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Vol. 6, No. 1

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From The Editor

As the dawn of the new millennium finally has arrived I'm reflective of what the future holds for the sport fishermen of Lake Erie. I'm hopeful that Man will continue to respect this Great Lake and do whatever is necessary to properly manage its fisheries so that all future generations can enjoy what we do today.

Through the middle of this past century we witnessed Man's negative impact on the ecology and fisheries of Lake Erie. In the 1950s we looked the other way as the Blue Pike vanished from Erie's waters due to overfishing, by both commercial and sport fishermen. Yes, remember the stories of weekend fishermen filling their boats with 'buckets' of Blue Pike? It is now an extinct species.

During this same time we saw Erie ravaged by Man's excesses, driven by profit and greed, as hundreds of factories lining the lake dumping every waste chemical in the book into it. This pollution killed off the perch and walleye fisheries during the 50s, 60s and early 70s. What few fish that remained in the lake were unsuitable for eating with their flesh tainted by deadly chemicals.

In more recent years, Man has attempted to atone for his ecological sins by legislating against pollution and forming fisheries agencies to manage Erie's resources. These efforts have paid dividends with a rebirth of Erie's fisheries during late 70s, 80s and 90s. I'm hopeful that Man will continue this work well into the next millennium. Let's not ever repeat our ecological mistakes of the past.

See Editor, Page 6

Lake Erie Walleye

Rick Kubb, Editor/Publisher

Published for the walleye anglers of Lake Erie.

Subscriptions are \$12.00 annually for three issues. Questions, comments, and contributions are welcome and should be submitted to:

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Walleye News and Fact File

New State Record Walleye 16 Pounds Plus

Tom Haberman of Brunswick (**Cover Photo**) was sure glad he and friends decided to go fishing instead of rabbit hunting last Tuesday (Nov.23, 1999). Haberman landed a new state record walleye in Lake Erie that tipped the scales at 16.19 pounds, report the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife.

After paper work was completed by the Outdoor Writes of Ohio (OWO) who certify all state record fish. It surpassed the old state record of 15.95 pounds, caught off the Marblehead Lighthouse in March 1995.

Haberman and friends were perch fishing two miles off Cleveland, when he unexpectedly caught the whopping walleye. He was fishing with minnows on a perch rig using 6-pound test line on ultra light spinning tackle.

The group was going to go rabbit hunting but with the unseasonably warm temperatures, decided it was too warm to run their dogs. They went fishing instead, according to Haberman's friend and LECBA member Capt. Andy Emrisko.

Haberman's walleye initially weighed in at 16.29 pounds, but immediately afterwards spit up a round goby. When weighed again on a second scale at a local meat market, the fish weighed 16.19 pounds. It measured 33 inches in length and had a girth of 21.5 inches.

"This state record catch is testimony that Lake Erie continues to produce some big fish. In addition, the lake has good numbers of walleyes in a variety of sizes as the result of some favorable hatches from the mid 1980s through the 1990s," said Mike Budzik, chief of the Division of Wildlife. "Lake Erie is still the Walleye capitol of the world providing a fishery that is unsurpassed."

Biologists at the Division's Fairport Harbor Fisheries Research Station officially examined the fish Wednesday. From scale samples, biologists determined the fish to be from Lake Erie's 1986 walleye hatch or possibly an earlier hatch, making it at least 13 years old.

"This was undoubtedly the most active year we've ever experienced for state record fish," said Jeff Frishkorn, the chairman of OWO's State Record Fish Committee for all tackle. I can recall about 9 new state record fish certified this year, which is an incredible number."

Often times these record breaking fish are caught by ordinary anglers under ordinary circumstances, which indicates every angler in Ohio is a potential record holder."

Magazine Names Lake Erie as Top Destination

Lake Erie continues to rank among the best sport fisheries in the world, according to In-Fisherman Magazine. In a recently published special issue "Angling Adventures 2000," the popular fishing publication named Lake Erie a top 10 angling destination for walleyes, smallmouth bass, and steelhead trout, reports the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

"These designations by the expert staff of In-Fisherman are more testimony to the mixed bag of angling opportunities this world class fishery continues to provide," said Mike Budzik, chief of the Ohio Division of Wildlife. "Lake Erie not only remains unchallenged as the Walleye Capital of the World, but the lake's

smallmouth bass fishery has moved up the ranks in the last decade to rival smallmouth fishing anywhere else in the country. In addition, the Division's steelhead stocking program has created a superb stream fishery in Central Basin tributaries that becomes more popular as anglers discover this fishery."

In-Fisherman Magazine rated Lake Erie first among "this year's world's best smallmouth bites." The magazine revealed, "No doubt, Erie is today's most storied smallmouth fishery. On Erie, the bass tend to average 3 pounds, with a few exceeding 9 pounds. From the flatlands surrounding Erie's Western Basin to the rocky, hilly terrain of western New York, smallmouths inhabit every bay and reef."

Angling pressure for these fun-to-catch, feisty jumpers has quadrupled on the lake over the past decade. Lake Erie has become such a popular hot spot for smallmouth angling that the Division of Wildlife is conducting a smallmouth bass study to ensure that the population remains stable to support the fishing pressure.

"We have increased the legal size limit and decreased the bag limit beginning March 1, 2000 to maintain and ensure a quality smallmouth fishery," said Budzik.

In-Fisherman designated Lake Erie's Western and Central basins as top 10 picks for big-water walleyes. Good spawning success throughout the 1990s is sustaining a healthy population of these popular sport fish, which have long drawn anglers from across the country. A new state record walleye weighing 16.19 pounds was caught off Cleveland in November. The fish surpassed the previous state record of 15.95 pounds, caught off Marblehead Lighthouse in March 1995.

"We're thrilled that the Western Basin remains in the top 10," said Melinda Huntley, executive director of the Ottawa County Visitors Bureau. "In-Fisherman anglers should know. Anglers competing in the In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail tournament set 17 out of 19 records while fishing the Western Basin this past decade. We are looking forward to the tournament's return to Port Clinton April 19-21, 2000."

In the Central Basin of the lake, Jim Roethler, execu-

tive director of the Ashtabula County Visitors Bureau, responded, "It's great that In-Fisherman recognizes the Central Basin as a top 10 site. Anyone looking for that trophy catch in 2000 is welcome in Ashtabula County."

Roethler noted, "When the walleye are biting, the county sees a significant increase in visitors. This has a direct impact on our local economy as these fishermen will use hotels, campgrounds, restaurants and visit our stores. We are very appreciative of their visits and attempt to be as accommodating as possible."

Last but not least, angling Adventures 2000 named the Grand River, a Lake Erie tributary in northeast Ohio, as one of North America's top 10 fishing destinations for steelhead trout. The Division has been stocking 200,000 steelhead trout in four Central Basin tributaries, including the Grand River, and will increase that number to 400,000 in the spring of 2000. These fish migrate out into Lake Erie and spend the summer in the cooler part of the lake, before returning to streams in the fall through the spring.

"Ohio has been blessed with one of the country's greatest resources — Lake Erie. It is the warmest and most biologically productive of the Great Lakes, which has made it a sport fishing Mecca," said Budzik. "Interagency fisheries management and significant improvement in habitat over the past three decades has helped maintain a world-class fishery that provides a wealth of angling opportunities."

A couple of Ohio's inland waters made In-Fisherman's top-ten lists as well. West Branch Reservoir (Portage County) was listed as a top 10 destination for muskie fishing. Delaware Lake (Delaware County) was included on the list of top 10 hot spots for cold water catfish. In addition, the Ohio River was mentioned under "more coldwater hot spots" for its catfish angling.

In-Fisherman's staff and writers are expert anglers who travel world-wide to experience and write about fishing opportunities. The publication was founded by professional anglers Al and Ron Lindner.

Two State Record Burbot Caught Recently

Anglers fishing Lake Erie near the mouth of the Grand River in Fairport Harbor this winter are reeling in some lunker catches of a fish most people think long went by the wayside. Two potential state record burbot were caught over the past two weeks, reports the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Mike Hepker, of Sandusky, was fishing the waters of Lake Erie from the Fairport Harbor pier on December 16 when he caught a 12 pound, 10 ounce burbot. Hepker turned in the proper paper work to the Outdoor Writers of Ohio (OHO), the organization that officially certifies all of Ohio's all tackle state record fish. The burbot surpassed the previous state record burbot, an 11.95-pound burbot caught in April 1998 by a Conneaut angler. Within just a few days, yet another potential state record burbot was caught at the Fairport Harbor pier. Bud Clute, of Chardon, landed a 17.33-pound burbot from the pier on December 20, easily surpassing Hepker's fish. After accounting for the time involved in processing the State Record Fish paper work, Hepker's fish was recognized as the state record burbot for only one day before Clute's fish was officially certified as the new state record burbot.

"Two state record burbot from the Fairport Harbor pier is not all that surprising," said Kevin Kayle, Aquatic Biology Supervisor of the Division's Fairport Fish Station. Kayle states that adult burbot congregate at large river mouths in the late fall and early winters to feast on abundant forage fish like gizzard shad, smelt, and shiners. They also congregate in these areas before they spawn, which makes for some very heavy female burbot available to anglers. It would be expected that the new record is also short-lived.

"We may see a large burbot tip the scales at close to twenty pounds," Kayle said. He also noted that the recovery of the burbot in Lake Erie in the last decade has been due to changing lake conditions, good reproduction and growing conditions, and lack of concentrated fishery for burbot. Increased catches of burbot throughout the 1990s indicate their numbers are on the rise in Lake Erie's Central Basin, after extremely low numbers in the 1960s.

This unusual-looking fish is a freshwater relative of the Atlantic cod family and resembles no other fish species in Lake Erie. Burbot have a large head with a single barbel at the tip of the chin. A fin extends down the back to its belly. Adult burbot normally range in size from 16-32 inches and weigh 5-12 pounds. They are voracious night predators and feed upon a variety of species of small fish, such as shiners, used by most freshwater cod, lawyers, lingcod, and eelpout.

Canada launches 5-Year Plan to Improve Eastern Lake Erie Fisheries

On January 1, 2000, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) will launch a five-year action plan to protect and restore local stocks of yellow perch and walleye in eastern Lake Erie for the benefit of both the sport and commercial fisheries.

The plan calls for managing the harvest of fish from the eastern basin separately from the rest of the lake to protect local, genetically-distinct stocks of fish from further decline.

"This plan creates the management tools needed to set the scene for a recovery based on sound science and strong consultation," said Natural Resources Minister John Snobelen. "MNR will work with both sport and commercial fish organizations to increase the chances for stock recovery by rehabilitating and restoring some of the components of the lake's ecosystem."

There have been serious declines in the abundance of important fish species in eastern Lake Erie because of changes in the ecosystem brought on by the presence of exotic species and by efforts to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the lake. The total commercial harvest of fish from the eastern basin has declined by more than 75 per cent in the 1990s. The rate at which anglers are catching walleye, the most sought-after sports fish, has declined by 50 per cent since the late 1980s.

