

Fall Fishing on the Thornapple River

(September 19th thru 21st, 2010)

I decided to test the Thornapple and its Smallmouth population during less than ideal conditions. I arrived in Hastings, MI on Sunday (9/19/2010) prior to lunch. Since I was too early to check into my motel room, I drove out to the McKeown Rd. Bridge to look at the river.

Views at McKeown Rd. Bridge



Canoe launch point under construction



View across the "Old" Bridge



Looking downstream at the "New" Bridge



Looking upstream from McKeown Rd. bridge

Fortunately I had talked with Jim Fox of *U Rent Em Canoe* livery on Saturday (9/18/10) and he was able to verify for me that the river was clear even though it had rained during the week. *Note: Since I'm 300 miles south of Hastings in the Cincinnati area, it's nice to be able to confirm the river condition, particularly water clarity. The USGS Real-Time Water web site will give you Flow & Gage Depth information. However, since Bass and Smallmouth in particular rely on sight to feed; water clarity is very important.*

The Hastings area had received over 2.5" of rain earlier in the week. The river flow had increased from a steady 124 cubic feet per second (CPS) to a peak of 221 cps on Sunday morning. Also, a cold front had pushed thru and daytime air temperatures had gone from the mid eighties to the mid sixties with winds out of the East/ Northeast on both Sunday and Monday.



USGS Gage Station # 04117500 @ McKeown Rd. Bridge on the Thornapple



The Thornapple @ Airport Rd. on Sunday afternoon @ 221 cps

SUNDAY (9/19/10) afternoon fishing:

River Flow	221 cps
Air Temps.	Mid 60's F
Water temp	64 F
Winds	East @ 5 mph

Sunday afternoon I first fished the Thornapple downstream of town along Irving Rd. I fished for about an hour and only caught/released one Smallmouth ~ 12" long. Since the fishing was slow in this area, I decided to go back to Hastings and fish upstream near the Center Rd. bridge.

The fishing action was completely different upstream of town. I managed to catch & release ~ 11 Smallies in the 12" to 16" range. Six of these Smallmouths were "Keepers" ranging from 14" to 16". Nice fish but no real "Lunkers" yet. However, this provided me with some positive signs of encouragement since I would be fishing in this section of the river all day on Monday.

Monday (9/20/10)

River Flow 200 cps
Air Temps. High 65 F & overcast
Water temp 64 F
Winds East/Northeast @ 10 mph

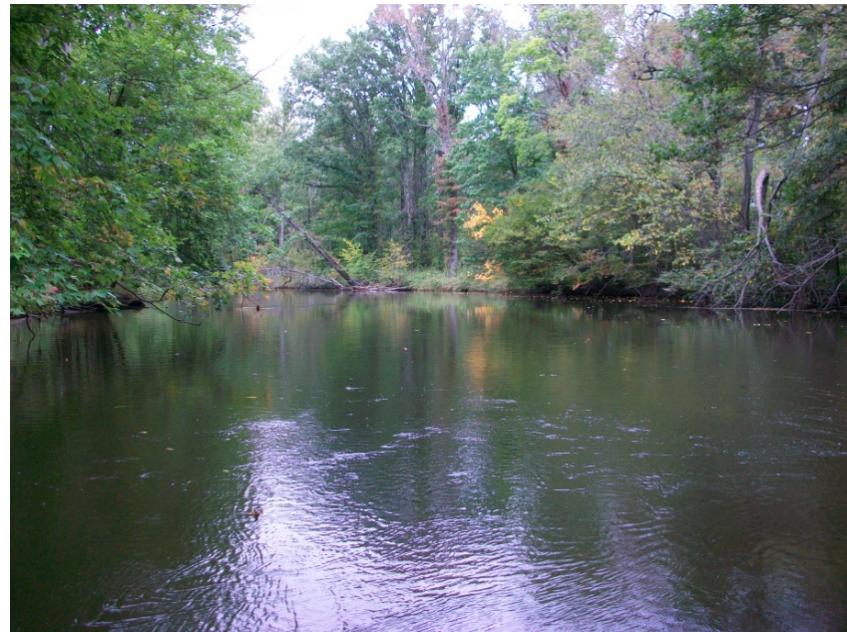
Thanks to the folks (Jim Fox and his wife Julie) at *U Rent Em Canoe*, I was able to "put in" along River Rd. @ 8:00 am. Fishing was real slow at first and I did not catch my first Smallmouth until 11:00 am. The areas pictured below usually produce a good number of Smallmouths but not on this day. The cooler weather and East wind were going to make fishing more of a challenge; "patience will be required".



Looking upstream near the River Rd. "put-in" point.

