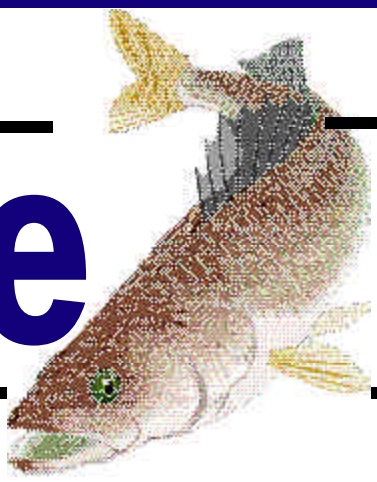
Lake Erie Walleye



Summer 2003
Vol. 9 No. 2

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The Complete Fishing Scene on Lake Erie

Summer 2003

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- Amazing Lake Erie Fishing Stories
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Plus

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Lodging for Lake Erie Fishermen

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From The Editor

It's June and finally beginning to feel like summer. Fishing reports have been very good so far this year, when the weather has cooperated. Nothing can spoil a planned long weekend of Lake Erie Fishing like a good old three day blow from the North!

Walleye numbers are holding up well and there are plenty of fish to be caught. The next couple of years might be tougher though, with the reported recent poor hatches of walleye and perch. The jury is still out on that though.

Did you take your Father fishing this past Father's Day? What a wonderful way to spend a day with Dad on the water.

The Braggin' Board at www.walleye.com/braggin.htm is setting records of its own with many individuals sending in nice photos of walleye. We really do appreciate these and will post as many of them as we can. Keep those pics coming our way.

We hope you're enjoying the new "Online" format of Lake Erie Walleye Magazine. The Summer 2003 issue marks the second issue where we are delivering all of the content online and not printing and mailing to subscribers. We hope that you'll continue reading the magazine and renew your subscription, when it comes due.

Make sure to visit the www.walleye.com/walleyecomshopintro.htm where you can purchase Michigan Stinger Scorpion Spoon, fishing maps, hats and more. Till next time, good fishing!

Lake Erie Walleye
Rick Kubb, Editor/Publisher
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Walleye News and Fact File

Studies Focus on Fish-Eating Cormorants on Great Lakes

The double-crested cormorant has gone to the head of the bird class in expanding its population, gaining the attention of wildlife researchers and frustrating a great number of sport fishermen.

You know the cormorant, don't you? The feathered fishing machine is becoming more plentiful. Tens of thousands nest at the Great Lakes and the birds frequently are seen at inland lakes.

The large dark-colored cormorant, 30 to 35 inches long, has a tapered, streamlined shape with legs and feet set far back on the body. Cormorants are powerful divers and swimmers. They eat a lot of fish. What fish?

Sport fishermen fear they are consuming perch, walleyes and bass. The anglers probably would be pleased if the birds ate sheepshead and carp.
Wildlife researchers are assessing the food habits of cormorants at the Great Lakes. Results of some of this research were outlined last week in Columbus at the 43rd Ohio Fish and Wildlife Conference. Michael T. Bur of the Great Lakes Science Center at Sandusky, a researcher, said as of last count, two years ago, nesting cormorants at the Great Lakes numbered 115,000 pairs. He said the population is growing at a rate of seven percent a year.
Bur's research has been at West Sister Island. It's one of three Lake Erie islands where nesting cormorants are concentrated.

At West Sister cormorants were captured live and outfitted with a transmitter that allowed the scientists to tract the birds' feeding habits. A percentage of the birds collected were examined to learn what they ate.

Shad, a baitfish, is the species most often consumed, followed closely by freshwater drum (sheep shead) and shiners, according to the study. Well down the list in fish eaten were white bass, yellow perch and walleyes.

Bur did not speculate on why shad and sheepshead ranked first and second in the diet. It might be they are more accessible in deep waters offshore from West Sister.

Another research project at Lake Ontario cited disclosed that the yellow perch is the second leading food target of cormorants offshore from Little Galloo Island. Alewives, a baitfish, are the leading source of food for the Lake Ontario birds, Bur said.
Also learned at Lake Ontario is that the growing number of feeding cormorants may be associated with a decline in the population of smallmouth bass less than two years of age.

Little Galloo Island has become the home of about 10,000 nesting cormorants. Many trees on Galloo have died because the birds use twigs and leaves for their nests and bomb what's below them with their excrement, killing that vegetation.

Bur said the loss of trees at Galloo has required the cormorants to adjust. "Now they are nesting on the ground," he said.

The situation at Lake Huron, where other research has taken place along the north shore between St. Ignace and Detour Village, was not reviewed. Sport fishermen in that area blame cormorants for wiping out what was once considered the greatest perch fishing in the United States.

Cormorants are protected from hunting under laws set by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, but shooting the birds would not put a dent in their population, the researchers say.

What does work is oiling the eggs during the nesting period. The wildlife service granted a permit for an oiling test project at Lake Ontario and it worked.
Bur said he did not believe the service would honor

many requests for these permits.

Reprinted, courtesy of Southtowns Walleye Association. Article written by Jim Robey, outdoor columnist for the Dayton Daily News. Write him at Sports Dept., Dayton Daily News, appeared in April 2003 Fishline.

Study Shows Fish Cannot Feel Pain

A large-scale (no pun intended) study conducted by James D. Rose, a professor of zoology and physiology at the University of Wyoming, has concluded that fish do not feel pain. Awareness of pain depends on functions of specific regions of the cerebral cortex that fish do not possess. Previous studies that indicated fish can feel pain had confused "Nociception" – responding to a threatening stimulus – with feeling pain. For more information, refer to the complete article, The Neurobehavioral Nature of Fishes and the Question of Awareness and Pain from the journal Reviews in Fisheries Science, 2002, vol. 10, no. 1 pp. 1-38.

Lake Erie 2003 Harvest Quotas Set

Harvest quotas for the 2003 Lake Erie walleye and yellow perch fisheries have been set by the Lake Erie Committee of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission and will remain largely unchanged from the previous year, according to the Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) Division of Wildlife.

This year, the entire lake's annual harvest quota of walleye is again set at 3.4 million fish, while the yellow perch quota is up slightly to 9.9 million pounds.
The Lake Erie Committee is made up of fisheries managers representing Ohio, Michigan, Pennsylvania, New York and Ontario. Each year this committee sets the Total Allowable Catch (T AC), which reflects the number of fish that can be taken from the lake without harming these populations.

"By pooling our resources to monitor and manage this great fishery, we're cooperatively working to attain healthy fish populations and an equitable distribution of fisheries benefits among our member agencies," said Roger Knight, ODNR'S Lake Erie Committee representative.

"Two years ago, we committed as a group to lowering the walleye quota to allow this species at least three years to rebuild its population," said Gary Isbell, fish management and research administrator for ODNR's Division of Wildlife. Isbell noted that since 2001, the walleye T AC has remained at 3.4 million fish.

Each state is allotted a share of the total allowable catch, determined by a formula based on surface area within each jurisdiction. Ohio and Ontario receive the highest quotas because their waters encompass the highest percentage of the lake. Of the 2003 quota, Ohio's share is just over 1.7 million, about 51 percent of the total. Ontario's share is just under 1.5 million walleye, about 43 percent of the total allocation. The remainder is shared by New York, Michigan, and Pennsylvania.
Ohio's daily bag limit for walleye caught in Lake Erie and its tributaries will not change. Anglers may harvest four fish from March 1 through April 30, and six fish from May 1 through the last day in February per angler.

Sport fishing on Lake Erie is a catalyst that draws anglers from all across the nation and helps boost local economies all along the lakeshore.

"Last year, walleye fishing got off to a slow start because of the cold and rainy spring weather, but anglers saw improvement as the summer progressed," said Isbell. "We anticipate anglers experiencing a better season this year, with good numbers of 19 to 22-inch walleye from the 1999 hatch, many 13 to 15 inch fish from the 2001 hatch, and some 24 to 27-inch fish from the 1996 hatch," he added.

This three-year conservation effort for walleye follows the similar successful action taken by the Lake Erie Committee to boost the population of yellow perch. The perch population is improved to the point the Lake Erie Committee slightly increased the 2003 total allowable catch for yellow perch to 9.906 million pounds, up from 9.333 million pounds in 2002.

Yellow perch quotas for individual jurisdictions surrounding the lake are based on a different sharing formula than walleye, involving surface area and past fishing performance. Ohio's share of the 2003 perch allocation is 4.3 million pounds - about two hundred thousand pounds above last year - and is allocated between sport and commercial fisheries.

See Fact File, Page 35

Ohio Lake Erie Fisheries Report For 2002

Summary and Excerpts from the March 2003 report by the Lake Erie Fisheries Units of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife

Note: Tables and figures quoted in this summary can be found in the full report. The full report is available as a PDF document on the ODNR web site at: http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/PDF/estatus2002.pdf

Overview

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources' Division of Wildlife manages sport and commercial fisheries within the 2.24 million acres of Lake Erie under Ohio jurisdiction. In this report, we summarize research, assessment, and other projects conducted by our fisheries research stations at Fairport Harbor and Sandusky through calendar year 2002. These projects provide fishery harvest and effort information, baseline stock assessment data for important sport and commercial fish species, and information on howvarious parts of the food web are responding to changes in the Lake Erie ecosystem. This report is intended to accomplish several objectives: 1) provide timely fisheries information to user groups, resource managers, and the general public, 2) serve as a repository for fisheries and stock assessment data, and 3) fulfill reporting requirements for our Federal Aid projects on Lake Erie. Below is an overview of thecurrent status of five key fish species, followed by a summary of projects conducted on Lake Erie in 2002.

Walleye

Adult abundance continues below the annual average for the 1990s. The 2002 Ohio sport harvest of just over 702 thousand walleye was lower than expected, due to lower than long-term average angler effort throughout Ohio waters and poor spring weather. Only the western basin anglers had lower catch rates than the previous year. The good 2001 year class will enter the fishery this year, offering hope for improved harvest and catch rates; however, the very poor 2002 year class will not help in the future rehabilitation efforts. As active participants of The Great Lakes Fishery Commission's Lake Erie Committee, we have participated in the Coordinated Percid Management Strategy to reduce walleye exploitation and rebuild walleye stocks. We have implemented research to examine the performance of individual walleye stocks. The daily bag limit for walleye remains at four during March and April and six for May through the following February.

Yellow Perch

Yellow perch fisheries improved again in 2002 relative to previous low years of the 1990s, owing to successful reproduction in four of the last six years and reduced fishing mortality. The strong 1996 and 1998 year classes and the moderate 1999 year class were responsible for this continued increase. With poor reproduction in 2000 and good reproduction in 2001, the numbers of adult fish will be about the same in 2003 compared to a year ago. Ohio's sport and commercial fishermen met their allotted quotas in 2002. The 30-fish daily bag limit for anglers and individual trap net quotas are still in effect for 2003.

