

Lake Erie

Walleye

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Vol. 7 No.2 • Summer 2001

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The Complete Fishing Scene on Lake Erie

Coverage of the Western, Central & Eastern Basins

Summer 2001

The 2001 Walleye Report

Diving Planes for Erie 'Eyes

Fishing Erie's Central Basin

Precision Jigging

Steelhead Madness on Lake Erie

Erie Innovation for Walleyes

Smallmouth on the Rocks

The Eastern Lake Fishery Report

Lake Erie's Walleye Under the Microscope



Plus:

Walleye News & Fact File
2001 Walleye Tournaments
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On the Cover

Captain Timothy Garrett of Aqua Fantasea Charters with a Central Basin Summertime trophy walleye weighing in at 14 pounds

From The Editor

Boy, what a difference a year makes. Walleye fishing to this point (May 25th at this writing) has been fantastic; the best seen in several years, according to many charter captains. Walleyes have been caught just about anywhere in the western basin. Limits are common and the weather for the most part has been very cooperative. In the central basin there has been an excellent spring and early summer night-time and near-shoreline walleye bite.

Just a year ago catching walleyes was tough, and that's putting it mildly! In 2000 spring and summer fishing more often than not was nothing to write home about. In the western basin we couldn't consistently find the walleyes and when we did mark fish, the bite just wasn't there. Fishing for walleyes in the central basin was so tough that many charter captains switched to targeting steelhead trout. The steelies were there in great numbers. Good thing for that cause the walleyes were having fun playing hide and seek. Last year fishing didn't pick up until very late summer and into the fall, when walleye fishing suddenly turned into something truly special.

So what gives? How can a single year make such a difference? There are likely many factors but here are a few. **Weather:** The weather to this point in the season has been better than last year. Fewer fronts have allowed fisherman to get on the water more often. **The strong 1999 year class:** A very large 1999 walleye hatch has plentiful 2 year old fish swimming around and being taken by fishermen in big numbers. **Lower numbers of bait fish:** Potentially,

See Editor, Page 6

Lake Erie Walleye

Rick Kubb, Editor/Publisher

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Walleye News and Fact File

Water Levels Forecasted for Lake Erie

Lake Erie water levels are expected to remain 5 to 12 inches below their long-term averages during the coming spring and summer. But the ups and downs of water levels are a normal part of Lake Erie's life cycle, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

"In reality, Lake Erie is a dynamic, constantly changing body of water," said Dave Cashell, state hydrologist at ODNR. "In the mid-1930s, the lake was nearly 2 feet below its present level. In the 1950s and again in the 1980s, it was more than 3 feet higher than its present level. We must realize that change is inevitable when dealing with Lake Erie and adapt our plans and outlooks accordingly."

Some lakefront property owners and business people who grew accustomed to consistently higher-than-average water levels during the last 30 years may find that news difficult to accept. For them, lower water levels translate into reduced shipping revenues and difficult-to-enter marinas and boat slips. But ODNR experts encourage people concerned about present water levels to take a page from Great Lakes history before concluding that Lake Erie is suffering some sort of decline.

Officials first began measuring water levels in the Great Lakes in the mid-1800s. The present system of gauges began operating in 1918. Hydrologists have learned that lake levels fluctuate with the seasons and can vary dramatically over longer periods of time.

Long-term monthly averages have varied more than 6 feet over the period of time records have been kept. Water levels were slightly above long-term averages during the mid-to-late 1800s and generally below the long-term averages from about 1890

through 1967. From 1968 to 1999, levels were again generally above long-term averages. Annually, the lake also rises and falls about 18 inches with the seasons - losing water in the fall and winter through evaporation, and gaining water back during spring snowmelt and summer rains.

Short-term fluctuations, such as those that can be associated with a single severe storm, are the most dramatic changes. Because the lake is relatively shallow and lies southwest to northeast, strong southwesterly winds can blow surface water from Lake Erie's western basin to the central and eastern basins in a matter of hours. Veteran boaters know that a storm passing through Toledo can leave dock areas standing dry in that city while creating high-water conditions in Buffalo, New York. During severe storm events, the instantaneous difference in water levels between Toledo and Buffalo can approach 16 feet!

Cashell describes the Great Lakes system as interconnected "bathtubs," with each lake lower than the next. Within each lake, waters slosh around in response to changes in wind and atmospheric pressure. Lake Superior, at about 603 feet above sea level, is the highest. It drains into Lake Huron and Lake Michigan (considered one body of water), which in turn, drain into Lake St. Clair through the St. Clair River. Lake St. Clair drains into Lake Erie through the Detroit River. Lake Erie waters drop dramatically (about 326 feet in 35 miles!) into Lake Ontario through the Niagara River and over Niagara Falls. Lake Ontario waters travel downhill through the St. Lawrence Seaway into Montreal Harbour and the Atlantic Ocean.

About 80 percent of Lake Erie's water flows in from the Upper Lakes through the Detroit River. Another 10 percent comes from tributary rivers and streams, with the remaining 10 percent from precipitation falling on the lake's surface. The Detroit River inflow

is directly dependent on rain and snowfall around lakes Superior, Huron and Michigan. Unusually warm winters and dry summers in the late 1990s brought little precipitation and virtually no ice cover to the Upper Lakes, causing lake water levels to drop in those bodies of water, and subsequently, in Lake Erie. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which projects Great Lakes water levels six months in advance, said in February that Lake Superior was approaching levels last seen in 1926. The recent winter did not provide enough moisture to counter all the preceding dry years.

Despite “urban legends” to the contrary, there are no man-made gates regulating the outflow of Lake Erie waters through the Niagara River. Only lakes Superior and Ontario have artificial controls to influence levels and those levels are governed by agreements with Canada, Cashell said. Lower-than-average water levels have a positive impact on many aspects of lake life. Coastal erosion has decreased and beachcombers are finding wider stretches of sand for swimming and sunbathing, according to Mike Colvin of ODNR’s Coastal Management Program.

“The lake’s shoreline provides some of the best bird watching in the Midwest,” said Melissa Hathaway of the ODNR Division of Wildlife’s Lake Erie Unit. “The lower lake levels only enhance these viewing opportunities.”

Jim McCormac, a botanist and bird expert with ODNR’s Division of Natural Areas & Preserves, said North American shorebirds with the longest migration patterns like the Hudsonian godwit and long-billed dowitcher are spending more time along Ohio’s Lake Erie shore in the fall. The birds feed in the expanding marshes, building stamina for their long flights south.

New expanses of rare and endangered botanicals are finding homes in the mudflats created by lower lake levels. Most are sedges and rushes - some of the rarest plants in the Great Lakes region, McCormac added. “They grow, bear fruit and reseed on the newly exposed mud flats,” McCormac said. “When the waters recover them, those seed beds will remain dormant for decades before producing another plant. They are an important part of the biological and hydrological cycle of Lake Erie.”

According to the ODNR Division of Watercraft, most Lake Erie boat launches remain fully operable in these times of lower-than-normal water. Boaters should check for the best launch areas when planning a lake outing. ODNR always advises boaters to use charts when navigating unfamiliar waters.

Boaters should be especially cautious around the islands in the western basin and when nearing shore. Areas that may have been safe to pass over in the past, may have an underwater hazard in low-water conditions. Navigation charts for Lake Erie are available at marinas, bait shops and other outlets on the north coast.

Dredging projects made necessary by receding waters require advance planning since securing mandatory dredging permits from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers can take several months. Limited funds are available to communities and public agencies for dredging assistance through ODNR. Commercial marinas, homeowners’ associations and private clubs are ineligible.

For more information about Lake Erie’s changing waters, check the ODNR web site at www.dnr.state.oh.us or call the ODNR Coastal Services Center at 419-626-4296 or toll free at 888-644-6267.

Walleye and Perch Quotas Set for 2001

In an effort to boost Lake Erie’s walleye population, fisheries scientists, working with the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) met in March and agreed to cut in half international harvest quotas for walleye on the lake, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR).

The GLFC’s Lake Erie Committee met in March in Niagara Falls, NY and agreed to reduce the total allowable walleye harvest for the entire lake from 7.7 million in 2000 to 3.4 million fish this year.

The daily bag limit for walleye in Ohio waters of Lake Erie and its tributaries for 2001 will be four fish from March 1 through April 30 and six fish from May 1 through the last day in February 2002.

“Committee members agreed last year to set future quotas conservatively in an effort to stop declining walleye populations,” said ODNR Division of Wildlife fisheries biologist Mike Costello. “Toward that goal, Ontario accepted a decrease of nearly 2 million walleyes, confirming their commitment to rebuilding populations of the lake’s most popular game fish.”

The Lake Erie Committee is made up of fisheries managers from Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York and Ontario. The group meets annually to determine the status of Lake Erie fish stocks and, establish international harvest quotas for each of those jurisdictions surrounding the lake.

“We are committed to doing everything we can to improve the Lake Erie fishery for the future,” Costello said. “It won’t happen overnight but we’ve laid the groundwork and shown that the entire team can work together to protect this important resource.”

Walleye harvest quotas are determined by a formula base on surface area within each jurisdiction.

Ohio and Ontario receive the majority of the walleye allocation catch for Lake Erie. Of the 2001 quota of 3.04 million fish, Ohio’s share is just over 1.7 million, about 51 percent of the total. Ontario’s share is about 1.4 million walleyes, about 43 percent of the total allocation.

“Our focus is to manage for improved growth in the walleye population,” said Costello. “Supporting this effort, both Ontario and Michigan have made similar changes in their bag limits.”

Based on the strength of the 1999 walleye hatch, fisheries biologists predict a brighter future for Lake Erie walleye fishing.

“The new quotas positively impact the ’99 year class fish, enabling them to contribute to the fishery for a number of years,” Costello said.

The total allowable catch for yellow perch in Lake Erie for 2001 was set at 7a.1 million pounds, up slightly from 6.57 million in 2000. Yellow perch quotas for individual jurisdictions surrounding the lake are based on a different sharing formula than walleye, involving surface area and past fishing performance.

Ohio’s share of the 2001 perch allocation is slightly more than 3 million pounds. Ontario will receive about 3.7 million pounds and Michigan, Pennsylvania and News York will share the remainder.

Ohio’s portion of the yellow perch quota is then allocated between sport and commercial fisheries. Sport anglers are allocated 64 percent of the Ohio quota, and commercial anglers 36 percent.

“Yellow perch stocks I the central basin are strong but we still have some concerns in the western and eastern basins of Lake Erie,” said Costello.

The daily bag limit for sport anglers remains at 30 perch per angler and existing commercial fishery regulations also remain in effect.

For further information contact: Mike Costello, ODNR Division of Wildlife (614) 265-6349 or Andy Ware, ODNR Media Relations (614) 265-6882

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From Editor, Page 2

the recent cold winter and ice conditions we had back in January could have killed off a number of bait fish. Fewer bait fish means for a stronger walleye bite.

Lower Limits: With the walleye daily limit lowered from ten to six fish, fishermen can more easily take their limit. I would bet that in the minds of many anglers their level of satisfaction would be greater taking 6 fish knowing they had 'limited out' versus taking 7-8 fish last year knowing they were short of their limit of 10 fish. Go figure.

Unfortunately, many anglers are missing out on the fun this year. Several charter captains I know have reported that their bookings are 'way down'. Low water and poor fishing early last year have kept many anglers from coming back to the lake. These things naturally go in cycles. Next year the captains could likely be reporting that bookings are up based on the great fishing experienced this year. Let's hope the fishing conditions keep up through the summer months and into the fall.

As a former Fisheries Biologist and current avid walleye fisherman I greatly appreciate the recent work of the Lake Erie Committee of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission in significantly lowering the quota for walleyes in the lake. Their action of reducing the lake-wide Total Allowable Catch (or TAC) from 7.7 million fish to 3.4 million fish sends a message indicating that the walleye stocks in Lake Erie need help. Hopefully this action will mark the beginning of a strong walleye comeback.

Let's be cautious here, though. It's not realistic to expect walleyes to return to the numbers of the mid 80s. Why? Over the years the ecology of Lake Erie has changed from 'eutrophic' to 'mesotrophic to 'oligotrophic' meaning that the carrying capacity (how much biomass a lake can sustain) has been reduced. Since walleyes are at the top of the food chain in the lake, it is only logical to deduce that lower biomass at the bottom of the food change will carry forward to lower biomass (fewer walleyes) at the top.

That being said, we don't really know at this point how many walleyes good old Lake Erie can sustain. The recent fish management strategies in lowering quotas and limits will allow the walleyes to rebound some-

what. How much of a positive rebound only the future will tell.

With this issue we welcome two new writers to our staff. Bud Riser (remember Walleye Magazine?) brings incredible credentials. A seasoned veteran walleye fisherman, Bud will share his expertise and stories with us in the issues to come. Jeff Frischkorn, noted Ohio outdoor writer also joins us. Jeff has fished Lake Erie for many years and has a vast knowledge of "North Coast" fishing. Welcome Bud and Jeff! Good fishing to everyone this year and we'll see you on the water!

Editorial Correction

In the Spring 2001 issue the photo on page 31 was mis-labeled. The fish pictured is a King Salmon, not a Lake Trout.

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The 2001 Walleye Report

by
Rick Kubb

In each summer issue of Lake Erie Walleye Magazine, we provide a synopsis of the walleye fishery in Lake Erie based on the scientific reports produced by the fisheries management biologists from the states of Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York.

