

## ***Detroit River – Equipment List***

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Fishing the Detroit River effectively is not as simple as picking up a few jigs and drifting downstream. There are days when every clown on the river using a surf casting rod and two ounce chartreuse jigs can catch fish but these are the exception. The people that consistently catch fish day in and day out, use very specific equipment and well established techniques.

### ***Fishing Rod and Reel***

Get started on the right foot by putting together a good quality rod and reel combo. The jigging rod will be the most expensive part of the package – probably in the \$50-80 range for most people. We use one piece Berkley Series One rods that are 6'0" long. Generally the best sticks on the river use a one-piece medium or medium heavy rod that is 6'0" or less. This is your connection to the fish and you will be amazed at the difference in using a quality graphite rod.

Save some money when you head out to buy your reel. A mid size spinning reel with a good front drag system is all you need. Remember that most of your fishing is done in 30' of water or less, walleyes in cold water don't fight quite like a salmon, and most fish are going to hit the scales at less than 5lbs. We use Okuma SGT 30 reels, but anything in the \$30-\$50 range is fine.

If you are on a tight budget a quality combo unit from Bass Pro Shops or Cabela's can get the job done. You need to watch for a sale and can probably get one of their store brand jigging rod and reel combos for about \$50-\$60. We have two from Bass Pro we started using ourselves and now keep them in the boat for our friends that come with us. They work great and while they compromise a little in terms of rod quality, they've hooked up plenty of fish.

### ***A Word About Snags***

Lots of expensive new rods end up as two ice fishing rods every week on the river. Your boat is moving downstream at 6 MPH, your Berkley FireLine doesn't stretch, and if you pull back and try to rip the snag out your rod will snap – we've done it!

When you get a snag follow these simple steps:

- Point your rod at the snag and quickly snap it up and down several times, if the snag doesn't come out immediately open the bail
- Let out 10-15 feet of line and repeat the process, if the snag doesn't come out quickly do the following: point the rod at the snag, hold the spool so the drag doesn't let line out, and wait for the jig to release, the stinger to rip, or the line to snap. Be careful...NEVER wrap the FireLine around your finger or hand as it will cut you bad! .

### ***Jigs, Minnows, and Stingers***

The best weights for the river are from ½ oz to ¾ ounce depending on current flow, water depth, and your experience level. Day in and day out our preferred jig is a 5/8 oz size. Colors are simple – green, chartreuse, orange, or any combination of these three. Jigs need to have the line tie on top so they hang level and we prefer flat-sided jigs with a long shank hook because they spin less in the current. You'll see plenty of jiggers using round ball short-shanked hooks. Verdict is still out on this one. Figure on having at least a dozen of each color and weight – that means 12 half ounce chartreuse, 12 half ounce green, 12 half ounce orange, etc.

Some days the fish prefer minnows, but most of the time they are not necessary. If you are fishing early in the year (April) make sure you have a few dozen with you. Emerald shiners in four inch range are best. By the time we get to late April plastic is the way to go and we prefer three inch Berkley Power Minnows – chartreuse, silver and pearl seem to get the job done. We also use a four inch brown “Wyandotte worm” with a chartreuse tail. Clip off the front part of the worm if the fish seem to be hitting short.

Stingers are required and there is no real debate here – skip ‘em and you’ll miss a majority of the fish particularly early in the season. Best set up is a quality #8 treble hook with three to four inches of 8lb mono line to reach the back fin of the bait – remember to leave some clack in the line to allow the bait to swing freely. Figure on using at least 15-20 stinger hooks per day – more if you’re in the Trenton channel for any length of time. We learned a great way to tie stingers at a Lance Valentine river fishing seminar. The technique allows you to quickly remove the stinger, put on a new minnow and reattach the hook in about 30 seconds (see it demonstrated in our video section). Remember to release the fish that you foul hook.