“Both sport and commercial fishing are important economic and social activities in many eastern Lake Erie communities, such as Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Port Maitland,” said Tim Hudak, MPP for Erie-Lincoln. “This plan will lead to increased economic and tourism benefits for these shoreline communities and will boost Ontario’s economy.”

Under the plan, fishing for walleye by commercial and sport fishermen will no longer be permitted from March 15 to the second Saturday in May. This will protect walleye during spawning time. New lower catch limits will be set for the commercial harvest of walleye and yellow perch. Anglers will now have a daily limit of 25 yellow perch on the lake and 50 when fishing in Long Point Bay. The walleye daily catch limit in the lower Grand River and the eastern basin of Lake Erie will drop to four from six fish.

One of the key parts of the habitat component of the plan will be to improve walleye movement over the Dunnville and Caledonia dams to allow the fish better access to high quality spawning and nursery habitat in the Grand River.

The first moderately good year-class of perch and walleye in the 1990s appeared in the Eastern Basin in 1998, and are early signs for cautious optimism. These year-classes will become vulnerable to fishing in 2000 and will need to be protected from overharvest so we can build from them, according to Canadian officials.

From Editor, Page 2

The most recent fisheries management efforts come from our friends on the North Shore. In January of this (MNR) announced a Five-Year Plan to improve fishing in Eastern Lake Erie. The plan calls for protecting

spawning season from March through Mid-May. Protecting walleyes from gill netters? Now there’s an

of commercial harvests and reduced bag limits for sport fishermen, both for walleye and perch. Many sport

not go far enough to protect the eastern basin fishery, which has been in rapid decline the past two decades. I

wonder why our Canadian neighbors won’t just bite the bullet, as we did here, and simply **NETTING ONCE AND FOR ALL!!!**

On a lighter note, as editor and publisher of this magazine,

the Year 2000 and took every possible precaution to guard against the now infamous millennium bug. I tested

compliant computer etc., etc. So confident was I that st, I

my home office during the “Midnight Rollover”. Did all my painstaking efforts pay off? Uh, No! On that early st morning I discovered that a large contingent

subscription expiration dates of September 1, 1900!! Don’t panic. All is well now as the expiration dates were

With the new Millennium we also are ushering in a new look to our Magazine cover. The original “Fish in the a new logo. Hope you like it!

With this issue we welcome Mark Hicks and Mark

known outdoors writers and bring years of experience and knowledge of Lake Erie and walleye fishing with

Till next time, good fishing!

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Understanding Pre-Spawn & Spawning Walleyes

by
Mike McClelland

Much debate has occurred over the years about fishing and walleye activity during the pre-spawn and spawning period. Unfortunately much of the information that has been passed along has been based upon mis-information or just plain ignorance. Understanding walleyes and the proper techniques to use during this period will help you greatly improve your fishing success.

Many well intended anglers nationwide have questioned the ethics of catching walleyes during the pre-spawn. Remember this: It doesn't matter whether a female walleye is caught during this time period or in the summer, the net effect is much the same. Simply put, provided that anglers don't over harvest the key spawners, (the three to six pound females) during any time period throughout the year, fishing pre-spawn walleyes won't have a negative impact on your favorite fishery.

Always practice good conservation skills not only during this time period, but through out the whole fishing year.

Now let's get into understanding this calendar period. Walleyes spawn in rocky areas, instinctively



The Author with a prized catch. The spawning for walleyes is temperature driven, usually between 40-45 degrees.

seeking places that receive large amounts of wave action which does two things: oxygenates the

eggs and keeps silt from covering them. These areas should be sought out in the early spring on lakes, reservoirs and rivers. The spawn begins when water temperatures reach 40 degrees and lasts until the water warms beyond 45 degrees. In the period leading up to the spawn, look around. You can use rip-rap, skull-sized rocks or other known spawning areas as your points of reference when searching for pre-spawners.

The quickest and easiest way to find spawning areas is to simply ask. Since walleyes spawn in the same locations year after year, someone will know where the spawn occurs. If you can't learn this information at local bait shops, contact the local conservation officer to put you on the right track.

Pre-Spawn

Once the spawning area has been located the fish staging for the spawn is easy to find with the help of a few simple rules.

Begin at the spawning area as walleyes spawn in the same area year after year. Proceed from the

spawning area and locate the closest 30-foot level of water on the flattest bottom possible.

Whether this depth is found in the backs of bays or the bottom of the lake, 30 feet is the key. If the lake doesn't have 30 feet of water, move to the closest, deepest part of the lake and begin looking there.

The fish can be easily found and are unmistakable. On your electronics, they'll mark as big hooks a foot or two off the bottom. It may not be on a red-hot bite, so fish them with confidence and big baits. Eventually a few will bite and two or three fish on any pre-spawn day is considered a great day.

Once you have located the fish, move your boat to the up-wind side and drift through them as slowly as possible. The best method for taking pre-spawn fish is either Lindy rigging a large minnow four to six inches long or vertical jigging with a 1/4 ounce to 3/8 ounce jig using a large rubber body and a big minnow. My preference is both presentations at the same time. Let the Lindy rig trail 75 to 100 feet behind the boat and set the rod in a rod holder. Always keep an eye on the Lindy rig rod. When a hit is made, open the bail and give the fish a good deal of line and time before setting the hook. Remember these fish are somewhat lethargic and you're using a large minnow, give them some time.

With the Lindy rig rod is in its holder, vertically jig with the other rod. Jigging is easy - simply bounce the jig off the bottom, keeping it as close to vertical as possible. Unlike the Lindy rig, set the hook as soon as you feel a hit. For that matter,

set the hook as soon as you think you feel a hit.

One key to catching walleyes during the pre-spawn is to use big baits. The young of the year haven't hatched yet, so the main food for walleyes are the adult bait fish that have made it through the first year and are now fully grown. Add the biggest body you have to your jigs and cast or troll bigger crankbaits.

Slow Is The Key

Once you've located fish with electronics, remember fishing slow is the key. For jigging or rigging, you can't go too slow. Use your bow mount electric motor on the slowest speed. The slightest breeze will push you fast enough. Use a sea anchor to slow you even more if there is any wind.

Spawning

Walleyes spawn in water from one foot to over 20 feet deep. Rocky and gravel covered shore-lines are the most typical spawning sites; however, if habitat is lacking walleyes will also spawn on sand and in other less desirable areas. An abundance of broken rocks and gravel in water three to 10 feet deep will normally attract the largest concentrations of fish.

Reservoir walleyes typically migrate to the upstream end of an impoundment to spawn. In large reservoirs, such as those along the Missouri River, walleyes have been known to travel 100 plus miles to reach prime spawning sites. Fisheries' biologists have tracked walleyes tagged with radio telem-

etry transmitters from one end of Lake Oahe in South Dakota to the other. Although this long distance may be an isolated incident, walleyes are nomadic creatures that won't hesitate to migrate many miles to find suitable spawning habitat. Rip-rap shorelines near the dams are often prime spawning areas. Trolling crankbaits along this rip-rap edge can prove absolutely deadly on big fish. The best action usually takes place after dark and continues until about midnight.

Although many walleyes prefer to spawn just downstream from dams, the rocky shorelines and tributary streams also attract spawn-laden fish. Not all the fish spawn at the same time or in the same places. This is Mother Nature's way of ensuring that an entire "year class," those particular fish that are born each year, isn't destroyed by floods or other natural disasters.

Walleyes that spawn in rivers are the most predictable of all. Clearly, 99 percent of the fish that enter the river to spawn will physically swim as far as they possibly can before stopping to deposit their eggs. Low head dams, waterfalls, or natural and man-made diversions, usually stop the upstream movement of fish and often cause the concentration of tremendous numbers of big fish in amazingly small areas. At times, the walleyes will be so thick you can feel your lure bouncing off the backs of the fish. Fishing under these conditions can be easy and rewarding.

See McClelland, page 33

Lake Erie Pre-Spawn & River Walleye Tactics

by
Richard Martin

Every year it happens. Like the inexorable ticking of a clock, the days grow longer, two minutes by two minutes. And as they do, Lake Erie walleye eggs and milt begin to mature and hormones trigger off behavior patterns that have changed little over thousands of years.

The fish begin staging south of Green Island, north of such reefs as Clinton and Cone, between North Bass and Niagara, and off the tip of Catawba island, all deep water spots. Then the huge, loose schools and pods begin a slow, measured movement toward the western end of the lake.

Some of those schools head toward reefs like Toussaint and Niagara, others favor flats, beach areas, and rockpiles, and more seek out the Sandusky and Maumee rivers, but they all move and as they do, offer opportunities for the first big walleye catches of the

year. And some of the fish caught will be BIG walleyes!

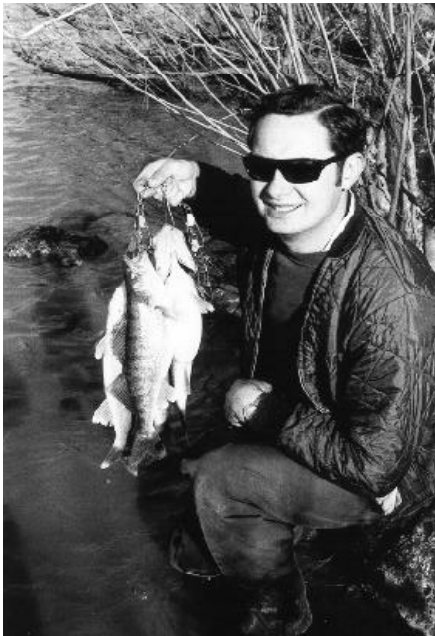


Early Pre-spawn walleyes stage in deeper water south of Green Island, then begin a slow westward migration to shallower waters around the reefs.

It's tough fishing. Some years the ice lingers long, and anglers will

often perform the dangerous trick of walking their boat over thin ice to open water. Foolish. Other years the ice leaves early, and launch ramps in western Lake Erie are free and ready for use. However the weather, once boats can be launched, it's going to be cold. Lake water won't be much above 33 degrees, snow and high winds are always possible, and ice chunks will be floating here and there. which means anglers had best dress warmly and carry plenty of hot coffee. But the fish have no choice and will move, whatever the weather. All that's necessary is to find them and then catch them.

The finding most days isn't difficult. At the beginning of the migration, look for them in the deep-water spots listed above. As it progresses they'll move into shallower water and schools will swim west, many of them passing the tip of Catawba Island. They might be a half-mile offshore, or a mile or several, and depending on when you're able to go, most



Smaller male 'jacks' are typical catches during the river runs' in spring.

could be north of the island, or west and south.

So, one good tactic is to launch at Catawba Island State Park and head a mile or two due west. Then anchor if necessary, or drift if the winds are gentle and drifting is possible. With a fish locator, pinpointing schools and pods is easy, but lacking this basic gear most anglers anchor and fish one spot for 15 minutes then move, and move again. Drifters just keep going, maybe working deeper or shallower on each drift.

