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From The Editor

It's early February at the time of this writing. Recent mild temperatures all around the lake put a rapid end to what little ice fishing was available this winter. Heavy rains and high water have hindered those seeking the steelheads in the tributaries flowing into Lake Erie. Cabin fever this late winter is at a fever pitch. Thank the heavens for Sport and Outdoor shows and quality fishing magazines. It's about the only way some of us can get through these times as we eagerly await spring time and the 1999 walleye season!

And what a walleye season it should be. Biologists are predicting an excellent fishing year in 1999! There are several indicators that point to their favorable prognosis.

- * There are an estimated 60 million plus walleye swimming beneath Erie's surface
- * Last season walleye anglers in Lake Erie netted 2.8 million fish (more than double the 1997 total) and the catch rate of .8 fish/hour was the highest since the 1980s
- * The very large 1996 walleye hatch (largest in 10 years) will enter the fishery at 15-16 inches and will continue to grow during the season.
- * A good 1997 walleye hatch (13-14 inches) will also help keep anglers busy.
- * There are still many larger fish (20-24 inches) from the '93, '94 year classes and trophies (24 plus inches) from the very large '91 year class.

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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 mailed to:

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Walleye News and Fact File

1999 Fishing Outlook is Excellent

Lake Erie anglers got quite the smorgasbord on Lake Erie throughout 1998 with excellent fishing for walleye, yellow perch, smallmouth bass and other sport species. Weatherwise, anglers had more good fishing days on the big lake than in the past five years, bumping the total sport harvest to 7.8 million fish in an estimated 6.1 million angler hours, reports the Ohio Division of Wildlife. The good news is, the same great fishing should continue throughout 1999 as long as the weather cooperates.

“Anyone who fished Lake Erie in 1998 knows what a banner year it was,” said Roger Knight, supervisor of the Division’s Sandusky Fisheries Research Station. “The fish were there and the weather was on our side. Good spawning success in recent years for walleye, smallmouth bass, and yellow perch, plus consistent good weather that allowed anglers to get out on the lake provided for some excellent fishing during 1998.”

Walleye

Lake Erie still maintains its reputation as the “Walleye Capital of the World.” Walleye fishing was exceptional across the Ohio waters of the lake beginning in April. Action remained fairly consistent and prolonged much of the summer with boat anglers still bringing in catches through October.

Lake Erie sport anglers boated 2.3 million walleyes in 1998, (almost double the 1997 catch of 1.2 million). The 1998 catch was one of the highest annual harvests in recent years. The walleye fishery of 1999 should continue to be excellent because of the plentiful youngsters spawned in 1996. The 1996 hatch, which entered the fishery last year, was the most successful spawn in 10 years. These fish, measuring 13-15 inches, were a large percentage of the 1998 harvest. This large year class will strongly dominate the 1999 harvest, and will be even more desirable to anglers at 15-17 inches.

A moderate 1997 hatch entering the fishery in 1999 at 13-15 inches in length will also help to maintain an excellent fishery. Added to this good news is the fact that there are still plenty of fish from the good 1993 and 1994 year classes (20-24 inches), and some even larger fish from the large 1991 year class (24 plus inches) available to the fishery as well. The daily bag limit for walleye in 1999 remains at 10 fish per angler. In addition to good numbers of walleyes, anglers are becoming more adept at catching them. Successful anglers are adapting to a variety of fishing methods to master Lake Erie’s walleye fishery of the 1990s. Improved water clarity from the introduction of zebra mussels and reduced phosphorus has altered fish behavior and fishing success. The most successful anglers use a variety of fishing gear and techniques depending on the season, weather, and water conditions.

The 1999 catch could rival that of 1998 if anglers give the midsummer walleye fishery a chance. Creel surveys show peak harvest and catch rates occur in July and August.

In 1998, July was once again the peak harvest month. The harvest of walleyes by private boat and charter boat anglers during July alone was slightly over 1 million. The July catch rate of .77 fish per hour (3 fish every 4 hours) was the highest since the late 1980s.

Yellow Perch

The 1998 yellow perch harvest was a hefty total of 5.2 million fish, down only slightly from the 1997 catch of 5.5 million yellow perch. An excellent fall perch season was due in part to the large 1996 year class, as well as some larger fish from hatches of 1994 and 1995. September was the peak month for yellow perch with a harvest of 2.3 million, followed by August with 1.9 million fish taken. The annual catch rate was 3.4 perch per angler hour.

Yellow perch action should be good lakewide again

for 1999 with the abundant 1996 fish averaging a more desirable 8 inches. Lake Erie's yellow perch population appears to be slowly increasing in Ohio waters due to improved spawning success in recent years. A 30-fish bag limit and individual quotas for commercial trap net fishermen, both enacted in 1996, has also helped boost the population after a major decline in the early 1990s. Ohio's bag limit for yellow perch remains at 30 fish per angler.

Smallmouth Bass

Anglers should also continue to reap the benefits of Lake Erie's superb smallmouth bass fishery throughout 1999. The 1998 harvest for Lake Erie's third most sought-after species was 75,000 fish, down from the 1997 harvest of close to 112,000 smallmouth bass. Strong hatches in 1991, 1993, and 1995 that dominated the harvest in 1998, will again make a big showing in 1999. Anglers can expect catches of Lake Erie smallmouth bass in the 14- to 16-inch range. The daily bag limit for smallmouth bass is 8 fish per angler. Minimum size limit is 12 inches.