Smallmouth Bass

Smallmouth bass populations, and associated sport fisheries, appear to have declined slightly after the increase observed in the late 1990's throughout Lake Erie. Fishing effort for smallmouth bass decreased in Ohio waters to the lowest seen since 1996. Catch rates declined slightly for the second consecutive year. Poor spring fishing conditions may have helped in both of those declines. A 5-fish daily bag limit and a 14-inch minimum length limit were implemented in 2000. They are having the desired effect at reducing exploitation of smaller fish. Research continues to examine factors affecting reproduction and movements of smallmouth bass in

Ohio waters of Lake Erie.

White Bass

Sport fisheries for white bass have improved compared to lows seen in the mid 1990s. Seasonal effort and catch was affected by poor weather. The successful 1996 hatch and moderate hatches in 1998 and 1999 have contributed to the sport and commercial fisheries. The very good 2001 hatch will continue this moderating trend. Older adults (ages 3+) have begun to contribute well to fisheries in recent years.

Steelhead Trout

Steelhead angling has improved dramatically in the open lake during the summer, as more anglers target steelhead while trolling. Lake catches, at 41,347, were the highest recorded and exceptional catch rates for those seeking steelhead were observed. Tributary and lake fisheries will remain very good with continued stockings of yearling Little Manistee River (Michigan) strain steelhead.

Sport Fishery Summary

Boat Fisheries (FFDR01)

Ohio's private and charter boat fisheries were assessed by a direct contact creel survey during 2002. The creel survey was conducted from Toledo to Conneaut at 39 major boat departure sites along Ohio's portion of the Lake Erie shoreline. These sites were grouped into six areas (Figure 1). Areas 1-3 were surveyed from April 2 to October 27, area 4 from May 16 to October 26 and areas 5 and 6 from May 6 to October 29. Three weekdays and two weekend days were surveyed each week in each survey area.

Survey dates and count and interview schedules were randomly selected. Each survey day included time interval counts of boats returning from Lake Erie at all major harbors and completed trip interviews of people on boats returning to marinas, docks, and ramps within the harbors.

Boat effort was estimated from counts of private and charter boats returning to major harbor areas during 20-minute count intervals at 35 access points. Boat counts were scheduled to include coverage of the busiest hours of the day: 1100-2000 hours (military time) for April, 1100-2100 hours for May, 1030- 2130 hours for June and July, 1030-2030 hours for August, 1100-2000 hours for September and 1100-1900 hours for October. Boat counts included all vessels except sailboats, commercial boats, and government boats that were assumed to be not involved in fishing. Boat count means and variances were expanded with monthly constants for count locations per area, count intervals per day, and days per month.

Completed trip interviews were obtained from boats returning to harbor areas. Boat interviews identified the type of fishery (private or charter), number of anglers per boat, hours fished, the number of each species harvested and released, the grid location where the majority of time was spent fishing, and the primary target species. The duration of the fishing trip was defined as the time when actual fishing began until fishing was completed.

Calculations of angler hours and catch were computed following the procedures outlined in Table 1. Survey data were stratified by type of fishery, month, survey area, and weekday-weekend. The primary location fished was coded into one of 50 grids in each statistical catch districts (Figure 2). Estimates for the private and charter boat fisheries were summarized by grid, district, and month. Catch per unit effort (catch rate) was expressed as the number of fish harvested per angler hour. Catch rates were calculated for all targeted species. Significant differences in fishing methods, areas, and seasons for each target species did not allow effort to be comparable across target species. If more than one species was indicated as the primary target species, they were recorded to "anything that bites" and not included in species analyses.

The angler catch was sampled weekly to obtain fish lengths and scale samples. Mean weights in grams were obtained by using the length-weight regressions presented in Table 2. Age composition by percent, mean length, and mean weight were calculated for each district and month for walleye, yellow perch, smallmouth bass, white bass and white perch. Private and charter boat estimates of harvest and effort were based on 7,911 interval boat counts and 5,358 boat interviews.

The 2002 total sport harvest, for the private (Table 3) and charter boat (Table 4) fisheries, was 7.6

million fish and 4.7 million pounds (Appendix A). Yellow perch (87%) and walleye (9%) represented the majority of the total harvest in numbers. Total angler effort (4.6 million angler hours) for the two fisheries (Tables 5 and 6) decreased 11% from 2001. The private boat fishery accounted for 92% of the harvest and 89% of the angler effort. The primary target species were yellow perch (47%) and walleye (41%) for the private boat fishery, and walleye (78%) for the charter boat fishery. Characteristics of private boat and charter boat angler trips, by target species, are presented in Tables 7 and 8, respectively. A total of 861 charter guides were licensed in Ohio for 2002. This was a two percent drop from 2001and well below the ten year mean of 998 (Figure 3).

Walleye

The private boat harvest of 0.51 million fish was a 43% decrease from last year's harvest of 0.90 million fish (Table 9). Walleye harvest was the lowest recorded since the first year of the survey in 1975. Targeted walleye effort of 1.7 million angler hours was 33% lower than in 2001 and the third lowest since 1975. The primary fishing method used on walleye trips differed among districts (Table 10). Casting represented 63% of the fishing effort in District 1, but only 32% in District 2, and 0% in District 3. In Districts 2 and 3, the percentage of fishing effort by anglers using depth-control trolling was higher than flat-line trolling. In Districts 1 and 2, harvest rates were higher for the two trolling methods than casting.

The lakewide targeted harvest rate for anglers seeking walleye was 0.29 fish per angler hour, a decrease of 15% from 2001. Boat limit trips decreased from 13% in 2001 to 9% in 2002 (Table 7). The 2002 charter boat fishery harvest of 0.19 million fish was a 26% decrease from 2001. The targeted harvest rate of 0.47 fish per angler hour was lower than last year (0.63) and lower than the ten year mean of 0.56. Boat limit trips ranged from 4% in District 2 to 16% in District 1 (Table 8). The majority of the walleye sport harvest was from the 1999 (57%) and 1998 (14%) year classes (Table 11).

Age-5 and older walleye constituted 20% of the lakewide catch. Walleye mean size increased across Districts 1 to 3 and averaged 483 mm and 1,080 g.

Yellow Perch

Private boat anglers harvested 6.3 million yellow perch and expended 1.9 million targeted angler hours during 2002 (Table 12). Harvest and targeted effort were the highest since the mid 1980's. Harvest rate remained unchanged at 3.2 fish per angler hour from 2001. Private boat limit trips ranged from 18% in District 2 to 23% in Districts 1 and 3 (Table 7).

The charter boat harvest and target angler hours increased 6% and 27%, respectively, from 2001. Harvest was the highest since 1989 and target effort since 1991. Harvest rates decreased 21% from 4.83 fish per angler hour in 2001 to 3.81 fish per angler hour in 2002. Percent of limit trips by charter anglers remained high at 42% (Table 8).

The 1999 year class comprised 42% of the sport yellow perch harvest followed by the 1998 (38%) and 1996 (9%). Yellow perch mean size increased across Districts 1 to 3 and averaged 236 mm and 172 g (Table 13).

Smallmouth Bass

The private boat effort of 311,553 angler hours was a 25% decrease from 2001. (Table 14). The harvest of 31,458 was a 26% decrease from 2001 and the lowest since 1992. As in previous years, the release rate (0.39 fish per angler hour) was considerably higher than the targeted harvest rate (0.07 fish per angler hour). The Charter boat fishery showed the opposite trend with harvest (49%), targeted effort (38%) and targeted harvest rate (41%) all increasing compared to 2001. The 1996 and 1998 year classes combined constituted 43% of the smallmouth bass harvest in Ohio's waters (Table 15). Fish of age-6 and older comprised 58% of the harvest. Smallmouth bass mean size averaged 414 mm and 1,187 g lakewide.

White Bass

The private boat harvest (-50%) and the targeted effort (-70%) both decreased compared to 2001 (Table 16). As in past years, very few angler trips were targeted for this species; therefore the majority of the white bass were harvested as incidental catch from anglers targeting other species. There were a small number of targeted charter boat trips for white bass during 2002. The majority of the harvest was from the 1999 year class (52%) followed by the 2001 year class (24%).

White Perch

The 2002 estimated sport harvest of 46,623 white perch (Tables 3 and 4) was over a 200% increase compared to 2001. Angler hours targeting white perch totaled 1,638 in 2002 compared to 0 from 2001. The 1999 (42%) and 1998 (40%) year classes comprised the majority of the harvest (Table 18).

Steelhead Trout

The combined private and charter boat harvest of 41,357 for 2002 was a 41% increase compared to 2001, and the highest since the stocking program began. Steelhead trout are harvested primarily from the central basin, with 46% of the catch from District 2 and 52% from District 3. Combined (private and charter) targeted angler hours decreased 35% from 2001. The harvest rate for both the private and charter boat anglers targeting steelhead trout was 0.22 fish per angler hour. During 2000, an additional category was added to the target species list (walleye/steelhead) in order to measure the number of angler trips targeting both walleye and steelhead. Total walleye/steelhead target angler hours for both fisheries increased 41% from 36,631 angler hours in 2001 to 51,474 angler hours in 2002. The targeted harvest rate for the combination trips was 0.28 fish per angler hour for the private boat fishery and 0.15 fish per angler hour for the charter boat fishery. Lakewide, steelhead trout averaged 573 mm and 2,464 g.

Other Species

Private and charter boat anglers harvested 27,252 freshwater drum, channel catfish, and other species in 2002 (Tables 3 and 4). These fish were harvested by anglers as incidental catch while targeting other major species.

Sandusky and Maumee Rivers Tributary Fisheries

A direct contact creel survey was conducted on the Sandusky and Maumee Rivers from March 14 to April 30, 2002. Surveys were conducted from Ewing Island to Waterville on the Maumee River and from Brady's Island to Roger Young Park on the Sandusky River (Figure 4). Three weekdays and both weekend days were surveyed each week. Each survey day included instantaneous counts. Completed and inprogress interviews were made on a roving schedule among survey locations. Survey dates, times of counts, and interviews were randomly selected within strata for month, survey location, weekdayweekend, and shore-boat anglers. Angler interviews were conducted to determine hours fished, target species sought, and the number of each species harvested.

Angler effort was estimated from instantaneous counts during daylight hours, which included 0700-1900 in March, 0730-2030 in April. One count and interview route was employed throughout the survey. Mean counts were expanded to angler hours by constants for daylight hours per day, days per month, and the number of count locations in each river.

