

Wide Open Walleyes

by
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It's happening all around us, and there is nothing we can do to stop it. Rather than trying to stop it, one would be far better off accepting it and reacting accordingly. But before you react you have to believe and believing requires a good dose of open mindedness, and letting go of some of the old ideas about traditional walleye location.

What many anglers have a hard time accepting is the fact is that walleyes will often suspend far off the bottom, relating to nothing but their next meal. Just about anywhere you find walleyes there's a chance that a good portion of them will sprout wings and lift up and off the bottom, where they now enter the "suspension zone".

From natural lakes to the Great Lakes, and even reser-

voirs, walleyes will often suspend when the conditions are right. On some bodies of water walleyes

may be riding high one day and belly to the bottom the next. On others, like Erie, it's unusual to find them any other way than suspended, especially during the summer months.

Suspension is triggered by a high riding food source, like shiners, shad, alewives, ciscoes, and even perch. As seasonal temperatures continue to increase and mid lake temperatures begin to pop up, things start to happen that get the whole process going. Those warmer temps can spur plankton productivity as well as trigger insect hatches, all of which will attract the aforementioned baitfish, which in turn will pull in ol' marble eyes like a magnet. Wherever a solid bait source is found, you can bet the walleyes won't be far behind, even it means leaving classic structure like rock humps and quick drop offs in the dust.



The author with a trophy taken on a trolling run.

Once you've accepted the fact that it can happen, the next step is determining what to do about it.

Methods for rounding up suspended walleyes can vary, but the most efficient presentation is trolling with either crankbaits or spinners.

Some anglers have experienced success by using floating jig heads tipped with live bait and using extra long leaders, like twenty feet or more. It's a method that approaches walleyes from the bottom up, and can be effective when dealing with small groups of walleyes confined to small areas. While possibly effective, this method loses its appeal when dealing with walleyes that are suspended way off the bottom, or when you have acres and acres of water to cover and only so much time to get it done. In that case it would make more sense to opt for a faster more efficient approach, and is where trolling crankbaits and spinners come in.

Crankbaits in particular allow for a quick trolling pace and includes speeds up to three mph or more, which allows anglers to cover the maximum amount of water in the course of a day.

Selecting a crankbait starts by picking one that you have faith in, and feel confident that if you run it past a walleye with an appetite that it will be accepted. It also includes selecting a bait that will run at a particular depth, especially if you're graphing most of the fish in a narrow band. There are several books and charts that are readily available, like Precision Trolling, that give specifics of particular baits which can help

greatly with determining running depth.

Confidence baits that lend themselves well to tackling suspended walleyes include Shad Raps, RS Shad Raps, Down Deep Husky Jerks and Storm Deep Thundersticks. There are certainly more but this line up will handle just about any situation you may be faced with and gives you the luxury of knowing that what you have to offer has been proven effective on walleyes throughout the entire country.

Spinners can also provide for a quick trolling pace, especially if you employ blades designed to perform at warp speed. Willow leaf blades are on top of the speed blade pile, while deep cupped Colorado's would be on the bottom. Colorado spinner rigs can't take the pressure of a high speed run and will spin out, resulting in a twisted up mess, and of course no fish.

The problem spinners present is; Just how in the world do you get one to run at a particular depth? Spinners by themselves are shallow running and will need some sort of weight to achieve any kind of depth. There are several ways to get the job done but experience has proven that the easiest method includes the use of an in-line weight and an eight or nine foot leader.

The in-line weight keeps the whole process simple, and simple is good. To vary depth, you can either vary the size of the weight your using or vary the amount of line you let out.

The ability to determine exact running depth comes with practice, but getting close can be as easy as finding out how much line it takes to get your rig to the bottom and adjusting from there.

For example; If it takes one hundred feet of line to get your bait to the bottom in forty feet of water, at your given speed, it will take about fifty feet to get it to run at twenty feet, and so on and so on. The thing is, you hardly ever have to have your bait running at an exact depth to be productive as you will probably never find all of the walleyes holding at the exact same depth at the same time.

Another consideration is the fact that suspended walleyes can be extremely spooky and a pair of trolling boards may be in order. In-line boards are relatively inexpensive and easy to use, and will help get your baits out and away from the boat, where you're more likely to encounter active fish. Another advantage to using trolling boards is the ability to increase the amount of the coverage area by spreading out your baits, and allowing you to take a wider swath.

It's easy to be confused with the whole suspended phenomenon but don't let it bother you.

The thing to do is relax, as it's not and exact science, and you don't have to be perfect to be successful. However, to be successful you do have to give it some time, and it could easily turn out to be time well spent.