Fishing pressure for these fun-to-catch fighters has more than quadrupled since the late 1980s. Despite increased angling pressure, good spawning success, improved habitat, and catch-and-release fishing have kept Lake Erie's smallmouth bass population stable. Because of the increased pressure, the Ohio Division of Wildlife initiated a study in 1998 to monitor Lake Erie's bass population. In addition to routine angler surveys, the Division has initiated a tagging study to monitor the movements and survival of smallmouth bass. Lake Erie anglers who catch a smallmouth bass bearing a metal jaw tag should make a note of any tag information, fish length, and the date and location caught. This information should be reported to the Division of Wildlife at (419) 625-8062.

1-888-HOOK FISH

Anglers can call the Division of Wildlife's toll-free fishing hotline 24 hours a day at 1-888-HOOK FISH (1-888-466-5347). In the local Sandusky, Ohio exchange, call 625-3186.

A Wake-Up Call for Lake Erie and the Great Lakes

Since the invasion of zebra mussels in the Great Lakes in the mid-1980s, researchers have wondered what was the extent of zebra mussels' colonization capacity. Once thought that their colonization was limited solely to hard surfaces, such as rocks, clams, and runoff pipes, the new research by Ohio State University Professor Paul Berkman and his colleagues documents that zebra mussels have a far wider invasive capacity than previously suspected. Sonar and video surveys taken at Lake Erie indicate that the mussels have been building colonies on large sand and muddy areas of the lake, areas previously thought incapable of supporting the animals.

The new findings, reported in the May 7, 1988, issue of *Nature*, reveal that this may be a rude awakening for the Great Lakes. "In terms of potential zebra mussel habitat, Lake Erie is wide open," said Berkman, Senior Research Associate at the Ohio State University's Byrd Polar Research Institute. "We found that zebra mussels clearly colonize sand and muddy substrates in the lake," he said, adding that the densities of some of the zebra mussel colonies exceed 20,000 animals per square meter.

The researchers studied 200 square kilometers of the Lake Erie floor, collecting *dreissenid* mussels and their underlying sediments from 1994-96. With the use of an underwater video camera attached to a submersible remotely operated vehicle, the researchers took pictures of the suspect areas. By 1995 they determined that zebra mussels covered about 2,000 square kilometers of the lake bed's soft sediment. Zebra mussel densities ranged from 1,500 to 32,500 animals per square meter. In order to differentiate between hard and soft underwater surfaces, side scan sonar was used. "Since the side scan signal is strongly reflected by hard substrate and weakly reflected by soft substrate, we could profile the lake bottom to determine where the zebra mussels were located," Berkman said.

Starting out as a microscopic larva, a zebra mussel can attach itself to a single grain of sand or mud. As the animal matures to a juvenile state, it begins to

secrete byssal threads, which serve as anchors attaching the mussel to a stable surface. By sending out these threads and attaching to sand grains, the juveniles create a hard substrate, which grows into a bed of zebra mussels on the bottom of the lake.

This discovery documents that zebra mussels can persevere in areas once thought to be unfeasible. Because Lake Erie's floor is 90 percent soft substrate, it is now fair game for a full zebra mussel invasion.

From the October/November '98 issue of Twine Line, the educational newsletter of Ohio Sea Grant.

Lake Erie Sturgeon Provide Interesting Fish Tales

Since the decline of lake sturgeon in Lake Erie at the turn of the century, only occasionally would one of these state endangered fish turn up in a commercial fishing net. That all changed several years ago when other lake users began spotting these strange looking creatures from the deep. Sport anglers, boaters, shoreline residents, and scuba divers are reporting some interesting fish tales about sturgeon to the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Reports of sturgeon are on the rise because of two things, according to David Davies, an aquatic biologist with the Division's Sandusky Fisheries Research Unit. The Lake Erie sturgeon population is increasing, and an education campaign is underway encouraging people to report sturgeon sightings.

"We are very optimistic Lake Erie's sturgeon population is making a gradual comeback and reproducing successfully because of the number of small fish reported. Of 43 lake sturgeon sightings reported to the Division in 1998, 28 measured 30 inches or less, which are juveniles spawned in the past 10 years," said Davies. "Two sturgeon caught in the same day near Mouse Island by a yellow perch angler last October measured only 6 and 7 inches in length. These small sturgeon were most likely young-of-year fish spawned last spring."

The number of sturgeon caught by sport anglers is increasing, especially during the fall perch fishing season. Anglers are catching sturgeon because they are fishing on or near the bottom, where sturgeon feed. The hot spots appear to be the areas around Marblehead, Cedar Point, the Lake Erie Islands, Huron, and Sandusky Bay. The largest sturgeon on record in recent years was spotted by a boater last August near Dunkirk, New York. The fish measured 7 feet, 4 inches, weighed 250 pounds, and was estimated to be 100 to 120 years old.

Three years ago the Division began disseminating "Sturgeon Sighting Alert cards" all across Lake Erie's shoreline encouraging people to report sturgeon observations. These wallet-size cards include an identification graphic, life history information, and who to contact if you encounter a lake sturgeon. More than 100,000 of the cards have been distributed to marinas, bait stores and other shoreline outlets over the past several years.

Davies acts as a clearinghouse for Ohio in collecting information on sturgeon populations in Lake Erie, as well as Lake Huron, St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, and Detroit River.

"Any attempt to document the status of sturgeon must be a combined effort between agencies because these fish are so highly migratory in the lakes and connecting waterways," said Davies. Biologists learned two adult sturgeon found last fall along southwestern Lake Erie apparently migrated together from southern Lake Huron. Two waterfowl hunters at the Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area in eastern Lucas County found one of the sturgeon stranded in a shallow pool of water. They saved the 4-foot fish by carrying it to deeper water, but only after making note of information imprinted on a tag attached to the sturgeon's dorsal fin. The tag indicated the fish was tagged by the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources.