Anglers will basically be using ice fishing techniques at this time of year, and that means jigging just off bottom with spoons and jigs. Good choices are Swedish Pimples, jigging Rapalals, Snakey Spoons, Hopkins Spoons, and Crocodiles. Those who prefer

straight jigs should try those with twister tails, soft flaring maribou, or tinsel tails. Either way it's best to bait all three hooks of spoons or the single hook of jigs with emerald shiners. The minnows bouncing up and down add both eye appeal and flavor to any lure.

Keep in mind that early fish are very cold and therefore very sluggish. A fast moving rig won't attract them, so keep it slow and make jigs easy up and down, rather than fast and jerky. Strikes might be serious hits, but much more often they'll be gentle tugs or maybe just a touch of extra weight on the line as a fish clamps down. So, use a sensitive rod, 6-10 pound test line, and take action at any difference in the lure.

On my last trip for these cold water walleyes, the action was more or less typical. We launched at Catawba State Park, moved out about two miles until the locator showed a cluster of fish below, anchored and started jigging blue and silver Swedish Pimples with shiner dressing. It took less than five minutes to feel that first gentle tug, a slow plunging fish that materialized into a seven pound female.

Then my partners started picking up fish, and I caught more, filling my limit within an hour. And thank

heavens for that. Even with plenty of protective gear, my fingers were wet and growing numb, toes weren't moving well, and the coffee had long gone. We headed back to the dock in a hurry.

It's worth pointing out that not all walleye follow this general migration route. Some move into Sandusky Bay from the Marblehead area and these are the easiest to catch of all. Several years ago I spent a few minutes studying a map of the Bay, and found a spot where the shores pinched in dramatically. That's at the old railroad bridge just east of old Bay Bridge and east again of fairly new Route 2.

Every walleye that takes this route must funnel under that bridge, and it looked like a likely spot. I never got around to trying it, but did pass the information on to a friend who lives up there, and he said, "It's a great place all right. Once we



Fishermen can find walleye action in the western basin Sandusky and Maumee rivers during the spawning runs each and every spring.

tried it and couldn't stay because of the current, but twice we found the current slow and limited out under the bridge both times." It's worth a look.

Once spawning begins, many fishermen head for various flats, and work off the beach areas, rock piles, and near such reefs as Niagara, Toussaint, Crib and Locust Point Reef. These areas will account for lunker walleyes, up to 10 pounds and better on spoons and jigs, but it's worth pointing out that older and larger fish aren't that great eating, and are better left to spawn and produce a new generation. When I hit these pre-spawn fish, my keepers are the nice little 2-4 pound jacks, and all others go back. But that's a choice each fisherman must make himself.

Each year a substantial number of fish enter the Sandusky and Maumee rivers, and these are a bonanza for boatless anglers. Easy access, no cost for charters or headboats, just a few jigs and patience. And hopefully a little extra knowledge. The jacks arrive in the river first, often by very early March, weather deciding. And while they're waiting for the larger females to arrive, some will strike a bait. But once serious spawning begins, it can be tough to interest a lovelorn walleye in food.

The first point to keep in mind for this river fishing is that there are lots of regulations on both rivers. Among them are restrictions on the most popular fishing areas. on the Sandusky, the regulated stretch runs through downtown Fremont from the Toledo Edison power line

to the northern tip of Bradys Island.

And on the Maumee, it's from the Ohio Turnpike bridge to the Old Waterville interurban bridge at the end of Forest Road and from the SR 578 bridge to the Grand Rapids Providence dam. Only single hooks are allowed too, and there are other regulations. Read them carefully, because both rivers are usually swarming with wildlife officers in plain clothes looking for snaggers and other miscreants.

Most of the anglers who fish these rivers spend their time casting quarter or eighth ounce twistertail jigs in chartreuse, white, yellow, and red slightly upstream and let the lure sink to bottom before making a slow retrieve. Occasionally this works, and the fish is actually mouth hooked, instead of snagged.

But you'll have better luck adding a small minnow or piece of worm to the hook, then strike at any change in resistance. Some try live bait too, maybe a 2-3 inch minnow or whole night crawler on a slip sinker, and tight line in pools or other likely places where fish will stop to rest.

With a small boat you can move downstream past the crowds and jig for fish that haven't yet seen swarms of doll flies. or test the old Michigan trick of drifting downriver exactly as fast as the current, and jigging an eighth or sixteenth ounce doll fly just off bottom. Again, with a little bait added for allure.

Sometimes a nice cluster of fish will move upriver and action will be

fairly fast for those who can keep their baits down and moving slowly. Sometimes no new fish will arrive for several days, and fishing can be slow. Weather is always important on any river, too.

The best time to fish is after a good rain that swells the river and turns it almost chocolate. As the water recedes and begins to clear, it's time to go fishing, since each rain will bring up new fish. Trying your luck on a low, clear river or on one too muddy to allow more than inches visibility is always iffy.

And remember, if nothing is producing a catch, turn to the unusual. Try removing the standard treble hook from a small jigging spoon, and adding a proper single hook. Then Dig Dust off bottom with a minnow dressing and see what happens. or use a worm rig with single hook and spinner. or some incredibly gaudy doll fly. Maybe nothing will happen, but then again

Fishermen!

Are you online? Let us know how you're doing by sending your fishing reports to us. We'll post them on our web site at www.walleye.com

Lake Erie Post-Spawn Walleye Tactics

by
Richard Martin

Some anglers say that any time is a good time for Lake Erie walleyes, and that's true up to a point. Fishing can be very good early in the season when fish are heading for the spawning grounds and sometimes good during the summer, though last year July and August were poor. Autumn fishing can be well worthwhile too, especially at night on the piers, and winter action through the ice is often excellent.

But there's a best time to go, the top time to fill a limit in a hurry with substantial fish, and that's after the spawning runs when walleye are still gathered in large schools and hungry. Very hungry. It's not always great at first. Weather deciding, Erie walleyes usually spawn in mid to late April and are usually finished by the first week in May. They're off the spawning reefs and out of the rivers, but their stomachs are still shrunken from a long period without feeding, and they initially aren't very interested in hard strikes and large meals.

I found this out the hard way on a charter trip just east of Toledo two years ago. Four of us and the captain were fishing a spoil bank near the ship channel, and the

fish were definitely there. His screen showed a layer of walleye extending from near the bottom to 15 feet below the surface. Hundreds of them!



Post-spawn walleye fishing can be the most productive time of the year for trophy 'eyes in the western basin.

We started casting half ounce jigs with twister tails and a worm dressing, but nothing much hap-

pened. Bites were gentle, just taps or slight resistance, and we followed Standard Operating Procedure by striking, then dropping the bait back hoping for another try. In 45 minutes we had just two fish in the box.

All five of us were switching offerings by that point, trying this and that, different colors and speeds, then one of our group tied on a stinger hook. He caught fish after fish. At that point we all did the same, hooking the trailing nightcrawler in its end, and striking at any change. Our box was filled in less than an hour. The walleye that day just weren't ready for serious feeding and instead of wolfing the bait, swam behind and nipped off the crawler tail. The stingers made all the difference that day.

But within a couple of weeks they're on the feed again, filling up wasted stomachs to build up fat lost in spawning, and it can be an anything goes proposition. Last year I made another trip in late May, this time on the Sassy Sal, a head boat based in Port Clinton, and it was a whole new ball game.

Again, I was using half ounce jigs with twister tails, either chartreuse or yellow, and I'd learned my



Big fish and improving weather make the post-spawn period an enjoyable experience for early Lake Erie anglers.

lesson enough to have a stinger hook perched in the crawler. But it wasn't necessary. We found a big school west of Port Clinton, anchored, started casting, and almost immediately rods were bending all over the boat. This time the school was hovering between 10 and 20 feet below the surface, this on a clear, sunny day with a good one foot walleye chop.

I hooked one on my first cast, the jig taken before it made it down through the school. And another on my third toss. Fish were not only hitting with abandon, they were following hooked fish to the surface, often several at a time, trying to pull the bait from a hooked mouth.

It didn't take long to learn to leave a catch in the water while several

surrounding anglers dropped jigs into the cluster. My last fish literally came out from beneath the boat to hit just a foot below the surface. That was a red-letter day, and it can happen often during the post spawn season.

Anchoring and casting jigs is a favorite technique among head boat captains, and it works fine. But charter boat captains taking out their half day or full day "6 packs" more often opt for trolling, especially if the sports along aren't expert fishermen. When trolling starts, they'll almost invariably be dragging bottom bumpers and worm harness if the fish are holding low, close to the bottom. Many private boat owners do exactly the same.

Bottom bumpers are basically just

a slim sinker with a pencil-like bottom to keep it out of the rocks, a three-way swivel, several feet of monofilament and a spinner and worm harness. It's a lethal bait when they're down. Most captains favor small spinners, and favorite colors are chartreuse, red, yellow, and blue and white in about that order. But if rains have come and the water is a little murky, a larger blade produces more flash and visibility, so keep a modest selection of these and use them all until something works.

If fish are holding high, both captains and private fishermen should have a selection of trolling lures that are routine producers. Hot-n-Tots are much used as are WiggleWarts and other crankbaits that have large lips and a tendency to dig deep. Favorite colors again are chartreuse, red and white, fire tiger, and sometimes multicolored offerings and pure silver or gold. Again, it's a matter of switching and switching again until something perks their interest.

By late May or early June with the water warming fast, most anglers turn to tossing weight forward spinners, though the bottom bumpers still produce when they're deep. Then it's a "nothing to it" business. Cruise around in a private boat, charter or headboat, find a school that's usually 15-20 feet down and either anchor or drift across the school tossing spinners in all directions. Strikes come quick in most cases, and many a boat will fill its limit in just an hour or two. Again, and no surprise by now, top colors for the Erie Dearies and similar lures are chartreuse, red, red and white,

chartreuse and yellow and sometimes blue and white.

Where do you toss those lures whether it be May or early June? Top spots are again near the ships channel off Toledo, and off various reefs. Among the best producers are Niagara and Cone reefs, off Gull Reef, between South Bass and Kelleys, north of Rattlesnake, the list goes on and on. with a charter or headboat, don't even ask. If fishing on a private craft, stop in at any bait shop like Rickard's on Catawba Island and ask, "Where are they hitting?" They'll have answers.

There are times, even during this prime season, when fish get a little picky. That's most often on bright sunny days, when winds are calm, and/or after storms that stir the water and send barometers bouncing. That's when it's wise to go to Plan B for a decent catch. Too many Lake Erie anglers spend all day mindlessly tossing weight forward spinners, or long hours bottom bumping or trolling crankbaits with little or no result. if the fish are biting, that's fine, but if they're touchy, try something else.

