

Lake Erie Forecast for 2002

by
Captain Phil Cadez

It's hard to believe it's been 31 years since they stopped netting walleye on Lake Erie. Many of you that have fished Lake Erie in the 70s and 80s remember the fabulous fishing we had. The decline in the 90s has

best catches were off Toledo and near the Michigan waters west of West Sister Island. By late May a very large area between the Bass Islands and West Sister turned on and were hot thru mid August.

very hard to obtain limit catches.

The biggest disappointment was the big schools of walleye which returned off Lorain and Huron. In 2000, October walleye fishing was unbelievable with limit catches of



By all accounts, the walleye fishing for 2002 should meet or exceed last years success.

been tough to predict. Blames were put on over fishing, lack of restocking, zebra muscles, goby's and other exotic species that were introduced into our lake from foreign freighters emptying their ballast.

2001 was the first good April fishing in the last 10 years. The

The fishing in the Canadian waters did produce bigger walleyes near Pelee Island in June and July. The consistent numbers were down significantly, no where near the big catches that occurred in 2000. Fishing the structures in Canada always did give up larger walleyes. The charters that ventured over the border found it

fish 4 to 10 lb. Walleye. But 2001 had high winds all of October and the fishing was terrible. Many of the charters moved to Huron Harbor to get in on this great fall fishing but were very disappointed. The smart boat owners pulled their boats earlier because they were worried about the low water. A few storms came in late



Happy anglers from last year. You can bet these guys will be back for more action in 2002.

October and earlier November which blew out all the water in harbors and bays.

Other great fishing areas off Cleveland, Fairport Harbor and Geneva had very tough fishing for walleye in 2001. These fishermen are used to trolling for bigger walleye. The steelhead population was up so it did provide action for these anglers. Most still prefer the good eating walleye to most other fish except the yellow perch.

The smallmouth fishing has been great for many years. Most fish average 2 to 4 lbs and will give you all you can handle on light tackle. Near the Bass Islands, Kelley's or in Canadian waters off Pelee Island was still the best areas. A few anglers used tube jigs in the spring and practiced catch and release, but most of the action came using live softcraws in July, August, September and October.

The yellow perch fishing has been nothing short of fantastic from late April thru October. These tasty fish provided many an angler with super eating. Many "jumbo" perch were caught in the fall of 2001. Vast numbers of boats packed up anywhere these fish had a frenzy.

After a conversation with the Division of Wildlife in Sandusky it gives me great pleasure to give good news on the forecast. The big hatch will be 3 years old in 2001 and will reach 17 to 20 inches and provide many anglers with limit catches again this summer. There's still a few bigger fish out there from previous years which will offer a mixed bag of fish. Another thing was mentioned about a good 2001 hatch. This means good news for years to come.

Smallmouth bass fishing has been super for many years and will remain so for a long time. Lake

Erie has always been one of the top 10 smallmouth lakes in the world. These fish will provide the true sportsmen a good fish with plenty of action.

The perch has been getting better every year. It's hard to believe it can get better than 2001. Using minnows or worms off the bottom in most deeper areas constantly rewards Anglers with their limits of these great eating fish. 2002 should be another banner year.

All of us are looking forward to great fishing in 2002. One suggestion is to try coming in late May thru early August. We've had many bad early fishing days in April and earlier May due to weather. High winds bring water conditions that resemble chocolate milk. Cold water and murky water conditions make it too tough to produce good catches. When the water temperature gets over 60 F is usually when the walleye start feeding the best. Whether you cast or troll you'll enjoy a great fishing day on our lake.

Plan ahead to come to this vacation area. There's lots of charters, ramps for your own good sized boat and motels to stay in. These areas book up months in advance. Don't wait till March or April unless you can come up during the

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Early Spring "Ice-Out" Walleyes

by
Mark Martin

In the fickle Midwest, it's possible, even probable, to have ice and open water at the same time. About now, on the cusp of spring, a frozen surface remains on lakes while floes dissipate from rivers. And it just so happens that the time is right to get in on serious pre-spawn walleye movements in either domain.

There's a surprising similarity between the two despite the seemingly at-odds environments. In lakes and rivers, walleyes are on the move, migrating before the spawn. Their locations are far different from months, even weeks, earlier. Knowing where walleyes will be and how to target them makes all the difference between poor fishing and some of the best of the year.

Frozen Fish Tricks

This is the time of year of late ice, when walleyes are approaching their spawning

grounds. Come late February and into March, I seek out areas near creeks as well as spawning flats



Huge 'Eyes are taken in winter and early spring through the ice or 'around' the ice.

such as gravel and rock reefs, places where walleyes will spawn

before long. The fish move through in waves, shallower than they've been for the previous months. While 30 to 50 feet of water was the deal earlier, now I'm looking as shallow as eight feet, with my preferred depth range of about 15 to 30 feet.

Keys at these depths are changes in bottom composition. It helps to have transitions from soft to hard bottom, especially mud to rocks, gravel and hard clay. The reason is that these spots have more underwater life, more "stuff" growing on them that in turn attracts bait.

It's easy to see the correlation with an underwater camera. When you drill holes and put a camera down, you'll find areas where minnows scoot across bottom from rock to rock. The walleyes are never far behind. I

see both bait and predators with my Vista Cam, which allows me



Vertical jigging in the very early spring is often the most productive technique for trophy fish

to figure out why one hole might be more productive than others. There's always a reason, including food or cover in the form of rocks or bottom debris. The cameras are also handy because you can find out how the fish react to a given jigging motion. To offer a shortcut, I've found that aggressive jigging more often than not spooks walleyes. They like it slower and

more gentle, with frequent pauses. Something more aggressive will draw them in but seldom get them to bite.