We'll report on the estimated size of the walleye population in Lake Erie, walleye growth and migration, catch rates, and other biological factors related to the walleye fish stocks in Lake Erie.

Walleye quotas for 2001

The Lake Erie Committee of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission for the third year in a row has reduced the total allowable catch (TAC) of walleyes. The TAC for 2001 has been set at 3.4 million fish, down 50% percent from the 2000 TAC of 7.7 million fish. The 1999 TAC was higher still at 10 million fish.

The committee took this action as a result of declining walleye fish stocks since the mid 1990s. It is believed that reducing the TAC by this significant amount over the next few years will help boost the walleye stocks.

Ohio and Ontario receive the majority of the walleye TAC. Of the 2001 TAC of 3.4 million walleyes, Ohio's share is just over

1.7 million fish, about 51 percent of the TAC. Ontario's share of the TAC is about 1.4 million fish, or about 43 percent. The remaining estimated 6 percent of the TAC is divided among Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York waters of Lake Erie.

Michigan Waters of Lake Erie

In 2000 anglers harvested an estimated 252,281 walleyes from the Michigan waters of Lake Erie. Of these, a total of 205,215 walleyes were taken by private anglers (81%) and 47,066 fish were taken by charter boat anglers (19%). Walleye fishing peaked in the month of July with 131,763 fish caught (Chart 1). More than 55% of the total annual walleye harvest occurred in the month of July. Overall angler effort in 2000 increased slightly to reach the highest level since 1994.

Age 2,3, and 4 (1998, 1997, and 1996 year classes) walleyes dominated the walleye harvest, comprising 87% of the catch. Harvested and age 2, 3, and 4 walleyes averaged 14.3 inches, 16.9 inches and 18.5 inches in total length.

In 2000 a total of 6,241 walleyes were tagged by Ontario, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and Michigan biologists at eight Lake Erie sites. A total of 130 tags were

recovered by fishermen for a single season reporting rate of 2.3%. This inter-agency tagging study will continue to provide valuable information regarding walleye movements throughout the lake. Figure 1 indicates the locations where Raisin River tagged walleyes were recovered in 2000. Remarkably, a few fish from the Raisin River tag site moved as far east as Buffalo, NY to the far eastern basin of Lake Erie.

Ohio Waters of Lake Erie

In the year 2000 an estimated .93 million (combined private and charter catch) walleyes were caught in Ohio waters of Lake Erie. This is down just slightly from 1999 (chart 2). The year 2000 private boat harvest of .68 million fish was a 2% decrease from 1999. Targeted effort of 2.2 million angler hours was 16% lower than in 1999. Walleye harvest was the second lowest estimated since the survey began in 1975.

In 2000 there were a total number of 907 licensed charter guides. This was a four percent drop from 1999 and well below the peak of 1,209 licensed charter guides in 1989. The 2000 charter boat walleye harvest of .25 million fish was a dramatic 26% lower than in 1999. The majority of the walleye sport harvest was from the 1996

and the 1998 year class. Age 5 and older walleye constituted 30% of the lakewide catch.

Walleye size in Ohio waters averaged 19 inches and 2.4 pounds. The average size for walleyes increased from west to east (chart 3, figure 3). In District 1 (western basin) walleyes caught averaged 18.3 inches and just over 2 pounds. The average age of walleyes caught in District 1 was just under 4 years. In District 3 (eastern part of the central basin) walleyes taken were significantly larger and older, averaging 23 inches and 4.5 pounds. The average age walleye in District 3 was 6.5 years, over 2.5 years older than walleyes taken in District 1.

Walleye Diet

What were walleyes eating last year? In the western basin walleyes fed mainly on shad and alewives. These clupeid species represented 86% of the total walleye diet in the western basin. The diet differed dramatically in the central basin Ohio waters of Lake Erie. Central basin walleyes fed mainly on shiners and rainbow smelt (Figure 2). Walleyes also fed on round gobies in the central basin. The amount of round gobies found in the stomachs of walleyes has been fairly consistent over the past three years ranging from 5% in 1998 to 9% in 1999 and 8% in 2000.

Walleye Migration

Tag and recapture studies of walleye in Ohio waters over the years have indicated that these fish migrate extensively throughout the

lake. Figure 2 indicates where previously tagged walleyes (tagging sites were Sandusky River, Sandusky Bay and Cedar Point areas) were captured by anglers. The majority of the fish tagged from the Sandusky River, Sandusky Bay and Cedar Point areas were caught at points further east with some traveling to the far eastern basin of Lake Erie. Many of these fish migrate back to the western portions of Lake Erie during the fall months.

Pennsylvania Waters of Lake Erie

A very strong 1996 year class should sustain the 2001 walleye sport fishery at or near the 2000 level. This will still represent a general decline in walleye fishing success from the previous few years.

The numbers of older walleye are expected to remain in the population because of low exploitation rates and the Pennsylvania waters will produce good numbers of large 'trophy' sized walleyes in 2001. The large 1999 year class will also produce good numbers of 2 year old fish. These will show up in late summer walleye catches.

In 2000 anglers caught an estimated 84,410 walleyes in Pennsylvania waters. This represents a 9% decrease from 1999 levels. In 2000 walleye angler effort was estimated to be 244,116 hours, a decrease of 38% from 1999.

The walleye catch peaked in July (33,668 fish). Last year the fishing season was prolonged with excellent weather and anglers in Sep-

tember took over 20,000 walleyes (chart 4). The five year average catch for September is less than 5,000 walleyes.

The average size of walleyes caught in Pennsylvania waters in 2000 was 24.3 inches. This was an increase of over 2 inches from the previous year. Walleye age ranged from 3 to 12 years with 7 year old fish (93 year class) accounting for the greatest proportion (18%) of the catch.

New York Waters of Lake Erie

In 2000 the sport fishing angling effort in New York waters of Lake Erie was an estimated 424,563 angler hours which was the lowest seen in the 13 year time series of this creel survey. The lower fishing effort is attributed in part to difficult low water conditions that made it difficult to launch boats at several launch ramps. A total estimated walleye harvest was 28,594 fish, up slightly from the 23,134 walleye taken in 1999 (chart 5).

The 2000 walleye sport fishery was centered in offshore waters between Dunkirk and Irving, New York; areas east and west produced a markedly lower harvest. Walleye angling quality and fishing effort in the vicinity of Barcelona and areas east of Sturgeon Point were particularly poor during 2000.

The overall targeted walleye catch rate during the 2000 fishing season was .15 fish per hour which ranks walleye fishing quality very similar to the previous 7 years.

The average total length of walleyes in 2000 was 23.7 inches.

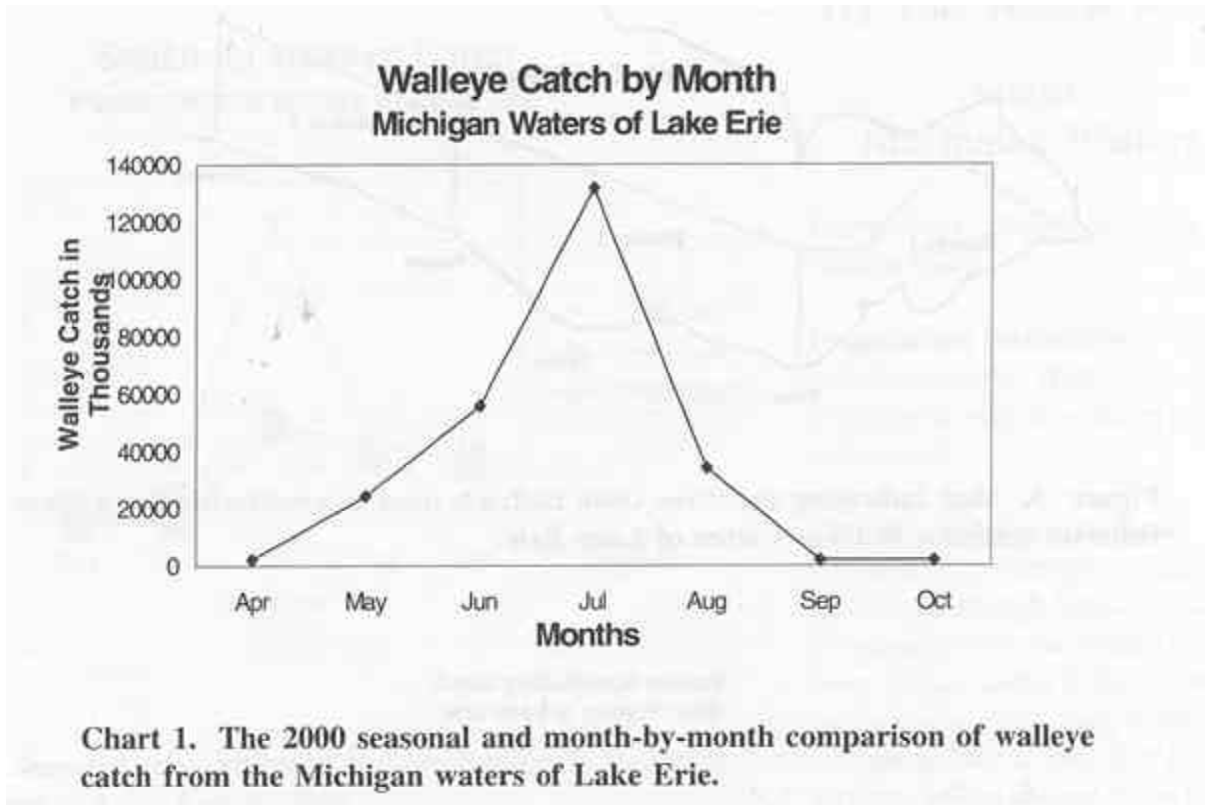


Figure 1. Distribution of walleyes tagged in 2000 from the Raisin River area (far left) that were caught in 2000. A few walleyes traveled the entire length of Lake Erie from this tag site.



Figure 2. Distribution of walleyes tagged in 2000 from the Sandusky, Ohio area. Many of these fish were caught at points east of the tagging area indicating a large migration pattern to the east during the summer months.

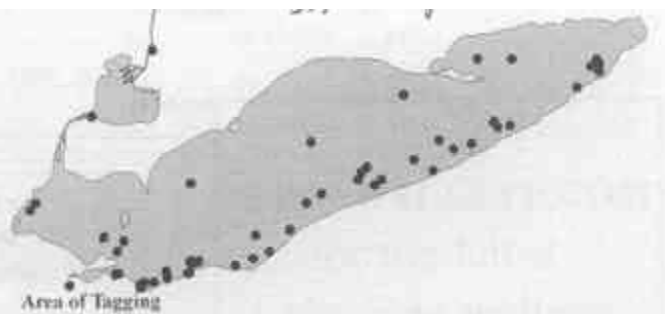




Figure 3. Map indicating the three Ohio Districts used in monitoring the walleye fisheries statistics in Ohio waters of Lake Erie.

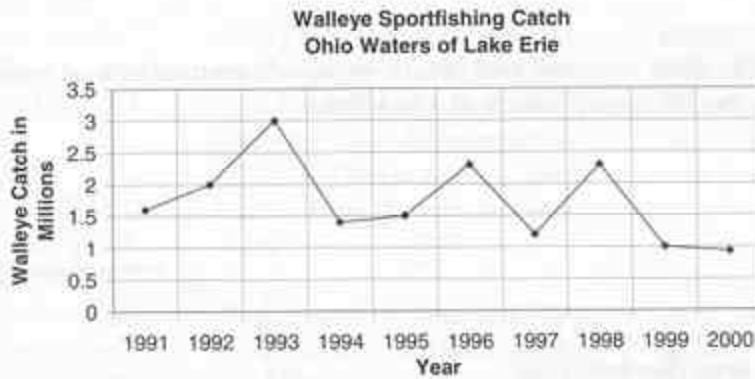


Chart 2. Ten year comparison of walleye annual harvests from Ohio waters of Lake Erie.

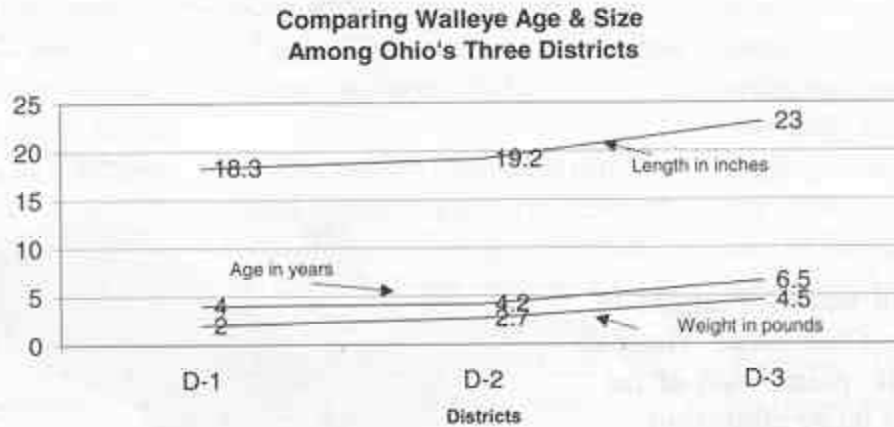


Chart 3. Comparison of walleye age and size among Ohio's three districts.