I've had days when lack of action would see me turning to jigs again. When a fish has seen a few hundred weight forward spinners, something different can perk their interest. I've tried jigging spoons tipped with emerald shiners too, sometimes with no success, sometimes with good. Or used a Lindy rig when nothing else was working. A Lindy rig is basically a slip sinker, swivel, two feet of line and a small hook, maybe with a

brightly colored bit of balsa wood (floating Lindy) in front for eye appeal.

The rig is dropped to bottom with a fat nightcrawler head attached on lines end, and fished with an open bail. When a strike comes, however gentle, release line for a 10 count, then tighten up and strike. It can be a lethal weapon for walleye when they're being touchy about what they eat, and lying with their bellies practically in the mud.

If Lindy's have a problem, it is that they also target other species. I've caught walleye, smallmouth bass, channel cats, sheepshead, white bass, white perch, yellow perch, even carp on the rigs. But a good mixed bag can be a welcome change, and I don't mind.

Here's a final thought for post-spawn walleyes, and you might or might not disagree. I've found over 30 plus years of fishing this big lake that large fish are generally poor eating, while chunky little 1 1/2 to 3 pound fish are absolutely excellent. So, when I catch a 6 pounder, an 8 or a 10, I return them. They're usually females and better for spawning than keeping, unless an angler wants to hang one on his wall.

Admittedly, I've tried everything, since some days good eaters are hard to come by, and big fish easy. I've filleted them, cut out the center streak, and sliced the thick fillets lengthwise to make them thinner. I've soaked fillets in milk overnight to hopefully remove that fishy taste, and my wife has tried various marinades from outdoor cookbooks. The BEST I've ever

done on a big fish is make it decent eating, not delicious, not great, just decent. So, I just don't keep them anymore.

Again, whatever your choice of lures, fishing spots, and cooking tactics, Lake Erie walleyes are waiting in hundreds of thousands. And the best time to take them is post-spawn.

Try These Walleye Recipes

Broiled Walleye

Place small dab of real butter on alum. foil

Place walleye fillets on foil & broil until top looks half cooked

Flip fillet

Cook until done (turns white in color)

Take flavored croutons and roll in baggie with rolling pin until powdered Spoon this on top of cooked fillets and drizzle with melted butter

Put back in broiler until golden brown-just a second

Take out and pour lemon juice over fillet

Beer Batter for Walleye

1 cup all-purpose flour

3 tablespoons cornstarch

1 teaspoon salt

1/2 teaspoon paprika

Dash nutmeg (optional)

1 cup beer

1 tablespoon vegetable oil

In medium bowl, mix dry ingredients.

Blend in beer and vegetable oil until smooth. Dip fish into batter.

Deep-fry or panfry as desired.

World's Greatest Smallmouth Fishery

by
Mark Hicks

Lake Erie, the undisputed “Walleye Capital of the World,” reigns as the “Smallmouth Bass Capital” as well. From Ohio’s Bass islands to Buffalo, New York, Lake Erie gives up scads of quality smallmouth bass.

At this writing, Lake Erie has produced state record smallmouth bass for Ohio, 9 pounds, 8 ounces, and New York, 8 pounds, 4 ounces. Now that Pennsylvania has opened a trophy spring smallmouth season, their current state record smallmouth, taken on an inland lake, is in serious jeopardy.

“With the trophy season,” says Gary Moore of the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, “we hope to see the smallmouth record become part of the Lake Erie system. If there’s anytime it’s going to be broken, it’ll be between mid-April and mid-June.”

Southern states have yielded bigger smallmouths, but no place gives up quantities of quality bass like Lake Erie. It’s common for a pair of anglers to land more than 50 smallmouths here in one day.

many of Erie’s game fish populations, such as walleye and the now extinct blue pike. But even during the worst of times, smallmouth bass thrived around the many islands in western Lake Erie and in

other areas. Thanks to a steady decline in pollution and the spread of no-till farming practices, Lake Erie’s water quality has improved dramatically over the past 25 years. Smallmouth bass, and the anglers who pursue them, have benefited.

“I’ve run bass charters on Erie for over 20 years,” says noted charter captain Dave Demeter, who docks at Fox Haven Marina on Ohio’s Catawba Island. “The lake has always produced lots of 3- and 4-pound fish. But now we’re catching more bass over 5 pounds.”



Smallmouth bass can be taken in numerous locations in the western basin. The Perry Monument stands in background.

Before the introduction of the Clean Water Act in 1972, unchecked pollution and unregulated commercial netting devastated

The foundation for this peerless smallmouth fishery can be described in one word—habitat. Lake Erie is the southernmost, shallowest, warmest and

HABITAT



You don't need to venture far from shore (an issue for fishermen with smaller boats) to take advantage of Lake Erie's tremendous smallmouth fishery.

most fertile of all the Great Lakes. Here smallmouth bass enjoy a long growing season, abundant baitfish and crayfish, and ample hard-bottom areas where they spawn and feed.

ZEBRA MUSSEL INFLUENCE

When zebra mussels invaded Lake Erie from overseas in the latter 1980s, they proliferated at an extraordinary rate. These tiny shellfish now cover virtually all the hard rock and gravel bottoms that Lake Erie's smallmouths call home.

Each mussel filters over a liter of water per day as it feeds, removing small particles, including plankton, the base of the food chain. The result has been a dramatic increase in Lake Erie's water clarity, which is a primary reason for the sudden

surge in the smallmouth population.

Fisheries biologists feared that zebra mussels would undermine the smallmouth fishery by reducing nutrients and spoiling spawning areas. As it turns out, smallmouths spawn nicely on top of the zebras. So much so that smallmouths are establishing strong populations in areas where they previously existed in small numbers. The extensive reef system to the west of Ohio's Catawba Island, for example, has long been a key spawning area for walleyes in the spring. Now that zebra mussels cover these structures, smallmouth bass are caught here in much greater numbers.

The increased water clarity caused by zebra mussels also has improved the smallmouth's feeding efficiency. The bass can see and assault baitfish and other forage

from greater distances than in the past, hence the increase in their size.

OTHER EXOTICS

Other exotic species in Lake Erie have caused concern regarding their impact on native fish. One invader is the round goby from the Black Sea, which looks a lot like a sculpin, a native Lake Erie species. Gobies feed primarily on zebra mussels and also compete with sculpins, darters and other bottom-dwelling fish for snails and aquatic insects.

Gobies have intruded upon the rocky bottom structures that smallmouth bass call home. Though the overall impact of this nuisance species is negative, smallmouths find the plump, soft-finned goby to be an easy meal. "Gobies cause a decline in sculpin populations and an increase in smallmouth bass populations," says Roger Thoma, an Environmental



The round goby, although a nuisance species, has been a factor in smallmouth bass proliferation in Lake Erie.

Specialist with the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.

Zebra mussels, gobies and other exotics were introduced by ocean going ships that dumped ballast water from overseas into the Great Lakes. In an effort to prevent other nuisance species from entering the Great Lakes, ships traveling the St. Lawrence Seaway from foreign ports now must exchange ballast water before passing through the first U.S. lock.

THREE BASINS OF LAKE ERIE

Stretching 210 miles northeast from Toledo, Ohio, to Buffalo, New York—with a breadth of 57 miles—Lake Erie contains three distinctly different basins. It is divided along its length by the Canadian boundary line. Fabulous smallmouth fishing exists in Canadian and U.S. waters.

WESTERN BASIN

Lake Erie's shallow western basin contains the most extensive smallmouth habitat and receives the heaviest fishing pressure for this species. The western basin averages 24 feet deep and lies west of an imaginary line extending north across Lake Erie from Cedar Point, Ohio, to Pelee Point, Ontario. This portion of the lake contains the Ohio islands of South Bass, Middle Bass, North Bass and Kelley's, as well as Ontario's Pelee Island. The hard bottoms around these islands feature countless points, humps, flats and drop-offs, which are prime smallmouth structures.

Smaller islands and many offshore reefs in the western basin also furnish excellent fishing, as do the near shore areas around Catawba Island (actually a peninsula) and east to Sandusky Bay. Sandusky Bay and the protected marinas on Catawba Island produce good smallmouth fishing in the spring, but bass generally run bigger on the main lake.

In the Michigan waters of Erie, limited smallmouth habitat exists compared to the rest of the lake. But Ontario waters, from the mouth of the Detroit River east to Pelee Point, deliver exceptional bass fishing.

CENTRAL BASIN

The central basin stretches from Cedar Point, Ohio, to Erie, Pennsylvania. In recent years, fishing pressure from Huron to Avon Point has increased substantially. However, the stretch from Avon Point to Erie, Pennsylvania, sees relatively few smallmouth anglers, with the exception of Pennsylvania's Presque Isle Bay. The bottom drops off more sharply in the central basin, with depths to 30 feet generally within 1 to 3 miles of shore and a maximum depth of more than 80 feet. Hard bottom areas near shore comprise expansive smallmouth habitat.

Key smallmouth waters in the central basin include near shore bottom structures from Huron to Avon Point, which lies west of Cleveland. Smallmouths are taken along the Cleveland lakefront, primarily off man-made break walls and Cleveland's artificial reefs, but the mud and sand bottom

in this area is generally not conducive to smallmouth bass.

East of Cleveland, rocky smallmouth habitat again shows up at Fairport Harbor. The best fishing takes place from the break walls in front of the harbor west to Mentor Harbor. Many productive near shore spots all along the southern shoreline of Lake Erie are related to the mouths of tributaries.

"Creeks and rivers bring fertile water into the lake," says Ohioan Jeff Snyder, a career bass angler who probably has more firsthand experience fishing for smallmouth bass throughout Lake Erie than anyone alive. "More fertility means more food, more food means more shad, more shad means more smallmouth bass."

Other prime smallmouth locations along the northeast Ohio coastline include near shore areas off Ashtabula and Conneaut.

"It's one of the best big fish areas on the lake," says Snyder of Conneaut. "There's a tremendous amount of rocks and drops out there. I do especially well along a 5-mile stretch just west of Conneaut."

Heading east from Conneaut into Pennsylvania waters, you are likely to catch bass along near shore areas all the way to Presque Isle. Hard bottom structures just west of Presque Isle are especially good.

Presque Isle Bay, at Erie, Pennsylvania, is protected by Presque Isle peninsula. Many smallmouths are taken from weed beds in the bay in

spring and early summer, but larger bass are generally taken out on the main lake.

The Canadian side of the central basin offers comparatively few smallmouth fishing opportunities. "That stretch," says fisheries ecology supervisor Phil Ryan of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, "doesn't have the right bottom composition. It's primarily sand and drops off sharply."

EASTERN BASIN

East of Presque Isle lies the eastern basin, which continues to Buffalo, New York, and holds the deepest, clearest water in Lake Erie. It is bordered by cliffs, features deeper water closer to shore and plunges to a depth of 210 feet. The Pennsylvania waters east of Presque Isle see relatively few bass anglers despite excellent fishing, especially in front of Sixteen mile Creek and Twenty mile Creek.

Moving east along Erie's coast, near shore smallmouth structures—rocky flats, humps and points—become more prominent and expansive. Here smallmouths grow bigger and more abundant.

