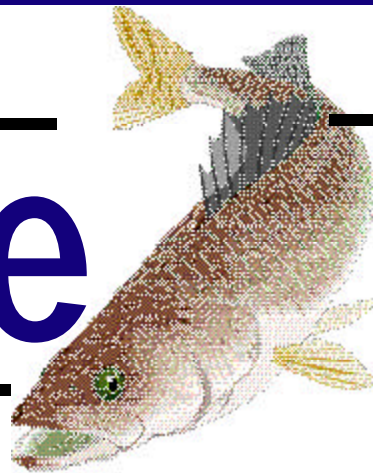


Lake Erie

Walleye



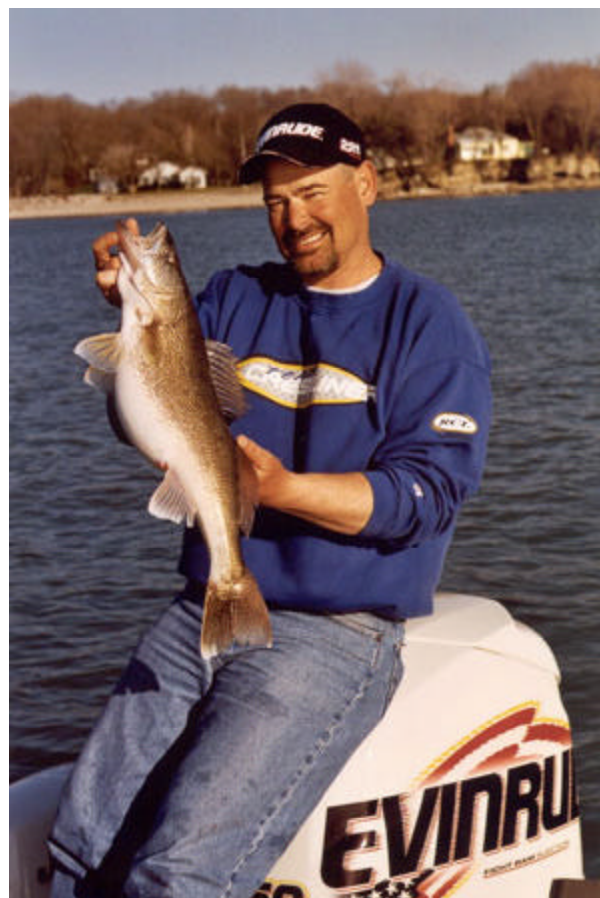
Spring 2004
Vol. 10 No. 1

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The Complete Fishing Scene on Lake Erie

Spring 2004

- Lake Erie 2004 Forecast
- Lake Erie Crankbait Savvy
- Cranking Up Early Season Walleyes
- Hot Spots for Early Walleye Action
- Making a Pitch for Spring Walleyes
- Playing the "Weighting Game" Part 1 -Live Bait Rigs
- Choosing the Right Fishing Line
- Lake Erie Exotic Invaders



Plus

*Walleye News & Fact File
Charter Fishing Information*

*Dockage for Lake Erie Fishermen
Lodging for Lake Erie Fishermen*

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At this writing we're only a few days from Spring. It has been a seemingly long winter. Ice fishing was good on the Lake for those who ventured out. Not me though. As the years progress I don't find sitting in a shed in the cold all that much inviting. Must be the age.

Won't be long now and the ODNR is predicting a good year for walleyes, perch and smallmouth. The 2003 hatch was one of the best on record. Good fishing should prevail for the next few years. Time to be thinking about preparing your boat for the season and about installing the latest gizmo that you may have purchased at the winter sport shows. Personally, I've added a Garmin 238 combination GPS/fish finder to my boat. I couldn't wait for spring though so I purchased a topographic map on CD, downloaded various regional areas close to my home into the data cartridge, and with an automobile power supply and antenna, I was able to use the darn thing all winter in the car. Can't wait to get her on the water though where it really counts!

New fishing regulations take effect this spring. For walleye, the daily bag limit between March 1 and April 30 will be reduced from four fish to three. For all other times, the bag limit for walleye will remain at six fish per day. Other new walleye regulations include a year-round size limit of 15 inches and the elimination of treble hooks in the Maumee and Sandusky Bays during the March-April spawning runs.

See Editor, page 23

Lake Erie Walleye

Rick Kubb, Editor/Publisher

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Walleye News and Fact File

Dead Zone Update Lake Erie Again Battling Areas of Hypoxia

Lake Erie's dead zone has returned again this past summer according to new research in Lake Erie's Central Basin. During a six-day survey in mid-August, scientists on US.EPA's Lake Guardian, found that only 20 percent of monitoring stations had the desired amount of four milligrams per liter (mg/L) of dissolved oxygen in the water. Forty percent of the stations showed less than half that amount. The lowest oxygen concentrations were discovered in the western portion of the Central Basin, where concentrations dropped to .7 mg/L. Over the last two years, Lake Erie has experienced dead zones or areas of anoxia, where oxygen levels in the lake are too low for fish and other aquatic species to survive. Dissolved oxygen concentrations less than 2 mg/L are considered hypoxic and can threaten aquatic life that cannot move from the area.

The key is the amount of phosphorus that goes into the Lake, says Ohio Sea Grant researcher, Dr. David Culver. "The smaller the amount of phosphorus discharged into the lake, the less likely we will have a dead zone."

Unfortunately, even with regulations in place, phosphorus concentrations have been increasing since 1995. "Scientists are beginning to suspect that they might have underestimated the amount of phosphorus still entering the lake from sewage treatment and agricultural runoff," says Jeffrey Reutter, Director of Ohio Sea Grant and Stone Lab. "High levels of phosphorus increase the growth of algae, which in turn, increases the rate of oxygen consumption."

While phosphorus levels may be the key, other factors influence the magnitude of the dead zones. Lake Erie is functioning with less water due in part to global warming and falling water levels. The thickness and volume of the hypolimnion is reduced as water levels drop, resulting in less available oxygen. Thus, if water levels continue to decline, the anoxic area may cover less of the lake's bottom, but arrive earlier and last longer each year.

Another suspect of the Lake's dead zone may be the invasive zebra and quagga mussels. Early research results indicate that as mussels process organic matter, they excrete phosphorus into the water where it is repeatedly used instead of going into the sediments.

Predictions for next year are not encouraging. "Lake Erie has had quite an eventful summer this year," says Culver. It was first pounded by 10 inches of extra rainfall, 30 percent above its average. Then, the largest power outage in the US resulted in millions of gallons of raw sewage discharged into the lake and its tributaries. And at the same time, the western basin saw a growth of algal bloom, one of the largest in recent years. "These large nutrient inputs may mean next year's dead zone will develop earlier," emphasizes Culver.

Its severity, however, will depend on the amount of wind the lake will get in the spring. If the spring is extremely windy, the wave action will cause the warmer upper water layer (epilimnion) to mix heavily with the lower cooler layer (hypolimnion), resulting in a deeper thermocline. The deeper thermocline will mean a smaller volume of oxygen in the hypolimnion and an earlier dead zone.

For more details about the dead zone, request the dead zone excerpt in Highlighted Publications (page 2) or go to the 2002 Sept/Oct issue of Twine Line at www.sg.ohio-state.edu.

This article is reprinted from the September/October, 2003 issue of Twine Line, a publication of Ohio Sea Grant.

Steelhead Trout: A Money Fish for Ohio

Research Finds Steelhead Angling Beneficial to Anglers and Economy

Steelhead trout have been stocked into Lake Erie tributary streams since 1975 through a very successful program administered by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife. The success of the program has grown over the years, resulting in increased stocking numbers and the addition of more streams. During 2003, over 400,000 steelhead smolts were stocked in five Lake Erie tributaries. This program provides Central Basin anglers with the opportunity to catch trophy class rainbow trout (steelhead) during the summer months in the open waters of Lake Erie, and in tributary streams during the fall, winter, and spring months. Over 98 percent of steelhead are caught are in Ohio's two lake districts (#2 and #3) that stretch from Huron to Conneaut.