On both the Maumee and Sandusky rivers, walleye harvest increased slightly compared to 2001 (Table 19). An estimated 32,889 walleye were harvested from the Maumee River, and 4,620 walleye from the Sandusky River (Table 20). The harvest rate for anglers seeking walleye averaged 0.25 fish per hour on the Maumee River and 0.18 fish per hour on the Sandusky River. Release rates for anglers seeking walleye were 0.70 fish per hour on the Maumee River and 0.46 fish per hour on the Sandusky River.

Estimated white bass harvests (Tables 19 and 20) are just for the survey period and should not be compared to previous surveys which included the traditional white bass run during May. Walleye angler hours observed from angler interviews totaled 3,187 and 2,108 for the Maumee River and Sandusky River, 12 respectively (Table 21). The 1998 year class comprised the largest percentage of all the ages in the harvest in both the Maumee (26%) and Sandusky Rivers (32%) (Table 22). Walleye in the harvest averaged 509 mm and 5.0 yr. in the Maumee River and 553 mm and 5.6 yr. in the Sandusky River. White bass in the harvest averaged 322 mm (N=30) on the Maumee River and 302 mm (N=34) on the Sandusky River.

Commercial Fishery Summary (FSDR06)

Monthly catch reports submitted by licensed commercial operators were summarized to determine harvest (in pounds) and fishing

effort for all species by month, statistical grid, and district (Figure 2). The dollar value of Ohio's commercial fish harvest was estimated based on average weekly prices reported by cooperating processing facilities and applied to weekly reported landings.

Major species landings were sampled every two weeks, in spring and fall, from peak harvest areas to determine mean length, weight, and age composition of the commercial harvest. Scale samples, length data, and updated length-weight regression equations (Table 2) were used to estimate harvested age groups in pounds and numbers.

The 2002 commercial harvest from Ohio waters of Lake Erie totaled 4.02 million pounds (Appendix A), up 16% from 3.48 million pounds reported in 2001 (Table 23). Trap nets accounted for 58% of the harvest (Table 24). District 1 (32%) led all statistical areas in total landings (Table 24). Peak harvest occurred in April-May (55%) and total dockside value was estimated at 2.5 million dollars (Tables 25 and 26). Trap net effort of 11,881 lifts peaked in May and September with no lifts reported in District 3 (Tables 27 and 28). Seine effort was highest in April-May in District 1, in April and September in District 4 (Sandusky Bay) and in March and August in District 5 (inland fishing district). Total seine effort has fallen steadily since 1998 and was the lowest on record in 2002.

Yellow Perch

Ohio's yellow perch harvest quota allocations to sport and commercial fisheries, first implemented in 1996, are based on a rolling 5-year sport:commercial harvest ratio (Table 29). The total allocation to Ohio's licensed commercial trap net fishery in 2002 was 1,438,074 pounds, with both the western basin (District 1) quota of 338,427 pounds (337,829 lbs. landed) and the central basin (Districts 2 & 3) quota of 1,099,647 pounds (1,099,971 lbs. landed including 668 lbs. of last lift allowance) the highest under quota management. With quotas filled in both districts, total harvest ranked highest since 1990. Lakewide trap net catch rates were 138.4 lbs./lift, down from 2001 levels (highest on record at 172.9 lbs./lift) (Table 30).

The number of yellow perch harvested from District 2 accounted for 75% of the total, with the 1998 cohort the most abundant of eight year classes in the fishery (Table 31).

White Bass

White bass landings totaled 161,664 pounds in 2002, down from 226,664 pounds landed in 2001
(Table 23). District 1 trap nets annually account for the bulk (77% in 2002) of this primarily spring harvest (Tables 24-25). Lower lakewide unit pricing, heavily influenced by the Canadian market, contributed to a dockside value of $81,242 ranked lowest over the last ten years. Catch rates in trap nets (38.5 lb./lift) were lower while seines catch rates (65.6 lb./1000 ft.) climbed slightly and exceeded the tenyear mean (Table 30). The 1999 year class comprised 73% of numbers harvested (Table 32).

White Perch

White perch landings totaled 269,512 pounds, up from 155,555 pounds in 2001 (Table 23). Catch rates were higher at 38 lbs./lift, up for the third consecutive year and highest since 1992 (Table 30). Most white perch were harvested in District 1 trap nets (Table 24) during April-May (Table 25). The 1999 and 1998 cohorts led six year classes represented in the harvest (Table 33).

Lake Whitefish

Whitefish landings fell to 6,539 pounds (Table 23) with a catch rate of 6.5 lbs./lift, lowest since 1993 (Table 30). Inclement fall weather conditions coupled with more effort diverted toward yellow perch quotas led to the lowest effort expended toward whitefish since the harvest was re-instated in 1987. Historically a late-fall western basin trap net fishery, 72% of 2002 whitefish landings occurred during November (Tables 24-25). The 1996 and 1995 cohorts led eleven year classes in the harvest of whitefish (Table 34).

Other Species

A total of 2.1 million pounds of "other species" were landed, accounting for 53% of the total commercial harvest from Ohio waters of Lake Erie. Carp led all other species with 523,539 pounds (Table 23). Seines accounted for 74% of other species harvested (Table 24). The estimated value was $429,478, or 14% of the total dockside value (Table 26).

Population Assessments

Experimental trawl and gill net surveys were conducted in the Ohio waters of Lake Erie to ascertain relative abundance, growth, and maturity rates of the major predator and forage fish species. Total counts by species and age group, were obtained from both trawl and gill net catches. Relative abundance indices from bottom trawls for all age-0 and age-1+ fishes were computed as the geometric mean catch-per-hour-trawling (CPHT). Western basin relative abundance indices of age-1+ and older walleyes and white bass were calculated from fall gill net catches as the geometric mean of the catch per gill net set. In the central basin, relative abundance of age-1+ and older walleyes, yellow perch, and white bass were calculated from trawl catches as geometric mean CPHT.

Western Basin (FSDR13)

Due to research vessel repairs, trawling surveys were limited to August and September/October. Sampling was conducted on the new R.V. Explorer, therefore, trawl relative abundance data may not be comparable to other data in the series. Comparative trawling exercises are scheduled for late-August 2003 to address potential differences in catchability between vessels. Due to time constraints in August, the number of stations sampled was reduced from the normal 41 stations to 38, however, in the fall survey 40 stations were sampled (Figure 5). Trawling was stratified over four depth strata (0-3 m, 3-6 m, 6-9 m, and >9 m) with effort allocated in proportion to the number of available sampling units (2.5 minute grids) per strata. One 10-minute tow was conducted at each site using a flat-bottom otter trawl with a 10.7-m headrope and 13-mm bar mesh in the cod end.

Fall gill net sampling occurred in October/November at two historic and five randomly selected stations in the western basin (Figure 6). One western basin random station was omitted from the original design due to weather/time constraints. Sample stations were stratified by depth with two strata (4–10 m 14 and >10 m) in the western basin. Effort was allocated based on the number of possible sampling units per strata, as for trawls. Overnight sets of standard interagency nylon multifilament gill nets, consisting of a gang of 13 randomly-ordered sections, each 30.5 m (length) by 1.8 m (height) ranging from 51-127 mm stretched mesh in 6 mm increments, were fished two meters below the surface at each station. In addition, canned and bottom sets were fished all seven of the historic sites using modified interagency community monofilament gill nets. These nets consisted of a gang of 12 randomly ordered sections, each 15.2 m (length) by 1.8 m (height), ranging from 32-76 mm stretched mesh by 6 mm increments and from 76-127 mm by 12 mm increments.

Central Basin (FFDR04)

Bottom trawling was conducted monthly, May through August and October, at 16 randomly selected stations within four depth strata (5-10 m, 10-15 m, 15-20 m, and >20 m) at established transects in each district. Additional transects were established every 20 km from Berlin Heights to the Pennsylvania state line (District 2: Berlin Heights, Vermilion, Lorain, Avon, Cleveland, Chagrin; District 3: Perry, Ashtabula, and Conneaut; Figure 4). Trawling is conducted before, during, and after lake stratification at two stations per depth strata per transect. Bottom trawling included six fixed index stations in District 2 and three fixed stations in District 3 that have been sampled in October since 1969. A 10-minute tow was conducted at each site using a Yankee two-seam bottom trawl with a 10.4 m head rope, 25 mm bar mesh in the cod end, 13 mm stretched mesh liner, and 25.4 cm roller gear. Fixed station trawl indices prior to 1995 were adjusted with correction factors to account for catchability differences between Biloxi trawls (previously used at fixed stations) and Yankee trawls.

Fall gill net sampling occurred in October/November at five historic and one randomly-selected stations in the west-central basin (Figure 6). Six west-central basin random stations were omitted from the original design due to weather/time constraints. Sample stations were stratified by depth with three strata in the west-central basin (10–15, 15–20 m, and >20 m). Other procedures for central basin gill netting were exactly the same as those for the western basin described above.

Walleye

Relative Abundance

Western basin indices for age-0 walleyes were the lowest on

record during both summer and fall trawl surveys. Age-0 walleye abundance was similar to the extremely poor 1995 year class (Table 35). However, age-1+ abundance was relatively high, similar to the 1997 and 1999 year classes and slightly below the 1996 year class.

Central basin indices for age-0 walleye in 2002 were lowest in the fall in District 2 and District 3 (Table 36 and 37). Age-1 fall indices increased from 2001 values in both districts. District 2 age-1 indices were below the historic mean in both summer and fall while District 3 indices were above the historic mean in both months (Tables 38 and 39). In general, summer and fall trawl indices are higher in District 2 than District 3 during the time series. Historically, District 2 age-0 fall indices have proven the most reliable estimator of cohort strength. Catch rates (Table 40) have typically decline from west to east among transects during the time series.

District 1 fall gill net catches were higher than those in 2001 owing to good catches of age-1 and age-3 walleye. Total catches in District 1 gill nets were similar to those seen in 2000 and 1993 and similar to long-term average catches (Table 41). Catches of age-1 walleye were the fifth highest in the series and similar to those seen in 2000. Catches of age-3 walleye were the third highest in series, but significantly lower than age-3 catches in 1989 or 1985 (the strong 1986 and 1982 year classes, respectively). The results were similar in District 2 where indices for age-1 and age-3 walleye were some of the highest on 15 record and total walleye abundance indices were higher than in 2001, but similar to the long–term average (Table 41).

