

Walleye News and Fact File

New State Record Walleye 16 Pounds Plus

Tom Haberman of Brunswick (**Cover Photo**) was sure glad he and friends decided to go fishing instead of rabbit hunting last Tuesday (Nov.23, 1999). Haberman landed a new state record walleye in Lake Erie that tipped the scales at 16.19 pounds, report the Ohio Department of Natural Resources, Division of Wildlife.

After paper work was completed by the Outdoor Writes of Ohio (OWO) who certify all state record fish. It surpassed the old state record of 15.95 pounds, caught off the Marblehead Lighthouse in March 1995.

Haberman and friends were perch fishing two miles off Cleveland, when he unexpectedly caught the whopping walleye. He was fishing with minnows on a perch rig using 6-pound test line on ultra light spinning tackle.

The group was going to go rabbit hunting but with the unseasonably warm temperatures, decided it was too warm to run their dogs. They went fishing instead, according to Haberman's friend and LECBA member Capt. Andy Emrisko.

Haberman's walleye initially weighed in at 16.29 pounds, but immediately afterwards spit up a round goby. When weighed again on a second scale at a local meat market, the fish weighed 16.19 pounds. It measured 33 inches in length and had a girth of 21.5 inches.

"This state record catch is testimony that Lake Erie continues to produce some big fish. In addition, the lake has good numbers of walleyes in a variety of sizes as the result of some favorable hatches from the mid 1980s through the 1990s," said Mike Budzik, chief of the Division of Wildlife. "Lake Erie is still the Walleye capitol of the world providing a fishery that is unsurpassed."

Biologists at the Division's Fairport Harbor Fisheries Research Station officially examined the fish Wednesday. From scale samples, biologists determined the fish to be from Lake Erie's 1986 walleye hatch or possibly an earlier hatch, making it at least 13 years old.

"This was undoubtedly the most active year we've ever experienced for state record fish," said Jeff Frishkorn, the chairman of OWO's State Record Fish Committee for all tackle. I can recall about 9 new state record fish certified this year, which is an incredible number."

Often times these record breaking fish are caught by ordinary anglers under ordinary circumstances, which indicates every angler in Ohio is a potential record holder."

Magazine Names Lake Erie as Top Destination

Lake Erie continues to rank among the best sport fisheries in the world, according to In-Fisherman Magazine. In a recently published special issue "Angling Adventures 2000," the popular fishing publication named Lake Erie a top 10 angling destination for walleyes, smallmouth bass, and steelhead trout, reports the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

"These designations by the expert staff of In-Fisherman are more testimony to the mixed bag of angling opportunities this world class fishery continues to provide," said Mike Budzik, chief of the Ohio Division of Wildlife. "Lake Erie not only remains unchallenged as the Walleye Capital of the World, but the lake's

smallmouth bass fishery has moved up the ranks in the last decade to rival smallmouth fishing anywhere else in the country. In addition, the Division's steelhead stocking program has created a superb stream fishery in Central Basin tributaries that becomes more popular as anglers discover this fishery."

In-Fisherman Magazine rated Lake Erie first among "this year's world's best smallmouth bites." The magazine revealed, "No doubt, Erie is today's most storied smallmouth fishery. On Erie, the bass tend to average 3 pounds, with a few exceeding 9 pounds. From the flatlands surrounding Erie's Western Basin to the rocky, hilly terrain of western New York, smallmouths inhabit every bay and reef."

Angling pressure for these fun-to-catch, feisty jumpers has quadrupled on the lake over the past decade. Lake Erie has become such a popular hot spot for smallmouth angling that the Division of Wildlife is conducting a smallmouth bass study to ensure that the population remains stable to support the fishing pressure.

"We have increased the legal size limit and decreased the bag limit beginning March 1, 2000 to maintain and ensure a quality smallmouth fishery," said Budzik.

In-Fisherman designated Lake Erie's Western and Central basins as top 10 picks for big-water walleyes. Good spawning success throughout the 1990s is sustaining a healthy population of these popular sport fish, which have long drawn anglers from across the country. A new state record walleye weighing 16.19 pounds was caught off Cleveland in November. The fish surpassed the previous state record of 15.95 pounds, caught off Marblehead Lighthouse in March 1995.

"We're thrilled that the Western Basin remains in the top 10," said Melinda Huntley, executive director of the Ottawa County Visitors Bureau. "In-Fisherman anglers should know. Anglers competing in the In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail tournament set 17 out of 19 records while fishing the Western Basin this past decade. We are looking forward to the tournament's return to Port Clinton April 19-21, 2000."

In the Central Basin of the lake, Jim Roethler, execu-

tive director of the Ashtabula County Visitors Bureau, responded, "It's great that In-Fisherman recognizes the Central Basin as a top 10 site. Anyone looking for that trophy catch in 2000 is welcome in Ashtabula County."