Creel data is collected annually by the ODNR Division of Wildlife to assess open lake steelhead angler success. During 2002, private and charter boat anglers caught approximately 41,357 steelhead in the open lake; an increase of over 41 % compared to 2001, and the highest on record since the program began. When compared to past years harvest (1995 = 3,500 and 1997 = 4,000) the increased stocking has resulted in a significant benefit to angler harvest. Unfortunately, very little is known about the harvest of steelhead from tributaries.

To learn more about this steelhead stream fishery, Ohio Sea Grant initiated a research effort to survey these anglers during the 2002-2003 tributary angling season. This is the first time an economic survey of Ohio Lake Erie steelhead stream anglers has been conducted. While the state of Ohio and other Great Lakes states have intensive management programs aimed at enhancing the steelhead fishing experience for anglers, little is known about the tastes, preferences, and values of Ohio steelhead anglers. From October 2002 through April 2003, Ohio Sea Grant personnel contacted anglers at popular stream-side locations (from Vermilion to Conneaut) seeking their participation in a survey to better understand steelhead angler fishing habits, economic expendi-

tures, and angling/visitation needs. Anglers were asked basic creel data questions and were also asked to participate in a mail survey related to the day of contact and other seasonal angling questions. Overall, 487 anglers were contacted for survey participation, with 375 surveys returned.

Within the steelhead fishery, most anglers (94%) appear to take single-day trips. Due to the low number of respondents for multiple-day trips, the study has focused on single-day trips. Respondents on single-day trips indicated taking an average of 44 steelhead fishing trips per year. About 72% of the trips individuals take are taken to the site where individuals were intercepted. Most trips are taken in fall of 2002 and spring of 2003, with a smaller proportion taken in winter. This was largely because most, if not all of the prime steelhead fishing streams were frozen solid and unfishable in most of January, February, and much of March 2003.

Anglers indicate that they keep approximately 12% of the fish that they catch (7.1 fish kept vs 58.4 fish caught), and that they eat approximately 49% of the fish they kept (3.5 fish eaten vs 7.1 steelhead kept). Anglers catching relatively few steelhead tend to keep a higher percentage of the fish they catch than anglers who catch large amounts of steelhead. The survey did not consider other types of fishing in which the individuals potentially engage, but it does provide information on the way individuals fish for steelhead. Approximately 65% of steelhead anglers spin cast with bait or artificial lures while a smaller proportion fly fish (30%). The average angler surveyed had 9.0 years experience fishing for steelhead.

Individuals responded that they spend approximately \$26 per trip, with more than 60% of these expenditures within 10 miles of the sites where they are fishing, suggesting that each trip generates nearly \$16 in local expenditures. For just the 311 visitors in our single trip angler sample, taking 44 trips per year on average, this generates \$218,000 in annual expenditures locally on steelhead fishing. It is not possible, unfortunately, to extrapolate the expenditure values to all steelhead anglers since the sampling protocol provides no information on the proportion of the total population that fishes for steelhead. However, if as many as one percent of the 754,704 licensed resident

anglers in Ohio in 2001 fished for steelhead this would give us a total of 7,547 anglers x 44 trips x \$26 = \$8.6 million.

The study explored the factors that affect steelhead catch rates and the value of steelhead fishing in tributaries to Ohio's portion of Lake Erie. Overall, the results suggest that steelhead fishing is a very valuable activity in Ohio. The travel cost model used estimated that the value per trip for anglers taking part in our study ranged from \$36 to \$50.

The study results also made it possible to consider the value of a single fish caught. On average, individuals in the sample catch 1.33 fish per trip. This suggests that the value of each fish caught ranges from \$27 to \$38 per fish. Over all fish caught by the anglers in just our survey (approximately 20,323), the estimated value of catching fish is \$591,300 to \$832,200. In 2002, ODNR Division of Wildlife stocked 411,601 fish, for a cost of approximately \$590,000 per year. These results do not fully capture all benefits of the stocking program, but suggest that the benefits of stocking do outweigh the costs.

While these results suggest that steelhead angling is highly valued by a segment of anglers in Ohio, we cannot fully estimate the benefits for all Ohioans from the limited sample collected. In the future, more thorough data collection would provide information on other anglers who fish for steelhead less frequently. Further, it would be useful to have independently collected creel data to assist in benefit cost analysis of the stocking program. Finally, the results of the survey suggested strong differences in seasonal trips, and access to a variety of sites. Further evaluation of the timing of trips and access could provide additional useful information.

This article reprinted from the November/December 2003 issue of Twinline, a publication of Ohio Sea Grant and was authored by Dave Kelch & Frank Lichtkoppler, Ohio Sea Grant Extension; and Brent Sohngen & Adam Diagneault, Ohio State University.

Fish Ohio's Lake Erie Artificial Reefs!

Lorain

Polish Fisherman's Club Reef

41 28 .076 N
82 12 .758 W

The Mountain Reef

41 28 .150 N
82 12 .750 W

Lakewood

Cuyahoga County Commissioners Reef

41 30 .175 N
81 47 .266 W

1984 Experimental Reef Site "A"

41 30 .271 N
81 47 .533 W

1984 Experimental Reef Site "B"

41 30 .256 N
81 47 .041 W

Cleveland Stadium Artificial Reefs

Edgewater

Cleveland Stadium Reef West #1 (north)

41 30 .148 N
81 45 .575 W

Cleveland Stadium Reef West #2 (south)

41 29 .970 N
81 45 .416 W

Euclid

Cleveland Stadium Reef East (Euclid)

41 35 .933 N
81 33 .804 W

Lake Erie 2004 Forecast

by
Captain Phil Cadez

The weather was very cold in 2003 and again in 2004 for January and February. Most of Lake Erie had thick ice thru this period. Hardy anglers who ventured out on the ice had to have lots of patience. It was hit and miss but some good catches of walleye were reported on the ice. Most of the fish were 17 to 24 inches. A few big females were also offering exciting trophy fishing.

Some true sportsmen that practice catch and release when fishing for small-mouth bass enjoyed some success. The "jumper" population is down mostly because of the goby. These little bug eyed pests are all over any rocky reef, structure and island shoreline. They'll eat the bass eggs and fry when not protected by the spawning grown ups. The Division of Wildlife has closed small-mouth fishing until the last Saturday of June.

The casters enjoyed good fishing west of West Sister Island in later May thru June. There were big walleye caught between Kelley's Island and South Bass dragging the bottom bouncers in May. Mid May and throughout June was great fishing around the reefs in Canada. Catches of 100 pound limits were almost routine.

Ohio's shoreline of Lake Erie enjoyed fantastic yellow perch fishing. From Toledo to Cleveland had great perch fishing from April thru October. Many fish were from 8 to 13 inches offering great eating among the angler's who



fished from the shoreline and especially small boats off shore.

It isn't official yet but the 2003 walleye hatch might be one of the biggest on record. This information was obtained from Travis Hartman, the State Biologist in Sandusky Ohio. All around the islands perch fishermen were

bothered by tiny walleye from 4 to 6 inches. This is about the best news we could have for the future of our Lake. Most of the catches will include the 1999 hatch which will be around 3 pounds or better. All in all should be a great year of catchable good sized walleye.

The changes for walleye limit are 3 per day before May 1, after May 1 the limit is 6 fish in possession. Because of the 30 limit on yellow perch and the regulating of netters 2004 should be a super perch fishing year. The lake is loaded with food for these voracious eaters. Most times we fished for them you couldn't count to 10 before you had a perch bite.

Overall should be a great year. Try to make reservations in advance with an experienced guide. For information you can call 1 800 BUCKEYE. Or get on the web www.odnr.wildlife or you can e mail me at capt.phil@cadez-charters.com . You want to

be here where most of the catchable walleye will be close to 3 pounds. GOOD FISHIN, Captain Phil Cadez.