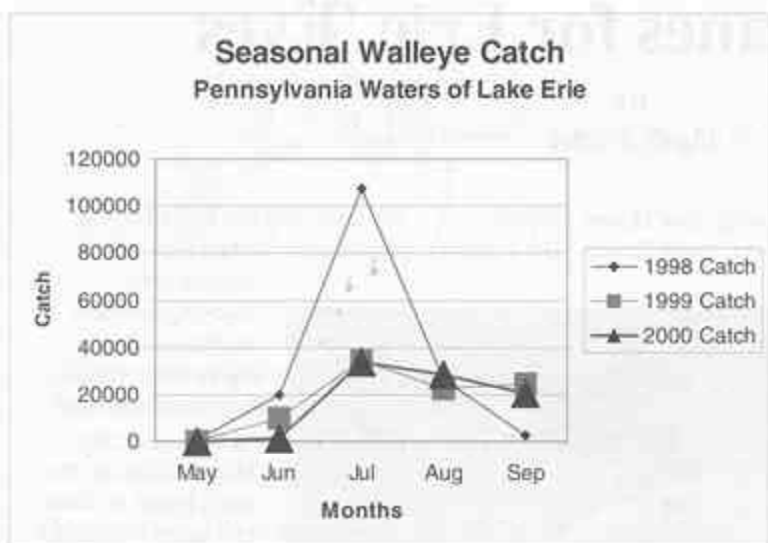


Chart 4. Seasonal comparison of walleye harvest in Pennsylvania waters of Lake Erie in 2000.

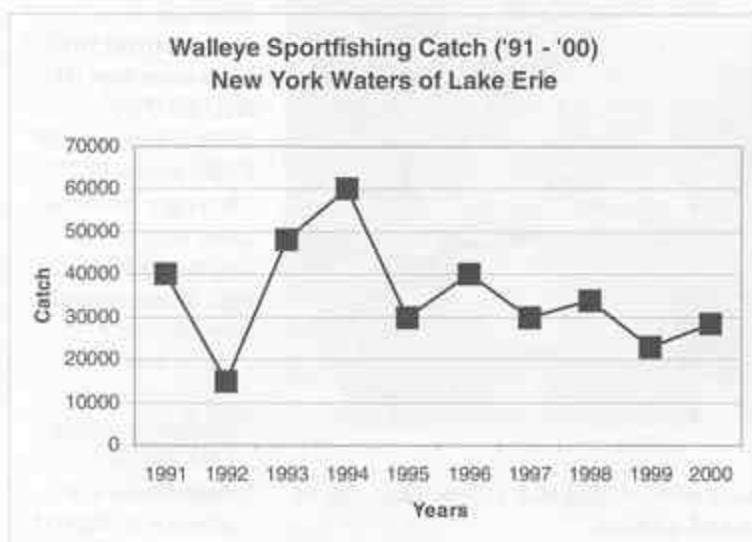


Chart 5. Ten year comparison of walleye sportfishing catch in New York waters of Lake Erie.

Try This Walleye Recipe

Simple Marinated Walleye

Ingredients: Italian Dressing & walleye fillets

Preparation Instructions: Fillet and skin walleye. Wash fillets and, if preferred, soak in solution to remove oil.

Place fillets in medium plastic container bag (storage or freezer type). Add enough Italian salad dressing to cover the fillets (Wish-bone Italian works well). Close the bag tightly and place in the refrigerator for at least four hours, turning the bag several times to be sure all parts of the fillets marinate.

Remove the fillets and place the fillets onto large pieces of aluminum foil, one fillet per sheet. Leave enough dressing with the fillets to keep them moist. Fold the aluminum over the fillets and seal each package.

Place each package of aluminum on a hot outdoor grill. Cook several minutes on each side, then carefully open the package (careful - it will let out hot steam). If not done, close up and continue to cook until fish flakes.

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Diving Planes for Erie 'Eyes

by
Mark Hicks

Captain Bob Troxel's first experience with diving planes illustrates why these trolling devices should be mainstays for every Lake Erie walleye angler. The outing took place on a hot July afternoon several years ago.

Drift fishing with weight-forward spinners had slumped badly after the peak early summer season. Faced with markedly clearer water due to the zebra mussel invasion, Troxel conceded that he would have to adopt trolling methods to catch boat-shy walleyes in deep water.

Heading his 30-foot cruiser, "This Is Reality," out from Foxhaven Marina on Catawba Island, Troxel and two friends boated west of Rattlesnake Island in the western basin. When the graph began marking fish near the bottom in 32 feet of water, they put out four brand new diving planes matched with spoons fresh out of their colorful packages.

"I really didn't know what to expect," says Troxel. "But I didn't

The relatively low cost of diving planes, plus the fact that other anglers were enjoying excellent results with them, figured into Troxel's decision to try this method of trolling. He still relies on the same brand of diver he started with-Luhr Jensen's Dipsy Diver.



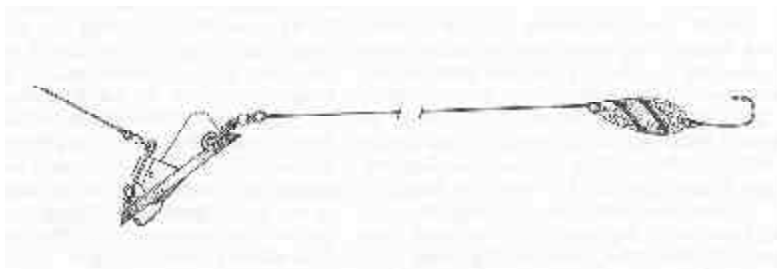
Captain Bob Troxel with a big Lake Erie walleye taken on a diving plane and a spoon.

have much time to think about it. In two hours we landed three limits of big walleyes, including one over 11 pounds. It was unbelievable."

and the Dipsy digs powerfully downward. When the release breaks free, the Dipsy flattens and stops diving, eliminating its strong resistance.

ESSENTIAL DIVERS

Available in three sizes that run at depths ranging from 14 to more than 50 feet, the Dipsy Diver is built around a hard plastic disk. The larger two sizes come with an "O" ring that expands their diameters and increases their running depths. These models also feature an adjustable release mechanism that attaches to the rod line. Snap the release in place



A diving plane followed by a spoon is a deadly combination for big walleyes throughout Lake Erie.

What makes the Dipsy so versatile is its directional feature. On a 0 setting, the diver runs true. But when an underside weight is adjusted to the right or left of center on specific settings from 1 to 3, the diver angles to the left or right side of the boat. The higher the setting, the farther the diver swings out.

Using different settings spreads the lines, which prevents tangles and increases the width of the trolling

swath. Some charter captains set out as many as eight divers at a time. The center divers run deepest, while those set to sweep farthest away from the boat run shallowest.

Another directional diving plane, Kastaway's Diver, features a magnetic release. Should the release inadvertently pop free—a common problem with these types of divers—simply drop the rod tip sharply to put a little slack in the line. This allows the magnetic

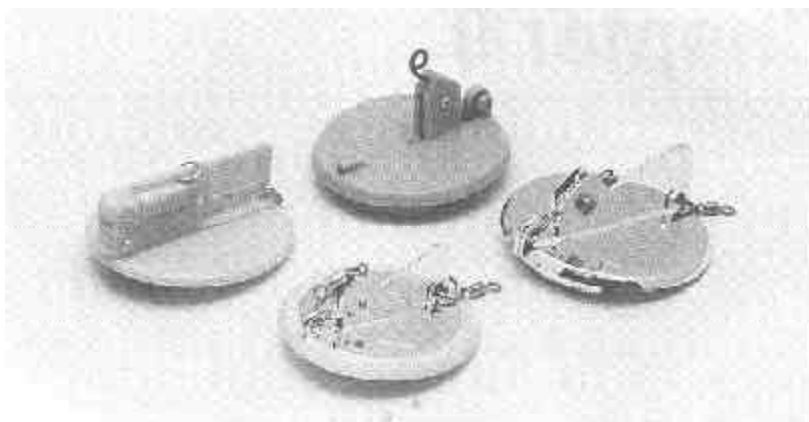
release to reset itself and averts the chore of winding the diver all the way up. The Kastaway comes in three sizes that dive from 50 to 80 feet

Leaders on most divers must not exceed the rod's length so that fish may be reeled close enough to net them. A short leader helps when trolling spoons, since it gives them a snappier action. Long minnow crankbaits and other lures, however, may trigger more strikes when trolled on longer leaders.

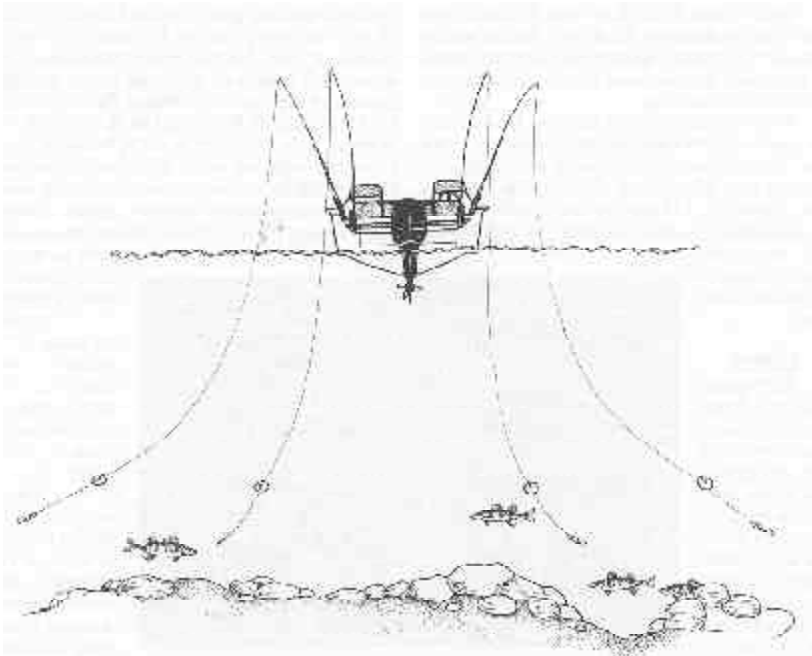
The directional Slide Diver, from U-Charters Inc., overcomes this dilemma. The rod line feeds through the Slide Diver's release mechanism, so you may set the lure back as far as you wish from the diver. When a walleye strikes, the release opens and the diver slides down the line to the fish. Randy Even, who designed the Slide Diver, recommends using an abrasion resistant line, such as 20-pound Berkley XT.

Diving planes are typically set back from the boat 75 to 180 feet. Most divers come with charts that indicate how deep they run at different settings. With 125 feet of line out, for example, the standard Kastaway Diver reaches 55 feet at the 1 (center) setting, 48 feet at the 3 setting and 42 feet at the 5 setting. The actual depths vary depending on the type of line used, trolling speed, influence of underwater currents and other factors.

Most divers come in a variety of colors that may help attract walleyes. Precut reflective tape panels also may be purchased for Dipsy Divers.



Clockwise from top: Slide Diver; No. 1 Dipsy Diver; No. 0 Dipsy Diver with "O" ring; Kastaway Diver.



Directional diving disks get lures deep and swing them out from the boat's path.

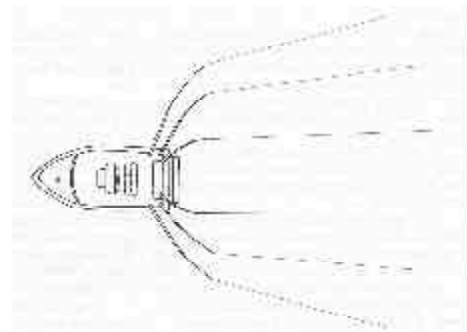
DIVER TACKLE

“The bigger disk divers pull hard,” says Capt. Troxel. “They require rod holders and stout rods.” Several manufactures offer rods specifically designed for diving planes. They generally run from about 7 to more than 10 feet in length and boast strong butt sections with limber tips. Troxel has settled on an 8 1/2-foot model made by Daiwa.

“You need that soft tip,” he says, “so you can see the rod rattle when a fish hits. A small fish may not snap the release. If you don’t see the strike, you may drag it for quite a while. You have to watch your rods closely and check them regularly.”

Light, big-water trolling reels with low gear ratios ease the task of dredging up diving planes. Fill reels with line that withstands the relentless drag of a diving plane. Troxel started out with 20-pound monofilament. Though it served well, he switched to one of the new super-strong braided lines, as have many other anglers who dote on diving planes.

Captain Emrisko trolls up to six divers at a time. He uses rods of three different sizes to keep the lines spread. A brace of 8-foot rods on the transom is flanked by 9-foot rods and then a pair of 10-footers.



A 25-pound super braid has the diameter of 6- to 8-pound monofilament, so it lets divers run deeper. Because this type of line has virtually no stretch, rods respond more vigorously to strikes, and the releases on the divers break cleaner. Avoid Dacron braided lines, however, since they prevent divers from reaching maximum depths.

These days, Troxel runs Berkley FireLine. It handles more like monofilament, but retains the virtues of the super braids. However, he still runs a clear, 20-pound monofilament leader to his lure, which he believes is less visible to walleyes.