Growth

Mean length-at-age of walleyes collected during fall surveys declined from 1972 to the early 1980s, and generally leveled off through the 1990s (Figure 7). However, there is indication of an increasing trend in mean length-at-age since the 1997 survey. Inter-basin length and weight differences continue to be evident, with age-1 and age-2 female walleyes from the central basin being larger than those in the western basin (Figures 7 and 8). Mean length and weight of age-1 female walleyes in the western and central basins were lower in 2002 relative to 2001; however, mean lengths of age-1 females were near the highest on record in the past 20 years in both basins. Mean length and weight of age-2 female walleyes in the western basin were similar to those seen in 2001 and near historic highs. For the second consecutive year age-2 walleye mean length and weight-at-age in the central basin was at a historic high. Mean lengths of age-0 walleyes in the western and central basins were slightly lower than those observed in 2001; however it should be noted that only 1 age-0 walleye was collected during the fall trawl survey in 2002.

Maturity

Walleye length-at-maturity was similar to that of recent years and did not differ between basins (Figure 9). The majority of male walleyes were sexually mature at 400 mm (age-2), although significant numbers of age-1 male walleyes were mature in 2002. The majority of female walleyes were sexually mature at 475 mm (age-3). In 2002, 15 and 0% of age-2 female walleye were mature in the western and central basins, respectively, similar to past years (Table 42). The vast majority (>94%) of age-3 and older female walleyes were sexually mature in both basins. There was no spatial trend in sexual maturity of female walleyes collected from the western or central basins.

Diet

Diet information was collected from age-1 and older walleyes caught in both fall trawls and gill nets in the western, west-central, and central basins of Lake Erie in 2002. Consistent with previous years, there is an apparent shift in walleye diets from clupeids in the western basin to clupeids/shiners in the west-central basin to smelt/shiners/goby in the central basin. In 2002 (Figure 10), clupeids again dominated the diets of western and west-central basin walleye (96% and 67%, respectively), with gizzard shad dominating the clupeid component in both the west (68%) and west-central (90%) basins, similar to 1999. Emerald shiners comprised only 4% of the diet in the western basin. In the west-central basin, there were significant contributions to walleye diets from emerald shiners (23%) and alewife (7%). Frequency of occurrence of round goby in walleye diets initialized in 1996 (1%) and increased to 11% by 1998 and has ranged from 7% to 12% since with a 9% value in 2002 (Figure 17).

Yellow Perch

Relative Abundance

Summer and fall western basin age-0 indices were down significantly in 2002, with abundance indices being similar to the poor 1997 and 1987 year classes (Table 35). Summer age-1 indices in both surveys were the highest on record due to the good 2001 year class. Both summer and fall catches of age- 2 and older yellow perch were down relative to 2001, but near their long-term average.

The overall index from fall District 1 sites selected for age composition was slightly higher than that in 2001 due to relatively high catches of age-1 yellow perch (Table 43). As expected the 2001 and 1999 year classes comprised the majority of the catch. Surprisingly, the 2000 and 1998 contributed 16 significantly to the catches as well, with a few of the 1996 year class fish still in the population. While the contribution of older age classes to the population is increasing in the west, the contribution is still well below index values seen in the early-1980s. This information still indicates a need for conservative management strategies.

The 2002 summer and fall age-0 indices were some of the lowest on record in the central basin for both districts (Tables 36 and 37). Fall central basin indices for age-0 yellow perch were higher in District 3 than District 2. Overall, the fall age-0 indices suggest a very weak year class, similar to the 1991 and 2000 year classes. The summer and fall age-1 indices increased from 2001 in both districts, reflecting the strong 2001 cohort. Overall, the yellow perch fishery in the central basin should continue to be good due to strong year classes in 1998, 1999, and 2001. Catches of age-0 and age-1 were higher from Cleveland west than east of Cleveland (Table 40). The age composition of the fall trawl indices were primarily from the 1998, 1999, and 2001 cohorts in both District 2 and District 3 (Table 43). The overall index shows a lower number of older fish (age>4) yet a substantial number of age-5 and age-6 yellow perch.

Growth

Fall mean size-at-age declined from 1970 to the early 1980s in both basins, but increased thereafter for most age groups through 1994 and has remained relatively stable since (Figure 11). Mean lengths of age-0 and age-1 yellow perch were slightly lower in the western basin but higher in the central basin than in 2001. Since 1998, mean lengths of yellow perch have been higher in the central basin than the west basin, a reversal of what was seen from 1991 to 1997. Since 1990, the age-1 central basin yellow perch mean lengths have been higher than the west basin except on 3 occasions (1992, 1995, and 1996).

Mean lengths of age-2 yellow perch decreased slightly in 2002, relative to 2001 in both basins (Figure 12). Since 1990, age-2 yellow perch mean lengths have been higher in the central basin than the west basin except for 1991, 1992, and 1993. This follows a scenario that has been depicted historically since the 1960's. In 2002, annual growth increments (mm/year) of age-2 yellow perch were similar to those in 2001 (Figure 13) and higher growth rates have been exhibited in the central basin since 1996.

Maturity

Yellow perch length-at-maturity in 2002 (Figure 9), was similar to that of recent years. The majority of males were sexually mature at 150 mm (age-2), females at 190 mm (ages 2 and 3). In 2002, the sexual maturity rates of age-2 yellow perch were lower than those seen in 2001 in the west basin (30%) but similar in the central basin (75%; Table 44). Across the series, sexual maturation rates in the western basin tend to be higher in the 1990s than in the 1980s, while sexual maturation rates in the central basin were similar between periods.

Diet

Yearling and older yellow perch diets in the central basin during 2002 varied seasonally (Figure 14). Benthic invertebrates (60%) were the primary diet item in the spring. The majority of the benthic items consumed were chironomids (68%). As the summer progressed, yellow perch additionally consumed Bythotrephes (36%) along with chironomids (27%). In the fall, fish (49%) were consumed along with, chironomids (26%), and Bythotrephes (17%). Round goby were the primary component of the fish consumed (80%). The frequency of occurrence of round goby in yellow perch diets was first noticed in 1996 (6%) and increased to 36% by 1998, and has remained constant over the last three years (14% to 16%).

Amazing but True Lake Erie Fishing Stories

by
Michael Veine

Some of the best fishing stories often involve catching huge fish. The biggest walleye that I ever caught was back in 1995. I was fishing by myself on April 1, out of Bolles Harbor and the east wind was throwing sizable waves over the near-shore, Michigan waters. I had fished all morning without so much as a strike. I was ready to call it a day and since it was to rough to run fast, I decided to troll my way back to the harbor. I was about 1/2-mile from Bolles when one of my in-line boards suddenly pulled back sharply. I was trolling in just six-feet of water, so I naturally thought I had snagged bottom.

After clearing my other line in preparation for circling the snag, I finally figured out that the snag was actually a big fish. After a long tussle, I finally managed to slip the net under a huge walleye that measured 33" and weighed 14-lbs. Incidentally, those fish were packed into that tight, shallow spot and I caught and released at least 30 more fish in the next few hours and 10 of them were 30" or longer.

Even Bigger Walleye

As a charter captain, I rarely get to catch many fish myself anymore, but I do get to help plenty of people to land some awesome catches. On March 31, 2000, I was fishing with Revius Williams and Roger Poore. These two friends are like the Odd Couple: One a hardcore Democrat and the other a diehard Republican. These two unlikely friends were having the fishing trip of their lifetime. With flat, clear water conditions and air temperatures in the 70s, the walleyes were feeding big time. We had already caught and mostly released about 25 walleyes with most of them being trophy class, adult fish weighing 8 to 11-pounds. It seemed like wherever we trolled, big walleyes were hitting with reckless abandon, so when one of the Mr. Walleye boards was again pulled behind the boat from the weight of a big walleye, the mood seemed rather routine.

Rod Stafford broke this big walleye off and the next day was able to recover the lost planer board and hand-line in the fish. Michael Veine photo

Revius Williams took the rod and slowly worked the fish towards the boat. As the fish came closer, it surfaced and slowly slicing across the water giving us all a clear view of his immense proportions. The mood on the boat changed to pure excitement as the long, lanky walleye bared his fangs at us with some nerve-racking headshakes on the surface. I even had a hard time getting him to fit in my net. He measured 36" and weighed 14-1/2

This enormous walleye ranks as the largest one ever caught in the author's charter boat. Revius Williams was the lucky angler to take this 36", 14-1/2 pounder. Michael Veine photo

pounds. Revius didn't want to mount the fish, so my charter boat policy of releasing prespawn walleyes kicked in and after snapping a few photos, we tossed it back. I wonder if that fish is still swimming in Lake Erie today and if so, how big is she?

Too Many Fish

I heard a saying that goes something like this: "You can never have too much money, too pretty of a wife or catch too many fish." The first two may be true, but despite popular beliefs, it is actually possible to catch too many fish.

My wife and I were fishing a MWT; team, walleye tournament and the weather conditions were nearly perfect. The water was slightly stained and the weather was warm and sunny with a nice southwest wind that put ideal chop on the water. During prefishing, we had located a large school of walleye located in water 8' to 13' deep. We caught some walleyes on crankbaits, but we were catching about five sheephead for every walleye. We tried crawlers pulled behind bottom bouncers and experimented for several hours before coming up with a combination that resulted in mostly walleye hookups. We pulled 3-oz. bouncers with long leads to the chartreuse beads/blade crawler harnesses. The trolling speed seemed to be critical to weeding out the sheephead. We skimmed along at 2.2 mph.

On the first trolling pass of the first day of the tournament, we

The mouth on this 14-pound walleye was like a gator. This is the largest walleye the author has ever caught himself. Michael Veine photo

Chris Schasroth smiled through his seasickness when he caught this 23" smallmouth bass. Michael Veine photo

managed to catch 10 walleyes. The fish were obviously of the same year class measuring 23"-25". However, about one out of every 10 walleyes was a couple inches bigger. The action was steady all day long. We would catch a bunch of walleyes until we had our legal, two-man limit in the livewells, then we would sort through them and keep the biggest five, which was all we were allowed to weigh-in. It was a frantic pace. We were constantly either reeling in fish or resetting lines.

The action was just as fast and furious the next day. We never went five minutes without catching a walleye. At the end of fishing time on the second day, we had managed to catch over 200 walleyes. We were both physically and mentally whipped at the end of that tournament. If we had been fun fishing, we never would have pushed ourselves that hard. Needless to say, we managed to cash a check though and that's what tournament fishing is all about.

Huge Smallmouth

On April 27, 2000, a strong northeast wind was kicking up some pretty good waves. My charter for the day consisted of the Phil Schasroth and his 10-year-old son Chris. Chris had been suffering from a mild case of seasickness, but when it was his turn at the rod, he bucked-up for the occasion. Even though we were trolling for walleyes in Brest Bay, his fish turned out to be a dandy smallmouth. The fish jumped, bulldogged and pulled like crazy. Finally, Chris managed to bring the fish close enough to the boat so I could net it. The chunky bass measured 23" and weighed 7-1/2 pounds. Michigan's bass season was still closed though, so the fish went back.