A week later, a Port Clinton resident walking his dog along the beach found a 4-foot sturgeon washed ashore. Unfortunately, the fish was dead, but bore an Ontario tag as well. Upon contacting the Ontario agency, the Division learned both sturgeon were

captured in a commercial fisherman's trap net in Lake Huron just one month earlier. The fish were tagged by Ontario biologists, and released at Point Edward at the southern tip of Lake Huron. If traveling a direct route, the sturgeon traveled 100 miles through the St. Clair River, Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River, and across western Lake Erie in about 30 days.

Another tagged sturgeon was captured in a trap net by a commercial fisherman in western Lake Erie in 1997. The 5-foot-long fish was landed 500 miles from where it was initially tagged and released in Lake Winnebago by Wisconsin biologists 19 years earlier. Surprisingly, one recent sturgeon report came from an inland body of water. A Lucas County man got quite a surprise when he discovered a 5-foot-long sturgeon while draining his farm pond this past fall. The fish had survived in the 2-acre pond after being released there 30 years prior. The man and several other people revived the fish in a large oxygenated tank and contacted the Division. The fish was transported to the Division's Sandusky office, where it was tagged and released into Sandusky Bay.

Lake sturgeon, Ohio's largest fish species, were once so abundant throughout the Great Lakes they were considered a nuisance by commercial fishermen. Once society acquired a taste for fine caviar and smoked sturgeon in the mid-1800s, sturgeon became a lucrative commercial fishery. By the 1920s, sturgeon populations were much reduced.

Coupled with over harvesting, is the species' slow maturity rate. Female sturgeon do not normally spawn until 20 years of age, and only spawn every four to seven years. Consequently, young fish could not replace the adults lost to fishing quickly enough. Other contributing factors in the population decline were pollution and the damming of rivers that prevented sturgeon from returning to spawning grounds.

Lake sturgeon look very prehistoric. They have no scales, but instead bony plates along the back, sides, and belly. They have a distinctive shark-like tail, long, pointed snout, and four long barbels (used to locate prey) in front of a suction-like mouth. The upper body ranges from olive to gray, graduating to a yellow or milky color belly. Lake sturgeon are endangered in

Ohio waters and anyone who catches a sturgeon should release it unharmed immediately. Any sightings should be reported to the Ohio Division of Wildlife at (419) 625-8062. Additional information should include the date observed, location of the sighting, approximate length, any tag information, and a photograph, if possible.

From Editor, page 2

Biologists have a similar favorable outlook for yellow perch and smallmouth bass for this year. In particular, the yellow perch numbers will again be up in 1999 with the fantastic '96 year class reaching beyond 8 inches in length.

Last year about 1.2 million Ohio anglers spent \$836 million on fishing. I know I did my share, according to my VISA statements! And last year was the first year for the one day fishing permits in Ohio. Over 44,000 one day permits were sold, making both the vacationing fishermen and Charter Captains very happy.

In this issue, we've got lots for you with Ted Takasaki, Mark Boyd, Keith Kavajecz & Gary Parsons, Dave Kidd, and Michael Veine sharing tips, techniques and their experiences in going after spring walleyes in Lake Erie. In our "Ask the Captain" section, professional guides will again answer your walleye questions. We'll also have a run-down of Lake Erie walleye tournaments for the upcoming season.

So get out there this year and take all the walleye you can, legally that is, because, who knows what the new millennium will bring, with the Y2K (year 2000) computer bug and all. You thought El Nino was bad? I can't wait to see what havoc 'El Y2K' causes us fishermen. Will your fish finder still locate fish? Will your line counter on your trolling reel count right? Will your down-rigger go down? Will your temperature gauge still gauge? Will your GPS still point to the correct waypoint? The clock is ticking down! Till next time, good fishing in '99 and in '00 too.

Western Basin Spring "Hot Spots"

During the spring, the western basin hosts marauding schools of oversized walleyes; the trick is finding them

by
Michael Veine

Lake Erie is the personification of big water walleye fishing. With hundreds of square miles of fishable waters, finding active walleye can often be a daunting task. During the spring, adult walleyes tend to congregate in the relatively shallow waters of the western basin where savvy anglers can cash in on a mixture of eaters and true trophies.

One day last April, my partner and I launched at Boles Harbor near Monroe, MI for a day of early season walleye action. As I made my way down the channel, I fired up my Lowrance GPS receiver and switched it to its plotter mode. As we cleared the last buoy, I hit the throttle sending us on our walleye search and destroy mission.

While keeping an eye on the graph for fish marks, I first searched on a parallel course along the Michigan shoreline. Finding

no fish in the ten foot depths, I then made another reconnaissance pass from south to north a bit farther

from shore. Using a back and forth grid type exploration technique is often the best way to

locate elusive spring walleyes. Since there were very few boats actively fishing at that time, we simply had no choice except to find our own fish.

After two hours of searching, I still hadn't been able to find any concentrations of active fish. Scratching my head in bewilderment, I was puzzled. I knew there were fish in the area, but their location was still a mystery. Even in the fabled walleye waters of Lake Erie, you can't catch them if you can't find them.

It dawned on me that with the moderate south/east winds hammering portions of the shoreline, the walleyes might be tucked up close to the beach. I selected a shoreline with a steep drop-off south of the Edison plant near Luna Pier. The wind was



Oftentimes, cold weather must be endured to get in on the spring fishing action. Proper attire is a necessity to promote enjoyment. Photo of Donna Veine taken by the author.