Superb smallmouth fishing in New York begins at Barcelona. Launch here and you'll find bass on near shore bottom structures to the east and west. Farther east lays Van Buren Point, which drops, into an extensive stretch of smallmouth habitat that reaches far into the lake.

Next comes Dunkirk, which gives up good bass in its bay during the

spring and along near shore structures to the east and west. The next hot smallmouth water is found outside Evangola State Park, particularly the stretch from Evangola east to Silver Creek.

Farther up the coast lies Sturgeon Point, an especially popular fishing area. Put in here and fish west past Muddy Creek. The water from Sturgeon Point to Buffalo is home to Jim Hanley, a local bass pro, TV host, bass guide and fishing promoter for Erie County and Buffalo.

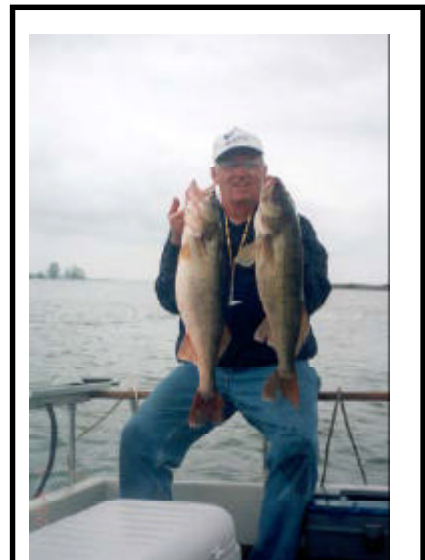
Known as the "Dean of Smallmouth," Hanley has witnessed Erie's smallmouth bass explosion first hand.

"The smallmouth fishing," says Hanley, "has always been good. But with the dramatic increase in water clarity, it has gone from being a very good fishery to where, now, it's just beyond belief."

Some of the better smallmouth fishing east of Sturgeon Point includes a series of humps and shoals in front of Eighteen mile Creek, Seneca Shoal (an offshore structure out from Buffalo) and near shore bottom structures in the very southeast corner of the lake.

Rocky bottom structures and points along the Ontario shoreline of the eastern basin, from Buffalo west to Long Point, also support legions of bass. The Inner Bay of Long Point provides an important smallmouth spawning area.

Note: This article is a condensed version of the first chapter in "Lake Erie Smallmouth," a new book by Mark Hicks. The book tells where and how to catch smallmouth bass throughout Lake Erie and includes 41 detailed fishing maps. Send \$14.95, plus \$3.50 shipping to Big River Press, P.O. Box 130, Millfield, OH 45761. (Ohio residents add \$0.93 tax.) For credit card orders call: 1-800-447-8238.



A pair of trophies from the "Braggin' Board".

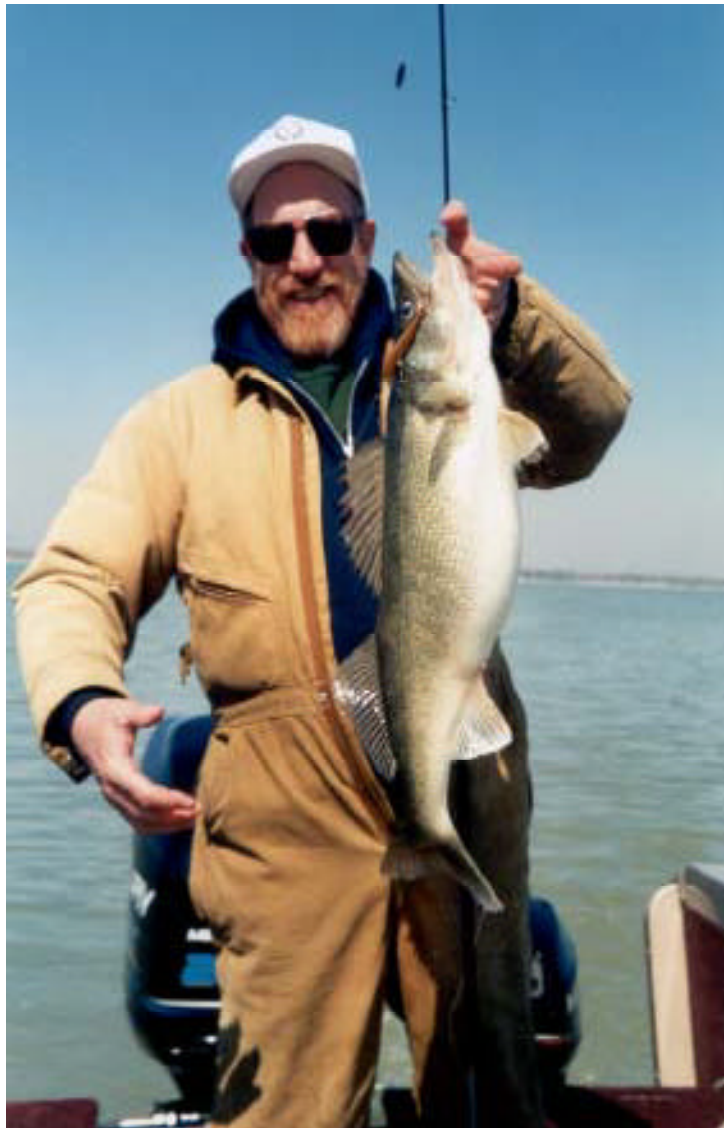
Visit www.walleye.com to view more Big 'Eyes. Send us a photo of your prize catch. Email a .jpg or .gif file or mail to:
Braggin' Board
C/O Lake Erie Walleye
P.O. Box 421
Ballwin, MO 63022

Trolling for Muddy Water Walleyes

A Precise presentation and plenty of patience both are required to catch walleyes with mud in their eyes

by
Michael Veine

Some of the toughest walleye fishing involves pulling those fish from muddy, low visibility water. To many, it seems like walleyes tend to shut down when the water dirties up; the truth is that walleyes will still actively feed, but they really have a tough time catching their dinner. Walleyes are primarily sight feeders, so poor water clarity forces them to rely heavily on their senses of smell and hearing to find food. Under crummy conditions, walleyes need to hunt for food longer in order to satisfy their hunger. One thing's for sure: When walleyes are forced to feed in low visibility water they are often very aggressive biters. The trick is to put the lure right in front of the snapping jaws of old marble-eyes' and keep it there



It's often possible to catch dandy walleyes by overcoming the muddy water. Photo taken by the author.

long enough for them to gulp the bait down.

Last April, Lake Erie was one tough customer when periodic storms with gale force, east winds turned much of the Western Basin into a big bowl of mud-soup. The muddy water persisted well into May creating the lowest early spring catch rate in modern years. Even when the weather permitted anglers to hit the water, typical fishing success was still dismal. Only those anglers that applied some specialized, refined techniques managed to eke out decent catches of walleyes.

One day during mid-April, my partner and I fished Erie with only one inch of water visibility. Baits would literally disappear just under the surface of the water. My



In-line planer boards are important ingredients to any muddy-water trolling tactic. Photo taken by the author.

normal fishing technique for Lake Erie is to first locate the fish using my electronics. I often search for hours before even wetting a line. While searching on that day, we managed to find some slightly clearer water several miles out from Breast Bay, but there were no fish inhabiting the cooler water in that area. However, we did mark large schools of bait-fish and large hook shaped icons close to shore and right in the middle of the slop. According to my Lawrance X85, the bait-fish were near the surface and the predatory walleyes were just below them perhaps five or six feet down. The overcast skies and dingy water conditions prompted us to try a modified night-fishing technique. We deployed dark colored, minnow imitating body baits that contrasted with the light brown hue of the water. Minnow imitating body baits like Black/silver and Black/gold Storm Jr. Thundersticks are

proven baits under these conditions; they closely resembled the Real McCoy; an important factor considering that the walleyes would get a close, first look at the baits.



Even though the water visibility was only inches, the author still managed to bring in some awesome catches last spring. Photo taken by the author.

Thundersticks also have rattles that give out increased fish attracting vibrations.

The body baits were set back varying distances from 40' to 100' behind the boards. 1/4-oz. rubber-core sinkers were installed one rod length in front of the baits to both take them deeper and to catch debris to prevent the lures from becoming fowled. The varied set-backs would present the baits at differing levels allowing us to determine a productive running depth. Mr. Walleye, in-line planer boards were then used to take the trolled offerings away from the fish spooking presence of the boat. The boards would also allow us to sift the water with a wide trolling spread. Since we had marked the fish close to the surface and there was little boat traffic, we deployed the boards quite a distance out from the boat for the ultimate in stealth. During poor water visibil-

ity, walleyes become more tuned into any vibrations in the water, so presentations way out away from the boat are typically the most productive. At these times you can count on the outside boards getting the most action and the further out they are — the better.

We started our trolling pass up wind from some GPS waypoints that we had punched in when we passed over and marked fish. To add even more stealth to our presentations, my Minn Kota, bow mounted, electric, trolling motor was dropped into the water. I turned on the handy Auto Pilot function of the electric motor and then directed the boat on a straight, hassle free course down wind and right through the fish. A very slow trolling speed was selected. Night fishermen often employ this same slow trolling technique. The object is to present the baits in front of the walleyes long enough to allow them enough time to locate the bait and accurately strike.

In no time, one of the boards started dropping back in violent jerks as a big walleye smacked a gold Jr. ThunderStick set-back 60' behind a board. After we hooked our second walleye on that same ThunderStick, we switched the rest of the rigs to the hot setup. As we slowly trolled along, we were constantly being annoyed by big walleyes as they relentlessly chomped on our baits. Four hours and four aching arms later, we had experienced true walleye euphoria, and we did it in the mud.

Slowing down the presentation is a critical ingredient to muddy water walleye success. Keeping the bait

in front of the fish for a prolonged period is the key. If the presentation is too quick, then the walleyes won't have enough time to react to the bait whizzing by. Even when the fish are feeding aggressively, they simply can't catch a fast moving target. Slow things down and the walleyes have time to target the bait and gulp it down.

When water visibility is low, walleyes will key in on structure more than ever. The walleyes will locate tightly to the structure because of a readily available food source. Rock piles, sharp drop-offs, reefs, channels, holes and shoreline shallows are all good places to search for active walleyes during dirty water conditions. The walleyes take advantage of the structure because bait-fish are forced to swim along predictable routes. Walleyes use these funnels to ambush prey and also to herd schools of bait-fish for easy pickens. The trick is to locate fish holding in these lairs and present baits slowly and precisely.

When the water is muddy, I almost always check for active walleyes in shallow areas first. If I find eyes' in shallow water, then the water column that holds fish will be that much narrower and my catching success typically skyrocket. However, when walleyes suspend in muddy, deep water, the strike zone is that much wider and success usually suffers. I generally make a reconnaissance run over shoreline depths of around 10' first and then make another pass a few feet deeper until I locate fish. Since it's nearly impossible to mark fish on sonar that are holding in water less than eight feet deep, I

usually just troll the shallows to seek out walleyes.