Lost and Found Walleye

On a charter on March 28, 2001, Rod Stafford was battling a good walleye when another one hit a lure on the same side of the boat. Steve Griffin grabbed that rod and some how managed to twist his line around the Rod's breaking off the Rod's fish above the Mr. Walleye board. We circled the boat to try to pick up the lost board, but couldn't find it.

The next day, with the same charter party, we were fishing the same waters and spotted that board floating near the same spot where it was broken off the previous day. As we passed by the planer board, Rod Stafford netted it and began hauling in line when he exclaimed, "There's a

fish on here! I can feel him pulling." After a brief tussle, I netted the 10-1/2 pound walleye. They had already caught several 11-pound walleyes that morning though, so Rod released his lost and found walleye.

Robin Hitch Hiker

On April 7, 2001, it was a misty, almost foggy day on Erie. My charter was a family from IL. Visibility was about a half-mile when a robin suddenly fluttered into view with a seagull in hot pursuit. The robin had obviously become lost over the fog-shrouded water and the gull was trying to knock it into the water and eat it. The robin spotted my boat and landed on the gunnel. It then walked down the gunnel all the way to the top of the passenger side console, where Kristi Hicks was seated. Kristi was wearing two hooded sweatshirts with the inside sweatshirt hood over her head and the other one hanging over the back her neck. After a couple minutes the robin jumped up on Kristi's shoulder and eventually situated itself in the hanging, hood for a long nap. As the day went on the bird stayed comfortably sleeping in Kristi's hood. She even fought a couple fish without disturbing the soundly sleeping little bird.

Towards the end of the trip, the fog finally cleared. When the robin caught sight of shore and it took off for land. Just before taking flight though, the ungrateful robin left Kristi a smelly, white gift on her shoulder.

Kristi Hicks is all smiles with this robin hitchhiking on her sweatshirt. Michael Veine photo

Sinking Boat

Last year, during mid-May, I was running a charter from Bolles Harbor. It as a rough day with east winds kicking up 2-4 footers. We had run out to the MI/OH boarder and I was just starting to set lines for our first trolling pass when my customers John Demuth and Billy Mercer spotted a flare several miles to the east. I quickly pulled the two lines that I'd set and sped off to investigate. Two more flares were seen as we ran out near the shipping channel and I was radioing the Coast Guard when we saw a swamped boat with two very wet anglers in trouble. It was too rough for us to pull very close to them, so I threw them a life ring and pulled them to the back of my boat. I was able to hoist them aboard my boat over the transom in the slot next to my big Mercury outboard. The two men were chilled, but otherwise OK. We sped them to shore where they could change cloths and facilitate the recovery of their drowned boat.

These are just some of my collection of true stories from the big pond. If you have any questions, mikeveine@trophyspecialists.com is my email. Good fishing.

Tips for Reading In-Line Planer Boards

by
Mark Romanack

I had just completed setting out a 4th Off Shore Tackle Side Planer when my youngest son Jake looked at me with a puzzled face and asked, "Dad how do we tell when we have a fish?" An elementary but important question, reading or detecting strikes when using in-line boards isn't an easy concept to explain or grasp. .

I thought for a moment and then answered, "When a fish grabs our lure, the board will jerk backwards in the water." The look on Jake's face suggested he wasn't sure exactly what to expect next. I went on to explain that the weight of the fish pulling and fighting against the board causes it to jerk or pull backwards in the water. By watching and comparing to the other boards, it's pretty easy to tell if a board has hooked a fish.

The truth is it's pretty easy to tell when a fish is hooked on the Side Planer board. Pretty easy so long as the fish is good sized, you're trolling straight downwind, the boat doesn't turn and you happen to see the strike the moment it occurs!

Unfortunately there are times when even a seasoned troller can drag fish he didn't know was hooked. Small fish are tougher to detect because they aren't big enough to cause the board to react violently or in an .obvious way. Quartering into the waves (instead of trolling straight with or into the wind) also makes it more difficult to read in-line boards. When a fishing boat quarters the waves it doesn't enjoy a steady and smooth course. The wind turns the boat, forcing the driver to constantly adjust his course. The boat moves forward but is actually swinging back and forth along an imaginary

centerline. The trailing' boards follow the boat, swinging back and forth instead of following a steady and straight course.

Each time the boat turns toward one of the boards the line goes a little slack and the board sags backward slightly, then recovers when the boat turns again and the line pulls tight.

If a fish is hooked while the boat is in a subtle turn there's just enough slack in the line to prevent the board from showing obvious movement. The weight of the hooked fish does cause the board to sag backward, but it's easy to miss even if you're an experienced troller. Eventually the boat will pull straight or turn the opposite direction. When this happens the board with a fish attached always seems to be lagging a little behind the others. The rule of thumb is to always check lines that are sagging a little or don't look just right. It only takes a minute or two to check the line and be sure you're not dragging a small fish or a fouled lure.

Turns are the toughest place to detect strikes on inline boards. During a turn the outside lines speed up while at the same time the inside lines stall and slow down. Of course the trailing lures do the same thing, helping to trigger strikes.

If a fish is hooked on an outside line, it is usually pretty easy to detect because the board is moving in a steady path. It's the inside boards that are stalling that are tougher to read. Often a fish hooked on the inside lines isn't apparent until the boat straightens out again. A fish hooked on the inside lines often prevents the board from pulling back out to the side properly once the boat straightens out. Again, a board that always seems to be lagging behind is a tip off that something is wrong.

How Far Do I Run My Boards Out to the Side?

It's also easier to detect strikes when the boards are fished within 50 - 75 feet of the boat. When the boards are let out 100 or more feet away from the boat, slight changes in course cause the

boards to momentarily stall and start, making it more difficult to tell if a fish has been hooked. This is especially true if the target fish are small.

Running the boards a little closer to the boat makes subtle changes in how the board is running more obvious. However, there's obviously a point of diminishing return. Fishing the boards too close to the boat defeats the purpose of using boards in the first place. Running the boards 50- 75 feet out is a good rule of thumb when you're first learning how to read planer boards. Once you get a little experience, I'd recommend running the boards out 75-100 feet. Many of the top walleye pros run their boards as far as 150' out to the side.

TROLL WITH THE WIND

Trolling with the wind makes it easier to read the boards, no matter how far out to the side they are fished. In a following sea the boards' run smoothly and in a predictable manner. When trolling into the waves, the boards jump around, leap out of the waves and otherwise hop all over the place. While this board action can trigger strikes, reading these strikes is tricky for even those anglers who have considerable experience fishing in-line boards.

LOW STRETCH LINES HELP

Using low stretch lines such as the super braids or fused lines makes it very easy to detect hooked fish on in-line boards. Because the line doesn't stretch, anything that touches the lure causes the board to react accordingly. When fishing low stretch lines I recommend using the new Off Shore Tackle OR-18 Snapper Release that's designed to hold this thin and slippery surfaced line securely. Snapper releases are sold individually and can be installed on most in-line boards.

MATCHING UP LURES

Certain lures pull harder in the water than others. Matching up lures that generate similar drag or pulling resistance allows the board to run in a more uniform manner that's easier to monitor. Avoid running a deep diving lure with lots of drag next to a shallow diving lure with little drag.

TATTLE FLAGS

No matter how good you get at reading in-line boards, there will be times when a small fish or fouled lure is dragged around. The ultimate solution to this problem is the OR-12TF Tattle Flag produced by Off Shore Tackle.

The Tattle Flag is a spring loaded flag kit that allows the flag to fold down when a fish is hooked. The Tattle Flag is so sensitive even a crank bait that's fouled with a piece of weed causes the flag to fold to half mast. Never again will you drag a small fish or fouled lures with the Tattle Flag.

Designed as an after market kit, a Tattle Flag can be installed on an OR-12 Side-Planer board in about five minutes. The kit comes complete with a flag, spring/ linkage assembly, two OR-16 Snap Weight
clips and the necessary hardware.

Reading the boards is part science and part intuition. If for any reason you suspect something is wrong with the way a board is running, take a few seconds and check that line. The bait could have become fouled on something floating in the water, picked up a weed or a cluster of zebra mussels. It's better to check immediately than to drag something around, twisting the line in the process.

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Oh, Those Erie 'Eyes

by
Bob Riege & Mark Brumbaugh

Trolling is probably the most universal method for catch ing walleyes on Lake Erie. Trolling and covering as much water as is necessary to find active, biting fish. Far and away the most conventional presentation of trolling for walleyes is by anglers forward trolling them on handheld rods. In most conditions it would simply look like the anglers are just towing their lures behind the boat. As with anything that appears to be so apparently basic, there are a number of variations that enhance the productivity of the presentation. The first of these is lure selection. In shallow water presentations anglers will want to run small lipped floating stickbaits (Rapalas, Rebels, Storm Lures etc).As they find the need to work progressively deeper they will move from small sized crankbaits to larger lures with bigger deeper diving bills.

The color of the lures will often prove a key as well. Under bright, clear water conditions the natural, lifelike lure finishes are likely to be your top producers. On dark days, or at night, the brighter chartreuse, Firetiger, and phosphorescent colors will be the best.

At this time of the year combining spinners and crawlers along with Rapala Sad Raps will give the angler a variety of baits in the water when fished in conjunction with snap weights and off-shore planer boards. Boards give you the option of fishing multiple lines and covering lots of water fast and with this variance in depths you cover all columns of water for both suspended and bottom feeding fish.

Trolling is used in covering certain structures and precise trolling means catching fish. One way that I have solved the problem with boat control is by using a Drift Control sea anchor. A sea anchor is a cone-shaped under water windsock, simi-

lar to those at airports that detect changes in wind direction. Drift Control sea anchors aid boat control in two ways. First of all, they slow your drift in strong winds. Secondly, you can use them to fine-tune subtle boat maneuvers in rough seas or heavy current.

Most anglers who fish large expansive lakes or rivers carry a sea anchor with them daily. The rule is usually that one Drift Control sea anchor is adequate for most boats and conditions. Sometimes on Lake Erie when the wind is really stiff I will attach two Drift Control sea anchors, one to each cleat off the bow section both starboard and port. This will increase my control and allow me to run my engine at higher rpm's to combat the waves.

When fishing alone in a console boat in heavy winds, I troll headlong into the wind with a sea anchor tied off the bow according to which side the wind is coming from. By letting out about 8 feet of rope, the bag trails next to the console. I can yank it out of the water with a safety cord if I need to without getting out of my seat and I never lose control of the boat.