### ***Line***

This is as easy as it gets. No stretch line around 8lb test – we prefer green Berkley FireLine but other brands are fine. You don’t need a full spool of expensive line since you will rarely let out more than 50 feet. We fill the spoon about 75% full with a cheap baseline and then add about 50-75 yards of FireLine. This allows you to fish for a full day even if you need to break off a few jigs. If you get low on line just spoon up another 50 yards and you’re good to go.

### ***Trolling Motor***

Next to your new rod this is #2 on the list of importance. If you can’t keep your line vertical with a quality trolling motor you’re just not going to catch fish. The best set-up is a foot controlled bow mounted trolling motor – we use a Minn Kota Maxxum 74 lb thrust on a 20’ boat. If you can’t afford the more expensive 24 volt motor then make sure you have two fully charged batteries to give you the best response possible throughout the day. Keep the bow of your boat pointed into the wind and adjust the thrust until your line is exactly vertical - head towards your line by speeding up or slowing down until its vertical again.

It is possible to fish from a smaller boat with a stern mounted trolling motor – we did it for a couple years. Not as exact, but it will work with a little concentration.

### ***Sonar and GPS***

The ideal setup is for both of these to be located in the front of the boat. The driver will always be running the trolling motor from the bow and needs to see where you’re fishing. Sonar is the least important of these two units. Fish tend to be hard to see even with the best color sonar units. Your GPS is key to getting back to the same area time after time. Fish can be highly concentrated and just because you’re at the right depth means nothing. Very small structure changes hold fish and they won’t chase the bait more than a couple feet at best. A quality mapping chip will help you focus on key structure breaks. Mount your sonar pickup on your trolling motor and your GPS antenna up front if possible. Keeps the front of your boat right on top of the fish you are targeting.

### ***Safety First***

The Detroit River can be a deadly place if you’re not careful. Water temps are often below 40 degrees early in the year and survival time is low. You might get lucky and fall out near a crowd but if you’re alone or away from a pack of boats you’ve got a problem. Getting back in the boat

is almost impossible in the rivers strong current. We wear our life jackets from the time we leave the ramp until the time we get back and we always keep a throw cushion nearby. Sunshine and light winds might make you feel comfortable on the water but don't be fooled – play it safe.

***Key Points to Remember***

Rod: Excellent quality one piece 5'6" to 6'0" medium to medium heavy action  
Reel: Mid size, moderately priced front drag model  
Jigs: ½ to ¾ ounce for most experience levels (12 of each size and color)  
Hooks: Removable stingers are a must (15-20 per day for each person)  
Bait: Minnows early, plastics later in the season  
Line: Green FireLine 8lb test  
Motor: Bow mount trolling motor with at least 65 lb thrust  
GPS: Bow mounted for accuracy and quick waypoint entry, mapping chip  
Sonar: Bow mounted, just need it to know the water depth  
Safety: Life vest on at all times, throw cushion nearby  
Net: Big enough for a 10lb fish with a medium length handle around 4 feet

The Detroit River is a great place to learn to jig. Get yourself set up with the right equipment, spend some time learning proper techniques, and you'll catch lots of fish. If you're interested in learning about more advanced techniques you can watch some of our web videos, attend a Walleye 101 River Fishing Seminar, or go on an Educational Charter with former PWT pro and fishing educator Lance Valentine. More details are available at [Walleye101.com](http://Walleye101.com) or [WalleyeKid.com](http://WalleyeKid.com)

***See you on the water,  
Ron & Chris***

About the Authors: Chris Merbler is a 15 year old tournament fisherman. He has top ten finishes in both the GNWC and Mack's Lure tournaments with his partner and dad Ron Merbler. Chris and Ron are publishers of the Walleye Kid Fishing Phone Book – a great resource that has over 300 listings for bait store, boat ramps, motels, and much more for the Detroit River, Lake Erie, Lake St Clair and Houghton Lake. You can visit [www.WalleyeKid.com](http://www.WalleyeKid.com) for more information or send an email to [Chris@WalleyeKid.com](mailto:Chris@WalleyeKid.com).