“A heavy leader doesn’t seem to affect the bite,” he says, “and I’ve never snapped a fish off with one.” Many anglers use snubbers when trolling diving planes. Typically a 6-inch length of rubber tubing, a snubber acts as shock absorber between the rod line and the diver. It prevents a sudden jolt, such as bumping bottom or a hard strike from a big fish, from breaking off the diver or the lure. Snubbers are especially important when using lighter leaders.



Diving planes require stout rods.

BASIC SETUPS

Since he trolls primarily in the shallower western basin, Troxel doesn't have to get his divers as deep as anglers do in the central and eastern basins. He relies on his Bottom Line LCG to determine how deep the walleyes are holding and then runs his divers at that depth or slightly above it.

His two outside rods drag No. I Dipsy Divers, on a 3 setting, which pulls them well away from the boat. He lets out only enough line to reach the fish he sees suspended on his LCG. The two center rods pull No. 0 Dipsy Divers, the second largest size. He sets them back about 200 feet to intercept fish that may have been bothered by his boat passing overhead. The larger No. I Dipsy would plow bottom if set that far back in the 40-foot and

shallower water that Troxel normally fishes.

In the central and eastern basins, where walleyes regularly swim 55 feet or deeper, the largest directional divers rule. Capt. Andy Emrisko, who docks his 27-foot Wave Walker at Cleveland's Lakefront State Park, usually sets out six No. I Dipsy Divers.

To help separate the divers, Emrisko employs three braces of rods in different lengths that rest in three pairs of holders. The two holders on each corner of the transom support 8-foot rods matched with divers set on a 0 or I setting. The next pair of

holders on the gunnels receive 9-foot rods with Dipsy Divers adjusted to a 2 or 2 1/2 setting. A little farther up the gunnels, a third pair of holders carry 10-foot rods connected to divers adjusted to a 3 or 3 1/2 setting. Each rod reaches farther out than the next, and each Dipsy swims farther out to the side than the next.

"The more line you let out," says Emrisko, "the deeper a Dipsy goes. But once you get much past 150 feet, you hit a neutral point where it goes no deeper. "Even so, I may run it back 200 feet to get my lure farther away from my boat noise."

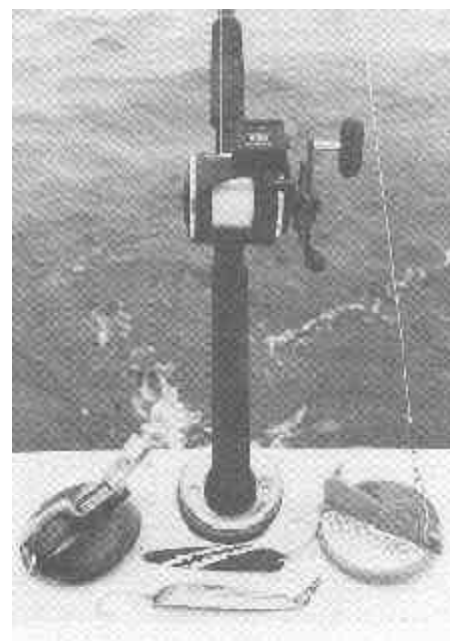
When trolling a diver on 200 feet of monofilament, it is extremely difficult to pop the release by sweeping the rod back. Monofilament has too much stretch. This chore must

be done many times a day to change or check lures. Here is another instance where a new super line has a clear advantage. Its low stretch lets you free a diver's release with the rod, even on a long line.

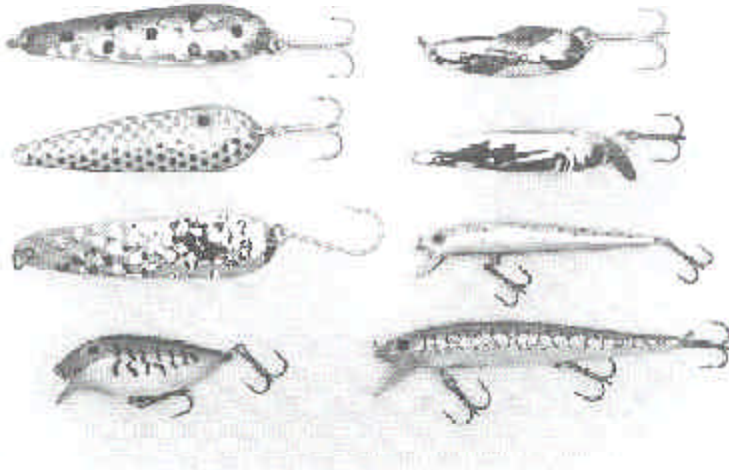
When starting out in the morning, Emrisko sets his lines back at different lengths on each side of the boat. The port lines, beginning with the transom rod, may run back 85, 135 and 175 feet. The starboard lines may run 75, 125 and 150 feet. If walleyes show a preference for a particular setup, he duplicates it with the matching rod on the opposite side of the boat.

LURES

Throughout Lake Erie, directional divers sack more walleyes with



Line counter reels work well with diver rods.



Clockwise from top left: Northern King 28; Northern King C5S1; Bay De Noc's Flutter Lake Taker; Storm's Thunderstick Jr.; Thunkerstick; Thin Fin; Luhr Jensen's Flutter spoon; Pro King.

spoons than any other lure. Spoons grow increasingly effective as the water warms in mid-summer, and they continue producing into the fall.

Combine active walleyes with flashing spoons and you've got the makings for a heavy catch. In the western basin, Troxel dotes on Flash Back Spoons in gold with chartreuse prism tape, and black with green prism tape and a white belly. Other proven colors include silver and white, each dressed with various colors of prism tape. Troxel also favors Bay De Noc's Flutter Laker Taker. Both spoons measure about 4 inches in length.

"Sometimes big spoons put walleyes off," says Troxel. "Dropping down to something like a 2-inch Flute Spoon from Bay De Noc may be what it takes to get them started."

Every spare compartment in Emrisko's cruiser overflows with flat, utility style boxes crammed with lures, most of which are spoons. He owns spoons in every size, color and configuration imaginable. And, of course, he has several of each type, just in case that's what they're hitting on at any given time. It's a wonder his boat stays afloat with all that metal.

A 3 3/8-inch Pentwater Spoon in the 501 pattern has been especially productive for Emrisko. It's pink on one side and black on the other with purple ladderback tape. He also highly recommends the watermelon pattern on any type of spoon. Other spoons that regularly swim behind Emrisko's divers include those made by Pro Spoons, Silver Streak and Northern King. He prefers treble hooks to single hooks and bends the points slightly

off center with pliers, which he believes improves their efficiency.

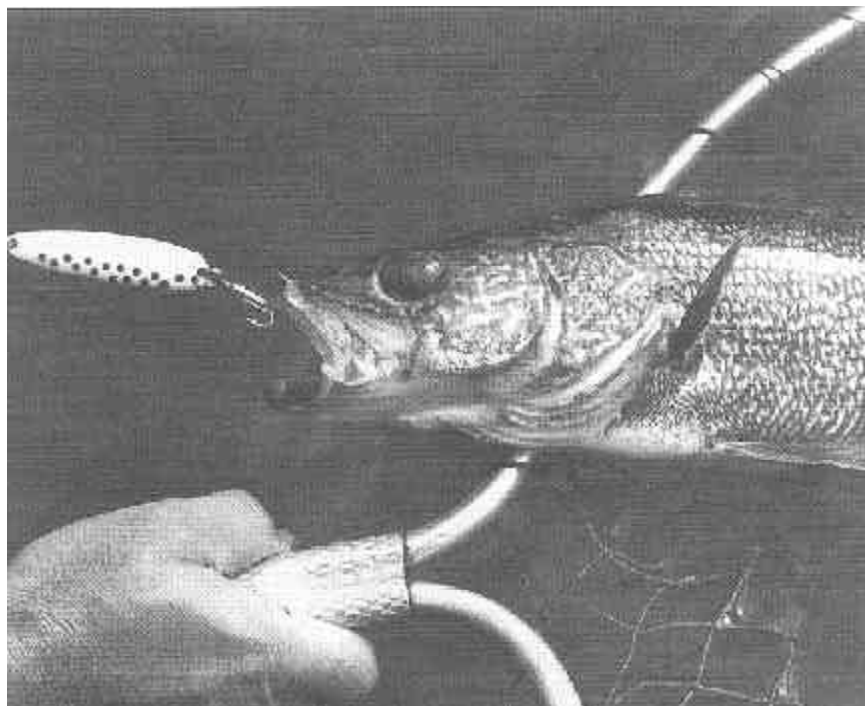
If walleyes ignore standard spoons, Emrisko digs out boxes filled with reflective tape and marking pens in myriad colors to modify existing patterns.

"Change is the name of the game, says Emrisko. "If I have something that's working, I leave it in the water. But if haven't caught anything for awhile, I change it. Lake Erie's changing. The water clarity's changing. Everything is changing. You've got to change your baits too."

Changes were unnecessary during a hazy July morning aboard the Wave Walker when I joined Emrisko, George McKenzie, Mike Shott, Art Regnelli and Bob Daniel, all northeast Ohio fishermen. After boating 13 miles north of Cleveland, Emrisko set out four diver rods rigged with spoons. He began putting out boards that would carry additional lines, but was interrupted when a 6-pound walleye slammed a spoon on one of the divers.

After netting the fish, Emrisko went back to work on the boards, but had to stop again to net another fish. He normally sets out board lines in less than 15 minutes. That morning it took him an hour. The walleyes wouldn't leave the spoons alone. By the time the boards were finally set, 10 respectable fish graced our cooler.

Things slowed somewhat after that, with the board rods and the diver rods both taking additional fish. When the sun burned off the



Another walleye falls for a spoon trailing a diving plane.

haze and the breeze died early in the afternoon, the action slowed considerably. "It's always tough when the lake gets flat," said Emrisko.

He responded by changing spoons in earnest. When he finally found a pattern that worked—a silver spoon dressed with green ladderback tape—he switched several other rods over to the same combination and managed to fill our limits.

Though spoons account for most of Emrisko's walleyes on divers, he has success with other lures. Capt. Ron Johnson, who makes a habit of winning major walleye tournaments out of Fairport Harbor with diving planes, has added crawler harnesses to the lures he carries aboard his boat, "Thumper."

"The water clarity is unreal," he

says. "My techniques have changed. You want to attract the fish, but if you put out too much flash you'll spook them." Johnson reduces flash when running crawler harnesses by cutting back to one blade. Some of his harnesses sport two treble hooks, which he rigs with three crawlers so they all hang straight. It's a virtual smorgasbord for walleyes.

"When I run spinners," he says, "I troll at about 1.4 to 1.5 miles per hour.

"The problem with crawler harnesses is that they attract a lot of attention from sheepshead and other undesirable fish. They pick the bait off your lures, and you may be dragging a small fish without knowing it. That wastes a lot of time."

When walleyes grow aggressive enough to nail spoons, Johnson feeds them hardware. He trolls at a faster clip with spoons, usually from about 2 to 2.4 m.p.h.

Emrisko prefers an even faster pace with spoons, from 2.5 to 2.9 m.p.h. He feels that covering more territory pays off better than a slower trolling speed.

Water temperature helps Capt. Pete Alex determine when to get serious with divers. He heads out on Lake Erie's central basin in his Vision Quest charter boat from Erie Angler Marina in Erie, Pennsylvania.

"You don't have to see them on your graph to catch them," says Alex. "When the water temperature gets up around 70 degrees, some walleyes drop down to the 35- to 40-foot range. That's when I start catching more fish with divers."

Shallow running minnow imitators perform well with divers for Alex. He especially likes Storm's ThunderStick, Jr., ThunderStick, and Rattlin' Thin Fin. Early in the morning and on dark days, he goes with purple or green patterns. Firetiger is a proven producer. On sunny days he runs metallic colored lures behind his divers, such as metallic rainbow trout, black/silver and blue/silver.

In the eastern basin, Ted Malota, also acclaimed for his skill with diving planes, runs a variety of lures. This Hamburg, New York, resident frequently teams up with Capt. Bill King who runs his Searcher One out of Chadwick Bay Marina in Dunkirk Harbor,

New York. The water clarity in the deep eastern basin exceeds that found anywhere else in Lake Erie, which presents special challenges.

“We’ve used Dipsy Divers over the past 8 years,” says Malota. “We’ve gotten into finer stuff because of the water clarity caused by the zebra mussels.”

One adjustment includes moving up to 10 1/2-foot diver rods that accommodate longer 10-foot leaders made from 10-pound Trilene XT. Malota believes longer, thinner leaders coax strikes from walleyes that may shy from divers sporting shorter leaders. He is also convinced that longer leaders allow the spoons to work with a more alluring action when the boat snakes back and forth in “S” turns.

“If you’re making “S” turns,” says Malota, “the outside diver runs faster. The inside one slows. They’re rising and falling like pistons. That’s where the majority of our strikes come from.”

Lately, worm harness have been working well for Malota and King, particularly a little number flaunting a pink and white willow leaf blade with a silver back ahead of a string of red and white beads.

In midsummer, when the smelt run small, the big hitter for Malota and King is a 2-inch C5 Northern King spoon in black and pink with a silver back. Copper with orange is also good. Later in the season, larger spoons get the call, such as Northern King’s 28, and Luhr Jensen’s Flutter Spoon in silver and blue.

“We tip all our spoons,” says Malota,

“with a piece of a crawler just over an inch long. We hook it right through the head so it doesn’t effect the spoon’s action.”