It's routine business landing impressive walleyes during the spring on the western basin of Lake Erie. Photo of the author taken by Donna Veine.

quartering along the drop-off making trolling passes most efficient. Since the water was less than ten feet deep, scanning the area with sonar would be pointless. Instead, we set out lines up wind for some in-your-face style scouting. Since the water visibility was rather poor, we opted for subtle action body baits and a rather slow trolling speed. We set out a mix of Storm Jr. Thundersticks in varying colors presenting them behind my Mr. Walleye boards. In-line planer boards are critical to trolling success when targeting walleyes in murky, shallow waters because they present the baits well away from the fish spooking presence of the boat.

It's funny how walleyes seem to know when you're not paying attention. One second all the boards were running straight and true, the next instant one of the

mini-skis had already been pulled almost directly behind the boat. Obviously a big walleye had attached himself to the business end and was putting on the brakes. I handed the bowed over rod to my wife Donna who was still a little cranky from our long, bumpy boat ride. It's amazing how a big walleye can wipe a droopy frown from one's face and instantly replace it with a wide, tooth baring smile.

Donna pumped the heavyweight slowly but steadily until I was able to remove the Mr. Walleye board. Without the added resistance of the planer, pulsating head shakes could be felt as they reverberated up the line to her trembling hands. In the sloppy water, the walleye was invisible until it broke the surface of the water, sending a rush of adrenaline through both of us. It was a true hog and with one scoop

of the net it was ours. In the next four hours, we managed to catch and release dandy walleyes until we simply were tired from pulling them in. Even though we were wiped out from a long day of catching walleyes, you certainly didn't hear any complaints from us.

The western basin of Lake Erie is defined as all the waters to the west of a line running north from Marblehead, OH, through Kelley's Island and then to Point Pelee Ontario. Biologists estimate that Lake Erie's current walleye population numbers over 60 million adult fish. Lake Erie's walleyes are entirely self sustaining with natural reproduction accounting for all of the fish stocks. During late March and April, most of Erie's adult walleyes migrate to the western basin to procreate. Michigan, Ohio and portions of Ontario waters are littered with reefs, rocky shorelines and rivers where Erie's walleyes take advantage of ideal spawning habitat.

During the spring, the shallow waters of the western basin warm up quicker than the rest of the lake. This bowl of warmer water draws plenty of bait fish like smelt, shiners and other walleye snacks. The combined attractions of massive schools of baitfish and reproductive urges turns the western basin into a walleye angler's heaven.

Walleyes typically spawn when the water reaches between 45 and 50 degrees. They will actively seek out warm water areas that hold favorable spawning habitat. This is what draws the walleyes to the reefs, shorelines and rivers of the

western basin. For optimal comfort and growth, walleyes prefer water temperatures that range between 65 and 70 degrees. The relatively shallow western basin typically yields water temperatures for spawning during mid-April. The water warm-up doesn't usually surpass the 70 degree mark until mid-May. After that, most of the temperature sensitive adult fish migrate east to the deeper waters of the central and eastern basins. That leaves western basin anglers with about 45 days of prime trophy walleye fishing. This period is divided into three distinctly different phases designated as pre-spawn, spawn and post-spawn stages.

Pre-Spawn

Frigid water conditions and rotten weather typically characterize the period before the spawn. From just after ice-out until the second week of April, Lake Erie can be a formidable opponent. Despite the challenges, I manage to catch some huge walleyes during this period every year. Basically, sacrifices must often be endured to have a crack at those awesome, sag-bellied brutes.

Pre-Spawn walleyes have a rather slow metabolism making them reluctant biters. They move into the western basin during the winter

and continue to stage in the area until the warming water kicks them into gear. The adult fish are typically scattered in the deeper water and they often hug the bottom. A slow, meticulous live bait presentation is often the hot ticket during this cold period.



With the Edison Plant near Luna Pier in the background, the author displays a nice walleye taken on a frigid early April day. Photo taken by Donna Veine.

Controlled drifting combined with vertical jigging and bottom bouncing tactics are often the best medicine during early spring. Captain Rocco Papandrea owns and operates a charter boat between Toledo and Port Clinton OH. Papandrea also competes professionally in the PWT, NAWA and MWT walleye tournament

circuits. Besides his other tournament accomplishments, Rocco placed very respectably cashing checks in both of the last two major events held around his home waters on Erie. Rocco passes along this wisdom concerning pre-spawn jigging: "Every year around the middle of April, Lake Erie's walleyes begin their spawning activities. From the end of March until the spawn starts, I catch pre-spawn walleyes in waters from 15 to 30 feet deep north of the Bass Islands. 25 foot depths have historically been the most productive waters and during this period jigs with live minnows have been the best bait. We vertically jig using heavier jigs when it's windy and lighter ones weighing no less than 1/2 oz. when it's unseasonably calm." Rocco went on to say, "We let the walleyes decide what color jigs they prefer on any given day. This is accomplished by fishing a different color jig on each rod and then switching over to the hottest setup once a pattern is discovered."

Rocco rates the areas north and west of the Camp Perry firing range as top pre-spawn waters for trophy 'eyes.

The deeper waters due west of Luna Pier all the way to West Sister Islands are also excellent waters to target fish staging for their run up the Maumee River.

The waters from the Sputnik light house north to the mouth of the Detroit River are another hot spot that harbors good numbers of pre-spawn walleyes.