Roethler noted, "When the walleye are biting, the county sees a significant increase in visitors. This has a direct impact on our local economy as these fishermen will use hotels, campgrounds, restaurants and visit our stores. We are very appreciative of their visits and attempt to be as accommodating as possible."

Last but not least, angling Adventures 2000 named the Grand River, a Lake Erie tributary in northeast Ohio, as one of North America's top 10 fishing destinations for steelhead trout. The Division has been stocking 200,000 steelhead trout in four Central Basin tributaries, including the Grand River, and will increase that number to 400,000 in the spring of 2000. These fish migrate out into Lake Erie and spend the summer in the cooler part of the lake, before returning to streams in the fall through the spring.

"Ohio has been blessed with one of the country's greatest resources — Lake Erie. It is the warmest and most biologically productive of the Great Lakes, which has made it a sport fishing Mecca," said Budzik. "Interagency fisheries management and significant improvement in habitat over the past three decades has helped maintain a world-class fishery that provides a wealth of angling opportunities."

A couple of Ohio's inland waters made In-Fisherman's top-ten lists as well. West Branch Reservoir (Portage County) was listed as a top 10 destination for muskie fishing. Delaware Lake (Delaware County) was included on the list of top 10 hot spots for cold water catfish. In addition, the Ohio River was mentioned under "more coldwater hot spots" for its catfish angling.

In-Fisherman's staff and writers are expert anglers who travel world-wide to experience and write about fishing opportunities. The publication was founded by professional anglers Al and Ron Lindner.

Two State Record Burbot Caught Recently

Anglers fishing Lake Erie near the mouth of the Grand River in Fairport Harbor this winter are reeling in some lunker catches of a fish most people think long went by the wayside. Two potential state record burbot were caught over the past two weeks, reports the Ohio Division of Wildlife.

Mike Hepker, of Sandusky, was fishing the waters of Lake Erie from the Fairport Harbor pier on December 16 when he caught a 12 pound, 10 ounce burbot. Hepker turned in the proper paper work to the Outdoor Writers of Ohio (OHO), the organization that officially certifies all of Ohio's all tackle state record fish. The burbot surpassed the previous state record burbot, an 11.95-pound burbot caught in April 1998 by a Conneaut angler. Within just a few days, yet another potential state record burbot was caught at the Fairport Harbor pier. Bud Clute, of Chardon, landed a 17.33-pound burbot from the pier on December 20, easily surpassing Hepker's fish. After accounting for the time involved in processing the State Record Fish paper work, Hepker's fish was recognized as the state record burbot for only one day before Clute's fish was officially certified as the new state record burbot.

"Two state record burbot from the Fairport Harbor pier is not all that surprising," said Kevin Kayle, Aquatic Biology Supervisor of the Division's Fairport Fish Station. Kayle states that adult burbot congregate at large river mouths in the late fall and early winters to feast on abundant forage fish like gizzard shad, smelt, and shiners. They also congregate in these areas before they spawn, which makes for some very heavy female burbot available to anglers. It would be expected that the new record is also short-lived.

"We may see a large burbot tip the scales at close to twenty pounds," Kayle said. He also noted that the recovery of the burbot in Lake Erie in the last decade has been due to changing lake conditions, good reproduction and growing conditions, and lack of concentrated fishery for burbot. Increased catches of burbot throughout the 1990s indicate their numbers are on the rise in Lake Erie's Central Basin, after extremely low numbers in the 1960s.

This unusual-looking fish is a freshwater relative of the Atlantic cod family and resembles no other fish species in Lake Erie. Burbot have a large head with a single barbel at the tip of the chin. A fin extends down the back to its belly. Adult burbot normally range in size from 16-32 inches and weigh 5-12 pounds. They are voracious night predators and feed upon a variety of species of small fish, such as shiners, used by most freshwater cod, lawyers, lingcod, and eelpout.

Canada launches 5-Year Plan to Improve Eastern Lake Erie Fisheries

On January 1, 2000, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) will launch a five-year action plan to protect and restore local stocks of yellow perch and walleye in eastern Lake Erie for the benefit of both the sport and commercial fisheries.

The plan calls for managing the harvest of fish from the eastern basin separately from the rest of the lake to protect local, genetically-distinct stocks of fish from further decline.

"This plan creates the management tools needed to set the scene for a recovery based on sound science and strong consultation," said Natural Resources Minister John Snobelen. "MNR will work with both sport and commercial fish organizations to increase the chances for stock recovery by rehabilitating and restoring some of the components of the lake's ecosystem."

There have been serious declines in the abundance of important fish species in eastern Lake Erie because of changes in the ecosystem brought on by the presence of exotic species and by efforts to reduce the amount of phosphorus entering the lake. The total commercial harvest of fish from the eastern basin has declined by more than 75 per cent in the 1990s. The rate at which anglers are catching walleye, the most sought-after sports fish, has declined by 50 per cent since the late 1980s.