GETTING DEEPER WITH DIVING PLANES

Walleyes in the central and eastern basins often drop below the normal running depths of most diving disks. One way to get divers deeper is by adding weight. With a Dipsy Diver, attach a bead chain sinker between the release and the rod line.

Kastaway’s Diver features an eye on its integral bottom weight where you may fasten an additional weight with a snap swivel. The manufacturer, Kulis, Inc., claims that each ounce of extra weight increases the diving depth by about 5 feet.

Wire line affords another option, though it does groove rod guides. Malota claims that his Dipsy Divers have hit bottom 65 feet deep when trolled with wire. The wire line guru in the central basin, Art Lyon of Conneaut, Ohio, relies on 20-pound, single strand Williams or American brand wire for trolling divers.

“They go deeper with wire,” says Lyon, “and you get real snappy releases. The rods are a lot more sensitive, too. Wire weakens if you get a kink in it, but guys who use it regularly don’t have too much trouble.”

OTHER DIVING PLANES

While directional disks comprise the most versatile diving planes,

non-directional divers afford other options. Luhr Jensen’s Jet Diver, which floats at rest, rates high with Lake Erie anglers. It’s available in five sizes that dive from 10 to 50 feet deep in 10-foot increments.

The smaller Jet Divers see the most play on Lake Erie when used in conjunction with trolling boards.

Luhr Jensen’s Deep Six features a trip action release and comes in three sizes that dive to 40, 60 and 90 feet respectively. The company’s Pink Lady, billed as the original diving sinker, has a slide bar that eliminates the diving angle when a fish strikes.

The Fish Seeker, from Fish Seeker, dives to depths of 70 feet. When a walleye strikes, it flips over and surfaces.

Only two non-direction divers should be run at any given time, and they should be trolled from opposite corners of the transom to avoid tangling.

This article by Mark Hicks is a reprint (Chapter 9) from Mark's book, "Lake Erie Walleye". His book can be ordered by calling 1-800-447-8238.

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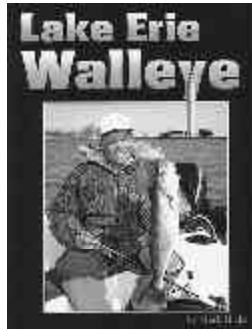
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Fishing Erie's Central Basin

Tips for Walleye and Steelhead

by
Bud Riser

If your nose is buried in this article, you're probably thinking in the back of your mind, "How much is gas going to cost me to find fish"? Can I catch 'em close in? Sure you can...it just depends on how many jet skiers you want to get buzzed off by.

My fishing day usually starts off like this. That chirping robin goes off at 4:15 AM next to the window. 45 minutes later, I'm creeping along the Lake Erie shoreline dropoffs in 17 to 27 foot depths anywhere from Huron to Conneaut.

I'm a die-hard lead chucker so I begin my morning a little shallower than I probably should...usually in 9 to 12 feet...just because I can. Bouncing bottom with jigs and minnows or

crawling a weight forward spinner generally produces a couple early AM fish in skinny water.

If that doesn't do it, I set up my next drift from 10 to 14 feet and maybe switch to a slip sinker and worm harness combo. Bango!—one or two more fish, including the world's largest sheephead.

This time of year, I still like silver, gold or chartreuse color combinations. No matter what your lure choice is, concentrate on using the lightest possible baits but still maintain contact with the bottom.

By this time, it's 9:00 and a boat or two has showed up. I usually slide into 17 to 27foot depths and try blade bait jigging or casting a worm harness in a sweeping arc pattern (casting the swing as charter captains call it).

One or two more fish, a couple of smallmouth bass and a perch or two...not bad for 3 or 4 drifts. 9:45 to 10:00AM and more boats show up



Albert Moll, of Avon Lake, OH, proudly displays a chunky 'eye that fell to a Northland Tackle "Rattlin' Rainbow Spinner" worm rig. Photo by Bud Riser.



Small spoons like the Fire-Eye minnow proved deadly on walleye & steelhead.

along with the first jet skier, churning up the shallows. Now it's time to make the offshore run.

Many mornings may find that you've already limited out on walleyes and you may want to play around with smallmouth bass in 18 to 30 foot depths or fish for perch in 45 to 55 feet instead.

I prefer to get out the heavy artillery and troll offshore for steelhead trout and walleyes. They are often found in the same area of the water column as June/July temps warm up and the summer thermocline sets up.

I generally turn the gain way up or to full on my fishfinder to show the

thermocline. It usually looks like a fuzzy, wavy band on your depthfinder and is about 5 or 6 feet thick, with 67-68 degree water on top. That's where the walleye are, above the thermocline.

I target my trolling baits for walleye to run from 32 to 42 feet deep while my steelhead baits are set to run the deeper part of the thermocline. Colder temperatures hold more steelies as it cools from about 65 to 58 degrees. It's easy to find with a temperature probe.

Right now, I'll bet you're still thinking, "20 miles out??" There's that gasoline question again.

In June and early July, walleye and steelhead action takes place within a reasonable distance from shore. 3 to 6 miles out can be a good early summer starting point and you can work your way out from there.

Last year anglers found schools of walleye and steelies

Northland Tacke's "Rock Runner" bottom bouncers account for many shore-line hugging 'eyes

off Huron, Lorain, Bay Village, Cleveland and points east early last year. Walleyes were spread more widely but those darn trout were everywhere! It was a steelhead bonanza!

My best day produced 30 steelies on line by 12:30 in the afternoon. Captain Bob MacFarland on the "Naughty Buoys" had about 45 on and one chinook as well.

My trip was with two pals who had never been trolling before. Here's how we chase open water walleyes and troutskiis. First, set up a communications hotline. I never hit the water without calling at least five friends to check action as well as internet fishing websites.

Charter Captain, Andy Emrisko, of "Wavewalker" charters uses his own unique formula. "If the TV weather says the lake temperature is 48 degrees, I start out in 48 feet of water. 55 degrees finds me looking



around 55 feet”, explains Emrisko. “I don’t know if it works everywhere, but off Cleveland, it’s been fairly reliable.

Captain John Solecki starts hitting walleyes off Rocky River and Bay Village, Ohio in mid-June when lake temps approach the mid 60’s. “I like to start shallow (45 feet) and work my way north from there”, says the skipper of the “Solucky” charter boat.

John is known for trolling worm harness rigs off Dipsy Divers and from his planer boards. “We’ll often run 12 and even 14 lines until we find what color and action they prefer. Then, we switch a couple more lines to that type of lure or color”.

A number of guys in our information network actually create a grid chart of the areas we fish. It’s unbelievably helpful at a quick glance. There’s a lot of water to cover and if you have 3 to 5 boats covering it, a lot of guesswork is removed.

The last 2 years found walleye in depths of 32 to 70 feet of water, both suspended and occasionally hugging bottom. From early to mid-June, don’t overlook those shoreline breaks for bottom-hugging walleyes.

Anglers have been extremely successful both day and night trolling. “eyes will suspend higher toward the surface as the sun goes down. It doesn’t take them long to become active feeders at dusk.

I’ve actually witnessed a gang of steelhead slashing the surface like

white bass as they chowed down on emerald shiner minnows. We could easily cast to them that evening with spoons or spinners.

Trolling baits for walleye vary greatly from small-bladed Northland Tackle worm rigs to #6 or #7 double willow leaf worm harnesses that “Solucky” charters likes to run. Many captains like crankbaits like Reef Runners, Bombers and Storm Thundersticks off side planers. Recently walleye have shown a preference for smaller stick baits over the larger 25A Bomber sizes.

Spoon sizes dropped into the mini and micro mini sizes for both walleye and trout but last year’s results showed NK-28’s, Wolverine Silver Streaks and Pro Kings in standard sizes working well again.

One thing we learned over the past three years was that if fish show a preference for smaller cranks and spoons, you better use them and not try to force feed ‘em. Sure, we all probably own a couple hundred dollars worth of lures, but if they’re too big or the wrong color or action, it doesn’t mean a thing.

I’m thrifty. It took me nearly half a fishing season to buy smaller spoons but once I did, my central basin success improved considerably. Apparently those walleyes were simply feeding on smaller fish.

Even the worm harness rigs went with small-bladed gold or silver spinners producing best. Try gold when the mayfly hatch is in full swing. Northland Tackle’s

Rattling Rainbow Spinner rigs have been a top favorite of mine for years. Their Rock Runner bottom bouncer and spinner combo has been especially deadly along Lake Erie shoreline breaks and dropoffs.

Buy bottom bouncers heavy enough to run you line as straight up-and-down as possible for maximum sensitivity and hookset. 2 to 3 ounceers are usually good to 30 feet, depending on water conditions. Slow trolling with a lift-and-bounce has worked best for me. Did I also mention that I prefer using Berkley Fireline or Spiderwire?? It really helps a lot with this technique.

Steelhead showed a consistent preference for smaller spoons but the occasional fish would still hit full-sized ones like Pro-Kings or NK-28’s. Any spoon with a copper back has been consistent for both ‘eyes and trout in Cleveland’s offshore waters. Rainbow trout, watermelon, clown, black and purple and green or blue with silver combos were still good colors.

The astounding new kids on the block were Northland Tackle’s Fire Eye spoons and the Michigan Stinger Scorpions along with my favorite Wolverine Silver Streak and micro streak patterns. Colors like “monkey puke, confusion, shrimp and boy/girl” became common to hear on the radio last season.

Trolling speeds are generally about 2-2 1/2 mph for walleye while steelies like baits running a little “hotter” up to about 2 3/4 mph consistently. I travel everywhere

See Fishing Erie page 35

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Precision Jigging

by
Ted Takasaki with Scott Richardson

Trolling is usually the ticket when it comes to catching walleyes on the Great Lakes. Spreading your lines and sifting through large areas of water fast will often connect you with active fish. But, trolling is not always the answer. Sometimes the situation calls for a presentation that lends itself to pinpoint accuracy. That's when it's time to turn to a jig.

The decision on which presentation to choose – jigging vs. trolling - is dictated by how the walleyes are relating to structure on any given day. Using electronics will tell you all you need to know before you ever wet a line. Just ask yourself one question as you watch the fish marks move across the sonar screen. Are walleyes dispersed over huge areas or are they tightly schooled and holding close to reefs, points, rock piles or weeds?

Then picture which method, trolling

or jigging, will keep your bait in front of the most fish for the longest period of time.



Jigging is an effective technique when precision is required to reach walleyes held in structure or when hugging the bottom.

Using this simple analysis, it

becomes clear that trolling does the trick for walleyes that are scattered or suspended. This is normally true in the warm, summer months when walleyes are on the move in search of suspended baitfish. Vary the choice of crankbaits and the amount of line out or use a combination of snap weights and Lindy X-Change bottom bouncers with Hatchet Harnesses and live bait to cover the water column from top to bottom. In-line planer boards can spread your lines to cover a wide path.

Experience has taught us that walleyes will often hold tight to the bottom in small groups on the largest bodies of water. Rock piles, humps and reefs act like magnets in spring and fall or when cold fronts strike in places like Lake Erie's Western Basin or Little Bay de Noc. At other times, walleyes will hold in dense cover, like the weed beds of Saginaw Bay. In all

of these cases, trolling would put baits in the fish zone for only brief moments. You'd spend more time turning the boat around to make another trolling pass than you would actually fishing. On the other hand, specific spots can be worked precisely with a jig. Your bait will stay in front of a walleye for longer periods of time.

Here's how

Doing your homework before you launch is an important ingredient to success on any fishing trip. But on the Great Lakes, information gathering is absolutely critical. There's just too much water to have to search by yourself when armed only with sonar and a rod and reel. Ask clerks at bait shops what areas and tactics are producing. Have them mark your maps. Get the scoop on where the largest concentrations of fish are and get GPS coordinates, if possible.

Once on the water, run from spot to spot, then cruise each location slowly. Watch your sonar carefully to see how fish are relating to the available structure and cover. Note the depth when you find a concentration of walleyes. If they are suspended 3 to 5 feet or more off the bottom, break out the trolling gear. If you are marking fish tight to structure, you'll be using a jig and live bait. When jigging, I like to use a 6-1/2 foot medium-heavy spinning rod with a fast tip like Pinnacle's Tri-Wing TI66SPMH. Your reel should be spooled with 8 or 10 pound monofilament line, like Stren Super Tough, that can withstand abrasions from zebra mussels and haul in the big fish typical of the Great

Lakes. Use a casting combination like the Pinnacle TI66CAMH for heavier jigs and deeper water.

Mark the locations where you see fish on your GPS so you can return easily. Check out the rest of the area and zig-zag slowly along structure contours and weed edges at the depth where you first noticed fish. You might discover the infamous spot-on-a-spot that holds an even larger school. When you do, enter the GPS coordinates or toss out a marker buoy. In addition, listen to your marine radio. Charter captains often exchange information and you might find a pattern or another spot that can help you.

Successful jigging often demands a precise presentation well below the surface. Your ability to accomplish that task depends on the conditions you face above. Are the waves small or large? Can you hold your boat still with an electric trolling motor? If so, you can literally drop a jig on a walleye's nose. A transducer on your trolling motor enables you to work your boat with precision on the edges of the structure.

Golden Rule of Jigging

Here's the number one Golden Rule of Jigging - your jig must always be on or near the bottom for it to be effective. You aren't fishing high percentage, structure-oriented unless it is.