The Spawn

This author has experienced days on Lake Erie that dreams are made of during the spawn. On one occasion, I caught and released over thirty walleyes in one afternoon with most weighing over eight pounds and a few 10+ pounders thrown in for good measure. By days end, my boat was a filthy mess from all the milt and eggs that were sprayed all over the deck.

When walleyes are actually spawning in the open waters of Lake Erie, you can bet that they will be either holding in shallow water or staging nearby along dropoffs. Since spawning is triggered by warming water temperatures, a heightened metabolic rate causes the cold blooded walleyes to feed quite heavily. Trolling along shorelines, dropoffs and reefs with the aid of

in-line planer boards is possibly the most productive tactic during this period.

Capt. Rocco Papandrea had this to say about the spawning phenomenon, "Once the walleyes

spawn are the Camp Perry firing range reef complex, the Turtle Island reefs and any shorelines that are lined with a gravel or rocky bottom. Look for rocky shorelines where wave action is present because when

walleyes spawn, they prefer turbid waters.

Post Spawn

Late April and May are top months for taking excellent numbers of adult walleyes in the western basin. The mid-depth waters adjacent to spawning structures are great places to way-lay a mess

of above average sized, post spawn walleyes. I prefer waters between 13 and 18 feet deep during this period.

The waters south of the Camp Perry firing range and the mid-depth waters between the Maumee River and the Detroit River all hold good numbers of aggressive walleyes during this period.

Since water temperatures will progressively rise during the post spawn period, faster action crankbaits and spinner crawler rigs pulled behind boards are often hot



Map Locations: 1) Camp Perry Firing Range, 2) Waters west of Luna Pier, 3) West Sister Islands, 4) Sputnik Light house, 5) Mouth of the Detroit River, 6) Turtle Island

move onto the reefs and up the rivers to spawn, we switch to trolling tactics using body baits behind in-line boards. I've had excellent success using metallic rainbow or silver prism Reef Runner Ripsticks. The surface trolling fishery lasts until the beginning of May when the walleyes move off the shallows and into the adjacent waters to fatten up after the rigors of reproduction."

Areas to key in on during the

See Hot Spots, page 19

Hatchet Spinners Do Work on Erie!

by
Ted Takasaki & Scot Richardson

Here's a fact shared by those in the know about Lake Erie;

More often than not, smaller walleyes suspend while bigger ones haunt the depths just off the bottom.

The key is finding a method to get to the deeper fish fast and effectively. Spinner rigs and bottom bouncers do the trick for a lot of good reasons;

- They make a fish-attracting commotion that offers both flash and vibration. Walleyes can hone in using both sight and lateral lines.

- Bottom-bouncers take you down fast, they keep you in the strike zone and they let you cover lots of water in a short period of time.

- When dressed with a nightcrawler, spinner rigs offer a scent and taste that true trophies, even finicky ones, find hard to resist. Crankbaits are great, but natural bait is tough to beat when times are tough.

- Replace the bottom bouncer

with a snap weight to deploy spinner rigs at varied depths in the water column and catch suspended fish.

- You can spread baits with planer boards to cover a wide corridor and get the spinners away from noise and shadow of the boat. Those are important factors since water clarity at Lake Erie has improved so much due to the filtering action of zebra mussels.

Here's how to start.

Spinner Basics

A state of the art spinner rig starts with 5- to 6-foot snell from the snap swivel and bottom bouncer. Shorten leader length if you get hung up too often.

Next comes a Lindy Little Joe X Change clevis, the small piece of plastic that threads onto the line and holds your blade so it can spin freely. It's designed to let you snap blades in and out fast to change



Skilled fishermen often use various spinner rig combinations to land big walleye in Erie's Western Basin.

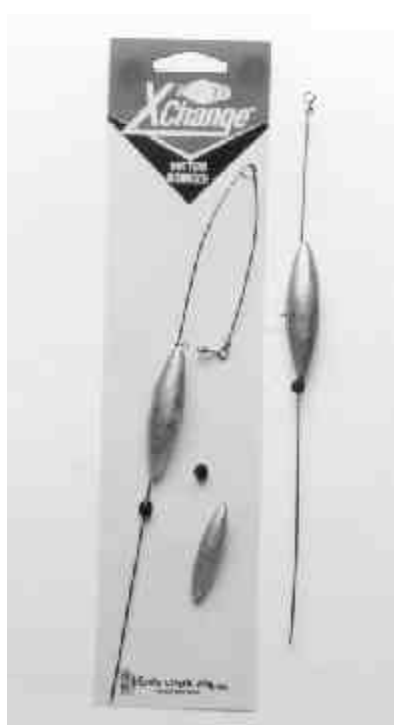


The Hatchet Harness

colors and sizes without having to retie the entire rig. Start with blades in #5s or #7s. Try metallics of gold, silver and bronze when the sun is shining; use florescent colors when it's cloudy or in dingy water.

Add enough beads to keep the spinner away from the front hook. Experiment with colors to see what the fish want. If you tie your own, the nightcrawler harness should feature two razor-sharp Gamakatsu's in size #4 or #2. Stick one right in the 'crawler's nose and the other farther back so the worm swims straight to avoid line twist.

If you don't want the hassle of making your own rigs, Lindy Little Joe makes a great pre-tied one called a Hatchet Harness, each features both the X Change clevis and the uniquely-designed Hatchet blade. Shaped just the way they



The Bottom Bouncer

sound, Hatchet blades turn faster and create more throbbing vibrations and flash at slower speeds than the standard Colorado, Indiana or Willow Leaf blades.