Lake Erie 2004 Forecast

from

Ohio Department of Natural Resources

Division of Wildlife

Year after year, Lake Erie anglers have experienced some of the finest and most diverse fishing on the Great Lakes and this year will be no different, say fisheries experts with the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife.

"Great opportunities abound for veteran anglers and those new to the Lake Erie fishing scene," said Roger Knight, Lake Erie fisheries program manager at ODNR. "The lake's famous walleye, yellow perch, smallmouth bass, steelhead trout and white bass are again plentiful this year."

Knight noted that good fishing and a large charter boat fleet in the western and central basins, as well as numerous public boat ramps, private marinas, and shoreline access continue to make Ohio's Lake Erie waters a popular fishing destination.

Walleye

The 2004 Lake Erie walleye fishery will be dominated by the 1999 and 2001 hatches. Fish from the 1999-year class will range from 18 to 22 inches and fish from 2001 will range from 15 to 18 inches. Walleye from the 1996 and 1998-year classes will provide 22 to 28-inch fish, with "Fish Ohio" walleye (over 28 inches) being from older year classes. Sampling during the 2003 season found fish up to 21 years old remaining from the large 1982 hatch.

Anglers are reminded that new walleye regulations are in place for the 2004 fishing season. The bag limit during March and April has been reduced to three fish, while the bag limit from May through February remains at six. A new 15-inch minimum size limit is in effect during the entire season. Another new regulation also prohibits the use of treble-hooked lures in Sandusky and Maumee bays during March and April. State fisheries biologists believe the 2003 walleye hatch to be one of the largest in recent history. August and September trawls sampled numbers comparable to the 1982 and 1986 hatches, two of the largest on record. By last September, anglers fishing with shiners were already catching walleye hatched in spring 2003. Individuals from the 2003-year class should reach 12 to 13 inches by fall of 2004. With the new 15-inch minimum size limit in effect, any fish caught from the 2003-year class should be gently handled and released as soon as possible. The fish from the 2003-year class will reach 15 inches during the 2005 fishing season.

Yellow Perch

The excellent perch fishing that anglers have experienced since the mid-1990s should continue through 2004. Fish from the excellent hatch in 2001 will enter into the fishery as 8 to 9-inch fish

just in time for the peak season in August through October. Anglers also had some success fishing for yellow perch during non-traditional months of June and July this past year, especially in the central basin. However, fall is when the catch rates are the highest. Limit catches of large yellow perch should again be attainable during 2004. Ten to 12-inch fish from the 1998 and 1999 hatches and a few Fish Ohio-size fish (over 13 inches) from the 1996 hatch will be available.

Conservative regulations for sport and commercial fishermen, coupled with improved spawning success, have helped Lake Erie's yellow perch stocks to gradually recover after low levels in the early 1990s. Ohio's daily bag limit for yellow perch remains at 30 fish per angler for the 2004 season.

Smallmouth Bass

Excellent smallmouth bass fishing exists in many Ohio areas of Lake Erie. Traditional "hot spots" such as the Lake Erie islands, the western basin reef complex, Sandusky Bay, Ruggles Reef, and harbor breakwalls from Lorain to Conneaut, all produce good numbers of smallmouth bass and also the potential to catch a trophy over 5 pounds. In the spring of 2003, a smallmouth bass weighing slightly less than the state record of 9.5 pounds (caught in the Bass

Islands area in 1993) was caught near Conneaut. Smallmouth bass anglers can expect to land “smallies” from 1993, 1994, 1998 and 1999-year classes, now ranging in size from 14 to 19 inches and weighing 1.5 to 4 pounds.

New smallmouth bass regulations will take effect for the 2004 season. A closed season will be in effect from May 1 through June 26 to enhance reproduction.

Fishing during the closed season will not be unlawful, but all black bass (smallmouth and largemouth) must be immediately released.

The daily bag limit after June 26 will remain at five fish with a 14-inch minimum.

Steelhead Trout

Anglers should look for peak steelhead action on the waters off Vermilion to Conneaut during June through August, with catches measuring 17 to 29 inches. The typical method for capturing steelhead in the open waters is depth-controlled trolling with downriggers or dippy divers with spoons. Many charter guides now offer steelhead charters as an alternative to traditional walleye charters. Once Lake Erie’s steelheads move into central basin streams in the fall, these feisty fish provide additional angling opportunities for wading anglers throughout the fall, winter, and spring months. The ODNR Division of Wildlife maintains this popular fishery by releasing approximately 400,000 steelhead trout each spring in the Vermilion, Rocky, Chagrin, and Grand rivers, as well as Conneaut Creek.

Fishing conditions on Lake Erie can change hourly. Adjusting fishing methods according to current conditions is the key to success. Anglers should take into account such factors as season, cloud cover, water clarity, boat traffic, wave action, and amount of prey fish present. Electronic equipment to mark fish is helpful. Once a school of fish is located, anglers should try various techniques including drifting, trolling, and jigging at various depths in the water column.

The ODNR Division of Wildlife maintains a series of [web pages](#) describing its Lake Erie research and management programs, fisheries resources, and open lake and steelhead fishing reports, maps and links to other Lake Erie web resources.

During the season, ODNR provides an updated, recorded [Lake Erie fishing report](#) at 1-888 HOOKFISH. ODNR Division of Wildlife staff members are available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays at Fairport Harbor (440-352-4199) for central basin information and at Sandusky (419-625-8062) for western basin information. For additional information on lodging, charter boat services, and local launch ramps, contact one of the following lakeshore visitor’s bureaus:

Ashtabula County Convention & Visitors Bureau 800-337-6746
Lake County Visitors Bureau 800-368-5253

Convention & Visitors Bureau of Greater Cleveland 800-321-1001
Lorain County Visitors Bureau 800-334-1673
Sandusky/Erie County Visitors

Bureau 800-255-8070
Ottawa County Visitors Bureau 800-441-1271
Greater Toledo Convention & Visitors Bureau 800-243-4667
Ohio Division of Travel & Tourism 800-BUCKEYE

For additional news check out the [ODNR Press Room](#).

For Further Information Contact:
Roger Knight or Jeff Tyson,
ODNR Division of Wildlife
(419) 625-8062

-or-
Jane Beathard, ODNR Media Relations
(614) 265-6860

This article reprinted courtesy of the ODNR Division of Wildlife

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Lake Erie Crankbait Savvy

Here's the scoop on how and when to use crankbaits on Erie's walleyes

by
Captain Michael Veine

Among avid, Lake Erie, walleye trollers, crankbaits are certainly a primary staple. In fact, crankbaits account for the lion's share of trophy walleyes every year.

That's especially true during the spring when adult walleyes stack up in the Western Basin. Crankbaits come in all shapes; sizes and color schemes to suit just about every fishing condition anglers are likely to encounter. Over the past 15 years, I've chased walleyes in the Western Basin on just about every fishable spring day. Those thousands of hours of experience have taught me some important lessons about crankbait fishing strategies.

The spring of 2003 served up the worst walleye fishing weather and water conditions that I have ever seen on Lake Erie.

With ice persisting into early April followed by a constant bombardment of strong easterly winds, the lake looked like a sea of mud for most of the spring. There were only a few narrow windows of walleye fishing opportunity: The last week of April was good and so were a handful of days during the last two weeks of May. Other than that, it was a bust. In total, I

lost 36 spring charters to the weather. In retrospect, 2002 was my best year ever when we landed 145 walleyes that weighed 10-pounds or more. With a low



exploitation rate last year and seven strong year classes to draw from, Lake Erie's trophy walleye fishery may be at a modern-time high. The bumper crop of eater sized walleyes from the 1999 and 2001 year classes should make for an awesome year indeed and crankbaits will inevitably account for much of that success.