Common sense dictates that the shallower the fish or the slower the wind or current, the lighter the jig can be. An eighth or quarter ounce Fuzz-E-Grub jig can be cast

to the top of a reef or hump topping out in a foot or two of water and retrieved slowly along the bottom back to the boat. For more finicky fish, dangle a smaller jig below a Thill Float so it rides just off the bottom. Let the waves impart the action. Jigs of three-eighths, a half or three-quarters of an ounce handle medium depths. A Jumbo Fuzz-E-Grub weighing five-eighths or an ounce can get down to 50 feet and more. (Ted once led the Professional Walleye Trail tournament on Lake Erie by using his trolling motor to thump big Fuzz E Grubs on humps that rose 5 feet from the bottom in 50 feet of water. His five fish weighed about 37 pounds.)

If the the waves make it too rough to control the boat with an electric motor, toss out an anchor or drift with the wind to cover large areas. Control boat speed with a drift sock, if needed. But whatever the situation, be sure to use a jig heavy enough to maintain bottom contact at all times. Keep no more than a 45-degree angle between your line and the water's surface when drifting to avoid slack in your line and missed fish.

Minnows are great a bait for the Great Lakes anytime. Emerald shiners are the most common. Ask at the bait shops for what's hot. Don't be afraid to experiment, though. Try two minnows on the same hook. There are times when big walleyes seem to want big baits especially in fall and very early spring. Try larger minnows and longer plastic tails. Try a five-eighths or 1-ounce jig dressed with a 4 inch or 6 inch plastic lizard like the ones bass fishermen use. It

works. Nightcrawlers and leeches work well as the water starts to warm up to above 50 degrees.

Sharpen hooks and bend out the hook gaps slightly to improve hook sets. Use stinger hooks, but sometimes allow it to remain free. Inserting the stinger's barb into small emerald shiners can make it appear unnatural.

Jig action is crucial. That was made crystal clear one frigid day when Ted was fishing with walleye/muskie expert Jim Saric on Lake Erie. No one was catching anything, including the charter boats anchored nearby. But that changed when a chilly Saric cast a three-eighth-ounce Fuzz-E-Grub to the top of a 12-foot reef and let it fall to the bottom. As he reached for a cup of coffee, his shivering hand sent vibrations down his rod, through the line and to the jig. When he finally lifted the rod tip, a walleye was on. We took fish after fish during the next several minutes by duplicating the quivering motion. This proved that the first fish was no fluke.

What was the lesson? Match the action of a jig to fit the mood of the walleyes. The most common presentation is lift-drop, lift-drop. But try dragging it, popping it and letting it fall or holding it still just off the bottom. When casting to shallow reefs, let the jig drop until you feel the bottom or see slack in the line. Then slowly lift your rod tip 2 or 3 inches. Pause, drop your rod tip, reel up slack and let the jig touch bottom again. Repeat. Concentrate and remember what action you were giving the jig when you get your first strike. A common mistake by most jiggers is that

they over jig. Use very subtle motions the majority of the time.

Color matters. As a general rule of thumb, brighter colors like chartreuse, lime-green or orange, are good in dirty or stained water. Try subtle, more natural colors like white, black, blue or purple for clearer water. Change up often until you find the color that the walleyes want.

Aggressive walleyes will really "thunk" a jig. If so, set the hook right away. But sometimes they will gently suck the bait in their mouth and just swim away. Get in the habit of watching your line. A few missed fish will alert you about whether you should "feed" them the jig and pause a little longer before driving home the point.

The Great Lakes are big - there's no doubt about it. But, when the walleyes are concentrated and relating to structure, it time to jig with precision.

**Fish Ohio's
Lake Erie
Artificial Reefs!**

**Updated Locations of All
Lake Erie Artificial Reefs
Based on ODNR/GEO Survey
Side-Scan Sonar Data
Updated August, 2000**

Lorain
Polish Fisherman's Club Reef
41 28 .076 N
82 12 .758 W

The Mountain Reef
41 28 .150 N
82 12 .750 W

Lakewood
Cuyahoga County
Commissioners Reef
41 30 .175 N
81 47 .266 W

1984 Experimental Reef Site "A"
41 30 .271 N
81 47 .533 W

1984 Experimental Reef Site "B"
41 30 .256 N
81 47 .041 W

Cleveland Stadium Artificial Reefs

Edgewater
Cleveland Stadium Reef West #1
(north)
41 30 .148 N
81 45 .575 W

Cleveland Stadium Reef West #2
(south)
41 29 .970 N
81 45 .416 W

Euclid
Cleveland Stadium Reef East
(Euclid)
41 35 .933 N
81 33 .804 W

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Steelhead Madness on Lake Erie

by
Jeff Frischkorn

Steelhead trout are expected to again give Lake Erie's walleye a run for their rainbow smelt. No one knows this likelihood better than does Ron Johnson, a charter captain from Painesville and whose base of operations is the Grand River. "I bet we caught between 600 and 800 steelhead last year," said Johnson. "It was, by far, the best steelhead fishing that we've ever seen. It was phenomenal."

Officially last year Ohio's Lake Erie boat fishermen caught a projected 33,524 steelhead. That figure is the second highest ever recorded; the highest being in 1993 when an estimated 34,000 steelhead were taken.

Though Johnson said he and his customers still took more walleye than steelhead last fishing season, on more than one occasion it was the steelhead that saved the day.

"I'd say the ratio was something

like three walleye for every steelhead but that is still impressive since we targeted walleye and

catches would have been much, much higher."



Captain Ron Johnson of Thumper Charters with a prized steelie. The action really heats up in summer.

not trout," Johnson said. "Had we gone after steelhead exclusively I know that our

Johnson typically fishes the summer months north of the Grand River, shunting his boat's position west to off Euclid or east off Geneva depending on the migration pattern of the fish.

Last summer the largest steelhead netted by Johnson for his customers was a 16 1/2-pound fish with a 17 1/4-pound trout being reeled in the year before. Most of the trout caught by Johnson's clients average 5 to 8 pounds, and his best day last summer saw 21 steelhead being poured into the boat's cooler.

Such keeping is not discouraged by the Ohio Division of Wildlife. It is

that agency's belief that trout taken from the lake's deep waters will probably die anyway so it's

better to keep them than it is to waste the resource.

These catches began appearing the second week in June and didn't ease back on the throttle until nearly the end of August. That is when the fish moved closer to shore in anticipation of the trout making their annual genetically disposed mating run up Northeast Ohio's Lake Erie tributaries.

"It wasn't unusual to find the steelhead schooled up with the walleye," Johnson also said. In most cases, however, the trout would hang out in the lake's cooler and more clear waters while the walleye preferred slightly more tinted and warmer water.

"There'd be days when we actually saw the steelhead near the surface, beating up the water and feeding on bait fish," Johnson said. Johnson said that when he sought steelhead either as his trip's main target or else for a change of pace he'd stay with the ammunition used to hoodwink walleye. Small spoons like Stingers worked especially well when finished in copper and orange coloring, Johnson said.

"Silver was good too if it had a strip of blue tape," Johnson said. "And the steelhead even would hit night crawler harnesses, which I found surprising." What steelhead do prefer is a slightly faster trolling speed, says Johnson.

By upping one's boat speed to 2.2 to 2.5 miles per hour, an angler can expect more strikes from trout. For walleye the best trolling speed is from 1.8 to 2.0 miles per hour, says Johnson. "And you definitely want

to use Dipsy Divers, and both sizes do work," Johnson said.

These directional divers are adjusted to a number 3 setting, says Johnson, and allowed to trail as short as 25 feet back from a planer board or 75 feet back from the boat's stern. "Steelhead are much less boat shy than are walleye so you can get away with the shorter distances," Johnson said.

It is important that an angler maintain proper leader length and strength of line. Initially in the fishing season Johnson employs a leader of from 5 to 6 feet, lengthening the line to 6 to 8 feet as the fishing season progresses.

Johnson also prefers using 17-pound test Power Pro line < a strength made necessary because of a steelhead's often chaotic attack. "A steelhead will trip a Dipsy so you don't have to worry about that at all. What you do need to be concerned about is the drag," Johnson said. "Most fishermen keep their drags set too tight and they lose both the fish and the lure; sometimes the diver too."

When fighting steelhead, Johnson recommends keeping the rod held at the 11 o'clock position and keeping up with the fish. Trout will often charge toward the back of the boat so reeling quickly to pick up line slack is essential, Johnson says.

"We caught a lot of walleye last year but the steelhead added numbers to the cooler," Johnson said.

New Book is First to Follow Official Lake Erie Circle Tour

Some of the most popular tourist attractions in four states and a Canadian province can be found on the Lake Erie shore. A new book by Ohio writer Scott Carpenter captures the natural, historic and cultural significance of the lakeshore, and all the region has to offer as a travel destination. Titled "Lake Erie Journal: Guide to the Official Lake Erie Circle Tour," the book is the first travel guide to the designated Circle Tour, a 700-mile marked driving route along the lakeshore in Ohio, Michigan, Ontario, New York and Pennsylvania.

The 308-page book is indexed and illustrated with nearly 200 maps and photos. It describes historic sites, parks and natural areas, large cities and major tourist attractions, small towns and lesser-known destinations.

"A lot of travel guides these days are about as interesting to read as the phone book — not much more than lists and phone numbers," Carpenter said. "I wanted to write a book that gave the reader a feel for the character of the lakeshore in its entirety and its many parts."

The Great Lakes Commission established the Lake Erie Circle Tour as part of the 6,500-mile Great Lakes Circle Tour in the late 1980s. Green and white signs mark the route in Ohio, Michigan and Pennsylvania, while in New York the tour overlaps about 75 miles of the larger New York

See Circle Tour, page 31

Erie Innovation for Walleyes

by
Mark Martin

Right now, as hard-core trolling tactics are in full swing every place on Erie, I'm armed with a selection of dependable lures that are excellent alternatives. For simplicity's sake, and to offer a straightforward strategy for success, I've come up with three of the most effective lure and bait styles that will do the trick around the reefs and river mouths when the trolling bite isn't working out. Or even if it is, these tips and tricks can serve as backup plans when the wind blows or if you're in a smaller boat without the full assortment of trolling gear. Whenever you're around walleyes, it pays to break out the jigs, body baits and a dead rod. Now is the time to adapt them to Erie.

Jigs

Of all the jigs on the market, none is more effective or versatile than the Northland Fire-Ball. They come in sizes from miniature to magnum, giving you the ability

to cover all depths and drop speeds. And they're perfect for snap-jigging, vertical jigging in rivers and lakes, casting and dragging, any

way you want to fish them. Though they are round jigheads, they excel even in current because of the slight keel shape of the head, which makes them track straight in running water. Fire-Balls are large

for their weight, too meaning a 1/16th-ounce specimen is bigger than a lot of regular 1/8th-ouncers, and have bigger, more dramatic profile fish like.

More than anything, the Fire-Ball is a live-bait jig, since it comes without a keeper collar to hold on plastics. I use them with minnows, leeches and half night crawlers. In springtime, I turn to a few tricks to catch more fish. When I know a bunch are beneath me, I often bait up with two small minnows, one hooked upside down, the other right side up. This gives you a pair of minnows in the shape of a V for a more enticing profile. And if walleyes are striking short, if one does rob you of one of the



The author with a good size walleye.

minnows, it will often turn around and grab the remaining bait. Something to remember.

I've seen the technique work time and again on the reefs of Erie's Western Basin. You might feel the first hit and miss, but often the same fish, or maybe a different one, will pounce on it harder the next time. For an added trick, every once in a while I hook a single minnow upside down. I do it when I'm fishing very slowly and giving the jig little action; instead, I depend on the minnow to do it for me. Upside down, the minnow is prone to extra antics.

Another jig from Northland that has an important place in my tackle box is the Whistler. It has a streamlined head and a small propeller for added sound and flash. If normally I'd fish a 1/4-ounce round jig, I boost up to a 3/8ths with the Whistler because of the added lift you get with the propeller. Whistlers are great for casting the shallows, around creeks, rivers and shorelines. When I pitch it out, I often work it almost like a crankbait. When it gets to bottom, I lift it and stop, lift and stop, perhaps a little faster than with a standard jig. With a Whistler I like to turn to plastics as well. Since the Whistlers have a curvature to their hooks, they'll hold plastics in place without tearing off. Try small tubes or Berkley Power Jigworms or Minnows. Sometimes I add an extra squirt of Berkley Walleye Scent. In case you're having trouble keeping near bottom with river current, try cutting the Whistler's prop off the jig. This way, you'll lose the lift of the

propeller and have the keel-shaped head to slice water with better hydrodynamics.

One of the more offbeat offerings depends on nothing but plastic—in fact, it's a double-barrel plastic presentation. On a standard jighead with a keeper to hold the plastic, I put a Berkley Power Minnow and then cut an inch or so off the back of the hook, as if I were tipping it with live bait.

This unusual combination is great in deep water and in times of poor boat control, when you can drag the fake baits over flats or the edge of structure.

I've extended the twin rig's use to deep water, running a heavy jig where I might otherwise want to fish a crankbait but am unsure I can reach bottom in 30 feet and beyond.

