

## **Lake Erie, WNY Bass a Focus of '26 Fishing Expo**

By Bill Hilts, Jr.

Bass fishing in Lake Erie and WNY overall is great. Based on the Department of Environmental Conservation's angler survey in Erie, 15 bass were caught per boat trip last year. The catch rate of one bass per hour is among the best in the country. That's one big reason why the area continues to rank in the Top 10 Bassmaster list for best bass spots in the U.S. The Greater Niagara Fishing Expo, set for Feb. 19-22 at the Niagara Falls Convention Center, will lead and instruct you to some of the best bass fishing on the planet.

One of the highlights of the bass fishing education is the Lake Erie Bass Fishing Roundtable. Three of WNY's best bass gurus – Capt. Joe Fonzi of Thumbs Up Charters, Brad Brodnicki of Amherst, and Destin DeMarion of Harborcreek, Pa. – will give their insights into the State of Lake Erie bass fishing, the evolution of Forward-Facing Sonar, Adapting to a Changing Fishery, and Pressured Fish Behavior. The session will be moderated by Todd Caisner with In-Fisherman.

Captains Justin Warriner and Sean Firkins will be instructing a Youth Bass Fishing Clinic on Sunday, Feb. 22 at 11:30 a.m. Kids ages 10 to 16 will be learning the basics on fishing lakes, rivers and ponds for bass. This is an in-depth class on how to properly fish for bass, from the right gear to use and how to use it. Check out <https://niagarafishingexpo.com/youth-fishing-clinics>.

There will also be two High School Bass Fishing seminars for kids in high school looking to form a team, be part of a team, and be competitive. Saturday and Sunday at noon each day, Gavin Hinman and Liam Purdy will talk about their high school bass fishing experiences with Youth Bassmasters.

The Hawg Trough will once again be the center of attention in the main exhibit hall and bass will be a huge focus. Having this huge 5,000-gallon aquarium as a stage for fish and fishermen is the perfect vehicle for education. Between the Hawg Trough and the other seminar rooms, there will be over 70 bass seminars on bass fishing, given by experts on the topics being discussed. Visit the Expo website to make your education plan for which seminars you want to attend at <https://niagarafishingexpo.com/education/> .

Once you catch a bass, you will need to know how to take care of it – especially if you are hauling it in from deeper water. Barb Elliott is the queen of bass fizzing techniques, and she will teach you how to properly perform this catch-and-release technique to conserve the resource.

When it comes to the gear that you need for bass fishing, just take a look at some of the vendor booths that will be exhibiting in the main hall of the convention center – with many offering show-special pricing. Exhibitors are Barb's Fizz Kit, Cooper Custom Reel Handles, Daiwa, Doc's Tackle, FishUSA, Gamma Fishing, Garmin, Grand Island Baits, Grimm Reaper Lures, JD Outdoors, NY Kayak Bass Fishing, Okuma, Rapids Fishing Solutions, and UB Bassmasters to name a few. With over 170 vendors at the show, check out <https://niagarafishingexpo.com/list-of-2026-exhibitors/> to see them all.

This year, the Greater Niagara Fishing Expo is raising money for pediatric cancer therapy. The theme for the 2026 show is “Fishing Fights Pediatric Cancer!” For example, Catching Dreams Charters, a non-profit organization that focuses on fishing therapy for families that are affected by cancer, will be selling raffle tickets for some excellent door prizes and make sure you sign up for a chance to win ... and help a most worthy cause. Because of this effort, we will be facilitating more fishing therapy for kids with cancer and their families this year.

For all the details on the 2026 Greater Niagara Fishing Expo, visit [www.niagarafishingexpo.com](http://www.niagarafishingexpo.com).