Last year, during late April, the

muddy water finally gave way and the walleye fishing broke loose from Mother Nature's stranglehold. I had nailed down a square mile of active walleyes in about 20' of water along the Michigan/Ohio boarder straight out from Monroe. I was running a mixed spread of crank baits and it didn't take long for the walleyes' preference that day to become apparent. They wanted Storm Hot N' Tots (old style) in Hot Fire Perch pattern. We ran the 1/4-ounce baits 60' behind the Mr. Walleye boards with a one-ounce rubber core sinker helping to take the baits down near the bottom. When I ran a full complement of that offering, we typically had two and three fish on at a time. My clients took several 10-pound walleyes that day and even caught a 48" musky as a bonus, which is quite an accomplishment on 10 lb. test line.

Early Spring

My crankbait selection methodology is based on two factors: The water clarity and the water temperature are both critical elements. During the early spring period, when the surface temperature is below 47-degrees, subtle action crankbaits are a top choice. These baits are known as stick-baits, jerk baits or minnow imitating body baits. My early spring favorites



are, Storms Jr. Thunderstick (old style), Reef Runner Lil' Rippers, Normark's #9 Original Floating Rapala, Normark's HJ10 Husky Jerk and the Mr. Walleye Rattlin' Rogue. These baits are about 3-1/2" and feature a slow rolling, side to side action that works wonders at the slow trolling speeds that cold water temps dictate. My favorite color patterns for early season stickbaits are variations of black/gold and black/silver.

I've also had good luck, from time to time, using chartreuse/silver and fire-tiger patterns, especially when fishing in clear water on sunny days.

During March, when the water temperature hovers near freezing, an extremely slow trolling speed is the key to success. The fish are

rather lethargic, so slowly pulling a stickbait is often deadly. I typically troll at around .5 mph. My 9.9 hp, Mercury 4-stroke kicker motor will idle down to that speed rather nicely. Trolling at slow speeds requires a down-wind trolling attack for best boat control. When the wind blows too fast, I often take the motor out of gear and just drift/troll. If the wind still pushes me along faster than .5, then I deploy drift socks. I use one on each side of the boat anchored from cleats I installed

amidship with the bags dragging along the port and starboard gunnels.

During the first week of April the water temperatures along the near shore waters of Erie typically

warm up into the low 40s. During this period I still run stickbaits, but I increase my trolling speed to .75 to 1.0 mph. If the water is muddy though, I slow my speed down to a crawl again.

Mid-Spring Madness

As soon as the surface temperature gauge on my Lawrance X97 reads 47-degrees, I change my offerings to faster action crankbaits. The #7 Rapala Shadrap is my number one bait at that time. Patterns like shad, black/silver, silver-shad, crawdad and silver/chartreuse are my go-to producers.

My trolling speed, when water temps are in the 47 to 50-degree range, is typically around 1.0 mph. As the water temperature rises into the low 50s, my speed is increased to perhaps 1.5 mph. If the water is dirty then I keep it slower, while conversely speeding up a bit in clear water conditions.

As the water temperature heats to the mid-50s, fast action crankbaits with rattles seem to get more





attention from the walleyes. At that time, lures like Reef Runner Deep Lil' Rippers and RipShads, Rapala Ratting Shad Raps, Cotton Cordell CC Shads and Grappler Shads, Rapala Deep Husky Jerks (DHJ7) and old style Storm Deep Jr. Thundersticks are all good producers. Trolling speeds in the 1.5 to 2.0 mph range seem to produce the best with these flashy, noisy attracter lures. Colors run the gambit with bright colored baits working best in clear water conditions and darker colors turning the walleyes on in low viability conditions. It typically pays to experiment with colors on any given day though.

Late Spring

As April gives way to May, the water temps typically blow past the 60-degree mark. This is when

the mighty Hot N' Tot rules on the Western Basin. I run 1/4 oz. Tots almost exclusively at that time with Crawdad, Perch, Red-Hot-Perch, Black/Gold, Rainbow, Black/Chrome and Captains Choice being my favorites. I still favor the old style, Storm Hot N' Tots and probably have a lifetime supply of them in my tackle boxes. I've also tried the Dave's Kaboom Winning Streak and found it to work very well in similar patterns as my old Hot N' Tot favorites. With Hot N' Tots, I prefer a trolling speed of 1.8 to 2.2 mph. Crankbaiting Tricks to Success

With any trolled crankbait, I make a couple simple modifications to spruce them up a bit. I bend the hooks outward slightly to increase my hookup rate on light biters. I also keep those hooks sticky sharp and replace the hooks often when they show damage beyond acceptance. I use a honing stone to sharpen hooks and before every outing you'll always see me in the back of my boat sharpening hooks, it's that important.

I won't run less than a #6 treble hook on any crankbait. If they come with smaller hooks from the factory, I replace them with my favorite Eagle Claws. I also favor chrome colored hooks on my crankbaits to add more flash.

Anytime I troll with crankbaits, regardless of the type; I always attach a rubber core sinker one rod-length ahead of the lure. This accomplishes several things: First it stops lure fowling debris from sliding down the line to the bait. Second, it allows baits to achieve greater depths with less line out,

which increases hooking power due to less stretch in the line. With less line out, it allows me to set a spread quicker. Those weights make letting line out much more efficient as well.

Rubber core sinkers will also help baits run straighter. Lastly, rubber core sinkers allow baits to hit depths that they otherwise wouldn't be able to achieve. I have sinkers from 1/16 oz. up to 2 ounces. I've caught walleyes off the bottom in water 30' deep using 2 oz. weights in front of crankbaits.

I tune every crankbait before setting it back. I drop in into the water with about six feet of line out and watch how it runs. If the bait sashays off to the side, then I bend the eye toward the opposite direction of where it is pulling. When a lure is running perfectly straight, it will dive deeper and the action will typically result in more fish.

One final trick is to tip the back treble hook with small bits of a night crawler. This tactic will make even the most finicky walleye gulp down your bait with reckless abandon. If you have any questions, email the author at mikeveine@trophyspecialists.com.

Cranking Up Early Season Walleyes

by
Rick Olson

What do early season walleyes really want? The answer may surprise you! You might think it's a jig, or a jig tipped with a minnow, or a live bait rig, and that could very well be. On the other hand there might be something in your tackle box that if given a chance could prove to be absolutely deadly, but is being completely overlooked. So what is it? Why it's a crank bait of course, but not just any old bait.

Early season means colder water temps and cold water walleyes have needs, needs that have to be addressed. Cold generally means slow, like a slower metabolism and a world that's moving in slow motion. With that in mind it would be a good idea to select a bait that can perform at slower speeds, and only the few and proud can actually fit the bill.

Balsa baits like the original Rapala have what it takes to produce a fish attracting wiggle at even the slowest speeds, giving them an edge over most other baits. The buoyancy of balsa combined with the long slim profile and tiny diving

lip of a Rapala creates an unmatched balance that allows the user to work at a snails pace, well almost.



An exception to the rule is the Jointed Shad Rap, which can definitely produce at slower speeds. Its hinged middle section gives the bait an enticing wiggle, and has the added attraction of rattles that are accentuated by the unusual action.

Other plastic cranks like Storm

Thundersticks can produce at all but the slowest of speeds, and definitely get noticed as they too have built in rattles.

The Shad Rap is another fantastic balsa bait but requires a little more speed to be effective and is the next lure in line on the early season "go to list," especially when water temps begin to warm up a bit. The Shad Rap really comes into its own when you move beyond the spawn, and can be counted on to get the job done throughout the rest of the open water season.

The one thing in common with most of these baits is the fact that they are shallow runners and early season walleyes aren't always holding in shallow water. In fact they can be plenty deep, especially right after ice-out. On Lake Francis Case (a big reservoir in South Dakota) for

example, walleyes will often hold in twenty to thirty feet of water or more early in the open water season. Sure there are deep diving crank baits designed to hit that depth on a given trolling run but they lack the attractiveness of a shallow running bait.

The solution is to run a shallow

diver in deep water, but that does require a change or two in the standard trolling tactics. Options include using inline weights ahead of the lure, or trying a weighted line like leadcore.

Leadcore has the edge when it comes to precision as you can specifically target within a six or twelve inch window of the bottom, and do so with nothing but the bait entering that particular zone. It also provides the ability to track your bait and know if it's constantly banging into the bottom or running clean.