Shad Raps

Ever since their debut in the '80s, Rapala's Shad Raps have been catching fish of all species from coast to coast. For me, they're go-to baits in walleye country, especially in spring, when I start with a No. 5 in water six feet and less. Because you can work them faster than a jig, they help eliminate water, and suspended fish will come up several feet to strike them. But I like them to tick and nick bottom on the way in. Now, I don't exactly pound them off the bottom, but a little light touch of bottom is perfect. When you do feel it hit, stop it. Start it up again and when it ticks again, stop it.

Every now and then I will plow it

into bottom just to see what happens. Sometimes it's the ticket. If the water's a little deeper, go with the slightly larger No. 7.

A new weapon in my arsenal is the Shad Rap RS, a rattling, suspending bait. Once, while doing a Bass Pro Shops seminar and casting into one of the fish tanks, I had walleyes, which, as we all know, ignore almost every bait or lure in such captivity, racing after the suspender. Like all crankbaits, don't just cast them out and reel them in. Rather, reel it down, tick bottom and pause. The lure will just hover there, not float up, and walleyes will grab it. There's something about a lure stopping in a walleye's face that it can't resist. You get much the same action when trolling them behind boards, a prime technique for suspended fish on Erie. (Okay, I had to mention trolling on Erie.) As the board shoots forward and then stalls on a turn, the bait will sit there, and the walleyes nail it.

With either type of Shad Rap, I like to add a little extra flash with thin strips of Witchcraft holoform tape. I also experiment with the company's adhesive eyes you can stick to the bait. Sometimes it makes a difference. On certain waters, I've found the walleyes have a definite preference for yellow eyes and black pupils. I don't know why, but I do know they work.

But there's a lot more to a Shad Rap than just casting. Raps are excellent trolling baits, and I have the depths they track almost down to a science. Without weight and with Berkley 20-pound FireLine

(the diameter of eight-pound monofilament), I can get a No. 5 down six feet with 63 to 73 feet of line, a No. 7 down seven to 10 feet with 100 to 110 feet of line, a No. 9 down nine, 10, even 12 or 13 feet with 140 to 150 feet of line. Trolling speed is important, and I almost always run 1 mph to 1.3 mph. If you do go faster, your lures are going to dig deeper. Try trolling Shad Raps around tight contours when you want to get a bait into small places on a short line or when you want to get out and over bottom on lake basins. They also excel for trolling around river mouths, where you need a shorter line because of boat traffic or to get a bait into tight places.

And, lest I forget, when casting add an extra rod, where legal, with live bait to pick up another fish or two or three. More on that in a moment.

The Dead Rod

A dead rod, or one that's basically unattended, will liven up the action many days. When I'm moving along a contour jigging or tossing a Shad Rap, I'll put another rod out with a Northland Rock-Runner bottom bouncer and a Northland Gum-Drop Floater with bait.

For best results, I put a fast-action rod in a holder with a bouncer, a leader up to three feet and a Gum-Drop in small, medium or large. If fish are tentative I'll use a smaller one. If they're more active, I'll boost up in size, or if I'm around bigger fish. The spongy material of the floater keeps the bait just above the tops of emergent weeds. It also helps to keep the bouncer a

few inches from bottom. When you get a strike, the rod will start to bend; pick it up and set the hook.

Any bait, a leech, crawler or minnow, will do the trick, but I prefer minnows around Erie's big fish. Some Gum-Drops come with stinger hooks, but I don't put the stinger into the bait. Since the stinger is tied on stiff mono, it will lie right next to the minnow and help you nail short-strikers. Or, as happens with big, Great Lakes-fed fish accustomed to inhaling high-profile baits, they might very well hold on and not let go. If only walleyes everywhere were that way.



Try This Recipe

Recipe: Cajun Fried Walleye

Ingredients: ½ cup bisquick, 1/ cup milk, 1 egg, 1 cup cornmeal, 2 tsp. Cajun seasoning, 1/ tsp. Salt, 1 ½ lbs walleye fillets, Oil for frying

Preparation Instructions: Whisk together the Bisquick, milk and egg in a medium bowl. Mix the cornmeal, Cajun seasoning and salt in a shallow dish. Dip the fillets into the wet batter first, then dredge in the cornmeal mixture.

Fry the fillets in hot oil until golden brown, turning once. Drain on paper towels and serve. Ranch dressing makes a great dipping sauce for this.

From Circle Tour, page 28

Seaway Trail, a National Scenic Byway that continues to the Atlantic coast. Blue and white signs identify the Lake Erie North Shore Tour in Ontario, which meanders from the Ambassador Bridge over the Detroit River to the Peace Bridge spanning the mighty Niagara.

For generations, families have vacationed at places like Niagara Falls, Cedar Point and Put-in-Bay. Today, tourists also flock to new attractions such as the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum in Cleveland, casinos in Windsor and Detroit, and Bicentennial Tower overlooking Presque Isle in Erie, Pa.

Recent magazine articles have touted the lake as one of the best places in North America for fishing and birding. The Ohio Division of Travel and Tourism just this year named the state's entire lakeshore as a Heritage Corridor because of its significant historic and natural features.

Carpenter has nearly 20 years experience as an editor, reporter and freelance writer in Northwest Ohio. For much of that time, he has written a column about Lake Erie, which has received more than a dozen awards for outdoor, travel and environmental writing.

Lake Erie Journal will be available in bookstores and other outlets this spring, and may be ordered from the publisher, Big River Press, P.O. Box 130 Millfield, OH 45761. Phone: 800-447-8238. The cover price is \$14.95, plus \$3 shipping. (Ohio residents add \$0.93 state tax.)



Smallmouth on the Rocks

by
Melissa Hathaway

It's "Smallmouth on the Rocks" for bass anglers on the Ohio waters of Lake Erie. Mid-to-Late Spring and early Summer bass anglers on this southern-most Great Lake know that where there is rocky structure there are lunker smallmouth bass ready to turn on.

It is no coincidence that the "Bass Islands" of western Lake Erie are so-named. The rocky shorelines and drop-offs around the islands were historically known for quality smallmouth fishing, but the 1990's exploded with a whole new wave of smallmouth mania, says the ODNR Division of Wildlife. Lake Erie's entire waters are teaming with smallmouth bass.

Smallies are taken around all the Western Basin islands, Western Basin reefs, along rocky shorelines across the entire mainland, nearshore areas and breakwalls from Huron to Conneaut, and the open water.

The third most sought after species in Lake Erie, smallmouth bass is gaining ground on walleye and yellow perch as more and more anglers discover the joys of pursuing these high-jumping, feisty fish. Last year the popular In-Fisherman Magazine named Lake Erie "the World's Best Smallmouth Bite."

As Lake Erie's water temperatures exceed 50 degrees Fahrenheit in spring, bass anglers from

across the country travel to Ohio to get a piece of the action. The procession of vehicles towing bass boats continues through October with the peak smallmouth fishing in May, June, August, and September. One or more bass tournaments, many on the national level, are held on the lake and Sandusky Bay almost any given weekend throughout the season.

It is ironic that these feisty fish are often nicknamed "smallies" because on Lake Erie they are not only plentiful, they are big! Catches currently average 14 to 17 inches, with many larger fish in the 18- to 20-inch range also caught. Ohio's state record for smallmouth bass caught in the Bass Islands area in June 1993 weighed in at 9.5 pounds and was 23.5 inches in length.

Good spawning success in the 1990s, good numbers of forage fish eaten by bass, and catch-and-release practices by bass anglers have helped Lake Erie's smallmouth population to thrive. (Angler interviews indicate that more than 80 percent of the bass caught on Lake Erie are released back into the lake.) Still, angling pressure for these fun-to-catch fighters increased five-fold during the 1990s. To help conserve the smallmouth bass population, the Division last year decreased the legal daily bag limit for smallmouth bass from eight to five with a

minimum size length of 14 inches.

To get a better handle on Lake Erie's smallmouth bass population, the Division of Wildlife is conducting studies to better determine harvest, smallmouth bass movements, habitat use, stock composition, spawning habitats, early life history, and biological factors that are affecting the bass population. This, in turn, will help determine appropriate management strategies and regulations for this popular species.

Division biologists have been tagging smallmouth bass in areas off Middle Bass, South Bass, and North Bass islands. Lake Erie anglers who catch a smallmouth bass bearing a metal jaw tag, are encouraged to report it to the Ohio Division of Wildlife at (419) 625-8062.

Besides the tagging studies, the Division is sponsoring research being conducted by The Ohio State University. Researchers are using scuba gear for underwater observations to document spawning habits and interactions between smallmouth bass and exotic species, particularly round gobies. Gobies, those plentiful, little, bait-stealing invader species that entered the Great Lakes in 1990, have been observed preying on eggs and fry of smallmouth bass.

The Division of Wildlife predicts that fishing for smallmouth bass on Lake Erie should remain good to excellent during 2001 and beyond. Bass anglers can expect to land smallies from spawns of 1995, 1996, and 1997 now ranging in size from 14 to 17 inches. Hot spots should include the Bass and Kelleys islands areas, Western Basin reef complex, Sandusky Bay, Ruggles Reef, artificial reefs in the Lorain/Cleveland area, and harbor breakwalls from Cleveland to Conneaut.

Anglers can find out more about smallmouth bass fishing on Lake Erie by requesting a Lake Erie Fishing Guide by calling 1-800-WILDLIFE (1-800-945-3543). The guide also includes information on launching facilities and who to contact for lodging and charter fishing information. A recorded Lake Erie fishing report is available by calling 1-888-HOOK FISH (1-888-466-5347).

Where and How to Fish for Lake Erie Smallmouth Bass

Knowing the habits of smallmouth bass is important to maximizing your fishing efforts. Smallmouth bass have relatively small home ranges and do not move great distances in Lake Erie like walleye. Smallmouth bass associate with bottom structure, preferring rock, rubble, gravel and sand substrates.

As water temperatures exceed 50 degrees Fahrenheit in the spring, adult smallmouth move from deep water wintering sites to shallow spawning areas. Spawning occurs at depths of 4 to 20 feet at water temperatures between 55

and 65 degrees Fahrenheit, usually in May. After spawning, adult smallmouth move to summer foraging areas at water temperatures of 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit, usually by July. The depth of their summering area depends on water clarity, available forage, and weather. As water temperatures drop below 50 degrees Fahrenheit, they move to deeper waters in their home zone, where they remain in a semidormant condition during the winter months.

Structure is the key. Look for rocky structures: gravel bottoms, rocky ledges, shelves, drop-offs, humps, shoals, reefs, breakwalls, piers, rocky and rip rap shorelines, and rocky bottoms in open water areas. Boat anglers have more of an advantage by drifting and moving from spot to spot, but shore anglers catch their share of smallies from rocky shorelines, piers, breakwalls and docks, all popular haunts of smallmouth.

Many anglers use jigs, plastic worms, or scented baits fished over rocky bottoms in 8 to 20 feet of water. Live baits generally provide the best success with crayfish and shiner minnows the preferred live baits. A traditional presentation still successful today is a lead headed jig tipped with a piece of nightcrawler, or plastic worm, grub, or tube bait. Anglers also cast artificial baits, including crankbaits, spinners, and blades. Baits and lures are worked along shallow reef bottoms, shoals and ledges, and near bottom along rocky shorelines in the spring and fall. Anglers generally find better success in mid-summer by fishing along rocky bottoms in open water and nearshore areas.

Most bass anglers practice catch-and-release. But for those who prefer to keep their catch, Ohio law requires that smallmouth bass caught in Lake Erie be released back into the lake if they are less than 14 inches long. There is a daily bag limit of eight fish per angler.

Some smallmouth hot spots in the Western Basin include the Bass Islands, Kelleys Island, and as well as the other small islands, near shore reef complex west of Port Clinton, Sandusky Bay, and nearshore areas, shorelines, and piers along Marblehead, Catawba and Sandusky. Excellent Central Basin smallmouth territory include Ruggles Reef off Vermilion, the artificial reefs off Lorain and Cleveland, breakwalls at Huron, Vermilion, Lorain, Fairport Harbor, Conneaut and Ashtabula, Perry Nuclear Plant east of Fairport Harbor, and nearshore areas from Fairport Harbor to Conneaut. Contact: Melissa Hathaway, ODNR Division of Wildlife (419) 625-8062.

Looking to Charter On Lake Erie?

See the Captains listed in our Charter Directory on page 39 in this issue or at

www.walleye.com

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The Eastern Lake Erie Fishery Report

by
Joe Fischer

The big news for 2001 to most veteran Eastern Lake Erie walleye fishermen is the International Lake Erie committee's recent proposal regarding walleye creel limits. The committee, which has representatives from 4 states and Canada, recognized that walleye stocks throughout the take have diminished by as much as 70% in the last ten years and that decisive steps must be taken to reverse this downward trend before a walleye population crisis appears. All stakeholders are being asked to share in a significant reduction of the sportfishing and commercial walleye catch (TAC) for the next three years. The eastern basin (New York) is considering a daily creel reduction from 5 to 4 walleyes while Pennsylvania is proposing to keep their daily limit at 6 but will close the spring spawning season for walleye fishing. Canada's eastern basin sportfishermen will reduce their daily limit from 6 to 4 with Canada's commercial fleet reducing their catch from 3.3 million fish to 1.47 million, which is a reduction of 56%.

