per pound, and pen fish are released at about 90 fish per pound. It's easy to see how the cormorant's feeding habits can really take a toll.

As of now, there is very little being done to combat the gross overabundance of these birds. We need to reevaluate why cormorants are protected. It is really turning into a management nightmare for the agencies tasked with creating a balance. It's time to put some pressure on the people in charge of making the regulations as it pertains to cormorant management, before we see a sharp decrease in fishing success.

Next time, we will dive deeper into the cormorant issue.

I hope to see you on the water enjoying the local outdoors. Every week, I produce a fishing report (Niagara County Fishing Hotline), and you can access it online at www.niagarafallsusa.com or simply call 716-282-8992, ext. 4, to hear what's up in the world of fishing. It is updated every Wednesday. I also host a weekly TV on Lockport Cable Television (www.lctv.net) that can be seen on Channel 1303 with Spectrum Cable. Check it out sometime.

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