Because leadcore possesses little stretch, the stop and go of a bait digging into the bottom is transferred back to the rod tip. By watching the tip you can adjust the amount of line you have out and know just how close you're running at any given time.

The combination of leadcore line and a shallow running bait gives you flexibility, and flexibility is good. This set up allows you to troll through shallow when you want, or deep when you feel the need, and do so without changing baits or lines. Again, getting back to Lake Frances Case; Early season walleyes will often move up into ten feet of water or less under the right conditions, and yet may be pushed back down into thirty feet or more like after a cold front pushes through. You never know for sure just where they'll be and you have to be able to get to it all to be effective. A presentation that lets you run both shallow and deep would be ideal, and is why leadcore is the preferred

method for trolling up early season walleyes.

You can do it all by simply letting out or taking in more line, and then watching your rod tip to make sure you're bait is running where you want it to be. Another advantage to the leadcore program is the ability to use smaller baits, and small is often what giant walleyes are looking for.

The basic set up consists of a longer casting rod with a medium light action tip in the eight to nine foot range, coupled with a large capacity reel loaded with leadcore line. The light action tip is soft enough to expose the details of a properly running bait and because of its bulk you simply can't get enough leadcore on a standard sized reel, especially if you're going to be working deeper water.

An eight or nine foot leader separates the leadcore from the bait and is fastened to the line with a small #18 barrel swivel. The tiny swivel will help keep line twist to a minimum and can actually be reeled through the guides and into the reel without a lot of trouble.

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Hot Spots for Early Walleye Action

by
Ron Anlauf

Where there's a will there's a way, especially if your will is to get in on some early season walleye action. The "way" will depend on where you are, or how far you're willing to travel. There are some exceptional "ways" available to today's anglers throughout the country, and includes some extremely productive river stretches.

In Minnesota you can't have a conversation on early season walleye angling without including the Mississippi River as well as the Rainy River on the Canadian border. The

reason for the inclusion is the fact that those are basically the only options, as the rest of the State's waters remain closed. In Wisconsin it's the Fox and Wolf rivers. In Illinois it's the Maumee, Sandusky and Illinois rivers. The truth is there is probably a fair amount of decent action happening within a reasonable drive for most early season anglers.

Heading for a river in search of ol' marble eyes can be a feast or famine proposition early in the

season, and unfortunately heavy on the famine for most first timers.

However, by reading up on a little pre-trip info you might be able to have your cake and eat it too.

Famine comes into play whenever



anglers fail to adjust to an ever changing river environment, and change is the only constant. Take the ups and downs of early season water levels, add in clarity that can run from clear to pure mud, and then throw in the annual spawning cycle for good measure and you have a scenario that is impossible to set in stone.

The good news is that even with all of those variables you can still be successful if you stay fluid and go with the flow.

According to professional walleye angler and river aficionado Jimmy Bell of Ham Lake, Minnesota;

"The most important factor effecting walleye location during the earliest part of the season is the presence of baitfish. If you can find the bait you can find the walleyes. The more you know about the forage base the better off you'll be.

On pools 2 and 3 of the Mississippi River where I spend a good deal of time the main forage base is shad, which can be readily found with a good graph. I've been using a Garmin 2010C color graph

and have found that it will clearly mark schools of suspended bait as well as anything holding tight to the bottom. Look for schools of bait to hold in front of and behind wing dams, in deeper holes, as well as along any type of current break."

Water levels are another important consideration and can vary greatly from week to week and even day to day, depending on the prevailing conditions. Light run-off and low water levels tend to spread

walleyes throughout a system while heavy run-off and higher levels will bunch them up.

“The higher the levels the more concentrated they’ll be. The process can be slow or quick, depending on just how fast water levels rise. For example: Walleyes that were previously holding in deeper water off the tip of a wing dam may now be packed in tight to shore on the downstream side of the dam, if there’s enough current.

Secondary channels are another hot spot and may be several miles or more downstream from any impeding dam. The key to finding walleyes in secondary channels is current, as they simply won’t hold any appreciable numbers without it.

When water levels peak and are at their highest levels you need to start looking for seams close to shore, instead of the usual major current breaks. A seam is a small current break that can be hard to detect, but may hold plenty of high water walleyes. They become easier to read when there are buds falling, like those that drop from maple trees. The buds will stack up along the edge of a seam and it becomes much easier to detect.”

Water clarity is the next item on the list that has to be dealt with. Just how dark or clear things are will require small but important variations in your presentation. “For the most part when I’m working clear water I’ll probably be pitching light jigs in the 1/16 to 1/8oz range tipped with minnows to the shore, and working them

back through the current break. I’ll also use high vis line to help me keep track of my bait. When a walleye picks up the bait many times the only indication you’ll get is a slight twitch in the line and the high vis line lets me actually see the bite.

Dark or muddy water calls for something else and is when I’ll start using big plastic baits without the benefit of any live bait. Bigger plastic baits provide a larger profile and create more commotion than a smaller jig and minnow, and are an easier target for ol’ marble eyes to hone in on. A plastic bait like a four or five inch lizard can be absolutely deadly at times, and is an option that’s often overlooked.”

Bell also uses the brightest colored baits he can find and will actually take the time to use a special dip to get the desired effect if he feels the need.

“If it’s dark enough I’ll actually jig straight up and down in two or three feet of water and slowly work down river along the edge of a seam. Fish that shallow can be easily spooked and you have to take some extra precaution to prevent that from happening, like running your trolling motor at a constant speed.

Starting and stopping an electric trolling motor can spook fish and may ruin your chances of finding active shallow. Instead, I’ll set the desired speed on my Minn Kota and let it run on constant until I am completely through an area.”

Besides current and clarity there’s that doggone spawning cycle

which can definitely change things and has to be addressed. According to Bell; “When you get close to the spawn look for walleyes to line up near flooded weeds like cane. Walleyes will actually use the weeds to drop their eggs in, and is where most of the river spawning takes place.”

It certainly doesn’t fit the bill of “classic walleye behavior” but tracking studies have shown the phenomenon to be true. See you on the river.

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Making a Pitch for Spring Walleyes

by
Keith Kavajecz & Gary Parsons

Spring, walleyes and jigs ... they go together like “eggs and bacon”. Every year hordes of winter weary anglers put so much emphasis on the spring walleye bite, and for good reason ... it’s a great way to start off the fishing season! Naturally, since rivers are typically the first areas that lose their ice cover and become accessible to anglers, coupled with the fact that walleyes intent on carrying out their annual spawning rituals congregate in predictable areas in rivers, fishing pressure can run high. Often times, because of the concentration of anglers and the relative single-mindedness of the spawn drawn walleyes, anticipation of great fishing often runs higher than actual angler success rates. If you’d like to cash in on some great early season walleye fishing, and bypass the majority of the crowds, begin searching out the fish that are all but ignored by most other fishermen ... the walleyes in the skinny water.

Most spring river fishing is done by vertical jigging while drifting in the current ... at least that’s what you’ll see the biggest number of anglers doing ... and that can be

very productive at this time. It’s not the only way to catch spring walleyes however, and many times it not the best way to score on



these fish. Pitching jigs can be very productive in the right circumstances. Holding the boat on the downstream side of a mid-river sandbar and pitching a jig into the slack water of the current break can yield great results. Pitching to small eddies formed around wing dams, shoreline breaks, rock piles and other similar

obstructions can also put walleyes in the boat. During periods of high water (not uncommon in the spring after a heavy run-off), flooded timber and willows can also provide good jig pitching opportunities.

Although rivers get the bulk of the attention in the spring, they aren’t the only places to catch early season walleyes. You can avoid a lot of on-the-water competition if you can find lakes or reservoirs free of ice cover in the early spring.

Remember, early in the season, shallow water warms up first. This draws in the baitfish, which naturally attracts and congregates walleyes. It’s imperative to keep in mind that not all the walleyes will be in the same stage of spawning at the same time. Those fish that are not zeroed in on the actual duties of spawning will be driven more by feeding

opportunities than by their instinct to procreate. That puts these fish in prime position to be picked off as they feed in shallow water.

