
Subject: : Warm Water & Salt Water Fly-Fishing

Topic: : Twenty Inch Smallmouth.... Edit: Finally Did It!

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I'm hoping maybe this will be my lucky year and I finally get an honest to goodness 20" smallmouth on a fly. While I haven't chased smallies with the fly rod for as long as I've seriously chased trout - I've been at it a dozen or so years and have steadily acquired a growing respect and admiration for this fish. Trout guys sing the praises of wild trout and profess their admiration (and I share this of course) for the beauty and challenge of mountain brookies or a big wild brown in Letort or Penns. I have come increasingly to believe that smallmouth bass have earned as much of my respect as any 20" limestone wild brown trout. Over the years I've been able to fool my fair share of 20" wild trout here in PA but I have yet to get that 20" smallie. Probably a dozen or so SMs have come to my hand that taped at 19" or just under that, but the magic 20" continues to elude me. A river smallie of that size here in central PA is a very rare and very old fish - probably at least 11 years old, likely more like 13. And, of course, they're all wild. Smallies are, generally, slower growers than trout and for a SM to reach trophy size makes for a very special fish. These wise old giants are out there - I see 'em every year but just can't seem to get them to strike despite my best efforts. Often they'll just watch me with contempt, and slowly swim away. More than one trophy SM has charged my fly, scrutinized it, and turned away like a Keys permit. I've come to expect big wild trout that charge my streamer flies to hit hard and hook themselves. Not so with big SMs. They almost seem to have sixth sense for carefully examining a lure or fly and deciding it's fake. It's a shame that, in the minds of so many trout fishermen, bass are perceived as stupid lunkheads that will hit any lure and fine to kill and eat. Big river smallmouths are wily, old, great fighters, and a challenging fish to pursue with a fly rod. While the Big Bass regs have helped, I wish we had more protection for these wild, very old fish. Sure, in the end, 20 inches is just a number - but it's a magical one. For the upcoming fly fishing season, we've all got our dreams - maybe hitting a great hatch, or a trip out West. Me? I'm dreamin of a 20" smallmouth for 2009.