The Ontario ministry of Natural Resources (OUNR) is taking considerable "heat" because of their drastic reduction in the commercial walleye harvest. The commercial fishermen have fully recognized the need for walleye restrictions but had hoped that a significant increase in the TAC for

Lake Perch might help them survive the next three years. The perch population is forecasted as being on the increase but didn't justify the large increase that the commercials hoped for. Rumors persist that many of the commercial fishermen are being laid off and some of the smaller operations are closing down. If all of the proposed changes do take place the yearly Total Allowable Catch (TAC) of walleye for Lake Erie will be reduced from 7.7 million fish to 3.4 million. This will be in place for a period of 3 years upon which time the status of the walleye fishery will be reevaluated. If the stakeholders feel that a significant improvement has taken place the quotas will obviously be increased.

As previously reported many veteran New York fishermen feel that they are being asked to once again take a cut in the daily creel limit when New York State has been a leader in walleye conservation with closed spring seasons, a ban on gill nets and a daily creel limit of 5 walleyes. They feel that if the rest of the lake's stakeholders would have followed these conservative regulations the walleye population downward spiral might have been averted. Their major concern however is for the conservation and preservation of the walleye resource in the future. New York does have the advantage of being on a 2 year program in regards to regulation changes

which means that they will not be able to institute their proposed walleye creel reduction until October of 2002. By this time the other stakeholders will be well into their new regulations and New York will have a preliminary indication on how well the new regulations are working or if any of the other stakeholders are deviating from the lakewide walleye regulation agreement. I certainly hope these regulations work and the walleye doesn't go the way of the blue pike!

The spring to early summer fishery in the eastern basin should be somewhat improved by the presence of a good mature 1998 class year of walleye. Most of these fish should be legal size and will make excellent table fare. These fish will be closer to shore and in shallower water and will probably respond to standard daytime shallow water walleye tactics such as worm harnesses, jigs and stick baits. Long line trolling after dark with stick baits in relatively shallow water can be very productive until the water warms up to summer temperatures. These fish generally are structure oriented but the extreme water clarity.

I drive them deeper in the daytime but they will feed in shallow water after dark. The Lake Erie water level is projected as being lower than normal so be careful when trolling in shallow water especially if your boat is relatively large.

The summer walleye fishery, as stated in previous columns, is totally dependent on the arrival of the suspended nomadic large female walleyes from the western basin. This proved to be later than usual last year, as these fish didn't arrive until late July. This year will undoubtedly be very similar unless we have very warm early summer temperatures, which will drive the western basin bait and walleyes to the cooler deeper water of the eastern basin earlier than usual.

Summertime deep-water walleye tactics on Lake Erie are based on finding the suspended deep-water walleyes and getting the proper bait down to their depth. These fish can be sometimes be found in water exceeding 100 feet and will suspend at depths of 40-80 feet in tight schools. Dipsy Divers, Wire line and Jet Planers are some of the tackle employed by veteran offshore summer walleye fishermen to get the lures at the proper depth. "The extreme water clarity requires the use of the new thin super lines such as Fireline to get your lures deeper without detection" stated veteran Eastern Lake Erie Charter Captain Jerry May at a recent Southtowns Walleye Association seminar. Once again the baits of choice will be spinner and worm combinations of various colors, body baits like the Renosky plug and spoons of various colors. In the morning hours colors such as purple, firetiger and black seem to work well but as the sun rises fishermen change to blue, green and silver. Watermelon and various shades of pink also have produced walleye strikes. A rule of thumb is if you are over fish and do not get a strike in 30 minutes pull your

lures in and change colors. This takes a lot of work but most veteran offshore fishermen employ a variation of this tactic.

The fall perch fishing should be improved, as 1998 was a strong class year for perch. This is indeed good news as next to walleye this is the most desirable and best eating fish in Lake Erie. These fish will be found in water 40-60 feet deep and the best way to catch them is with Lake Minnows. The area from Sturgeon Point to the Cattaraugus Creek is usually where these fish school up in the fall. Be sure to check the local weather forecast before you venture out in the fall as Lake Erie is noted for its fall windstorms, which can come up in a matter of minutes!

Smallmouth Bass fishing will continue to be world class in the summer of 2001. The amount and size of these fish are incredible with many people catching and releasing 20 to 40 smallmouths during one outing! Jigs continue to be the top choice of most bass anglers but crank baits also work quite well. This should be a good year for most fishermen as long as the capricious Eastern Lake Erie weather doesn't interfere. Good luck!

From Fishing Erie, page 22

with a GPS and a compass. They're invaluable when searching for open water hotspots. In June, patterns have found fish offshore in 35 to 45 foot depths. They may be suspended up high so look for 'em.

In July, walleye and steelhead are chased in 45 to 65 feet of water and both species can be located high as well as down into the thermocline. Last year, many anglers trolled Dipsy Divers 50 to 80 feet out on 1, 2 and 3 settings respectively for trout. Walleye hit deeper with setting farther back at 145, 165 and 185 feet of line out on 1,2 and 3 Dipsys. Fluorescent colors like Chartreuse and Fire Tiger took most of the 'eyes while copper and rainbow trout patterns caught most of my steelies.

By mid-July, lake temps are usually at 70-72 degrees down deep. Going into late July and August, water temps peak and motoring out 25 miles or more is not unusual to locate good action. By mid-August, many anglers shift over to yellow perch or smallies instead of spending all the time and gas money chasing distant fish.

Nearshore (4 to 7 miles out) walleye activity usually picks up off Lorain, Vermilion and Huron but that's another article for the fall issue. See you on the water!

Lake Erie's Walleye Under the Microscope

by
Jeff Frischkorn

Lake Erie's fisheries managers are feverishly applying brick and mortar to the state's fishing laws, implementing greater restrictions on the harvesting of walleye.

These rules apply lakewide to both classes of anglers: Commercial as well as sport fishermen.

Had the fisheries biologists from the lake's four slaveholding states and one Canadian province not undertaken halving the lakewide take of walleye, then at some point the species could easily have been spoken of in the past tense.

For this year Ohio's quota of Lake Erie walleye is 1.7 million, all allocated to sport fishermen. That statistic is out of the lakewide quota of 3.4 million fish. Last year the lakewide quota was 7.7 million walleye with Ohio receiving 3.8 million fish.

By comparison, Ontario's commercial fishermen are being allocated roughly 1.5 million walleye - down from their 2000 allocation of 3.3 million fish.

Distilling the rhetoric, fisheries managers agree they miscalculated the status of Lake Erie's walleye stock.

"Heck, we never said we were perfect. Our mistake was that we were being too liberal with our harvest policies. We used the same

harvest policies that we did in the 1980s but the ecological factors changed in the 1990s and I have no doubt that they will continue to change," said Mike Costello, the Ohio Division of Wildlife's biologist in charge of the state's Lake Erie fisheries program.

The real story, says Costello, is that had this year's walleye quota followed the traditional path of exploiting recent good hatches then the lakewide allocation would have risen to between 9 million and 10 million fish.

Instead the lake's stakeholders are placing harvest restrictions in an effort to rebuild a walleye fisheries that managers now admit is static, if not in decline.

"I believe that biologists and administrators are concerned enough to take these stopgap measures to give us time to evaluate the situation in order to see what long-term management options may be available," said Gary Isbell, the wildlife division's chief fisheries biologist. "In that way we may be able to restore the walleye's population to what it was in the past."

It is fundamentally wrong, Costello says however, to simply tie Ontario commercial fishermen to the stake and reach for the Butane lighter.

"That's an easy out. The reality is that Canada lived within the quota agreement," Costello said.

In truth, various unforeseen factors were what led to the walleye's current sluggish status. The unattended introduction of zebra mussels into Lake Erie years ago followed by the appearance of the round goby in the late 1990s were believed contributors to the walleye's present morose state.

Another negative factor in the equation was the ban on phosphates entering Lake Erie, allowing for the departure of nutrient-loving algae. All three of these conditions led to dramatically altered lake dynamics, both Isbell and Costello said.

"But we also believe that fishing had an impact, and that's why we believe a reduction in the harvest is necessary," Isbell said. Simply put, Costello says, a fisheries cannot sustain itself with the resulting surplus yielding sustainable dividends, Costello said. "What we've been doing is hammering those 15-inch fish before they had much of an opportunity to spawn," Costello said.

As a result, the management of Lake Erie's fisheries is only going to become even more blurred and more difficult, Costello says.

"It's a moving target, and it's moving a heck of a lot faster than it ever did before," Costello said.

2001 Lake Erie Walleye Tournaments

April 11-14. Walmart RCL Walleye Series. Port Clinton, OH. \$1,500 pro - \$750 co-angler Contact (270) 362-5259

April 21. United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Catawba Island State Park. Two person teams. \$115/team. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or eyetaker@raex.com

May 19-20. Michigan Walleye Tour. Monroe, MI. \$240/team. Contact Ken Shear (517) 895-8223

June 2. United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Lorain, OH. Two person teams. \$115/team. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or eyetaker@raex.com

June 9. North Coast Charter Boat Association. Fairport Harbor/Grand River, OH. Walleye Tournament \$400/boat (8 rods max) Steelhead Tournament \$50/boat (8 rods max). 80% payback, first five positions. Contact Bernie Roell: (440) 257-9544 or email: alurecharters@cs.com.

June 13-15. Pro Team Walleye. Lorain, OH. \$650/team. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or email: eyetaker@raex.com

June 15-17. 444 Walleye International Fishing Tourn. Port Colborne & District Conservation Club. Marina H, H Knoll Park in Port Colborne, Ontario. Entry Fee: \$130/team (US) Contact Mike Shatkosky (905) 834-4314 or Mike Hili (905) 835-1891 Email: pcdcc@inter-pc.com www.thefishingspot/pcdcc

June 16. The 2001 West Cleveland Open. Rocky River Metro Parks Ramp, Cleveland, OH. Contact: Crhis Songer; (440) 835-2892 email: getreelcms.aol.com Entry Fee: \$125 per boat, 1-4 man teams. Total Purse: Prorated 75% pay out.

June 17. United States Fishing Association (USFA) Team Walleye. Fairport, OH. \$115/team. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or eyetaker@raex.com

June 23. Fairport Harbor Rod & Reel Association. Fairport Harbor, OH \$100.00/boat. (8 rod limit) 90% Payout. Contact Jason Glatz: (440) 548-4102

June 30 – July 8 Southtowns Walleye Association of Western New York. Several Western New York weigh stations. Contact Tom Marks: (716) 947-9350

July 14-15. New York Walleye Association. Ameri-Can Walleye Classic. Chadwick Bay Marina, Dunkirk, NY. \$175/team (3 man teams). Limit 150 teams. Contact Jim Borucki (716) 897-1522 or George Boice (716) 874-2522

July 20-22. Walleye Challenge. Port Colborne, Ontario \$375/3-4 person team (US). 125 team limit . Contact Dave Malloy (905) 834-9218.

July 28. United States Fishing Association (USFA). Fairport, OH. \$115/team. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or eyetaker@raex.com

2001 Lake Erie Walleye Tournaments

July 29. Western Reserve Walleye Association Open Event. Geneva State Park Ramp, Geneva, OH.
\$100/2 person team. Contact Jim Breedlove (330) 530-3909 or visit www.thewrwa.com.

August 4. 11th Annual Lake Erie Walleye Tournament. ARU Marina, Ashtabula, OH.
Contact Chuck Baker (330) 392-1591 ext. 223 or Nick Frangos (330) 759-0746. Email: fishbanger001@netscape.net

August 8-10. Professional Walleye Trail (PWT) Lake Erie Tournament. Dunkirk, NY Contact PWT Headquarters at: (218) 829-0620.

August 11-12. Masters Walleye Circuit. Geneva, OH. \$375/team Contact: (612) 833-1522

August 15-17. Pro Team Walleye. Fairport Harbor, OH. \$650/team. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or email: eyetaker@raex.com

August 18-19. United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Fairport, OH. \$115/team Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or eyetaker@raex.com.

If you know of a Lake Erie Walleye fishing tournament let us know by calling 1 800 347-4519. We'd like to post all Lake Erie fishing tournaments both in the magazine and on our web site at walleye.com!!



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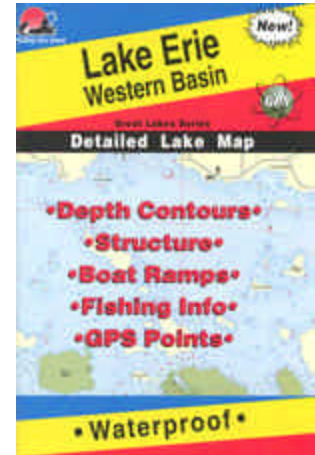
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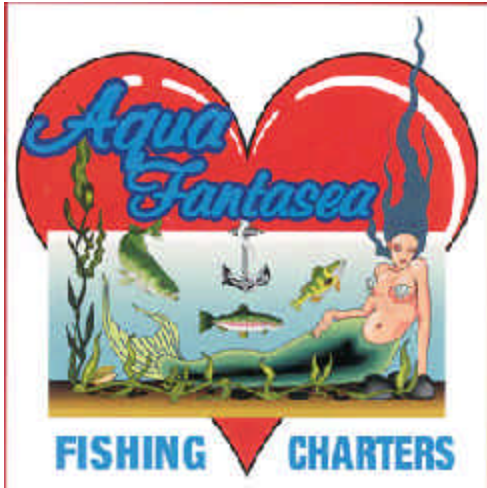
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