On a natural lake for instance, early season walleye location may center around rocky shoals with scattered weeds. Those are the types of places lake dwelling

walleyes go to spawn. Pitching a sixteenth ounce jig tipped with a minnow and swimming it through sparse vegetation can be a dynamite pattern for catching early season fish. Mid-lake reefs, rocky points and gravel bars at the mouths of incoming creeks are also good spots to explore.

Reservoirs can be tough puzzles to crack for many walleye anglers in spring. The fact that reservoir walleyes often exhibit characteristics and behaviors seemingly hybridized from their lake and river cousins seems to confuse many fishermen. It shouldn't. Because most popular walleye reservoirs are large bodies of water, the key is to not be intimidated by the lake's size, and concentrate your efforts on smaller areas that are likely to harbor most of the fish. Early in the year, walleyes migrate "up stream" much like they do in rivers, putting the majority of the fish in the upper ends of the reservoir, or in the furthest reaches of larger arms. Structures such as "stair-step" banks consisting of gravel and scattered rock are prime locations to try. Spots like this are especially good if located close to old river channels. Get a good contour map of the lake; find an area where the river channel bends close to shore, match that area up with the map on your GPS system, and you can drive your boat right to a potential walleye "hot zone".

Much of the success with pitching jigs depends on finding fish, and that's the tough part. When fish are relating to shallow water ... that is water 1 to 4 feet deep on average ... you may not think you can rely on electronics to locate

them, but a good locator does play a key role in finding these fish. As you approach an area you suspect to be good walleye pitching water, make a couple passes over deeper water adjacent to the spot. Look for signs of baitfish in particular, but keep an eye out for "arcs" as well. If there's bait meandering just off the shallow structure, it's a good bet that walleyes will herd the forage into the shallows at chow time. Other factors to consider when searching out good spots to pitch for spring walleyes would be to concentrate your efforts near likely spawning areas of the lake where water warms the quickest. These would include areas such as the northern portion of a body of water (where the water gets the most sun penetration) and protected bays ... especially those with dark bottoms (which absorb heat better) and also offer sufficient hard bottom spots such as gravel, rocks and/or sand for spawning habitat.

Pitching jigs is a technique very few walleye anglers practice with any regularity. This is a precision, finesse presentation that takes the right gear and the right touch to be successful. A pitch is not a cast ... it's more of an underhanded toss. This is not a situation where you're looking to cover a great deal of water. You're straining small areas that are prime for concentrating walleyes. Walleyes in shallow water are usually aggressive feeders, but are still cautious and easily spooked. Stick with small jigs, 1/16th to 1/8th ounce tipped with either a minnow or half nightcrawler. Pitching is also one tactic that lends itself well to using soft plastics such as Berkley Power Jig Minnows or half a Gulp Nightcrawler. The

small jigs enter the water with minimal splash, and provide a very natural action in the water.

Retrieves will vary from angler to angler, but a basic "lift-pause", allowing the jig to settle back to the bottom and reeling up slack before lifting again, is a simple yet deadly action to impart on the bait. The key here is the "pause" which allows the jig to "swim" on a tight line making bite detection easy. Because the jig is being pulled along the bottom throughout the retrieve, short strikes are not uncommon. To remedy this, short shanked, wide-gapped jigs like Northland Tackle's FireBall Jigs, create a compact package that is easier for the walleye to engulf and contact the hook.

Line choice is also a key factor to the presentation. No-stretch Berkley FireLine in 6 pound test (2 pound diameter) offers the ultimate in sensitivity. The bite of an early season walleye can be very subtle, and using a line that telegraphs a light bite all the way to the angler's fingertips is a real asset. Many jig-pitching aficionados prefer using highly visible line like Flame Green FireLine, which helps to increase an angler's ability to "line watch", actually seeing the line move as a fish sucks in the offering before the bite is even felt. In ultra-clear water situations, another good choice would be Berkley's Vanish Fluorocarbon, again in 6 to 8 pound test. The chemical composition of Fluorocarbon makes it virtually invisible under water, and because it has less stretch than monofilament line, it also telegraphs bites very well.

See Pitch, page 23

Playing the "Weighting Game"

Part 1 - Live Bait Rigs

by

Keith Kavajecz & Gary Parsons

Playing the "Waiting Game" ... that's what it feels like we've been doing all winter ... waiting for the ice to be gone and the walleye bite to begin. Well now the winter season is done and it's time to begin looking for open water in the pursuit of fast walleye action. But as we enter another fishing season, there's another game we need to be prepared for if we're going to consistently score walleyes ... the "Weighting Game". So many of the tactics employed in walleye fishing require the use of some sort of weighting system ... jigs, split-shot, slip sinkers, bottom bouncers, Snap Weights, in-line weights, and lead core line all have a place and time that they're most productive. The key is to know what system will work best in any given situation. We could write a book covering all the aspects of weighting systems, but here's an overview of the basics for choosing weighting systems by application.

Many anglers wouldn't think of jigs as a weighting system, but in reality a jig is simply a lead weight connected directly to a hook ... about as basic a weighting system as you're likely to get. While jigs

come in a wide array of styles and designs, for the most part they all do the same thing ... carry the bait down to where the fish are. The



key to being successful with jigs is using them in the right situations. Jigs are best when the bait needs to be presented with precision, on or near the bottom. This can be done by vertical jigging, or by pitching small jigs to shallow structure. In most cases you want to use the lightest weight jig possible to maintain bottom contact.

Besides the bait used to tip the jig hook, other factors that attract walleyes to jigs include the jig's color and the action the angler imparts to the jig. One of the newest trends in jig color is holographic finishes like those found on the Bass Pro line of XPS Walleye Jigs. These types of finishes combine both color and flash for real "eye-catching" appeal. When you need to put the bait right on a fish's nose, few presentations work better than a jig.

Walleyes are notorious for being finicky at times, and when that's the scenario you're facing, a slip-sinker live bait rig is tough to beat. Situations like when fish are relating fairly tight to structure such as points, humps or a channel edge, and seem

to want live bait presented slow and with finesse are ideal for the slip-sinker rig. The bait, be it a minnow, leech or crawler, is allowed to swim freely on a light hook and leader with the sinker, separated from the leader by a swivel, keeping the presentation down in the strike zone. When a walleye takes the bait, the angler can free spool line allowing the fish to move off and get the hook

well into its mouth before the line is tightened and a sweeping hookset drives the point home.

One variable in live bait rigging is the length of leader used. Standard leader length is usually around 24 inches, but if you're fishing very clear water and moving very slowly to tempt biters concentrated in a small area, it's not unusual to use a leader of 4 to six feet or even more. A slip-sinker rig like Northland Tackle's Roach Rig is designed with a moveable "sinker stop" which allows the angler to adjust leader length quickly and easily without retying the entire rig. Fine tune your slip-sinker rig to get just the right weight sinker and leader length and there are few presentations deadlier on finicky walleyes.

Another form of live bait rig that fits into the category of "ultra-finesse" would be the split-shot rig. This is fishing at its most basic ... a hook, line and sinker. It's a great rig to use for fishing bait in sparse shallow weeds, or over rocky bottoms where a heavier sinker would snag up instantly. Pinch the shot onto the line 12 to 18 inches up from the hook, choosing a split-shot just heavy enough to get the bait barely ticking the bottom. The split-shot rig can be cast and slowly worked back to the boat, or it's deadly on a slow drift.

Up to now the weighting systems we've covered are primarily for slow, methodical presentations. But there are times when covering water will not only put your bait in front of more fish, but trip the trigger of many that may ignore a slower moving presentation. No

doubt, one of the most versatile and productive weighting systems any walleye angler can stock in his arsenal are bottom bouncers. Bouncers are basically an inverted "L" shaped piece of wire with a lead weight molded on the longer of the two arms.

