

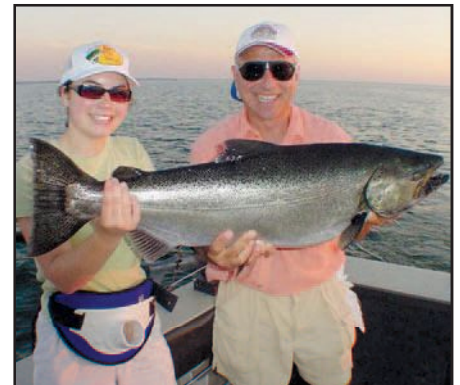
SPORTFISHING



Catches like this from the Niagara region are just one of the reasons Seaway Trail fishing is world renowned.



Muskie Magic's Don Lucas, Massena, NY with a trophy muskie. Don's boat is 100% handicapped accessible.



Hannab and Jim Sollecito boated this salmon in waters near Oswego, NY. Photo: Oswego Dept. of Tourism.

Seaway Trail Sportfishing: WORLD-CLASS ALL THE WAY!

From our archives ~ Updated by Journey Editor, Mary Burdette

As the name implies, the Seaway Trail is blessed with an abundance of water. It's one of the common bonds that is shared throughout its 518 miles—a trail of tourism destinations that is internationally recognized for beauty, history, culture and a long list of recreational activities including world-class sportfishing. Nearly every freshwater species of fish is there for the catching. Haul your own boat, charter a captain, hire a fishing guide or fish from shore off a bank or pier.

World-class fishing opportunities exist in the open lake waters as well as large rivers and innumerable smaller tributaries offering incredible diversity for all sportfishing interests. Seaway Trail waters yield big fish! A total of 13 record catches of the state's 46 freshwater species come from Seaway Trail waters.

The NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) coordinates fisheries management programs, including the stocking of salmon, trout, walleye and even muskie in some waters. They also keep track of state record catches. Complete information on state fishing programs can be obtained through the DEC's fishing regulations guide, available where licenses are sold as well as online: www.dec.state.ny.us

• **LAKE ERIE: Walleye, smallmouth bass, rainbow trout/steelhead**

Lake Erie, the shallowest of the Great Lakes, is a haven for warm water species, the two most popular being walleye and smallmouth bass. Excellent bass fishing can be realized from May-November, when the season closes, if water temperatures hold up.

Walleye fishing is also outstanding in Lake Erie, with the season opening in early May. Early season action is normally concentrated around the shoreline at night, but as the waters warm and fish migrate around the lake, deep-water action for suspended fish becomes a daily activity from June-September, offering up some of the finest walleye fishing in the Northeast.

As for cold water fisheries, the best time for trout (especially steelhead) is from fall to spring when the tributaries swell with these fish. From Erie PA through Buffalo NY, just about every tributary with a good flow of water will have fish in them.

The current NYS record lake trout (41 lbs, 8 oz.) was caught by Jesse Wykstra in Lake Erie in August 2003. Lake Erie also holds the NYS record catch for yellow perch (3 lbs., 8 oz. reeled in by George Boice back in 1982) and pink salmon (4 lbs., 15 oz.) caught by Randy Nyberg in 1985.

• **UPPER NIAGARA RIVER: Walleye, muskellunge, northern pike, smallmouth bass and largemouth bass.**

The Niagara River actually offers two distinctly different fisheries: one above Niagara Falls; the other below the mighty cataracts. Above the Falls, the waters are shallower and therefore warmer. Walleye, smallmouth and largemouth bass, as well as muskellunge, abound. Once the home for the world record walleye, these productive waters are considered some of the finest for the elusive muskie.

• **LOWER NIAGARA RIVER: Chinook salmon, steelhead, lake trout, walleye and smallmouth bass**

The area below the Falls receives the most attention from anglers as both cold and warm water fish species are available.

