

## On The Water With A Susquehanna River Guide Lance Dunham

October , one of the best months to fish the river. During the week you'd be lucky to see another boat on the water, most vacations are over, the kids are in school, hunting season is here, but it's also one of the easiest times to catch fish. Sometimes I think you could cast just about anything and catch a fish because they are on the feed before the cold water comes. And the smell of the fall air with the colorful leaves decorating the river view is second to none. But with cool fall days also comes the cool fall rains.

I've been guiding on this old river for 29 years now and have fished in every sort of weather there is be it rain, snow, wind, or the heat of summer. Staying home in bad weather is not an option when someone has waited sometimes a year to fish with you, or you have just found out that in February there was enough open water in the river away from the ice to go fishing from your boat. Well maybe that last one would be an option with many fishermen but not with me. After being cooped up and off my boat for a couple of months, I just got to go fishing.

During all these years I must have tried just about every sort of outdoor apparel there is to stay dry and comfortable. While nothing can or even could be perfect I think I've finally found something very close in an outdoor clothing system that keeps you dry and warm in the winter and also can keep you cool and dry in the summer rains and I'll share this information with you. It's called the SilverMax layering system from Medalist. It was introduced to me last November when I was doing a fishing show with Alan Probst of the "All Outdoors With Alan Probst" show. He brought me a Medalist outerwear suit for cold wet conditions called the 3 Peaks 3-in-1 jacket and the Anchorage insulated pant. Well I wore that suit in all kinds of cold wet weather while fishing in November through March and I've never had a cold or wet day since. Of course when summer got here it was too warm to wear so I got their lightweight Max series packable waterproof jacket and pants. We all know how the rain seeps in around your neck, cuffs and zipper during a hard rain or when you're going 40mph in a jet boat. The Max series kept me dry. The cost is about what you would expect to pay for a good outdoor suit and it performs better than any gortex suit I've ever owned. You can take a look at the Medalist SilverMax line outdoor apparel on their web sight at [www.medalist.com](http://www.medalist.com) .

There are many, many lures that work in October so here are a few that work for me. Traditionally this is when the river starts to clear up and we can use our surface lures to not only catch big smallmouth bass but the occasional pike and musky as well. If you get an overcast day with clear to light stained water you can use them all day long for some of the most exciting fishing action on the water. I use two types of surface lures depending on the water clarity and surface conditions. When the water is "glassed out" or very calm on the surface and the water is clear to light stained I like to use the Lucky Craft Sammy in the #85 size. Most of the time I use the black, blue, or gold colors. This lure is designed to imitate a wounded minnow. The head

stays above the water and it's weighted so when you pause the tail hook drops down to get a solid fish hook up. To use the lure cast it out and when it hits the water let it sit for a few seconds then with your rod tip down close to the water start to twitch your wrist while reeling in the lure. Not too fast now, watch the lure. The head should be above the surface and it should be moving left and right as you twitch your wrist, or "walking the dog" as some anglers put it. The other surface lure I use is the Storm Chug Bug. It comes in a wide variety of colors and I use it with stained water or when it's raining or when there is a light wind chop on the surface. It has a concave mouth on it that spits the water forward and has a nice "bloop" sound when you give it a short jerk. To use it just cast it out, let it sit for a few seconds, then give it a short jerk to make it spit water along with the "bloop" sound. Pause for a second or two in between each jerk. One of the most common mistakes made with surface fishing is to try to set the hook too early. For a good hook set, wait that half second for the lure to disappear when the fish strikes or you feel the weight of the fish. Use the surface lures where you have the most chance of getting a strike like a very rocky bottom in three foot or less of calm water.

Next is the mid water level lures like the Rapala X-Rap, I use a size #8. This is a suspending jerk bait. This is much like using a surface lure only about two foot down because it stays where you put it. It doesn't rise or fall when you pause. When the fish don't want something on top this is the way to go. To use it cast out and give it a sharp, short, downward jerk and pause, jerk down and pause. Most of the time the fish will hit the lure on the pause so reel up the slack as you pause. How long to pause? The fish will tell you. A rule of thumb is the colder the water the longer the pause. In water colder than 47 degrees I've paused up to 8 to 10 seconds and that's a long time. The fish will also tell you the color of the day. Most of the time in stained water it will be something with an orange belly like their gold, perch, or hot steel colors. As the water clears up the traditional silver, olive, or blue works well. This is my shallow 4ft or less go to lure in October. It works great over rocks where you would normally get hung up with a jig.

Another jerk bait that drives the fish wild in October is the soft jerk bait or "Fluke". It looks like a minnow made out of soft plastic. I use a four or five inch fluke normally in white or pearl colors because I like to see the fish strike the lure. I use it in dark calm waters near the edge weeds in water up to three foot deep. The fluke is weighted with salt to make it sink very slow and most of the time I use it weightless with a # 3/0 circle hook through the nose. To use just cast it out and watch it slowly sink. When it gets down to about 6 inches under the surface just slightly twitch your rod and the lure will dance in an erratic motion triggering the strike. If there is a slight wind causing a bow in your line and the fluke won't sink correctly just insert a small finishing nail in the head of the fluke and the added weight will send it down. Most likely you will either feel or even see the strike. Remember, with a circle hook you just lift the rod so the hook just connects with the lip of the fish. A hard jerk and it will come right out.

Last, the jig can be used to pick up the deeper fish. In October almost any jig seems to work but I use what has worked for me all year long and that is the 3" Trick Stick from Alluring Baits and the Shorty jig from JJ's Jigs.

October is also the start of the change in bass regulations for the rivers in Pa. The minimum size limit to keep a bass goes from 12" to 15" and the keep limit goes from 6 to 4 fish. Many anglers fail to read their rule summery book on that and receive a citation for short fish or having over the limit. I personally don't harvest bass on the river and since the 15" smallmouth are about 7 to 8 years old in the upper North Branch of the Susquehanna River and a 20" smallie is a teenager, I personally think it is a sin to kill a breeder fish that old just to fill your stomach for a few minutes. Also the longer time span a fish is in the river, the longer it has to absorb the heavy metals like mercury and PCB's which is harmful to humans. Since it is so easy to catch the old breeders in October I can't understand why the Fish commission allows it. Are they trying to thin out the big breeder sport fish or the humans by only allowing them eat the older fish with more contaminants? I'm sure it's not the latter but I think the law should be changed to a slot limit. For those who wish to eat the bass, let them keep the safer 12" to 14" fish. Save the 15" to 20" bass for the sportsman catch and release anglers and let them keep just 1 smallmouth bass over 20" for a wall mount even though the new reproduction fish are far better. I would think that this would be a win-win arrangement for all concerned, the smallmouth bass and the anglers. Well that's all for this month. For further reports, photos, and chartering information visit me on my website at [www.ldguideservice.com](http://www.ldguideservice.com) . Fish safe and I'll see you on the river.

Good fishing

Lance