Walleye fisherman on Erie aren't the only ones using this method. Bass fishing has virtually exploded over the last few years. In the early season it is not uncommon to find smallmouth bass in good numbers along the rock, and shale reefs of the islands that dot Lake Erie. Boat control is as essential when fishing for bass as well as for walleyes. As many anglers know, fish are usually most active near the windblown shore, but probably presenting a bait to them can prove a trial.

Anchoring limits you to a single spot when the fish may be someplace else or spread along the breakline, and short wind drifts have you motoring, casting and reeling most of the time. Bass anglers therefore, want to slow down their presentation and not be blown off breaklines. Here again the Drift Control sea anchor is used.

By tying off two Drift Control sea anchors to the windward side of the

See Erie 'Eyes, page 35

Break Line Basics

by
Rick Olson

The key to finding and catching big walleyes is quite often found along a change in depth or drop off (a.k.a. break line). Break lines can concentrate fish, and concentrations are exactly what you're looking for just about 100 percent of the time. The idea is to keep your bait in front of as many walleyes as you can for as long as you can. The end result should be more fish in the boat by the end of the day, and more walleyes is what it's all about. By getting a bait in front of the heaviest concentrations of fish you can greatly improve your odds of finding the willing.

Within a large school of walleyes there will almost always be a few that will be active enough to take a bait, even if the rest of the pack is not. The fact is they don't always do the same things at the same time, even when they're stacked up in a dense concentration. Finding said concentrations often starts at the break line, wherever that may be.

You can refine the activity along a break line even further and try to determine whether the walleyes are actively feeding at any given time. A good rule of thumb includes the shallowest fish you find being the most likely to take a bait.

A deep to shallow feeding movement is a classic one, and occurs both in deep water as well as in shallow. For example, walleyes holding on a deep off shore hump will often hold along the break line of the edge and move up on top during peak times of activity. The same thing happens on shallow rocky bars and reefs where walleyes hold along an edge which could be five feet deep or shallower, and move up into super shallow water when the timing is right. In either case the break line is where you're likely to find the heaviest concentrations, but not necessarily where you'll locate the heavy along the top, the middle, or at the base of the break are the biters. Quite often you'll find a group of fish spread out up and down a break line but only certain ones

feeders.

Break lines by themselves are not enough to pull in active walleyes, but a break line combined with a good feeding opportunity certainly is. Break lines or drop offs that lie next to a big feeding shelf is the stuff that quality time on the water is made of. Breaks next to shelves, rocky bars, or even flats are what you're looking for, and where and when will depend on the characteristics of the lake system you happen to be on, and time of the year.

A break line next to a big deep hump might be holding absolutely nothing if you get there too early, or if the water is too dark, or if it's below the thermocline. Time spent where they're not is time wasted, and a situation to try and avoid. The thing is there will be some time wasted in your search for the mother of all schools of walleyes but you can try and keep it to a minimum.

Finding likely break lines begins by gathering a little basic knowledge about a system, and then taking a hard look at a good map. A detailed map with latitude and longitude markings can be a big help, especially if you have an accurate G.P.S. to help exploit the information. A chart plotter like the Raymarine can keep your search time to a bare minimum, which allows for more time spent with a line in the water. By transferring break line readings into the G.P.S. you can take a direct heading for potential hot spots and the Raymarine can get you to within three meters of what you're looking for. A G.P.S. can be critical for finding off shore break lines on big water, and may be just about impossible to do so without.

Once you've found what your looking for take a good look with your depth finder and see if anything is around before you drop them a line. If you're marking fish try to find the tightest groups or concentrations, and take note of exactly where they're located. Try looking up and down the break line and even up directly on top of the accompanying structure. A good plan of action would include going back and working the shallowest fish first, and heading deeper from there.

Don't let the first fish you mark stop you from investigating thoroughly before you get a line in the water. Even if you mark what looks like the mother load take a little more time and check it all out before trying to put a few in the boat. It requires a good deal of self control but can pay big dividends in the long run. How you approach a break line will depend on the time of the year, and the type of structure, and just how tight the fish are bunched up. Fish that are spread out require a different presentation than those that are piled into a tight area. Tight schools likely call for rigging and jigging techniques, while loose groups may be more efficiently worked with much quicker trolling methods like lead core and crank bait combinations. Lead core can allow you to run a bait at an exact depth, and do so quickly resulting in more water covered (and explored) over the course of a day.

Lead core is a weighted line that sinks, and allows anglers to get their baits to run deeper than they are capable of on their own. It also has little stretch, and transmits the rhythmic vibration of a properly running crankbait back to the rod tip. You can literally see how your bait is running by concentrating on the tip. If it's consistently twitching, you're running clean. If it pulls back hard and pops forward, you're digging into the bottom. Reel up a little line and watch the tip, and keep picking up line until it runs free. It's OK to occasionally bang into the bottom; That can help trigger fish into striking. But a bait that's constantly grinding into the bottom will be constantly hanging up. Also, a small change in depth can get you back digging into the bottom, or put the bait too high to be in the zone. Constant monitoring of the rod tip is a necessity, and one of the most important keys to successful contour trolling.

It takes some time to get comfortable with the whole affair but once you do you'll be in control of a tool with an unmatched level of precision.

Secrets for Summer Walleyes

by
Ron Anlauf

Summer walleye fishing can be a little tough, but it doesn't have to be that way. The key is understanding how warming water temperatures and a changing environment can effect walleye location, and activity levels.

A walleye's environment is one that is constantly changing, with walleyes reacting accordingly. To stay with the fish, anglers need to be willing to change how and where they fish for walleyes, and keep an open mind. Doing the same things in the same places, time after time, will probably yield less than satisfactory results.

Transition

As walleyes vacate early season hideouts, in favor of deeper summer haunts, there's a period of time when fish are in transition. When there aren't that many fish shallow, and there aren't that many deep, fishing can be a bit sporadic.

However, as more and more fish show up at their new "home for the summer", the action can only get better. With an increase in numbers, your chances for finding a few active ones greatly increases.

Walleyes don't all do the same thing at the same time, and when it comes to feeding movements, it's like they take turns. Some will be totally inactive, some may be starting to stir a little but won't move far to take a bait, and others may be extremely aggressive and willing to take just about anything you put in front of them. Those are the traitors that can give up a schools identity, and location.

Summer Location

Summer location can include deep, offshore structure, like sunken islands, bars and humps. Look for structures that have most of their mass above the thermocline. Structure that is too deep will see little walleye activity, if any, until after the fall turnover.

Larger structures will often out produce the smaller ones, simply because they can offer more feeding opportunities for 'eyes on the prowl. However smaller ones can be easier to fish, because of their simplicity. There's only so many places they can hide. You can quickly check the top, sides, and the base of the break, with a good graph, like the Raymarine L 750. The L 750 provides incredible definition, and has a white line feature that allows the user to identify fish that are holding tight to the bottom.

If they're there, go ahead and fish, if not, it's time to move on.

Larger Structure

Larger structures will require you to spend more time watching your electronics, and less time fishing. Walleyes can be anywhere, and it doesn't pay to fish where they're not. To find them, you can save some time by cruising the entire structure, making note of where you saw the largest concentrations.

In that situation, a Global Positioning System can be a huge asset, as concentrations can be marked with an icon, allowing you to return after your search is completed. The Raymarine 425 is a GPS that possesses the new W.A.S.S. capabilities, and is accurate to within nine feet, which can help get you back to an exact spot.

Another option is dropping a marker which can be a good idea, and will help keep you oriented with the area you're fishing.

Searching

One of the best places to start your search, is near a break line that drops quickly into deeper water. The top of deep structure can play host to perch, baitfish, insects and crayfish. Active walleyes will often be found cruising the top edge of a break, where they can quickly move up to grab a bite to eat.

Another place to find summer eyes, that is often overlooked, is the transition line where hard bottom meets soft. Where gravel or rock changes to mud or silt, a transition line is created, and can concentrate fish. Transition line fish see little attention by most anglers, and can be one your best bets for a shot at a real hawg.

Presentations

Once you've found a potential area, and have marked at least a few fish, it's time to get down to business. The early season presentations of rigging and jigging may still produce, but quicker methods, like trolling spinners, really start to pickup. Rising water temps can push a walleye's metabolism to the boiling point, and increase the chances that he'll react to a speedier technique.

One of the top summer producers, is a spinner and live bait combo. Spinners possess an element of speed, and it's the speed that can often nail walleyes with a bad attitude.

To get a spinner in the "zone", it's hard to beat a spinner and bottom bouncer combination. A bouncer can get a bait where you want it , and run relatively snag free. Bouncers in the two to three ounce range are the ticket, and allow the user to keep the bait close to the boat.

By keeping it close, you can react to sudden depth changes. You can also lift the bait off the bottom, to get it in front of any high riding fish that you mark on your depth fmder.

If you see a fish riding high off the bottom, try to lift the bait to the same level. Walleyes tend to feed up, and by lifting your bait up, you increase the odds that he'll take your offering.

You'll want to keep the spinner snell short, let's say three feet or less. Longer snells allow for more drop, and result in more snags.

Bait

The odds on favorite bait for dressing a spinner rig, is a big fat juicy night crawler. However leeches can be effective at times, and minnows can turn late summer 'eyes when nothing else will.

Feeding

One thing to keep in mind in your quest for mid summer ' eyes, is the fact that walleyes continue to feed, and do so more heavily than at any other time of the year. The key is to find them, and then find out what they want.

Quite often, what they want is something with a little speed. Think about it, not only does a walleye's metabolism increase, but so does it's prey. Everything is moving at a faster pace, and it's a fast paced world we're living in.

See you on the water.

Editors Note: Ron An/auf is a former two time PWT Trail Champion.

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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

Trolling Open-Water Walleyes

Two Lake Erie Central Basin Charter Captains Share Their Tips

by
W. H. (Chip) Gross

One of a charter boat captain's toughest jobs is locating fish day after day, week after week, month after month. And once he's found fish, he must be able to put them in the boat for his clients. Two of the best at doing that in Lake Erie's vast Central Basin are charter captains Jim Cooper and Bob Schmidt. Both captains run boats out of Lorain, Ohio and are members of the Central Basin Charter Boat Association. Following are a few of their suggestions for catching walleyes and steelhead by trolling.

