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Walleye returns to Shiawassee River

The Shiawassee River is known for its smallmouth bass fishing. But recently, a new fish can be found there: the mouthwatering walleye. The return of this popular sport fish to its historic habitat in the Shiawassee River is exciting news for anglers.

In the opinion of Joe Leonardi, a Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Fisheries biologist for the past 30 years, it's likely that improved water quality and the building of the Chesaning Rock Ramp played a significant role in the return of the walleye upstream.

Walleye are a migratory fish. Although they have established populations in the Saginaw Bay, they rely on rivers like the Shiawassee for spawninwallg purposes.

"We have proof that there is a high density of walleye downstream of Chesaning, probably in the 10-30 thousand range in the spring," said Leonardi.

Since the removal of the Chesaning Dam, the DNR has conducted annual surveys to evaluate fish passage. Surveys conducted both upstream and downstream of the rock ramp have discovered four new species (including walleye) upstream.

"These [surveys] indicate passage over the rock ramp," Leonardi said. "The DNR is also receiving reports of walleye being caught at Corunna Dam, which is another sign they are passing."

There are eight dams along the main stem of the Shiawassee River. After the creation of the Chesaning Rock Ramp, the next barrier to fish passage on the river is the Owosso Dams. Although these dams contain structures for fish passage, many fish can't pass through them.

[Return to top](#)

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