Walleyes sometimes relate closely to the bottom when visibility is low making bottom bouncer presentations a logical choice. Live bait appeals to the olfactory senses of the fish and it's hard to beat a spinner/crawler rig when dragging lead. Since the mud necessitates an ultra slow presentation, I use bottom bouncers that are just heavy enough to keep things on bottom while maintaining a 45-degree line angle. I also send my spinner/crawler rigs out on in-line boards to increase their effectiveness.

I've found that smaller blades about the size of a nickel work best in dingy water and chartreuse blades with a splash of fluorescent orange have produced well for me on Erie. I tie my own muddy water spinners by first cutting off a 4' length of clear, 20lbs-test monofilament. Two #6 bait holder hooks are snelled onto the business end about six inches apart. Above the hooks I add two chartreuse beads, then a chartreuse/orange rig float followed by a pair of orange beads. A quick-change clevis is used to attach the spinner blade. An overhand knot is tied on the end and the rig is attached to the clip on the bottom bouncer. I thread the crawler's mouth and head onto the front hook and then push it forward to the barbs on the back of the bait holder hook to grip it in place. The rear hook is threaded on in the same manner just behind the collar. This specialized rig has caught dozens, if not hundreds of Lake Erie Walleyes from Muddy Water, page 24

The next time your favorite walleye waters look like a cup of

Swing It for More Walleyes

How to fish the Pendulum System

by
Mark Martin

I have always looked at these winter months as the time when I can begin to catch up on some learning. You see, during the period from April through September is tournament season on the Professional Walleye Trial (PWT) where I compete. During that period, magazines stack up next to my reading table, waiting for this season when I can finally devote some time to studying the written word. Since I'm thinking so hard about what I'm going to learn for the coming fishing season, why don't I take this opportunity to pass along some wisdom that I'm sure will put more walleye under your belt next season also.

Sure, I can fish a jig, and pitch to shallow walleye or work them in weeds, but when it comes to my bread and butter, everyone has one.

The one that I am so effective at and have great confidence in

cashing a check with is trolling. Not just any trolling, but trolling with bottom bouncers. Bottom bouncers are actually a misnomer because they are quite a bit more versatile than just for fishing on the bottom.



The key to fishing the pendulum system is adjusting your trolling speed to swing your bait up or down over the fish. Nice catches are often a result. Photo is of author.

A bottom bouncer itself is just a 90° bent wire with a weight cast to the leg that sticks out towards the bottom and a trailing arm that you attach your bait to. Bottom bouncers can be of varying weights, typical weights in my box are from ¼ oz. to 4 oz. They can also be painted or plain lead, and in most instances I fish painted, it adds an element of attraction to the trailing bait presentation. Bottom bouncers, made by a variety of companies, all claim certain traits that make their designs better than the others do. The one

aspect of a bottom bouncer design that is truly imperative is, if it spins and twists your line if you pick up speed or hit bottom. This you can only find out by experimentation of many different kinds, or listen to the advice of an old pro... like me (I don't feel that old). The only bottom bouncer I use, for the previous reason stated, is the Northland Rock Runner. It has an R bend where you attach your line, and this simple bend will keep you fishing productively without tangles and spinning, as long as you are not dragging them on bottom.

Now the bottom bouncer itself is an element of the equation to successful trolling and not the only key. The rig that fishes the bottom bouncer is just as important. Working up from the bottom bouncer, the next element is the line. Although many fisherman use monofilament lines as their main line, I have a distinct advantage over them by using 20lb. test Fireline. Because Fireline has no stretch, it transmits information to me up the line. I have much better feel and am able to keep my rig at the precise depth to make it most effective. You see, many fisherman make the mistake, knowing or unknowingly in the case of mono, of having their bottom bouncer in contact with the bottom too much, especially if it is a soft or sandy bottom. When fishing a contour edge, we need to keep the rig slightly above the fish's head. Because all predators look up to feed, a rig presented below them may go by unnoticed. I want my bottom bouncer to tick the bottom slightly, just occasionally. In fact, the ideal depth would be, when I drop my rod tip down

to the water's surface, the bottom bouncer makes contact with the structure. By constantly checking for the structure, I am fishing within a foot or so of bottom, and right over the walleye's heads. The process of checking for the bottom attracts attention. Fireline transmits that slight bit of information to me immediately, no matter what the bottom content is, so that my presentation spends more time in the productive fish catching zone.

Now it's up the line to the ideal stick and gear (rod and reel), combo, to maximize not only our feel for this type of fishing, but give us the ability to haul in some monster 'eyes once we hook'em. A long rod is required, with my personal choice being the Gary Roach 7' 10" medium action collapsible rod teamed with an Abu-Garcia 5500 reel. The good news is that this is the same rod I use for many applications, including a planer board rod, so if you get this one, it has a great deal of versatility.

Now once we have geared up, it is time for bait selection. Although you can present a variety of baits on a bottom bouncer, the primary weapon is the spinner rig for fishing crawlers and leeches. For reasons you will understand better in a moment, the spinner rig of choice for me is the Northland Float-N-spin. Ideal shell lengths, for fishing structure, is 4 to 4 1/2 feet, and for open water, lengthen it to 6 to 8 feet. There are reasons why the Northland Float-N-Spin is a superior rig. One reason is the float that keeps my presentation from falling deeper than the bottom

bouncer when I reduce speed. Speed, whether fishing structure or open water, is the key to fishing a bottom bouncer for maximum effectiveness.

Here's another example, that should go a long way in helping you understand how to use a bottom bouncer and regulate its fish catching ability with speed with planer boards in open water. If I want to present baits to both fish that I've marked on my Eagle Optima depth finder at 20 feet deep, I'll use a 3 oz. bottom bouncer and let out 27 feet of line. Trolled at about 1.4 to 1.8 mph, this bait will take my bait down to about 17 to 18 feet deep, right over the fish's head, where I want to be. Now, let's say I mark a school of fish at 15 feet on my Eagle Optima, I want to put that bait in their faces, right now, not on the next pass, because they may be gone by then. The way I do that is what I call fishing the pendulum. By increasing my speed, up to about 2.0 to 2.2 mph, the bottom bouncer immediately rises up, and by the time the bait comes by that school, it is tight over their heads and if they are active, they'll hit it. This is a prime example of the pendulum theory of fishing where I can swing the bait up to fish for the fish that appear on my depth finder screen.

The other end of the pendulum, would be if, fishing the same rig under the same set of circumstances, my Eagle Optima shows me a group down at 23 feet deep. To swing the pendulum down, and get the bait in above them, I simply hit the idle/resume button on my TR-1 autopilot and it kicks the

speed down from 2.2 to 1.4 on my Mariner 9.9 hp Four Stroke kicker motor, and pendulum the bait down. As my Lund 1990 Pro V glides down in speed, the bait is presented right to the fish, and pow! In a perfect world, I've just caught a fish that otherwise would not have had the opportunity to see or hit my bait.

The pendulum system of fishing requires perfect boat control along with precise speed adjustments. Although extremely effective at producing fish for years, this was a very cumbersome technique because I was forced to steer my boat, control my throttle, and fish all my rods all at the same time. I already know what happens when I have a great multitude of tasks to take care of when fishing some of them invariably suffer. Well, the task of pendulum fishing has become much easier with the advent of autopilot systems for kicker motors. I now use the TR-1 autopilot system, because not only does it steer my boat automatically, adjusting for cross currents and cross winds, but also controls my throttle so I can adjust my speed without ever touching the motor. I simply stand anywhere there is a fish finder in the boat, and a small hand held remote about the size of a microphone, and making steering and speed adjustments. There is also a button on the remote that when hit, immediately idles the motor down, and when I hit again, brings the boat back up to the speed it was at before the button was hit. It allows me to work the pendulum more effectively than ever before. That means more fish on the end of my string, and after all, that is

why we go fishing! For more information about the revolutionary new autopilot system from TR-1, call Nautamatic Marine Systems at 1-800-58-TROLL.

So this winter, take a little time at the sports shows and learn some about fishing bottom bouncers. Collect some of your own and start to fish the pendulum on your favorite waters. I can guarantee, that once you figure it out, it is not very hard. You will be putting more fish in the boat also. See you at the sports shows!

From Muddy Water, page 21



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Lake Erie - Walleye Capitol?

by
Ted Takasaki and Scott Richardson

In the three decades since Jim Fofrich began guiding on Lake Erie, he's seen the big water go

though changes that have forced anglers to adjust their tactics in order remain successful. Jim is the owner/operator of the Single Spin Guide Service and developer of the Lindy Flip'N Harness. He tells story after story of what Lake Erie was like in the old days, what happened to bring about the walleye rebound and how the accidental introduction of zebra mussels forced fishermen to rethink the way they did things.

But, the need to put away the old ways and embrace the new doesn't seem to bother a man who started fishing at a time when the standard depth-finder was a rope

marked in foot-long sections tied to a piece of lead with wax smeared on its bottom. Counting marks told

you how deep the water was. Checking to see what was embedded in the wax - sand or rocks or clam shells - revealed what lurked below. "Talk about primitive," said Fofrich, 63. "But, it worked."

He recalls his first favorite spinning rod. It was 100-percent fiberglass, and its weight was measured in pounds, not ounces. "Setting the hook was a hernia-provoking experience," he laughed. "Your eyes crossed, not the fish's."

Fofrich disputes the common portrayal of Erie as a "dead lake" in the 1960s. True, commercial nets took tons of fish away. Pollution flowed freely into it, raising nutrients and creating algae blooms that depleted oxygen levels, especially in summer. But even then, reputable magazines listed Erie at the top of any list of the best small-mouth lakes in North America. The lake also held smelt, yellow



Even with Lake Erie's ups and downs, over the years, it is still considered by many to be the best walleye fishery in the world. Photo by Michael Veine.

perch, catfish and white bass.

It was the walleye numbers, though, that suffered the most during that period. But, anglers could still catch them in the shallows. The water was turbid. Walleyes could go as high in the water column as they pleased. Weight-forward spinners like the Arbogast Tackle Co.'s Bunyon 66 dressed with nightcrawlers were the favored technique. The legendary Erie Dearie hit the market in the early 70s. Casting them to the tops of reefs or fan-casting them while drifting provided an effective tool to efficiently cover the water column from top to bottom, side to side with flash, vibration and live bait.

Walleye prospects improved dramatically with the passage of the Clean Water Act in the 1970s. Commercial fishing was curbed in the Canadian portion of Erie and banned in the part that laid within the United States. "We started seeing improvements almost immediately," Fofrich said.

The walleye rebound was well underway by later that decade. Fofrich recalls a day when he took Gary Roach fishing. Together they caught more than 60 walleyes in an hour, the smallest was 23 inches. He remembers another day when he guided a party to 80 walleyes in one drifting pass.