Captain Jim Cooper on:

A Basic Trolling Spread

"Ohio fishing law allows two rods per licensed angler, so if I have six customers, a mate, and myself onboard I run 16 lines at once. My spread normally consists of eight directional diver rods (4 on each side of the boat) and six planer board rods (3 on each side). In addition, I and some of the other boats in the area also run downriggers. Of the three methods, the downriggers seem to catch fewer walleyes than the other two. However, when the steelhead are running the 'riggers work great. I recommend using the same make and length of rod for the board lines. I also run them straight up in the air. That way, it's easy to tell if you have a small fish hanging on when you see one rod bent more than the

others. For my directional-diver rods, I run 7-, 8-, 9-, and 10-footers. This gives me a little more separation between rods. I lay them down in a horizontal position in the rod holders."

Preferred Lines

"I run 50-pound test braid that has 12-pound diameter. This line, combined with 25-pound test fluorocarbon leaders, has really cut down on lost fish because of line breakage. I recommend fluorocarbon leaders because they are close to being invisible, are soft yet tough, have minimal memory, are abrasion resistant, and have minimum stretch. I cut my leaders in six foot lengths. Many people use rubber snubbers between a diver and the leader. I personally haven't had any problems landing walleyes without them, but I do run snubbers on the divers closest to the boat when steelhead are in the area. Good snap swivels are also important."

Preferred Baits

"In the Lorain area, spoons are very popular, whereas east of Cleveland worm harnesses seem to be used more. I run mainly spoons, worm harnesses, and shallow diving plugs. When running deep-diving plugs, I don't run them off diving devices as they will pull the back of the diver down causing it to come to the surface. Controlling lure depth is extremely important. I've always said that I'd rather be running the wrong lure at the right depth than the right lure at the wrong depth. It's also better to be running baits a little above fish than below. If

you're not catching fish, don't be afraid to experiment with various depths and baits."

Captain Bob Schmidt on:

Finding Fish

"Zebra mussels continue to have a drastic effect on the water clarity of the lake, and as a result I recently bought a speed and temperature gauge to help me find the comfort zone of fish. I thought that would help me locate the fish themselves, but what I discovered was this. In the mornings, as the sun was just coming up, light penetration was only about ten percent at 45 feet. But very quickly the light increased to 100 percent by about nine a.m. and stayed that way all day until evening. I checked it many days and at all depths and got similar readings. The only difference was after a storm when the water was turbid.

"I was having trouble catching fish at the normal [pre-zebra mussel] water levels. It didn't make any difference what baits I used, the results were the same—some fish, but not the numbers I needed. What I believed was happening was this. If the light-shy walleyes wanted to feed during the day, they had to do it in bright light no mater what the depth. So I started looking for bait fish and usually found them up around ten feet. I tried running baits off #10 Jet Divers from a planer board on one side of the boat and #20s on the other side. That did the trick; I started catching more fish. I was even able to run flat lines at times. The point is this, with that much light in the water it didn't make any difference where the fish were in the water column, they couldn't get away from the sunlight. And if they wanted to eat they eventually had to come to where the bait was, oftentimes very high. I was limiting out by running most of my baits high when other captains were struggling to get just a few fish."

Braided Line vs. Mono

"I've tried some of the new braided fishing lines on my trolling reels (30-pound test, 8-pound diameter) and found that it's so thin it's like using sewing thread. Knots are almost impossible to untangle. It gets Dipsy Divers down fast and deep, but too deep and too close to the boat, in my opinion. Monofilament for running Dipsy's has its disadvantages too because of line stretch, but given a choice, and with water fleas now in the lake accumulating on trolling lines, the new oval-shaped monofilaments might be the way to go."

Spoons

"Lake Erie walleyes and steelhead love Michigan Stinger spoons, but as most trollers know the paint on the older spoons peels off easily. I repaint my old spoons with powdered paint that you melt onto the spoons. If you have the time and the will to do it they work great, and the paint stays on. You can also add some metallic tape to the spoon to give it more flash. I like pink best, but most colors worked for me last year. I usually had at least two or three spoons in the water at all times."

For more information contact:

Central Basin Charter Boat Association – 1-800-686-4702 or www.cbcba.com

Captain Bob Schmidt – BoKay Fishing Charters, 888-551-0440

Captain Jim Cooper – J & H Fishing Charters, 800-595-6673

Walleyes Down Under

by
Ron Anlauf

Idle time spent in a boat gets one thinking, like: Why aren't the fish biting and where have they gone? From there you start to imagine where they might be hanging out and what it might look like down there. Getting a bird's eye view from the fish's perspective would be great but it wasn't a real possibility heretofore, that is unless you had the time, and the scuba gear, and the lessons, to get the job done. In that case you had to be really serious and committed, as you would be spending a lot more time investigating and a lot less time angling. The trade off could be well worth the effort it in the long run, but it wasn't always practical.

All that has changed with the introduction of the underwater camera and has opened up a whole new underwater world. The camera can get you in and out quick, and will allow you to wet a line and investigate all at the same time. Even though that combination is possible there is a good chance that watching a live camera will keep you mesmerized and some of your angling efforts will shift to pure research.

Improvements in electronic depth finders have helped unlock some of the secrets to locating fish and structure, but have come up a little short when it comes to absolute information, leaving the user with plenty of unanswered questions. For example, the best graph in the world can't identify the species of a fish, and it can't reveal the whereabouts of fish clinging tight to a rugged bottom.

For example: Mille Lacs Lake in Central Minnesota is well known for it's tremendous walleye angling and deservedly so, but walleyes aren't the only fish swimming in it's rich waters. Nice big arcs marked on a graph doesn't necessarily mean walleyes, even if they show up in the right place at the right time of the year. To give you an idea, an early season run to a deep rocky hump indicated a screen full of walleyes.

After a good deal of time spent and wasted trying to get the first fish to take a bait it became apparent that they just weren't interested. A quick scan of the area with the underwater camera produced the answer to the lack of interest exhibited by all those arcs; They weren't walleyes,

they were big suckers. There is no doubt that the same scenario is repeated over and over again by anglers limited to relying solely on their depth finders to locate and identify fish.

Thinking that you know what you're electronics is telling you can waste valuable fishing time, specially when what you think you know keeps you in unproductive areas. Another case in point involved a sandy area that occasionally produces good early season catches, and the depth finder was indicating marks holding belly to the bottom, and which should be catchable. After a good amount of time spent experimenting with different baits and techniques with no success, down went the camera only to reveal that the fishy looking marks were actually short growing clumps of weeds, with absolutely no walleyes in sight.

Besides keeping you from wasting time in fishless waters, the camera can also help you to stay put, even when you think there's nobody home. For example: A recent trip involved a little early season angling on a lake that is known for producing numbers of nice sized walleyes, but the only thing taking the bait was a bunch of hammer handle sized northern pike. Sure the pike were fun to catch but they really weren't what we were after. The lack of success would have led one to believe that they simply weren't there, but nothing could have been further from the truth. In fact not only did the good spots hold numbers of walleyes, but the marginal spots were holding plenty of fish as well. A quick scan with the camera of an area known for being an early season hot spot revealed all kinds of walleyes, it's just that they weren't interested at the time. Knowing all those fish were there brought us back later in the evening, where we found the walleyes in a much better mood and where we were able to quickly put together a respectable catch. Without the camera we probably would have hit the road for home prematurely and missed out on the best bite of the day.

An underwater camera should be easy to set up or it probably won't get used and is where the OVS from Marcum Technologies really comes in handy. The whole thing comes in a compact carrying case that is completely set up and ready to go. It also has a built in telescoping sun shade that helps make daytime viewing a breeze. The bottom line is that because the unit is more easily read and used it will get more use, and because it gets more use you'll learn more and have more fun.

The OVS has proven to be a big hit with kids, as they are attracted to it like they would be to a new video game. It's a great teaching tool that will help to grab their attention and keep them interested, even when the fish are being less than cooperative. Slow fishing action translates into boredom for beginning anglers, and boredom may keep them from becoming full fledged participants in a sport that needs new entries.

Possible Walleye & Perch Quota/Limit Reductions Raise Questions

by
Jeff Frischkorn

For the next two years the lights may dim over Lake Erie¹s marquee highlighting it as the "Walleye Capital of the World." Beginning in 2004, major reductions in Lake Erie¹s total allowable catch of both walleye and yellow perch are anticipated. Reductions are likely to extend into 2005 as well.

Reporting that Lake Erie has experienced poor young-of-year hatches of walleye in 2000 and again last year, the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission¹s Lake Erie Committee is strongly hinting that reduced daily catch limits will come about for all stake holders.

These cuts could be between 40 and 60 percent of this year's total allowable catch. Lake Erie's 2003 allowable walleye catch is 3.4 million fish and 9.9 million pounds of yellow perch.

"Last year's walleye hatch was probably the worst we've seen in 25 years, and the yellow perch hatch was not much better," said Kevin Kayle, manager of the Ohio Division of Wildlife¹s Fairport Harbor Fisheries Research Station.

Such talk could hurt an already ailing sport fishing charter industry. Coupled with a sluggish economy, reductions in daily bag limits would not help in either recruiting new business or retaining existing customers. "This certainly isn¹t good news," said Ron Johnson of Painesville Township.

"Johnson says that Ohio's lake Erie sport fishermen aren't even taking their quota limit of walleye now.

Consequently, Johnson says, any further restrictions "don¹t make sense." "And I can't understand why they increased the yellow perch quota for Ontario's commercial fishermen. We're talking thousands of pounds of fish," Johnson said.

Each Lake Erie bordering state and province is allocated a certain share of the allowable catch. Each cut of the pie is determined by a formula based on the surface area of the lake under the jurisdiction of the respective state or province. Ohio receives 51 percent of the catch limit for all of Lake Erie. Meanwhile, Ontario's share is 43 percent. New York, Michigan and Pennsylvania split the remaining 6 percent. But the problem is not just with walleye. The commission is deeply concerned about Lake Erie's yellow perch stocks. Here, poor recruitment of hatched fish was noted in 2002 as well.

See Questions, page 35

The Eastern Lake Erie Fishing Report for Summer 2003

by
Joe Fischer

In the past a cold long winter fol lowed by a quick warm-up led to an excellent spawning year for walleyes", stated Don Einhouse, senior biologist at the Lake Erie Fisheries station in Dunkirk, New York. The basis for this assumption is that the shoal walleyes will spawn later and the quick warm up will hatch the eggs rapidly. The eggs then hopefully will avoid the early spring windstorms in the eastern basin, which can easily decimate a class year of open lake shoal spawning. Don Einhouse went on to cite historical data which appears to back his theory. If this theory holds true this year could be one of the best walleye spawning years in a long time. I sure hope he proves to be right on this.