I also suggest drilling a lot of holes. It's not uncommon for me to punch dozens of them across an area. Even though I know many of the fishing holes well from open water and find them with GPS

coordinates, there are often little nuances that you can only find with a camera or by fishing. After all, you're not exactly covering water when ice fishing. Save yourself some time and backache with a power auger such as the ones by Strike Master. The new three-blade model with serrated edges lets you drill a bunch of holes in a flash, decreasing the amount of noise you'd otherwise be making later. Get your drilling done with and start fishing. Not only a camera but a liquid-crystal depth finder, I go with the Lowrance X-85, will indicate the presence of fish and their level in the water column.

Spoons and jigs are the best bets for locating fish and continuing to catch them. Northland's Buck-Shot Rattle Spoons call in walleyes from a distance with rattles that are particularly effective in water with a bit of stain. If it's clear, be sure to try holographic colors that trigger walleyes without spooking them. I usually bait the spoon's treble with a piece of minnow for scent and flavor. If I'm on the Great Lakes, where the fish are huge and unabashed, I might hang a minnow off each hook of the treble. Don't overlook jigs, though. A Northland Fire-Ball or Buck-Shot Rattle Jig actively worked in your hand or set as a deadstick are tremendous options. If I'm jigging a spoon with one rod, I always have a deadstick out with a minnow just inches above bottom. Often I'll bring fish in with the spoon but they'll take the jig.

Go With the Flow

Jigging is not lost on river rats who

hit the open water as soon as it's safely possible to dodge icebergs. I'm right there with them.

Similar to the patterns on lakes, river walleyes will be moving in from connecting waters such as the Great Lakes in anticipation of spawning. Baitfish will be on the move as well, another cue for migrating walleyes. In clearer rivers, walleyes will be deeper, at the heads, sides and backs of holes. They'll be along drop-offs and channel breaks. In darker rivers, walleyes will scoot into the shallows, water as thin as three feet, where they're concealed by the turbulence.

Whichever I'm fishing, I always look for warmer water. Discharges from power and other kinds of industry are crucial. They may raise the temperature a couple of degrees, which is enough to concentrate a hot pod of walleyes. Creeks accomplish the same thing as they flow through farmlands and boost the temperature when they enter the river. The warmer water alone is enough to concentrate fish. If you have cover, it's even better. Fish the upstream side and behind rock piles or bumps and depressions on bottom. Be sure to watch on quality electronics for such nuances and get your bait down in any hidey-holes where walleyes are hanging.

Indeed, electronics and tackle are important ingredients when river fishing. On my Lowrance X-15, with its incredible definition, it's possible to see the slightest bumps on bottom, and fish behind and all around them. I'm always certain to anticipate a rise in bottom by watching the electronics, lifting a

jig above it, then dropping it down the back side, where walleyes hold out of the current. All of this, though, is almost impossible without quality rods, reels and line. I like a sensitive wand, something like a six-foot Berkley Series One spinning rod. Your sense of feel will improve with high-quality graphite and allow you to lift your jig over and out of snags when you touch bottom. Take a spinning reel like the Mitchell 300X and spool it with six- or eight-pound Flame Berkley FireLine. The line is easy to see, helping you stay vertical, and it helps sense bottom and light bites.

One of my favorite offerings when vertical jigging for spring fish is the same Buck-Shot Rattle Jig I use when ice fishing. I've seen so many times, especially when the water's turbid or the fishing pressure's heavy, that the rattles are that little something different that triggers strikes. To bulk up an offering for bigger fish and to present a softer mouthful, I'll hook on a three-inch Berkley Power Minnow. The chartreuse ones are dynamite on all river systems I've fished. Most of the time I'll add a minnow, too, but plain plastic works great on rivers, sometimes better than bait. Have one angler in the boat use plastic, another use bait, and let the fish tell you what they want.

When it comes time for March fishing, it can be a little difficult to figure out what you want to do. Ice or open water? Me, I'll take some of each. The walleyes, you see, are moving in anticipation of spring, and I'll go wherever necessary and do whatever it takes to catch them.

Try These Walleye Recipes

Blackened Walleye #1

1/2 tbsp Paprika
1/4 tbsp Cayenne Pepper
1/4 tbsp Thyme
1/4 tbsp Garlic
1/4 tbsp Black Pepper

You can play with the ingredients a great deal depending on your mood, adding white pepper or onion flakes even.

Lay the fish on the mixture on the plate and flip to coat both sides. If the fish is dry, either rinse with a little water or spray a bit of non-stick spray. Then rub the mixture into both sides of the fish.

Now you can either throw the fish on the grill or in a pan and cook roughly 5 to 10 minutes per side (depends on thickness of the fish). Fish should be firm, but not hard when done. The grill is great because it helps sear in the juices leaving a really tender fish when done.

Blackened Walleye #2

1 tsp. paprika
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. onion powder
1 tsp. garlic powder
3/4 tsp. black pepper
3/4 tsp. white pepper
1/2 tsp. cayenne pepper
1/2 tsp. oregano - ground
1/2 tsp. thyme - ground

Melt a stick of butter in a pan. Dip chicken breast (or whatever meat you use) in butter, then sprinkle mixed spices on meat to coat well. Toss in VERY HOT skillet and cook for 3 min. Turn, and cook for another 3 min. Skillet must be white hot. We use a cast iron skillet, heated on a campstove and cooked outside!

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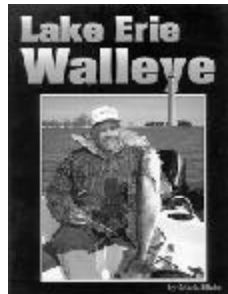
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