Still, there was much to learn. Impressed with what he had seen at Erie, Roach returned one April to discover the guides had not started fishing yet. The locals all thought the fish only spawned in feeder rivers. The banks were

lined with shore fishermen, and guides didn't want to take part in the mayhem. They chose to wait until later when walleyes began showing up at known haunts on the main lake. But Roach convinced Fofrich to venture out into the western basin. He cast a Fuzz-E-Grub dressed with a minnow to the top of a reef and wham, a walleye. Springtime on Lake Erie has never been the same.

Lake Erie remained a shallow fishery for years. The algae-stained water allowed game fish to inhabit the upper regions of the lake on structure from 6 to 18 feet deep. Anglers didn't have the knowledge of fish behavior or the equipment, such as advanced sonars, to explore the depths. Indeed, there was little need most days. "We were extremely effective in the shallows - extremely, extremely effective," Fofrich said.

Enter zebra mussels. Once introduced from the ballast of merchant ships, the invaders from across the Atlantic Ocean multiplied by the millions, each one filtering algae from a liter of water each day. Erie's fishery evolved from shallow to deep much of the time. Walleyes could still be found on the reefs during spawn. But, it soon became clear to the fishermen that new tactics had to be found in order to reach fish that often inhabited depths of 25 to 40 feet.

Anglers exchanged the one-quarter, three-eighths and one-half ounce weight-forward spinners they had used for five-eighths, three-quarters, 1 ounce and an ounce-and-a-half. But even then,

walleyes that once crunched the standard weight-forward spinners seemed to have become finicky biters. They merely nibbled at the 'crawlers. When Fofrich felt a tap, he would tip the rod toward a fish to feed the lure to it. But more than half the time, the fish was not there when he set the hook.

It was about that time the Professional Walleye Trail came to Lake Erie to host its season opener. For several years in a row, the PWT headquartered their operations at South Bass Island. Locals learned from the pros, especially about trolling tactics like planer boards which moved baits away from boat noise to avoid spooking fish. They saw innovations like bottom bouncers that resembled hand-lining "trolling-sinker" set-ups (3 ounce weights on three-way rigs). The old timers had hand-lined as far back as when Elvis was king.

Fofrich experimented with new tackle ideas and presentations himself. He reasoned the weight-forward design would still work but that it needed refinements to catch spooky fish. He came up with the notion to put a double-hook nightcrawler harness on an 18-inch leader on the rear of a weight-forward head. The weight-forward's spinner blade, which would make the rig ride upward if left on the head, was moved back to the harness. "We started smoking them immediately" he said.

Versatility was the Flip'N Harness' strong point. The model that weighed five-eighths of an ounce can be cast like weight-forward spinners. The one-and-a-half-

ounce Flip’N Harness can be drifted and dragged on the bottom with a dead stick. Fofrich likes to use light-action rods. He drops the Flip’N Harness down to the bottom before letting out enough line to let the line drift back to keep a 45-degree angle with the surface. He puts clients on the bow and stern casting Flip’N Harnesses as they watch the dead sticks for strikes. “It’s a super way to fish,” he said. “My boat looks like a porcupine.” The Flip’N Harness can also be trolled behind planer boards. He lets out different lengths of line to cover a wide range of depth. Average speed is about 2 mph.

So, how is Lake Erie today? “Even when Erie is tough, it’s still the Walleye Capital of the world,” Fofrich said. Call him at 419-729-2181 if you have any doubts.

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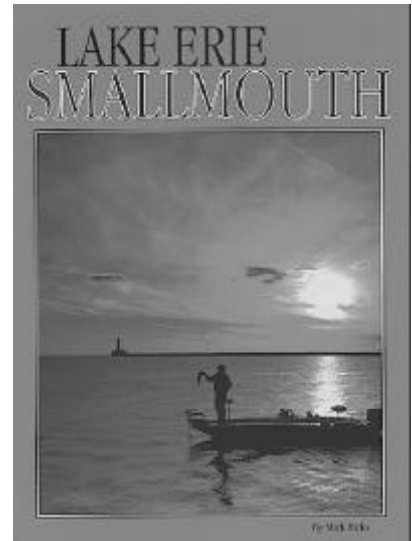
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Lake Erie and the Year 2000

A Captain's Perspective on Expectations for the Coming Year

by
Captain Robert Collins

What can we as Ohio anglers expect the walleye fishing on Lake Erie to be this year? Well, it all depends who you talk to. Walleye are the preferred species almost all anglers who fish Lake Erie seek. As a result, walleye fishing becomes a barometer of the health and productivity of Lake Erie. Let us for a moment take a look at the entire Lake Erie area and its three basins. We must realize that Lake Erie touches the shores of the following states: New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and the Canadian province of Ontario.

Each year in early spring the input of data from these four states and Ontario determines the quotas for sport and commercial fishing. Since commercial fishermen mostly do walleye fishing in Canadian waters, sport anglers who fish the U.S. waters almost always challenge those spring quotas. Considering that, many times commercial data reveals much about the catchable numbers of walleye that exist in Lake Erie. Sport anglers numbers are gathered by census takers and trawling surveys conducted by states. Determining quotas on the yearly basis helps wildlife managers make their quota decisions close to the start of the actual fishing season.

Since most of the U.S. waters lie within the borders of the state of Ohio and most of the sport anglers

walleye fishing is done in Ohio waters, division of wildlife estimates of catchable walleye play a major role. Sport anglers watch and wait for these quota numbers to come out yearly.

No matter what the quotas are determined to be or what the catchable amount of walleye are estimated to be, the sport anglers measure their success by how many walleye they were able to catch. Anglers must realize that nets, in particular gill nets, are fished 24 hours a day and catch fish as long as they are in the water. Hook and line sport anglers however catch fish only when they are biting. Having said all that let's move on to what we as sport anglers can expect the fishing in the year 2000 to be on Lake Erie.

Let's put one thing to rest very quickly: Lake Erie is still the recognized "Walleye Capital of the World." No other body of water offers the quality or quantity of walleye fishing to the sport anglers. Even though many times those of us that fish Lake Erie have experienced what we considered to be lean years, the walleye fishing is better than any other place in America.

Consider that the success of walleye fishing on Lake Erie will be determined by many factors. The following forecast will be determined to be a fair and best possible predic-

tion of what can be expected this year.

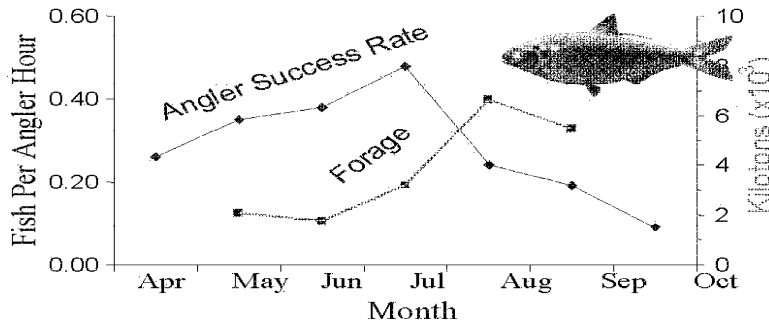
The end of 1999 produced a new state of Ohio walleye record. Tom Haberman of Brunswick, Ohio landed a 16.19-pound walleye while perch fishing on Lake Erie. It surpassed the old Ohio walleye record of 15.95 pounds. The new record was the talk of Ohio walleye anglers when it was caught November 23, 1999, off Cleveland, Ohio shores. Tom was fishing with friends for yellow perch with 6-pound test line when he caught the walleye. In addition a total of 9 new Ohio state record fish were certified this year across the state.

In-Fisherman Magazine recently published a special issue "Angling Adventures 2000." The popular fishing publication named Lake Erie a top 10 angling destination for walleyes, smallmouth bass, and steelhead trout. More PWT records have been set on Lake Erie than any other of their contest sites. And PWT will return to Erie in April this year (2000).

Chief Mike Budzik stated, "Good walleye spawning success throughout the 1990s is sustaining a healthy population of these popular sport fish, which have long drawn anglers from across the country."

At a recent meeting (12-10-99) of

Every year...



The chart, courtesy of the Ohio Division of Wildlife, demonstrates clearly that when forage fish are abundant angler success rates go down. Many other factors determine angler success: weather, water depths, water clarity and much more.

the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association, Roger Knight, Lake Erie fish biologist, gave a presentation regarding expected year 2000 walleye fishing.

Here is what Rodger had to say. "I'm glad that the presentation was helpful to LECBA and that you and Ohio anglers are trying to become better informed about Lake Erie issues. As you are learning, this is a very dynamic complex system and we'll never have all of the answers, but we are certainly trying. Understanding the challenges we face as fisheries managers in developing and improving predictive forecasting ability is important to the future of your charter businesses and sport anglers. We'll do our best to keep you informed."

He continued: "Gobies are included in the forage data beginning fall 1996 and, while they have increased every year since then, they still made up less than 10% of the peak monthly prey biomass estimate in 1999. Shad

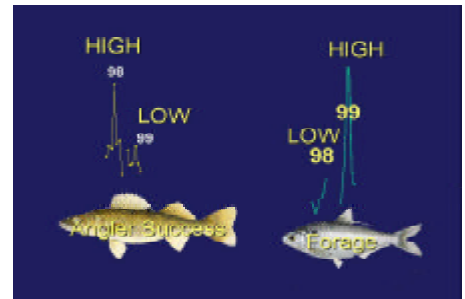
were by far the dominant species."

The following are some of the Ohio Division of Wildlife predictions:

- 1.) Walleye anglers should have a better year than 1999 since last year had an exceptionally large bait fish spawn.
- 2.) Low water levels experienced in 1999, produced by a very dry winter, are expected to rise to normal levels. In 1998 the spawn was poor but 1999 young of the year trawl samples are expected to show a good spawn season. Which is good news for the future.
- 3.) Many young 1 & 2 year old walleye never left the Western or Central basins in 1999 and good numbers of walleye were available in the Central basin into September of 1999.
- 4.) Gobies are becoming a baitfish that all species of game fish are eating. Gobies are being found in deeper waters than in previous years and the

yellow perch are eating them when they are found away from the shoreline. It is expected that the more walleye, smallmouth bass and perch eat them (gobies) the more their availability will go down.

5.) A new indicator model was developed in 1999 using the available bait fish vs. angler success input (See Chart Below). The new indicator points to a good available baitfish spawn, equals a tough walleye fishing indicator. And poor baitfish spawn equals a good walleye angler success. Gobies are considered in this model and yellow perch, walleye and smallmouth are now eating this invader species.



Anglers may want to consider using baits that will imitate the colors of the goby. If jigging in spring or trolling the basins in the summer, make sure to add to the popular silver, gold and chartreuse colors some smoke, brown and sparkle motor oil colors.

Anglers appreciate (usually) the fact that fisheries managers are keeping track of all the data input from various sources but, the final question still remains, "How is walleye fishing going to be this year?"

The answer based on all the available sources is... very good!