The early season shocking surveys on the Cattaraugus Creek again showed a very healthy population of walleyes with over 60 fish collected in less than an hour during one shocking stint. "Many of these fish will undoubtedly will still be on the shoals and in the creeks when the walleye season opens", remarked Bill Culligan, chief of fisheries at the aforementioned Dunkirk station. Bill went on to say that this would probably not be a problem as most females after spawning immediately leave the area and go to open water where they become somewhat dormant as they recuperate from the rigors of spawning. The vast majority of the walleyes caught in the early season tend to be males because of the female's quick departure. The Cattaraugus Creek incidentally, has become a success story for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). This Creek was used in a NYSDEC sponsored 5-year walleye fingerling-stocking program that has appeared to be an unqualified success. It also will be used as the benchmark for another proposed walleye fingerling stocking program in the Buffalo River a large urban river located within the city limits of Buffalo. Bill Culligan also remarked that the fall netting surveys of 2002 revealed a substantial healthy 2001 class year of walleyes, which are now approximately legal size at 18".

"The lake wide class years of 2000 and 2002 produced very poor walleye recruitment especial1y in the western basin, these poor spawning years wi11 have a very negative effect on the walleye fishery for the coming years", Remarked Don Einhouse. Don went on to say that there was a good possibility that the commercial quotas for walleye will be reduced in the future to reflect the reduced walleye population. The eastern basin however, appeared to have better walleye survival rates during these poor years so the wall-

eye fishing will probably be quite stable.

The early season started slowly with very few walleyes caught by the near shore night fishermen. This was not totally unexpected with the water temperatures hovering around45F. This changed rapidly near the end on May with rising water temperatures activating the many male walleyes still occupying the shallow water near Buffalo and the shoals in the Dunkirk Barcelona area. Some limit catches were reported and a lot of fish were caught in late May and early June. It is hard to get a handle on this fishery as many night-time fishermen tend to be tight lipped and not many people are around when these fishermen leave the water sometimes as late as 4:00AM! I generally gauge the fishing success by the amount of boats still present on the water after 1:00AM, if there is still a lot of boats on the water generally fish are being caught!

In the risk of being redundant the standard method employed by most night fishermen is long line trolling in 5 to 10 feet of water over Lake Erie shoals using stick baits such as the No. 13 floating Rapala and Junior Thunderstick. Preferred colors are black and silver, Chartreuse, Firetiger and Blue and silver. If you run one for a period of time with no results change colors or lures. These fish are easily spooked in the shallow water so it is important to be as still as possible and keep the lighting to a minimum when netting a fish. This early season walleye fishery is strictly for the hardy as nighttime temperatures in May can get down to the low 40's and it can be very cold especially if there is a little wind. The positive side of this type of fishing is that it is quiet, generally calm, and the 2-41b male walleyes caught in the cold early season water are some of the best eating I have ever experienced.

The late cold winter played a major role in the mid spring and early summer (June, early July) walleye fishing with the cold water temperatures keeping the post spawn fish rather dormant and scattered throughout the eastern basin. This led to many long fruitless trolling stints in search of feeding walleye. There was no consistent depth or area where the fish were caught so a lot of time and distance had to be covered to catch a few "eyes". At the present time the summer weather is elevating the water temperature rapidly and the walleye fishing should pick up quickly as mid-summer approaches. I will have more on this in the next issue plus the results of the annual Southtowns walleye tournament which last year produced a record 200 plus fish over 10 pounds. Southtowns website is at http://hometown.aol.comltrm1O52/swa.html.

"We had the best perch fishing in many years", said veteran hardwater angler Herb Schultz. Herb echoed the sentiments of many ice fishermen who were pleasantly surprised by the return of the great perch fishing experienced in past years. This excellent perch fishing carried on into the spring and early summer with many veteran Lake Erie fishermen recording limit or near limit catches of 8-12" perch. As stated in earlier articles, look for the small clusters of boats between Sturgeon Point and the Cattaraugus Creek and using good emerald shiners is the key to getting started if you want to take advantage of this excellent perch fishery. In my opinion the only fish that is better eating than a walleye is a perch!

Smallmouth bass fishing seems to be increasing in popularity with more and more fishermen taking advantage of this world class fishery. Last year for the first time more trips on Eastern Lake Erie were made with smallmouth bass as the target fish than walleye.

If you desire more information on eastern Lake Erie call the Talking Phone Book Fishing Information Hot Line at 716-844-1111 ext.4142. Fishing information can also be obtained at www.northeastoutdoors.com or www.niagara-usa.com. An excellent new free fishing "Hot Spot" map is also available This map can be obtained by calling the Erie County Dept. of Environment and Planning at 866-345-FISH. The Erie County and Niagara County Fish Advisory boards used their vast local fishing knowledge in the assembly of these excellent maps.

From Erie 'Eyes, page 23

boat the boat drifts perpendicular to the contour or breakline. Occasionally the bow mount trolling motor will correct the drift or in some circumstances the kicker motor will have to be nudged into gear to compensate for gusty winds.

All in all the walleyes and bass can be easily caught on Lake Erie. By using some simple techniques of trolling and boat control it won't be long before you will be saying. "Oh Those Erie 'Eyes." Hope to see you on the water soon!

Article is reprinted from the February 2003 Fishline, a publication of the Southtowns Walleye Association

From Fact File, page 6

"The sport fishing catch for yellow perch was tremendous last year and we anticipate it continuing," said Isbell. "Last year we saw a lot of 30-fish limit catches, and better angler success than in previous years. We should see a repeat of that success again this year."
Ontario will receive about five million pounds and Michigan, Pennsylvania and New York will share the remainder.

Ohio's daily bag limit for sport anglers remains at 30 perch per angler. Existing commercial fishery regulations also remain in effect
The Lake Erie Committee remains concerned about changes in the Lake Erie environment caused by aquatic nuisance species and climate driven impacts on lake levels. Spring weather patterns adversely affected walleye and yellow perch hatches in 2000 and 2002 and the committee anticipates major cuts in walleye and perch TAC in 2004 and 2005 to help offset these poor hatches. Work by the member agencies will continue through the summer to determine strategies for reducing harvest where necessary and for protecting Lake Erie's valuable resources.

From Questions, page 32

Consequently the commission is forecasting that agencies and anglers should prepare themselves for reduced catch limits in 2004, for both walleye and yellow perch.

"With our regulation cycle we're going to put forth our proposals for the 2004-2005 fishing season later this summer," Kayle said. "Right now, we¹re expecting changes, but we will be pouring over the data as well as the social and economic impact of any law changes before we decide what to do."

Pennsylvania's possible solution to its anticipated requirement to reduce the harvest next year may include an increase in the minimum size limit. That state's Fish and Boat Commission is exploring the possibility of increasing the size limit from the present 15 inches to 20 inches. Kayle also said he expects to see a series of public forums that will address the issue, allowing the fishing public to hear the division's arguments.

"The thing in our favor is that we haven't even come close to meeting our quota so we should still have some buffer that we can live off before we would have to make some serious cuts," Kayle said.

For this year Ohio's Lake Erie anglers will continue to live under a daily bag limit of 6 walleye if taken between May 1 and February 28, 4 fish if caught between March 1 and April 30. Ohio's yellow perch anglers can currently keep 30 fish per day.

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Lake Erie Walleye Tournaments for 2003

April 6. World Walleye Association: Lake Erie Division. Catawba Island State Park, OH. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 or email: oh@worldwalleye.com or eyetaker@raex.com

April 16-18 PWT Port Clinton, OH Lake Erie $1200/$575 (218) 824-2542

April 27. World Walleye Association: Lake Erie Division. Huron Boat Basin, OH. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 email: oh@worldwalleye.com or eyetaker@raex.com

May 28-31. RCL Port Clinton, OH Lake Erie $1250 (270) 252-1591

June 7-8. World Walleye Association: Lake Erie Division. Hotwaters, Lorain, OH. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 email: oh@worldwalleye.com or eyetaker@raex.com

June 14. North Coast Charter Boat Association. Beachcomber, Fairport Harbor/Grand River, OH. Walleye Tournament $400/boat (8 rods max) Steelhead Tournament $50/boat (8 rods max). 80% payback, first five positions. Contact Steve Jager: (216) 531-2754 or Bernie Roell: (440) 257-9544 or email: alurecharterss@cs.com.

June 21-22. Michigan Walleye Tour Unknown MI Lake Erie $250 secretary@michiganwalleyetour.com

June (Date Pending). Fairport Harbor Rod & Reel Association. Fairport Harbor, OH $80.00/boat. (4 man teams, 8 rod limit) 90% Payout. Contact Jason Glatz: (440) 548-4102

June 14 – June 22 Southtowns Walleye Association of Western New York. Several Western New York weigh stations. Contact Pete Paufler vicepresident@southtownswalleye.com or sign up at their web site: www.southtownswalleye.com . $22,000 in cash prizes plus boat, motor and trailer to tournament winner.

July (Date Pending). Chagrin River Salmon Association. 1st Annual Walleye/Steelhead Fishing Tournament. Willoughby, OH. $150/three man team. (440) 942-4730 or email epav198@aol.com.

July 19-20. World Walleye Association: Lake Erie Division. Fairport Harbor, OH. Contact Dave Kidd at (330) 537-8603 email: oh@worldwalleye.com or eyetaker@raex.com

July 12-13. New York Walleye Association. Ameri-Can Walleye Classic. Chadwick Bay Marina, Dunkirk, NY. $175/ team (2-4 man teams). Limit 150 teams. Contact Jim Borucki (716) 897-1522 or George Boice (716) 874-2522

July 9-11. PWT Dunkirk NY Lake Erie $1200/$575 (218) 824-2542

July 12-13. The Walleye Classic. Port Colborne, Ontario $400/3-4 person team (US). 100 team limit . Contact Dave Malloy (905) 834-9218.

July 26. Western Pennsylvania Anglers. Lake Erie PA Lake Erie Unknown (724) 438-6909

August 9-10. 444 Walleye International Fishing Tourn. Port Colborne & District Conservation Club. Marina H, H Knoll Park in Port Colborne, Ontario. 444 means 4 people/team, 4 fish/day and 4 pairs of poles. $40,000 in cash & Prizes. Contact Mike Hili (905) 835-1891 Email: mhili@cogeco.ca

August 16-17. Kinzua Allegheny Walleye Assoc. Dunkirk Harbor NY Lake Erie $225 (814) 726-3437

August (DATE PENDING). 12th Annual Lake Erie Walleye Tournament. ARU Marina, Ashtabula, OH. $140/boat Contact Chuck Baker (330) 392-1591 ext. 223 or Nick Frangos (330) 759-0746. fishbanger001@netscape.net

August (DATE PENDING). Western Reserve Walleye Association Open Event. ARU Club, Ashtabula, OH. $100/2 person team. Contact Jim Breedlove (330) 530-3909 or visit www.thewrwa.com.