

## Man-made Structure for September

Surely you have heard the adage “Ten percent of the fishermen catch ninety percent of the fish?” Success in fishing can be achieved by luck, but that ten percent consistently put bass in the livewell because of knowledge, the skills to make the proper lure presentation, and the ability to make good decisions about where to fish, which lure to choose, and which retrieve to employ.

Professional bass fishermen hunt for bass in various types of underwater environments, hoping to establish a “pattern” that indicates what type of locations and presentations will be successful on that day. For example, once the pro figures out that feeding bass are next to submerged wood, that angler can cast to underwater logs and pilings rather than weed beds or rock piles. This allows the pro to make more casts in *productive* areas rather than depending on blind luck to intersect their lure retrieve with a bass’ location.

Of the many smallmouth bass patterns that are possible on any given day, over the years I have found that one of my favorite seasonal patterns repeats itself every September, especially in rivers. I first discovered this pattern in the Susquehanna River in Maryland during the early 1970’s, found it to hold true in the Thousand Islands, New York, and I consistently repeat it for smallmouths today on the Columbia River system in Washington and Oregon. This is the pattern of smallmouths congregating on **man-made structure** in the main river current.

Examples of man-made structure include railroad trestles, highway bridge pillars, barge docks, river channel markers, submerged water pipe outlets, break walls, and even submerged piles of rocks created by dredging.

Now obviously bass don’t read the labels on different structures to see if they are man-made or natural, nor do they likely choose these as feeding locations because they admire them for their engineering or materials. While I don’t really *know* why bass seem to favor man-made structure, I do know that when I fish them in September my lures get slammed by angry smallies! If I had to guess I would suppose that the relationship exists because these structures tend to break up current, and the more the better. A single bridge piling can block the current from the riverbed to the surface, and the slack water behind the piling will provide shade and shelter, oxygen-saturated water, forage species, and an ambush spot for predatory bass. **Big bass instinctively work smarter, not harder, and what is smarter than hiding in calm water behind a piling while the current brings dinner to your doorstep?** This is a transition time in which both baitfish and bass are moving out into the main river for a late season feeding frenzy prior to moving to their winter homes. Man-made structure holds bass, and the baitfish stop here too hoping to rest from the current.

My favorite depths at this time of the year are 10-25 feet deep, so look for structures that are in that range. You can do this even before you get your bass boat or car-topper wet by studying a topographical map and picking out manmade features in the river. My Ranger bass boat has a Lowrance GPS Map unit at the console and on the

bow, so even if I am on an unfamiliar river I can easily see man-made structure and can navigate straight to it. Once there the color sonar will quickly tell me the bottom depth, and whether it is rock, sand or mud. If the bottom is rock, I will tend to use a dropshot rig; if it is sand I may use Yamamoto grubs on a jig head, and if it is mud (which is rare) I will look for another place to fish.

Almost every river has a railroad bridge or a highway bridge that has pillars in the river. I favor railroad pillars since they are often huge, to support the heavy load of a train. Consequently they break up a large expanse of current, and often are made out of large rock which baitfish seem to prefer over smooth concrete structures. Bridge pillars are simple to fish. Just position your boat down current from a pillar, and then pitch out a dropshot rig up current, next to the side of the pillar or directly behind the pillar. You want a heavy enough QuickDrop weight to quickly sink to the bottom and not get swept away by the current. Often I will be using a 3/16-ounce or 1/4-ounce weight, but occasionally in heavy current will go as high as 1/2-ounce in size. My best lure for this technique is the 4-inch 9J Senko in natural colors like smoke, greens or browns, nose-hooked on a #2 Gamakatsu split shot hook and 6-pound test McCoy monofilament. A Yamamoto grub fished with a football or darter head jig is also deadly here, but if there are lots of rocks you will need a bag full of jigs. Current and rocks make for quick snags.

A more likely man-made structure that stacks up schools of smallies in September and where the Yamamoto grub excels is a channel marker, aka "dolphins". Don't bother with the floating markers, as these don't break current. You are looking for the ones that are like tripods anchored into the riverbed. These markers create a resting and feeding spot for smallmouths that are starting their fall migration to their winter resting grounds. Try casting and swimming a Yamamoto Grub all around these until you locate the position of the fish, which is often immediately behind these structures. A dropshot rig also works well here.

Don't overlook any structure that big barges utilize. These pilings can also be a goldmine. What even many of the pro's overlook are the rock piles that are created when these barge docks and bridge pilings are dredged. With some good sonar work and patience you may find a pile of tailings located down current from the manmade structure that will stockpile big smallies even in moderate current. The rock pile acts as the current break, and attracts both crawfish and baitfish, followed by hungry smallies.

It may not be the prettiest scenery to fish, but man-made structure looks mighty fetching when its smallmouth bass you're catching! Ciao.