The Eastern Lake Erie Fishing Forecast

by
Joe Fischer

Will 2000 be as good of a fishing year for the offshore Eastern Lake Erie walleye fishermen as 1999 which was considered to be one of the best in recent years? This is the question I have heard several times in the last few weeks from some of the most experienced Lake Erie walleye anglers. It appears that the year 2000 will be very similar to 1999 as the lake appears to be relatively stable on water clarity, nutrient levels and forage. The only unknowns are the effect of the Goby, weather conditions, cormorants and the Low Lake Erie water levels. The late summer of 1999 produced some of the best offshore walleye fishing in recent memory with limit catches of 5-10lb walleyes commonplace in August and September. This was undoubtedly due to the warm summer, which caused a migration of western basin walleyes into the deep waters off Dunkirk harbor. If these same weather conditions occur I would expect to see a very similar scenario to take place in late summer.

Most of the Charter Captains I interviewed for this article anticipate similar conditions to last year with fishing being fairly slow in late spring and early summer and then improving rapidly as mid-summer arrives. Deep-water tactics will once again include the use of wire

line, Dipsy Divers, Jet Planers, etc. The bottom line will be as always, to locate the fish, find out what they will hit and when they are feeding. I call this the 3 W's of walleye fishing; Where, what and when! If anyone one of the three W's are missing you will probably not be successful.

The forecast for next year is not as good for the near shore early season walleye fishermen. Continued extreme water clarity coupled with rapidly rising water temperatures moved the post spawn walleyes quickly into deeper water with a resultant poor early season for the night shallow water trolling fishermen and the near shore daytime walleye fisherman. Much of the same is anticipated for the spring of 2000. Most of the relatively successful night fishing occurred of some of the shoals and reefs between Dunkirk and Barcelona. These spots remain cold longer in the spring and do not see the heavy nighttime boating activity that takes place off Athol Springs and Hamburg. The only problem with the Dunkirk area is distance. To get to a number of the good shoals requires a trip of over 5 miles down the lake at night. You might think that this is not a problem but if one of Lake Erie's early season windstorms quickly comes up and you are in a relatively small boat you could have a problem!

The good news is that the preliminary results of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) annual fall trawling studies for 1999 are in and appear to be very promising for the future of the Eastern Basin Lake Erie walleyes. "The 1998-class year of walleyes appears to be the best year since the benchmark year of 1984," commented Don Einhouse, Senior Biologist at the DEC office in Dunkirk. "The majorities of these fish are approximately 13" and should become legal size in another year" Don went on to say. The fact that these fish are 13 inches is important, as they are no longer considered prey for the vast majority of fish in Eastern Lake Erie. This would constitute the first exceptional spawning year in 15 years. The short winter of 1997-8 coupled by the very rapid spring warm-up probably was responsible for this excellent class year.

This should greatly improve the near shore fishery as these fish tend to stay in shallow water near structure until they increase in size. The combination of the deep water nomadic summer walleyes coupled with an exceptionally large 1998 class year of walleyes could produce excellent fishing by the year 2001 for the near shore and off shore fishermen.

See Eastern page 33

Ohio's New Record Walleye

How to Catch or How Not To Catch a Record Walleye

by
Captain Andy Emrisko

We all have had thoughts of catching a world record fish, or breaking some sort of record. To do this

utmost importance. Of course we will have to have the proper equipment and study the water as to proper depth, amount of baitfish,

I would like to tell you about all the things we didn't do last November while we still managed to land the Ohio State record walleye. First



This record setting fish was the furthest thing from Tom Haberman's mind at the start of his long and eventful day. Rabbit hunting, perch fishing, record walleye? Go figure!

requires hours and hours of planning. Knowing the exact place to fish, and being there at the right time of the year with the right bait in the right presentation is of the

and, most importantly, the right temperature. Once we have eliminated all the variables, we stand a good chance of catching that elusive record. Or do we??

off, the man that caught the fish, Tom "Blacky" Haberman and I had made plans to go rabbit hunting. Because of the unseasonably warm weather, we opted to give the dogs a break and go

fishing (first right move). Since it was a spur of the moment choice, finding enough people to fill the boat was not an easy task, so instead of starting early in the day we didn't get out in the water until after mid-day (worst time of the day to fish, right?)

I called on the radio from the dock to see if anyone was out perch fishing (yes, perch fishing, we didn't go walleye fishing). Sure enough, my pal "Stan the Man" was at the 72nd St. lighthouse on Cleveland's east side. He said he was picking up some really nice jumbos. As we motored out of the marina and approached him I decided to go out a couple miles further into water of about 45 feet (glad I didn't listen to Stan). Once we anchored the boat, the fish finder showed a lot of larger "hooks". An Ole Walleye hunter aboard, Dick Klimczak, said, "I have a feeling this is gonna be a walleye day, Andy." (first time he was ever right).

We immediately started catching some nice yellow perch, and things were going pretty good. I hooked onto something more than a perch, and needed the net. The large net wasn't on board, because I had stopped fishing for walleye earlier in the year, and had taken most of that equipment off the boat. There was a small net I used for small-mouth bass, which had a diameter of about 12 inches, and a depth of about 18 inches, but it was tangled in the anchor light. The fish I hooked turned out to be an 8 pound burbot (also know as Lawyers, or Ling Cod). While I played the fish, the other guy climbed on the hardtop, untangled the net and we

used it to land the fish. At this time we had no idea how important that burbot was to our catching the state record (another wrong that became a right).

A minute later, Blacky had a large fish that was taking a drag. "Probably a large sheephead, tighten the drag" I said. (glad he didn't listen). I had given him a rod and reel for his birthday five years previous, a nice St. Croix ultra light rod spooled with 6 pound test Berkley line (perfect set up for large walleye, wouldn't you say?). When the fish finally reached the surface, I thought my boat was sinking for all the commotion from the port side. I hadn't heard such language since the Army.

The first attempt at netting the fish failed, and the fish took off a-running. But the #4 long shank Eagle Claw hook held its own, and Blacky expertly brought the fish back for a second chance. The net allowed the head and about 3 inches of the body in, and when Dick simultaneously grabbed the tail, it was boated. Had I not caught the Burbot earlier, we probably would not have had time to untangle the net before the fish would have been gone (another wrong that went right).

Once everyone settled down, the fish was measured at 33 inches long, 21.5 inches girth. Using a 10 lb. downrigger weight to zero the scale, it weighed in right around 15.5 pounds. Since in my mind the Ohio record fish was 15.95 pounds but 36 inches long, I felt that the fish had plenty of girth. Because it was so short, I just thought the scale was off, or the rocking boat

in the waves might have affected a true weight. We decided to fish a couple more hours (pretty stupid huh?) and got our fill of perch and headed in. Once on shore, I took the fish to a certified scale and about passed out! The fish weighed 16.29 pounds (I also learned that the old record was also 33 inches long). I then contacted several people to tell them about the good news, and a buddy of mine suggested that we get a second weighing. I took the fish to be weighed at a neighborhood supermarket. When I lifted the fish up to the scale, a 4 inch goby popped out of its mouth! This little incident cost .10 pounds off the original weight of the fish. The fish has since been certified as a new Ohio State Record Walleye at 16.19 pounds.

Well, that's the story on how to catch -or how not to catch- a record. There were so many things that could have gone wrong but didn't, showing that no matter how you plan, if the Man up there doesn't smile down on you now and then, you ain't got a chance! Good luck, and Good Fishin'!

Editor's Note:

Captain Andy Emrisko runs Wave Walker Charters and can be reached at (216) 641-2549

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From McClelland, page 8

Walleyes that spawn in natural lakes are often the last fish of the season to deposit their eggs. It usually takes a week or two longer for the sun to warm these large inland lakes to the magical 40 to 45 degree spawning temperature that walleyes prefer.

Trolling rip-rap areas

Troll the spawning areas with shallow diving crankbaits such as a Rebel Minnow or Rattlin' Rogues. Trolling is by far the most effective method I have found for taking spawning walleyes along rip-rap or rocky shore lines. Long-lining crankbaits with eight to ten-pound test monofilament line will produce the best results. Troll at a fairly brisk pace and use a combination of long and short rods to stair-step lure depths to match the angle of the structure. This will keep all your baits in the fish zone.

Set the rods on the side of the boat closest to the rip-rap. Use a long rod (eight to nine-foot) to reach out from the boat and present the crankbait along the edge of the rocks. A shallow diving Rebel Minnow is the ideal lure for the outside rod. The Rebel Minnow only dives two to three feet, but that is enough to keep the lure ticking the stones near shore. Next, set up a shorter rod with a slightly deeper diving lure like the Rattlin' Rogue. Set an even shorter third rod with an even deeper diving bait such as a Wally Diver or one of the new Shad-R baits. By following this procedure, you'll effectively cover the sloping rip-rap edges.

Water Temperature

In the spring, ignoring water temperature can be a costly mistake. Since walleyes spawn in the same places every year at predictable temperature levels, it is a simple matter to determine where the fish are in their spawning cycle.

You can tell by temperature if the fish are close to spawning (pre-spawn) in the middle of it, or finished (post-spawn). This information, in turn, gives you a general idea of where the fish will be.

Peak Walleye Activity

Your best chances to catch a spawning walleye are definitely between dark and midnight. The telemetry studies we've reviewed show a definite trend with the majority of the fish arriving just at dark and spawning until about midnight.

We've also found that fish spawn primarily for about four hours. One fish might pull in and spawn for four hours and be done all in one night. Another may come four different nights and spawn an hour each night. In between these nightly visits, she'll make large movements, sometimes up to five miles as the staging areas can be a long way away from the actual spawning bed. Again, a key to big walleye success during pre-spawn: Be there at dark and don't stay any later than midnight."

Editors note: Be sure to check out Mike's book "Walleye Trouble-Shooting" available for \$14.95 plus \$3 S&H from Fishing Enterprises, P.O. Box 7108, Pierre, SD 57501. Credit cards call toll free 1-800- 223-9126

From Eastern, page 30

The same year (1998) also appears to be a good spawning year for perch, which by many is still considered the best eating of all the fresh water fish. These yearling fish are really "not out of the woods" as they are quite small (3-5") and are perfect food for all the 1998 walleye and our Eastern Lake Erie world class Smallmouth Bass fishery. A good class year for perch is very good news as the population of this fish has been on a precipitous slide for many years. Hopefully most of these delectable little fish will survive and rejuvenate the perch fishing in 2 years.

The DEC at this time do not anticipate as severe a problem as the eastern end of Lake Ontario has had with cormorant predation. The cormorants prefer islands for nesting sites and the eastern basin of Lake Erie is devoid of islands. The only place the cormorants presently nest are Strawberry and Motor islands in the upper Niagara River and the DEC has programs in place to control this population. Without an established residence Eastern Lake Erie only has to deal with the migratory cormorants in late summer and early fall so for the present time the cormorant effect needs to be monitored. I guess the bottom line is that the prediction on the year 2000 fishing would be for a stable fishery very similar to 1999 and future years could be even better as the 1998 class year of walleyes continues to mature.