Typical bouncer weights run from 1 to 2 ounces, but they are made in a wide range of weights from 1/4 ounce models for finesse bouncer presentations to 4 or 5 ounce models for fishing quickly in deep water. The design of the bottom bouncer helps make them relatively snag resistant, one reason they have grown in popularity especially for anglers fishing large reservoirs and rivers where rocks and timber tend to eat lesser presentations. Bouncers can be run with a plain snell and live bait for ultra-slow trolling in deep water or drifting mid-depth flats. However, the more popular presentation is to dress the bouncer with an in-line spinner tipped with a nightcrawler and trolled over structure at speeds in the 3/4 to 1.5 mph range. Match your bouncer weight to the depth and speed you're fishing so that the bouncer runs at about a 45 degree angle from the rod tip and the bottom arm of the bouncer is just ticking bottom. Then it's merely a matter of covering water until a fish grabs hold.

One adaptation of the bouncer that is really catching on in walleye circles is the use of sliding bottom bouncers. Marrying the best traits of the time-tested slip-sinker with the versatility and effectiveness of the bottom bouncer, slip bouncers like Northland Tackle's Rock-Runner Slip Bouncer are proving

to be "The" live bait weighting system on walleye waters everywhere. The beauty of such a system is the ability for the angler to fish a piece of structure with a finesse presentation, but do so quicker and more snag-free than would be possible with a conventional slip-sinker rig. Once fish are contacted, the angler can instantly switch gears and fish much like he would with a slip-sinker rig, hovering over the fish, feeding line once a fish hits before sweeping the hook home. Once you get the hang of fishing bottom bouncers, fixed or sliding, you'll quickly learn why they are walleye fishing's most versatile weighting system.

Many trolling presentations used for walleyes utilize various weighting systems too. In Part 2 of this series, we'll cover the different methods of adding weight to your trolling set-ups to help you dial in your baits to the perfect depth and get you hooked up with more walleyes.

Editors Note: If you have questions or comments on this or other articles from Gary Parsons and Keith Kavajecz, visit their website www.thenextbite.com.

Choosing the Right Fishing Line

by
Justin Hoffman

The strongest, and most fragile link you have between yourself and a fish is undoubtedly your fishing line. Choosing an inferior product in order to save a few bucks, or picking the wrong style for the type of fishing you do, can lead to heartbreak when out on the water. So what are the best lines to choose and when should you use them? The following will hopefully explain the subtleties of the common "fishing line."

Monofilament

Monofilament is the most commonly used line when it comes to fishing, and is a mainstay on the majority of angler's reels. The one problem many anglers make the mistake of is buying the cheapest mono they can find. In fishing, you normally get what you paid for, so spend a little bit extra and buy a reputable brand. Berkley Trilene, SilverThread, Stren and Ande all have proven track records, and make a high-quality line. It is also important to change your line regularly - at the bare minimum once a season - as the sun and water will break down the line, leaving it weak and partial to breakage.

Mono is a great line to choose when you are faced with clear water conditions. This type of line is virtually invisible once it is under the water's surface, and can really up your odds for "line-shy" fish and those with excellent eyesight. Mono can be used for virtually every fishing situation you may encounter, and it is generally regarded as the best all around fishing line for all situations. (Braided lines fill some of these cracks when it comes to specific techniques.)

Monofilament will stretch a fair bit on hook sets, so extra force is generally required to drive the hook home. (Compared to the no-stretch traits that braided lines have, where less force is definitely needed.) Mono is generally a strong line, most are extremely abrasion resistant and are thin in diameter. One problem that many find with mono is the "reel memory" that this type of line has. Coils and loops are common occurrences for the mono angler, which can lead to backlashes and knotted lines on reel spools. One remedy for this unpleasant aspect is to make sure you are using the correct line weight for the reel size you are using. Unless you are doing Great Lakes salmon fishing with a spinning reel, the maximum line strength I suggest for freshwater applications is ten-pound test. Anything higher and coils, backlashes and tangles will rear their ugly heads. Your distance and accuracy will also suffer by going above this recommendation. Anything higher than ten-pound test is best fished on a baitcasting reels. There are certain situations and styles of fishing that afford some leeway in this generalization, but for most anglers chasing bass, walleye or panfish, this advice will make your fishing much more enjoyable.

The Braided Lines

Braided lines have come on strongly over the past few years, and more and more anglers are realizing the advantages these lines possess for specific situations and techniques. Braided lines are made by "braiding" or "weaving" fibers of a man-made material like Spectra or Mi-

cro-Dyneema into a strand of line. This process produces a line that is very strong, extremely abrasion resistant and has virtually no stretch whatsoever.

They are also extremely thin in diameter in comparison to the equivalent monofilament pound-test rating. What this means is that you are to choose a braid in a similar line diameter to the mono you would normally use - not the pound-test that you would use. If you generally use ten-pound test mono, the equivalent braided line might have a thirty to fifty-pound rating.

Two of the most popular braids on the market would have to be Power Pro and Spider Line. Both make highquality products. One other thing to consider is the price of braided lines. It can be two to three times as pricey as regular mono, but it doesn't have to be changed as often. The majority of anglers leave a backing of mono on their reels and tie on 50 or 75 yards of braid to fill the spool up. This will also save you money in the long run.

Braids also have some interesting characteristics that can be both good and bad. Due to the "no-stretch" capabilities of the line, a simple flick of the wrist is often all it takes to set the hook into the mouth of a fish. Rear back like you do with mono and you very well could break your rod, line or hook. Although the newer braids have come along way since their inception, they can still wear down equipment such as line

See Fishing Line, page 23

Lake Erie's Exotic Invaders

by
Tom Marks

Lake Erie and all the other Great Lakes have been put through a lot of stress due to human activity. We have dumped chemicals, sewage, and over harvested the fish. Lake Erie in the sixties was considered almost dead. We began to recognize the damage we were doing and passed laws to reduce pollution and set limits on the amount of fish we could harvest. However, we failed to recognize the most serious threat to the Great Lakes' ecosystem, exotic species. We had clues over one hundred years ago as to how serious the threat could be but we failed to recognize the signs.

When the Erie Canal was built in 1812, it opened a path to Lake Erie and the upper Great Lakes for the sea lamprey. The lamprey invasion was slow but by the early 1900's, it became well established and it decimated the lake trout in the upper Great Lakes, in Lake Erie, lake trout became extinct. Sea lamprey not only decimated the lake trout, the lake white fish, and lake sturgeon were greatly impacted by this invader.

The Welland Canal was built in 1829; it opened another doorway for lamprey, and other non-native fishes, such as the smelt, and the alewife to expand their ranges into the Upper Great Lakes. We are now so used to seeing smelt and alewives we have become to accept them as native fish, however their appearance has been to the detriment to the ecosystem. The smelt and alewife replaced native forage fish. Smelt are not as nutritious and actually have had a negative impact

on the spawning success of walleye and any other freshwater game fish that feed on them. Smelt are rich in the enzyme, thiaminase, which breaks down the B vitamin essential for the larval development of walleye, lake trout and other fry. The fry are less robust and more likely to die from environmental stresses and diseases.

If you are old enough to remember the shad die offs during the 1960's, you will also remember that we introduced salmon (another exotic species) into the lake to remedy the problem. The margined madtom, a small baitfish, was accidentally released into the lakes as bait. So we not only have exotics entering the ecosystem by canals, some are being introduced by us intentionally or accidentally. Every time this happens and the animal becomes established they are here forever; and their presence displaces a native animal.

The invaders who came through these doorways into the upper Great Lakes were serious and should have awakened us to the problem of exotic invaders but it didn't. With the globalization of trade, another vector for species introduction was opened. Ships carrying cargo need ballast water onboard to optimize the ship's displacement to keep it from being top heavy when traveling empty. When a ship loads up with cargo, (grain or, steel) it dumps the ballast. Ships trading between ports in Europe, the United States and Canada are constantly filling their ballast tanks and then emptying them. Every time the tank is filled from a harbor, the pumps suck in

some of the creatures that live there. When the ballast is dumped usually in another port, the creatures are dumped with the water. If the conditions are okay for the new arrivals, they flourish. Usually the transferred creatures into a new ecosystem have no natural enemies thus increasing their odds for successful survival.

