

Summer Steelhead

Tenacious fighter available now to shore anglers

By Dick Ellis



In late July, expert shore angler Dave Sura waits for a Skamania steelhead on shore near the Lake Michigan Racine Harbor. Without a boat, Sura takes advantage of very good trout fishing from shore on harbors north and south on the big lake. (Photo by Dick Ellis)



Dave Sura finds great harbor fishing for summer run Skamania steelhead at harbors north and south on Lake Michigan. At this writing, fishing was heating up August 2nd with 10 and 12 pound steelhead taken by Sura. (Photo by Katie Sura)

Wisconsin anglers hear the dreaded words far too often. “You really should have been here yesterday. The fish were really hitting.” Now, I’m afraid after a July of chasing Dave Sura with the camera while he chases Skamania Steelhead, my good friend will expand on the rhetoric. “You really should have been here yesterday....and

tomorrow.”

While I plan trips to Marinette County, Richland Center, Lacrosse and the far north, Sura is easier to keep tabs on in southeast Wisconsin. If a daily phone call to his cell spells hot fishing, I can be in the truck in short order tracking him down on the harbor rocks of Kenosha, Racine, Milwau-

kee, and further north. It might be 5:00 a.m. in Racine targeting the Great Lakes rainbow. It might be 12:00 midnight in Milwaukee eyeing up the salmon. But without exception, Sura is planted on shore.

“What do you mean where am I?” was the typical Sura response to my phone probing Sunday. “I’m fishing. I can’t

help it. I admit it. I’m addicted.”

I took an hour trip south last week to meet Sura in Racine. On the dreaded “yesterday”, Sura had taken Skamania and watched several other fish taken including a mammoth 19 pounder. We caught nothing with the exception of another slough of photos. When I called

Sura August 2, he had corralled 10 and 12 pound Skamania at 2:00 in the afternoon.

“Things are heating up late,” he said. “You should really be here tomorrow.” “Sounds great,” I say. “Shut up,” I think.

Skamania steelhead is one of three strains of rainbows stocked for decades by the DNR. While the Ganaraska remain in the lake until March and April before running up scores of Lake Michigan tributaries to spawn, and the Chambers Creek strain runs in late fall to spawn in March, Skamania run in late summer and early fall and remain in the rivers to spawn in February.

Staging Skamania, according to Sura, are available to the shore angler as early as June in the far south and further north later as the water warms into the fifties. With cold weather and water temperatures defining 2009, Skamania fishing was just heating up as the summer moved into August.

“Each year the numbers and timing of their arrival fluctuates with the weather,” he said. “Be patient. The fish will show up. Last year they didn’t show up until mid-July. But once they arrived, I caught several fish each outing and missed at least one for every fish I landed.”

Sura said that bends in the break walls or near the mouth of the harbors are excellent places to set up for fishing Skamania because both places will have current. Current attracts baitfish and baitfish attract “steelies”. Although low light periods at dawn and dusk are prime times to fish, Sura

literally works the water successfully too at mid-day and midnight...unless I’m there.

Sura’s favorite bait is spawn. He uses the brown trout and rainbow he catches year round to harvest the fresh bait which he ties in spawn sacs. Readers may remember the large brown trout Sura took through the tributary ice for this column in winter. In Racine last week, Sura held out orange spawn sacs from that brown and steelhead and asked me to determine which was from which species. I could not, but they each work well on the summer harbor rocks.

“Without fresh spawn, steelhead fishing in summer can be difficult,” Sura said. “I tie more than 300 spawn sacs each year, mostly for summer steelies.”

Sura prefers orange netting in tying spawn sacs, and stresses that anglers make sure they cure the spawn with salt, borax or a commercial cure to keep the bait fresh, and also legal for use in Wisconsin due to VHS (Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia). Without spawn, Sura said that live alewives, shrimp, plastic minnow baits and spoons are all effective.

Sura recommends a minimum rod length of nine feet (his is 13 feet) in floating spawn to ease the stress placed on the thinner, lighter lines and leaders he uses, with 200 yards of 10-pound line. He prefers FireLine or PowerPro, and adds a 10-pound mono or fluorocarbon leader when using these super lines to avoid spooking “line shy” fish.

Hooks, floats, split-shot



“The summer run Skamania Steelhead available to shore anglers on Lake Michigan offer great fights that often feature acrobatic jumps and tenacious runs.”

FAREWELL TO WISCONSIN SKAMANIA?

Fishing for summer steelhead will remain good for several years but numbers of returning Skamania will decline. The DNR has suspended stocking Skamania due to VHS. Other states including Indiana and Michigan will continue stocking Skamania. Sura recommends taking the trip to neighboring states in the future. The fight is worth the travel. Sura is not a current guide, but with 25 years of shore and tributary fishing for perch, steelhead and salmon, he is an information machine and willing to share. Contact Dave at 262-930-8260 or steelheadsura@yahoo.com.

weights and swivels are also needed to effectively fish summer steelhead. Hook choice, he said, is extremely important. He prefers colored, octopus-style hooks in orange, pink or chartreuse in sizes #04 or #06. Floats can be fixed or slip-style, depending on angler preference.

Now you’re ready, and Sura says, you had better be when taking on the Skamania steelhead. “This fish is one of the most exciting fish found in the lake,” he said. “No other fish puts as much effort into shaking the hook as a Skamania. It’s a sleek acrobatic fish that likes to rocket out of the water. It’s a maniac.”

The bite is on now. And I’ll be shutting it right off when I meet Sura again sometime between yesterday and tomorrow. *o_w_o*