Lindy Little Joe makes a standard Hatchett Harness and a floating version to add buoyancy, bulk and color. Lindy Little Joe also applied the principle behind the X Change system to bottom-bouncer design. The result is a bottom bouncer that lets you change weights fast and easily. Rather than being fixed in place, the X Change weight merely slides onto the wire and is held in place with a rubber grommet or two, if you like. If you want to go deeper or shallower, change the size of the weight in a matter of seconds. If you get hung up, merely pull the

wire free and replace the weight without lost time. The X Change Bottom Bouncers come in sizes from one-half to three ounces and are packaged with spare weights. Use two weights on a wire to achieve mid-range sizes or weights over 3 ounces.

A standard rule of thumb is to keep a 45-degree angle between your line and the water. Use 1 ounce for depths of 10 feet or less, 1 1/2 ounces for 10-to 20 feet, 2 ounces for 20-to 30 feet and 3 ounces and more to go deeper than that. Best rod for the job is a 8-1/2 foot medium to medium-heavy stick with a medium tip rated for 12-to 25-pound test line and lure weight of 1/2 to 1-3/4 ounces .

Use 10 or 12-pound Stren Super Tough for its ability to withstand assault from sharp zebras. Still, you should check the line for nicks often. Lake Erie brutes will find the weak link in your tackle. You'd hate to loose a 10-pound trophy of a lifetime at boatside because of a broken line.

Use line-counter reels. The "why" of that will be clear in a moment.

On the water

Where to start? Lake Erie is a huge body of water, but good homework can cut it down to size. Check with bait shops, guides and even the Internet for the latest fishing reports to see where the big schools are located. If you can get coordinates, a Global Positioning Satellite system can take you right there. Maps are available

that feature the waypoints for places that traditionally hold fish.

In spring, you'll no doubt head for the Western Basin where huge numbers of big females and smaller males gather to spawn.

Like the general who said, "Don't fire 'til you see the whites of their eyes," don't fish until you see 'eyes on your sonar screen. Run from spot to spot, slowing every so often to see if you can see bait fish or the tell-tale marks that signal walleyes. That search method is a lot faster than trying to find fish by fishing.

Cover the water column from top to bottom once over a school. Put out two lines with bottom bouncers. Use a snap weight on a third line. Watch the dial on your line counter reel to let out 50 feet of line, then add the weight and let out 50 more feet of line. Follow the same procedure on the fourth line, but use a different-sized snap weight. The 50/50 formula lets you return to the same depth over and over. "Precision Trolling," by Dr. Steve Holt, Tom Irwin and Mark Romanack focuses on the running depths of crankbaits. But, it also has formulas to determine the running depth of snap weights.

Use planer boards to cover water from side to side. Troll slowly from .5 mph to 1.5 mph with the waves. Use gentle "S" turns to cover more area and to vary the speed of the baits. Boards on the inside turns go slower, boards on the outside go faster.

Listen to the fish, let them tell you what combination of blade color

and size, speed and depth they want.

Next time on Erie, take a "spin" around the Western Basin with Hatchet blades, bottom bouncers and snap weights. They just might be your ticket to the trophy of a lifetime.

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Lake Erie Springs Enormous Walleyes

by Mark Boyd
with
Keith Kavajecz and Gary Parsons

We routinely fish the Great Lakes in spring and we've found that they all have two things in common - big walleyes and more big walleyes. Nowhere is this truer than Lake Erie.

The first step to success is finding the walleye's general location. History is a great teacher, and seasonal migrations will elude to some clues as to where to begin your spring search. On Lake Erie, the spring action occurs right after spawn, in areas north of the expansive reef systems in the Western Basin. As Spring progresses, concentrations of big walleyes begin moving east and usually in early May the fishing will be good in areas around the Bass Islands. By the end of May, Erie's big fish move into the Central Basin and begin setting up in their summer patterns.

The next step is to pinpoint the walleye's specific locale in a given area ... after all, you've got to fish

where the fish are if you're gonna catch 'em. The key to successful



Springtime plus Lake Erie equal huge walleye, when the weather is right!

spring Great Lakes fishing is figuring out the primary feeding depth. Not bottom depth ... fish feeding depth. Walleyes can be on the bottom, but especially in the Great Lakes, they like to suspend and feed on roaming schools of bait fish. So, you ask, how does one find the feeding walleyes? Simple, use your electronics to find either big fish "arcs" or "clouds" of bait fish. Suspended fish are easy to see ... the hard ones to detect are the ones rubbing their bellies in the mud basin. If you are running a quality unit like a Lowrance (e.g. 350A or X-85) or Eagle (e.g. Optima or Ultra) try turning your gray line up to 31%. Also make sure the Sensitivity is running at 85% or higher. With those adjustments the units will show darkened "bumps" on the bottom which in spring is just what we're after.

Other electronics that have become very



Trolling small planer boards is a very productive way to catch springtime walleyes

important to fishing on Great Lakes waters are GPS's (Global Positioning Systems). Improved technology and increased "angler demand" have brought the price of these units down dramatically over the past couple of years. A reliable hand-held unit such as the Lowrance GlobalMap 100 offers full GPS mapping capability, 12 channel receiver dependability and easy operation for under \$400 ... and it fits in a shirt pocket or can be mounted to the dash of your boat. More permanently mounted units like the GlobalMap 1600 are also available, or even the new LMS 160 Map which combines a state-of-the-art GPS mapping unit with sonar capability. These new Lowrance products have truly brought mapping to a new level, with the ability to allow you to create your own, highly detailed maps of areas you are going to fish. These units come

with Lowrance's IMS Map Create software that, with the use of a home computer, enable you to build area-specific maps that can be uploaded onto your GPS. Mapping features include such goodies as US Navigation Aids, US Rural Roads, and US Coastal Wrecks and Obstructions to name a few. With this advanced software package, you can also take your GPS information such as waypoints, plot trails and fish icons, and save that info back to your computer for future reference. Make no mistake ... this is the future of fishing technology!