The wake up call for the Great Lakes came in the late 1980's when zebra mussels were discovered near Toledo Ohio. When they were discovered they already were well established now they are every where. Since that time 160 new exotic species have been identified in the Great Lakes and it is estimated that a new species is introduced every six months. The list of exotics continues to grow.

Since the introduction of sea lamprey, we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to combat it and to undo the damage it has done to the lake trout. The sea lamprey control started in 1958 the US. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) started treating lamprey spawning sites. The initial treatments cost about \$6 million per year and the cost is rising. The USFWS last year spent over \$36 million for lamprey control in the Great Lakes, one treatment on the Marquette River last year cost \$500,000. It has cost millions of dollars to treat power stations along the lakes for zebra mussels that plugged their water intakes. It has cost companies using water directly from the lakes or Niagara River millions of dollars because

zebra mussels clogged heat exchangers and plumbing. The cost of these two exotics on our economy is staggering; we have spent hundreds of millions of dollars and because it will never go away the cost will have to be borne by our children and generations to come. Sea lampreys are here forever as well as the zebra mussel, and 159 other exotic species.

After the walleye rebounded in the early 1980's from overharvest and pollution earlier in the last century again in the walleye population is in decline. Exotic species continue to affect the ecosystem and are contributing to the sharp decline in the fishery. Fishery managers are struggling to keep the walleye and other native fish populations from collapse. The spiny and fishhook water fleas, which have been introduced in just the past few years, are displacing native zooplankton creating an imbalance in the lower level of the food chain to the detriment of our native fish. Once an exotic species gets a foothold they are here to stay there is nothing we can do.

What other invaders could be in the ballast water? What about harmful pathogens, could a new epidemic be in the hold of some ship's ballast water? Recent studies of ship ballast water have found hepatitis A virus, *Vibrio cholerae*, salmonella spp, *E. Coli*, cryptosporidium spp, giardia and enteroviruses. Through DNA, testing it was shown these pathogens did not originate in the Great Lakes but they were from places like India, and Eastern Europe. Some of the pathogens were resistant to common antibiotics. In Third World countries, there is less control of the use of antibiotics and "germs" have evolved and developed resistance to many drugs.

We have seen the damage that

chemical pollution can do to our waterways. In the 1960's, Lake Erie was declared dead because it was chemically polluted with industrial waste and from untreated sewage run off. When scientists figured what was causing the decline of the fishery and water quality, there were a multitude of regulations and laws passed to correct the problem before the lake actually died. Phosphates in soaps, a fertilizer in the aquatic environment were banned, sewage treatment plants constructed eliminating septic system runoff into the lake, legislation was enacted stopping industries dumping their chemical waste into our waterways and the list goes on. It did not take long to see the results of the actions taken. When the chemical pollution was stopped, the water almost immediately started to improve. Even the most dangerous chemicals like PCBs and mercury would get chemically bound up in the sediments and be removed from the food chain if left undisturbed.

The invasion had been going on since the Erie Canal was built however more recently it has accelerated with the worldwide trade and larger ships. The unfortunate thing about this biological pollution is that if you were stop any further non-native species introductions the lake will not return to what it was before. Unfortunately, with this form of pollution, the damage is permanent. The exotic species invasion is the single greatest threat to the Great Lakes ecosystem. Now that we have identified the paths for the exotic invasion, it is time to plug the holes.

So what do we do? We can not let the status quo continue the risks are too great. It is estimated that a new species becomes established every six months. The ecosystem could collapse, we could lose many of our

native fish, or hazardous pathogens could be introduced with the potential of causing epidemics. The solution is simple, stop the exchange of ballast water in the Great Lakes. In the New York State Senate there is a bill S02567 (already passed unanimously by the Assembly) which needs to be passed and signed into law. This bill will not solve the problem completely but it will call attention to the issue and that New York wants federal legislation that will stop the invasion. In the Congress the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act of 2003 is stuck in committee. This act will address some of the concerns, it needs to be voted on and passed. However I feel it is weak and if we want to solve this problem, the final solution will be to ban all exchanges of ballast.

The solution is rather simple. Much like what the Federal Government did for automobile emissions. They established a standard and set the timetable to reach it. The Government did not legislate what technology nor did they engineer the solution, it was left to the auto manufacturers. The standard for our Great Lakes should be "no tolerance for exotic species introductions". All ships entering the Great Lakes system will have their ballast tanks sampled at the point of entry whether they have ballast water or not. We need to keep samples of ballast water or the tank sludge from each ship traveling the Great Lakes. The samples of ballast water and sludge will be available for university research and study. A portion of the samples will also be available if needed for evidence in litigation in the event damages are claimed due to the introduction of invasive species. There are only a couple shipping companies running the ships on the Great Lakes, and Lloyds of London insures all of them. Once

See Exotic, page 23

From Editor , page 2

To help boost smallmouth bass reproduction, a closed season was also approved for the months of May and most of June, when the popular sport fish are laying eggs and guarding nests. Anglers will be able to legally pose smallmouth bass beginning the third Saturday in June.

These regulations can only help make things better for all Lake Erie anglers for the future. Conserving Lake Erie's fishery resources is critical. We all know what happens when conservation is not practiced. Remember the Blue Pike???

Let's go fishing!!

From Pitch, page 17

As for the best rod and reel combos for jig pitching ... the same spinning combo you'd use for vertical jigging will also fit the bill for pitching jigs. A good sensitive graphite rod like the Bass Pro Shops Walleye Angler Signature Series model WX60MLJSH (6 foot, medium light action) does a nice job.

We know it's been a long winter and getting in on the spring walleye bite has been something you've thought about plenty over the past few months. But there's no reason to have to fight the crowds floating down the river in order to boat yourself a bunch of nice walleyes. Follow the path less traveled and head for the shallow water. You just might pitch your way to the best start to the fishing season you've ever had.

From Fishing Line, page 20

guides and reel arms due to their strong makeup. Make sure that your equipment is capable of handling this tougher line before you spool up. Reel memory is also in sharp contrast to mono - there is none. This can mean smoother casts and less chance of backlashes and tangles.

Specialized techniques is where braided lines really shine, and things such as jigging, crankbaits and topwaters are all areas that braids can improve your fishing. When jigging with braids, you are able to feel every piece of structure, weed or light bites. And you have a direct and immediate hookset without the stretch. Crankbaits will dive deeper and feelings will be heightened through the use of braids. And since the line floats, topwater fishing can be done more easily and efficient. (One key is to not pull the lure away due to the no-stretch braid.)

Fishing line has come a long way since it's inception, and new strides are being made each year. Consider these tips the next time you're in the "line aisle," and watch your angling skills grow in leaps and bounds.

From Exotic, page 21

the insurance company realizes the potential settlement damages they could have to pay, (the Tobacco Settlement was billions of dollars) the shippers will be forced to keep ballast out of the lakes by their insurer.

The exchange of ballast water directly with the Lakes could be banned altogether. No exchange in this case means "no dumping into or no drawing water from" the Great Lakes or tributaries. This will insure no exotics via ballast water will be introduced, thus protecting the environment. We could provide the infrastructure for ships to get ballast and a means to dump without exchanging any water with the lake. The ballast has to be isolated from the ecosystem. Again this is simple all that is required is a couple tanks similar to what is located at any oil refinery to store crude oil be made available at each port. In the ballast situation, a ship would exchange ballast water with water in the storage tank at each port. The water could be treated with a biocide so that if there were accidental leakage no exotic species would be introduced.

Lake Erie and the Great Lakes ecosystem are unique, there is no other, and it can not be reproduced or replaced. Every time a new exotic species is introduced, we loose forever a part of this priceless ecosystem. Finally, the only way to get the action required is to write our elected officials and tell them our concerns.