These waters never freeze, so year-round opportunities for salmon, trout, bass or walleye abound. In the spring, rainbows will cruise beside lake trout until the waters become too warm. The mouth of the river on the famous Niagara Bar offers lots of action, with the chinook and coho salmon at the top of the list.

Lake trout will stack up in large numbers at the mouth of the river as they gorge themselves on the baitfish attracted by the nutrient-rich waters of the Niagara River. In '94, the state's record came from here (39 lb., 8 oz.) but it has since been surpassed by a Lake Erie catch.

As waters warm up, cold water fish are replaced by smallmouth bass and walleye. The sauger, a cousin to the walleye, are infrequently caught, but the state record of 4 pounds, 8 ounces was reeled in here by Darrin Schwenkbeck in 1990.

The salmon will start to run up into Devil's Hole in September, followed by the lake trout and steelhead in late October/early November. The lower Niagara is one of the top steelhead fisheries in the country until spring.

• **LAKE ONTARIO: Pacific salmon, lake, brown & rainbow trout/steelhead, pike, walleye, black bass and panfish**

From April-October, the cry "Fish On!" is often heard around the lake. The rest of the year, the best action is in the tributaries and bays. Fisheries are a bit different at west and east ends of the lake, but each has its own rewards. Don't overlook bays that offer tremendous fishing for largemouth bass and walleye in the summer and perch and panfish in spring, not to mention the hard-fighting smallmouth bass found close to shore.

In spring, if you're looking for trophy brown trout, the Eastern Basin is where you want to be. The state record fish has been broken several times in the Oswego/Mexico Bay area, a mark last set in 1997 when Tony Brown out-fought a 33 lb., 2 oz. behemoth. At the same time in the Western Basin, trollers are chasing spring coho and Chinook salmon.

To the west, a big focus is with deepwater trolling for steelhead trout and early season chinook fishing. Action off Wilson, Olcott and Oak Orchard Creek can be outstanding for trout, as well as salmon, browns and lakereels. The state record rainbow/steelhead comes out of Lake Ontario, a 31 lb., 3 oz. trophy caught by Robert Wilson in 2004.

• **OAK ORCHARD CREEK: Pacific salmon, brown trout, steelhead, walleye**

The Oak Orchard River begins at the Oak Orchard swamps in Genesee County and flows through Orleans County emptying into Lake Ontario at Point Breeze. Marsh Creek, a prominent tributary of the Oak Orchard River, meets up with the river at an area known as "The Bridges." Oak Orchard River and Marsh Creek offer excellent cold water fishing with opportunities to catch brown trout, rainbow trout (steelhead), chinook and coho salmon. Runs of these fish offer some of the most exciting cold water fishing in New York State.

• **LOWER GENESEE RIVER: Pacific salmon, brown trout, steelhead, walleye**

On Lake Ontario, where east meets west, all points offer excellent fishing. Rochester, Sodus Bay, and Fairhaven all have outstanding reputations. Probably the most noteworthy from this section of the lake was the state record Atlantic salmon, a 24 lb., 15 oz. fish taken out of Pultneyville by Mike Dandino in April of 1997.

Everyone shares excellent lake trout fishing. They seem to be everywhere! The same goes for smallmouth bass, and to a certain extent, walleye. However, the better walleye fishing, on a more consistent basis, is to the east—especially in and around Henderson Harbor and on down to the Oswego area.

Other record catches for NYS include: Terrance Colwell's state record 16 lb, 12 oz. burbot from Black River Bay in 1991; and Joe Williams' 1996 world record 11 lb., 11 oz. redhorse sucker from the Salmon River.

• **SALMON RIVER: Chinook salmon, coho salmon, and steelhead.**

When the salmon start getting their urge to spawn, one of the best spots to be is off the mouth of the Salmon River to the east, home to many of these fish thanks to the Salmon River Fish Hatchery. The Salmon



Millie Mason shows off a nice carp she caught in the St. Lawrence River. Photo courtesy of St. Lawrence County Chamber of Commerce.