If you get several days of stable weather with warming water temperatures, trolling crankbaits will prove more productive. Subtle to moderate action lures like Storm ThunderSticks, Rapala Husky Jerks and Storm Deep Jr. ThunderSticks are good choices.

Run them behind Off Shore in-line planer boards and try to cover several depths - anywhere from 5 feet down to the bottom. You're looking for a feeding level for walleyes. Often our best setup is running a Deep Jr. ThunderStick 50 feet behind a board (that means it's only running down about 10 feet even if we're over 30 feet of water). At what ever depth you are marking fish, set your lures to run just above the fish. Walleyes feed "up", so they are much more likely to see your offerings passing over-head than if you were to fish below them. Popular Great Lakes colors include: Metallic Rainbow Trout, Rainbow Trout, Blue Mackerel and Black/Silver, but don't be afraid to try any of Storm's new Clown colors for '99 ... they all tested out to be HOT!

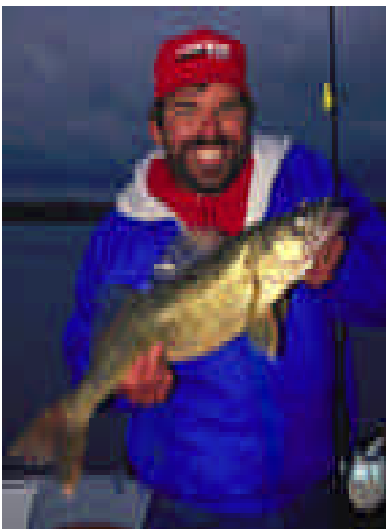
If the weather is unstable (as it is 75% of the time in the spring), pull out open water spinners. P/K Tackle's Open Water Spinners are tied with 14-6 FireLine, #6 Silver Plated Blades, two #4 Mustad Triple Grip hooks, and a chartreuse or red bead body. For an extra touch of "Flash" ... try one of the new P/K Tackle Palladium Plated Spinner Blades ... these are the ultimate in "shiny" and can really make a difference on a tough spinner bite. Bait up with a big juicy nightcrawler and you have a deadly rig.

These spinners can be run suspended by letting out 100 feet of line, attaching an Off Shore Snap Weight (1/2 ounce to 3 ounce) and then letting out enough line to drop it to the desired depth. Similar to cranking, initially cover several depths to determine the active feeding level.

When fishing conditions get tough (cold fronts, cooling water, etc.) walleyes will often move to the bottom. In that case, let out only 10 feet of line before adding a heavy Snap Weight (3 to 6 ounces), and free spool the weight until it hits bottom. Let the boat drag the spinner a while, then free spool it again, hitting bottom. At this point the Snap Weight should run just above the bottom positioning the spinner right in the walleyes' faces.

Keep switching around lures, colors and depths until you catch a fish. Make a note of the setup that was successful and start to move more baits into that zone. By keeping track of which "program" is producing, you can home-in on the best presentation for the day.

No where in the country is fishing for trophy sized walleyes more in vogue than on the Great Lakes, and specifically Lake Erie. While walleyes can be found throughout this prolific body of water, understanding the walleye's seasonal movements and habits is essential to consistent success. Start off the season on the right foot. Spring into action and experience some of the best walleye fishing the world has to offer.



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Hawgs On The Rampage

Lessons Learned From Tournament Points Anglers To Huge Walleye!

by
Dave Kidd

It isn't often that anglers, of either the professional or recreational ranks, have difficulty producing at least a few fish from the lake that is known as the walleye capital of the world. In mid April of 1996 many of the pros practicing for the North American Walleye Anglers (NAWA) season opener on Lake Erie were, at best, struggling. After a week of, well, frustrating pre-fishing for stubborn fish in heavy seas causing muddy water, forecasts for the tournament catch looked bleak.

This was the earliest professional walleye tournament ever held on the big lake. With the water temperature hovering around 42 degrees, locals were reporting catching a few "jacks" (male walleye) off of the reefs northwest of Port Clinton, but the large females

came few and far between.



Hawgs like these are common in Lake Erie's Western Basin in the Spring.

"Did they spawn? Are they spawning?" These questions raced through the minds of the competitors as they jigged, rigged, and trolled their way through painfully few fish during each practice day.

Jim Stedke, a local competitor from Lima, Ohio, had the good fortune of being able to draw from an experience that happened a number of years ago. He knew of a large school of fish that could annually be found suspended over the flats in an area east of the reefs during the early season.

"About four years ago, around April 10th, I was heading west toward Round Reef," Stedke explained. "On a whim I decided to stop the boat approximately 2 miles short of the reef and set out some boards with crankbaits to see what I could pick up. I was instantly rewarded as the first two fish in the boat were both over 28 inches. I can remem-

ber telling everybody I came in contact with that I had caught two, huge, male walleye. I believed so because the fish were not full of eggs and their undersides were not marred," he continued.

Upon his return home he realized while he was cleaning them that they were not males but females who had spawned at least two weeks earlier, perhaps even before the ice came off.

"These fish were suspended high in the water, I mean 10-14 feet down, in April no less. I was more than a little surprised to say the least," he concluded.

