

With national media in town, Niagara Frontier shines as premier freshwater fishing destination

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The Niagara media event once again showcased why the waters of the Niagara Frontier continue to earn recognition as one of the premier freshwater fishing destinations in North America. Held out of Lewiston from May 3-9, the long-running event brought together some of the most respected outdoor communicators, media representatives, and fishing industry manufacturers from across the country. For more than 20 years, the event has played a major role in highlighting the incredible diversity and quality of fishing opportunities available throughout the region.

The 2026 edition once again delivered unforgettable action on the water. Visiting media members experienced a fishery that few destinations anywhere can rival. During the week, anglers landed smallmouth bass up to 7 pounds, walleye topping 11 pounds, king salmon approaching 20 pounds, and lake trout in the 25-pound range. The catches did not stop there, as participants also encountered steelhead, northern pike, muskie, largemouth bass and silver bass.

What impressed many attendees most was not simply the size of the fish, but the sheer diversity available within such a short distance. It is rare for anglers to have the opportunity to target so many world-class

species in one destination during a single week. The combination of the lower Niagara River, Lake Ontario, and surrounding tributaries continues to create a fishery that stands among the very best in freshwater angling.

Representatives from Bassmaster Magazine, Outdoor Life, In-Fisherman, Fishing on SI and several additional outlets left the week already discussing plans for a return visit next season. Beyond the fishing itself, many attendees also praised the local restaurants, lodging accommodations and hospitality they experienced throughout the week. Events such as the Niagara media event continue to generate tremendous exposure for the region while helping drive tourism and economic activity tied directly to the outdoors.

While the spotlight often falls on the incredible fishing opportunities available today, much of that success is tied directly to the dedicated volunteers and conservation efforts working to protect and strengthen the fishery for the future. One of the most important examples is the trout and salmon pen project, which recently wrapped up another highly successful season.

The annual pen-rearing effort helps improve survival and imprinting rates for young salmon and trout before they are released into Lake Ontario waters. This year, volunteers cared for 25,000 steelhead – the highest number of any pen



Joe Albanese from Wired2Fish with a giant smallmouth bass.

project on Lake Ontario – along with 115,000 chinook salmon. The fish were held for approximately five weeks before release, allowing them to better adapt to local waters and increasing the likelihood they will return to the region in future years.

Projects like this require an enormous amount of volunteer labor and commitment. Local captains and community members dedicated countless hours installing the pens, monitoring the fish, feeding them daily, and eventually removing the structures once the fish were released. The effort is a true communitywide undertaking that demonstrates the passion local anglers have for protecting and sustaining the fishery.

Special recognition goes to Capt. Matt Yablonsky and his wife, Christine, who were present on a daily basis helping care for the young fish and ensuring operations ran smoothly throughout the project. Their dedication and consistency reflected the very best of volunteerism and stewardship. The community in Youngstown also deserves tremendous credit for continuing to support what has become an absolutely critical fisheries initiative for the region.

The importance of the fishery to the local economy and quality of life cannot be overstated. From charter captains and tackle shops to hotels, restaurants and waterfront businesses, countless people benefit from the outdoor opportunities these waters provide. Just as importantly, the fishery brings communities together through events and traditions that celebrate the waterfront and the people connected to it.

One of those traditions returns this Friday, May 22, with the annual Smelt Festival taking place along the waterfront at the Griffon Gastropub in Lewiston. The festival has become a popular community gathering that celebrates local fishing heritage while also supporting important causes tied to the waterfront community.

For those who have never attended, the event offers an opportunity to enjoy great food, spend time along the water, and celebrate

everything that makes the Niagara Frontier fishery special. At the same time, the festival also helps support the Youngstown pen project and Catching Dreams Charters.

Founded by Capt. Ned Librock, Catching Dreams provides unforgettable charter fishing experiences for children facing serious illnesses and life challenges. Each year, more families reach out for the opportunity to spend a day on the water together, allowing young people the chance to simply enjoy being kids while experiencing the excitement and peace that fishing can provide.

The organization has touched countless families while highlighting the healing power of time spent outdoors. Events like the Smelt Festival not only raise awareness for the fishery itself, but also help support programs that make a meaningful difference in people's lives.

As another successful Niagara media event concludes and another pen-rearing season comes to an end, it serves as a reminder of just how fortunate this region is to possess such an extraordinary natural resource. The combination of world-class fishing, passionate volunteers, strong community support, and organizations committed to helping others continues to make the Niagara Frontier one of the truly special outdoor destinations anywhere in North America.

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