River holds the Chinook salmon record for the Great Lakes, a 47 lb., 13 oz. monster landed by Kurt Killian in 1991. In 1998, the area produced the world record coho salmon, a 33 lb., 7 oz. giant, caught by Steve Sheets, Jr. Best fishing runs from mid-September through November and mid-March through mid-May.

• **ST. LAWRENCE RIVER: Smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, northern pike, muskellunge, and walleye.**

As the waters of Lake Ontario flow out to the Atlantic Ocean, they form the St. Lawrence Seaway—home to the Thousand Islands and a rich tradition in sportfishing. With the diversity of aquatic habitats, the St. Lawrence is home to a wide variety of warm water species and offers exciting fishing adventures. Smallmouth and largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, yellow perch, bullheads and various types of panfish are all common to the river, and it doesn't require a well-equipped yacht to fish here. Protected bays provide good fishing for the small boat angler, while area docks and piers offer action for shore fishermen.

Although largemouth bass are taken on the St. Lawrence, smallmouth bass is the most commonly caught species. Good catches of smallmouths are taken around islands, off points, in bays, below the Moses-Saunders Power Dam and off shoals. Largemouth bass can be found in shallow weedy bays and along edges of shoals. Lake of the Isles on Wellesley Island is known as the largemouth hot spot for the St. Lawrence River.

Northern pike fishing can be enjoyed almost year-round. In winter, ice fishermen take good catches from bays. During spring, shallow weedy bays and shoals are places where northern pike anglers do well. As a rule, bays that provided action for ice fishermen will do the same for open water anglers.

Walleye fishing is more localized than northern pike fishing along the river. In May, walleye hot spots are generally where

major tributaries enter the St. Lawrence. The mouths of the Oswegatchie and Grasse Rivers, below the Moses-Saunders Power Dam at Massena and off shoals and points are all good bets. In summer and early fall, walleye fishing changes somewhat. Areas below the Moses Saunders Power Dam and around Carleton Island become hot spots.

Fishing for panfish should not be ignored. Panfish are widespread in the river and offer action for both boat and shore fishermen. Often overlooked, these fish provide year-round fun for all anglers—novices and experts alike. Rock bass, black crappies, bluegills and pumpkinseeds are all good tasting and relatively easy to catch. Many a kid has had his or her first successful fishing experience with these smaller species.

Bullhead fishing is popular in early spring soon after ice-out. Tributaries such as French, Cranberry, Crooked, Chippewa and Coles creeks are all hot spots. Later in the spring, bullhead fishing moves into the bays such as those of Grindstone and Wellesley Islands.

Late spring through early summer is also a good time for yellow perch. Try off docks at Cape Vincent, Clayton and Ogdensburg.

In late summer and through fall, great effort is put into bringing home one of the most challenging warm water game fish; the muskellunge. In 1957, Arthur Lawton's NYS record 69 lb. 15 oz. muskie was taken near Clayton and this record still stands today. Catching a musky is so demanding and specialized that using a guide service is recommended especially for the inexperienced angler.

Within the last five years or so, carp fishing has become extremely popular in the St. Lawrence, the idea being imported from Europe. The average catch is around 15 pounds and three feet long—but it's not uncommon to catch 40 pounders. The size and numbers of carp here have brought well-earned international attention.

St. Lawrence County hosts the St. Lawrence International Junior Carp Tournament, which includes a carp school featuring world renowned experts and two days of rod bending competition. Contestants will fish from the mouth of the Oswegatchie River to the wide shallows of Lake St. Lawrence.

No matter where you fish in the Seaway Trail region, or what you're fishing for, check in at local bait shops for up-to-date information on best techniques, hot spots and lures—and ask other fishermen. Many counties have fishing hotlines, and the NYS DEC maintains a weekly fishing report for specific regions. Good luck! Know your records! You might just land the next one in Seaway Trail waters! 🎣