April 1996

On the day before the tournament Stedke managed only 5 fish, a result that disappointed him, having caught fourteen just a few days earlier. Many of his competitors would have been happy with such a catch so close to the first day of competition. Perhaps the pre-tournament predictions would be correct.

The "Rules" Change

Walleye are said to spawn when the water temperature reaches the low 40's. During the prefishing period and the tournament itself the walleye were indeed spawning and this accounted for the number of jacks on the reefs.

It has long been taught that immediately after spawning, female walleye lie, belly to the bottom, on the expansive flats of the western basin. This is true to a point. After a few days of rest from the

rigors of spawning, some of these fish will begin to suspend in the open water north and east of the reefs - feeding on schools of emerald shiners. Since the population of Lake Erie walleye is factored in the millions, the entire spawning process may take several weeks. This would explain why some females that anglers catch are "spawned out" while others are real hawks, stuffed full of eggs.

By tournament time the water temperature had risen to the mid 40's. Not much of a change you say? Those anglers working these areas on day one were pleasantly surprised at how much this temperature change affected the fishing.

"If I had my doubts on how I would do in that tournament, day one set my mind more at ease," stated Johnnie Candle, then a resident of Ohio, now residing in North Dakota. By trolling a combination of lures including the Reef Runner Rip Stick, Candle culled up a 6 fish limit exceeding 50 pounds placing him in 4th. place after the first day of what was supposed to be a three day competition.

Similar results were echoed by a good number of participants who were on that bite. Surprisingly, even in the cold water, many anglers reported that their fish were hitting the baits at speeds up to 3 m.p.h.

Day two was more of the same with many anglers handling up to 30 fish to get their limit approaching the 50 pound mark. Day three

was a disaster as 50 plus m.p.h. winds and monstrous waves reeked havoc on both boat and angler forcing the tournament director to call the competition. Even in the midst of threatening seas many anglers brought in their expected weights of 50 plus pounds only to be told that the competition was off. The second day leader, Ron Seelhoff would stand as the tournament winner.

Hawg Time

It's almost spring again and during the next series of weeks the walleye in the western basin of Lake Erie will again go on the rampage. In order to better inform you as to the whereabouts of these fish and how to catch them, I've asked Ross Grothe from Apple Valley, Minnesota, the second place finisher of the April 1996 NAWA tournament, for some tips.

"Once the water temperature climbs into the mid 40's start looking for fish suspended in clear water about 11 to 15 feet below the surface in 25 to 32 feet of water," instructs Grothe. "During that tournament I initially found the fish north of the A and B buoys of the Camp Perry Firing Range. The fish were moving east on a daily basis, by the end of the tournament I was northeast of the C buoy." He continues, "Somewhere between these two points you're bound to hit fish."

"When you find suspended fish set out medium depth crankbaits such as the bait I used, the Reef Runner Rip Stick," Grothe explained. Other baits worth trying are Storm

Thundersticks and Rapala Husky Jerks. Grothe went on to say that a Rip Stick that is run 80-120 feet behind the boat will dive to 9-12 feet, perfect for intercepting hawg walleye. Utilize in-line planer boards to spread your baits and increase your coverage.

Experiment with speed, typically starting out around 2 m.p.h. and ranging up to 3 m.p.h.

It's just a matter of days. Who knows? The ice is off and the fish may be active right now, just waiting for a bait to swim by. Use caution, staying on shore when the beast roars and fishing when it purrs. It's hawg time.



From Hot Spots, page 10

tickets. My favorite crank baits are Storm Deep Jr. Thundersticks, 1/4 oz. Hot'N Tots and #7 Rapala Shad Raps. Colors run the gambit with dark colors seeming to be preferred in low visibility water conditions and fluorescent and flashy colors performing best on bright days with clear water.

The Lake Erie walleye spawning phenomenon has a profound effect on the fish. With millions of trophy walleyes cruising around Lake Erie's western basin, anglers have an unbeatable opportunity to put a walleye on the wall or just catch a

bunch of eaters for the table. With limits set at 10 walleyes per angler in both Michigan and Ohio, fishermen can go home with enough walleye fillets to make a trip well worth the investment. Armed with a working knowledge of the latest tactics, a seaworthy vessel, modern equipment and up-to-date fishing information, walleye anglers have never had it so good.

Additional Information

For up-to-date fishing reports, wave heights, current tendencies and many other useful Lake Erie fishing facts, visit the Michigan Fishing Information page at <http://members.aol.com/mifishinfo> on the internet. Also, pay a visit to www.walleye.com. Of the dozens of charter boats that operate in the western basin, only a handful offer early spring trophy walleye trips. One operation that specializes in catching the biggest walleyes that Erie has to offer is Trophy Specialists Fishing Charters. Phone them

at 800-305-6988. Captain Rocco Papandrea can be reached at 219-262-3370. Monroe, MI lies in the heart of the western basin's spring walleye action. For a list of Monroe's accommodations, area attractions and other trip planning details, call the Monroe Chamber of Commerce at 734-242-3366.



From Eastern, Page 20

If the winds do not cooperate trolling will also work. Trolling should also be done with close contact to the bottom and at a very slow pace. Vary your spinner colors and types. As an example, try using blue, green or silver spinner blades on a sunny day and use colors like red, purple or pink on cloudy days. Planer boards are also very effective because your lure will not be traveling behind the wake of the boat. Walleyes tend to be spooked very easily which accounts for the success of planer boards. If there are a lot of boats in an area trying to move to a different location because the presence of all these boats will quickly spook the fish. If you decide to come up and give it a try, call J. Hanley at 716 549-2232 or W. Elliott at (716) 681-0253 for up-to-date conditions. Good luck
.....