A view downstream in the same area near the "put in" point

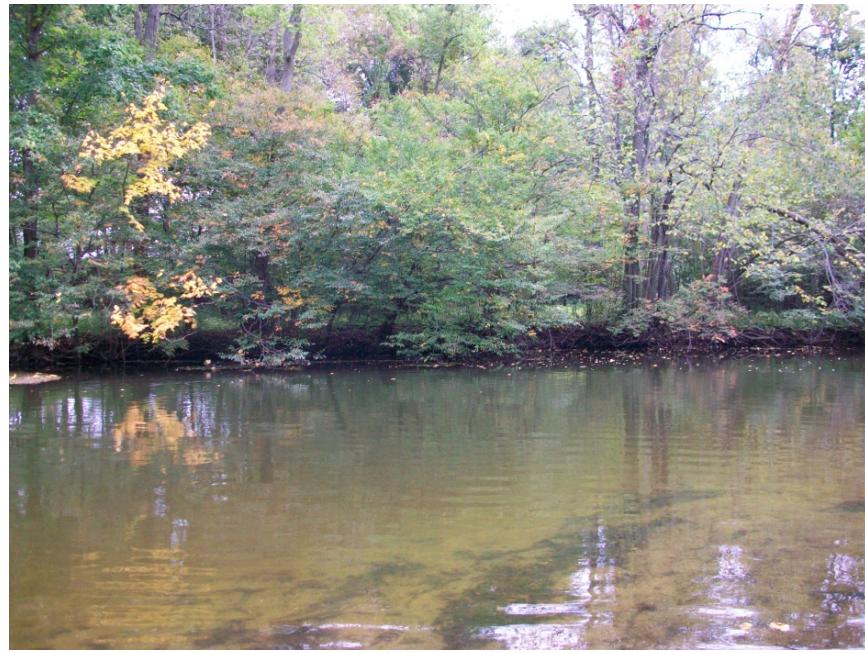




Entering a nice stretch of the river where the river forks in to 2 branches.



16.5" Smallmouth caught & released in the area of the river pictured above on a hard crawdad. Note: Photo taken with Cell phone so quality is lacking.

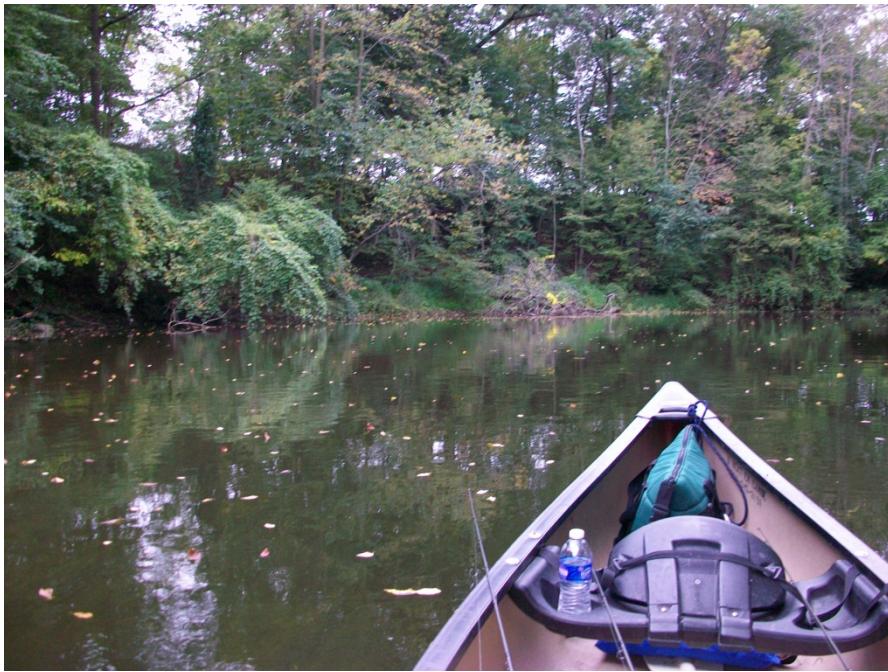


A view looking back upstream in the same area shown on previous page.

By the time I reached this section of the river it was 12 noon and the fish were starting to bite, finally. I caught 4 Bass out of the hole pictured above; 2 were nice 15" "Keepers".



Lunch time along a gravel bar, a good parking spot for the canoe. It's around 1 pm and I've caught and released 5 Smallmouth Bass; 3 of the 5 were > 14".



Entering another section of the river that has produced lots of big bass (+ 18") over the years. I caught & released 9 or 10 Smallies here on large minnows. The Bass were in a feeding frenzy. I left the hole while the fish were still biting (I hate doing that)! I was targeting a 6 pm "take out" time at U Rent Em's livery in downtown Hastings.

I floated downstream to the next hole and again the Bass were feeding wildly on large minnows.

I missed "BIG" fish on my first 3 casts in this hole. I tried to set the hook too soon and got my minnow back each time. Finally on the 4th cast I caught a 15" Bass. I caught another 9 or 10 bass from this hole as well. I left this hole also while the fish were still feeding. I had a long paddle ahead..... and didn't want to be late. I'll come back next year and get them again. The picture below (w/ 18" Smallmouth) was taken in this same hole in mid August.





A typical Thornapple Smallmouth. This one happens to be + 18" in length. Note the dark "bronze" coloring. And yes they fight like crazy in the swift water!

Summary of Monday's Float trip:

- "Put in" time 8:00 am
- 1st Smallmouth caught at 11:00 am
- Caught and released a total of 24 Smallmouths
- 16 of the 24 were "Keepers" greater than 14" in length
 - Not too bad considering the weather and river conditions
- Biggest fish on the trip an 18.25" Smallie pictured above; caught on a hard crawdad!
- "Take out" time 6:00 pm at U Rent Em
- River Flow @ 200 cps with water temp @ 64 F