

The Eastern Lake Erie Fishing Forecast

by
Joe Fischer

Will 2000 be as good of a fishing year for the offshore Eastern Lake Erie walleye fishermen as 1999 which was considered to be one of the best in recent years? This is the question I have heard several times in the last few weeks from some of the most experienced Lake Erie walleye anglers. It appears that the year 2000 will be very similar to 1999 as the lake appears to be relatively stable on water clarity, nutrient levels and forage. The only unknowns are the effect of the Goby, weather conditions, cormorants and the Low Lake Erie water levels. The late summer of 1999 produced some of the best offshore walleye fishing in recent memory with limit catches of 5-10lb walleyes commonplace in August and September. This was undoubtedly due to the warm summer, which caused a migration of western basin walleyes into the deep waters off Dunkirk harbor. If these same weather conditions occur I would expect to see a very similar scenario to take place in late summer.

Most of the Charter Captains I interviewed for this article anticipate similar conditions to last year with fishing being fairly slow in late spring and early summer and then improving rapidly as mid-summer arrives. Deep-water tactics will once again include the use of wire

line, Dipsy Divers, Jet Planers, etc. The bottom line will be as always, to locate the fish, find out what they will hit and when they are feeding. I call this the 3 W's of walleye fishing; Where, what and when! If anyone one of the three W's are missing you will probably not be successful.

The forecast for next year is not as good for the near shore early season walleye fishermen. Continued extreme water clarity coupled with rapidly rising water temperatures moved the post spawn walleyes quickly into deeper water with a resultant poor early season for the night shallow water trolling fishermen and the near shore daytime walleye fisherman. Much of the same is anticipated for the spring of 2000. Most of the relatively successful night fishing occurred of some of the shoals and reefs between Dunkirk and Barcelona. These spots remain cold longer in the spring and do not see the heavy nighttime boating activity that takes place off Athol Springs and Hamburg. The only problem with the Dunkirk area is distance. To get to a number of the good shoals requires a trip of over 5 miles down the lake at night. You might think that this is not a problem but if one of Lake Erie's early season windstorms quickly comes up and you are in a relatively small boat you could have a problem!

The good news is that the preliminary results of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) annual fall trawling studies for 1999 are in and appear to be very promising for the future of the Eastern Basin Lake Erie walleyes. "The 1998-class year of walleyes appears to be the best year since the benchmark year of 1984," commented Don Einhouse, Senior Biologist at the DEC office in Dunkirk. "The majorities of these fish are approximately 13" and should become legal size in another year" Don went on to say. The fact that these fish are 13 inches is important, as they are no longer considered prey for the vast majority of fish in Eastern Lake Erie. This would constitute the first exceptional spawning year in 15 years. The short winter of 1997-8 coupled by the very rapid spring warm-up probably was responsible for this excellent class year.

This should greatly improve the near shore fishery as these fish tend to stay in shallow water near structure until they increase in size. The combination of the deep water nomadic summer walleyes coupled with an exceptionally large 1998 class year of walleyes could produce excellent fishing by the year 2001 for the near shore and off shore fishermen.

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Ohio's New Record Walleye

How to Catch or How Not To Catch a Record Walleye

by
Captain Andy Emrisko

We all have had thoughts of catching a world record fish, or breaking some sort of record. To do this

utmost importance. Of course we will have to have the proper equipment and study the water as to proper depth, amount of baitfish,

I would like to tell you about all the things we didn't do last November while we still managed to land the Ohio State record walleye. First



This record setting fish was the furthest thing from Tom Haberman's mind at the start of his long and eventful day. Rabbit hunting, perch fishing, record walleye? Go figure!

requires hours and hours of planning. Knowing the exact place to fish, and being there at the right time of the year with the right bait in the right presentation is of the

and, most importantly, the right temperature. Once we have eliminated all the variables, we stand a good chance of catching that elusive record. Or do we??

off, the man that caught the fish, Tom "Blacky" Haberman and I had made plans to go rabbit hunting. Because of the unseasonably warm weather, we opted to give the dogs a break and go

fishing (first right move). Since it was a spur of the moment choice, finding enough people to fill the boat was not an easy task, so instead of starting early in the day we didn't get out in the water until after mid-day (worst time of the day to fish, right?)

I called on the radio from the dock to see if anyone was out perch fishing (yes, perch fishing, we didn't go walleye fishing). Sure enough, my pal "Stan the Man" was at the 72nd St. lighthouse on Cleveland's east side. He said he was picking up some really nice jumbos. As we motored out of the marina and approached him I decided to go out a couple miles further into water of about 45 feet (glad I didn't listen to Stan). Once we anchored the boat, the fish finder showed a lot of larger "hooks". An Ole Walleye hunter aboard, Dick Klimczak, said, "I have a feeling this is gonna be a walleye day, Andy." (first time he was ever right).

We immediately started catching some nice yellow perch, and things were going pretty good. I hooked onto something more than a perch, and needed the net. The large net wasn't on board, because I had stopped fishing for walleye earlier in the year, and had taken most of that equipment off the boat. There was a small net I used for small-mouth bass, which had a diameter of about 12 inches, and a depth of about 18 inches, but it was tangled in the anchor light. The fish I hooked turned out to be an 8 pound burbot (also know as Lawyers, or Ling Cod). While I played the fish, the other guy climbed on the hardtop, untangled the net and we

used it to land the fish. At this time we had no idea how important that burbot was to our catching the state record (another wrong that became a right).

A minute later, Blacky had a large fish that was taking a drag. "Probably a large sheephead, tighten the drag" I said. (glad he didn't listen). I had given him a rod and reel for his birthday five years previous, a nice St. Croix ultra light rod spooled with 6 pound test Berkley line (perfect set up for large walleye, wouldn't you say?). When the fish finally reached the surface, I thought my boat was sinking for all the commotion from the port side. I hadn't heard such language since the Army.

The first attempt at netting the fish failed, and the fish took off a-running. But the #4 long shank Eagle Claw hook held its own, and Blacky expertly brought the fish back for a second chance. The net allowed the head and about 3 inches of the body in, and when Dick simultaneously grabbed the tail, it was boated. Had I not caught the Burbot earlier, we probably would not have had time to untangle the net before the fish would have been gone (another wrong that went right).

Once everyone settled down, the fish was measured at 33 inches long, 21.5 inches girth. Using a 10 lb. downrigger weight to zero the scale, it weighed in right around 15.5 pounds. Since in my mind the Ohio record fish was 15.95 pounds but 36 inches long, I felt that the fish had plenty of girth. Because it was so short, I just thought the scale was off, or the rocking boat

in the waves might have affected a true weight. We decided to fish a couple more hours (pretty stupid huh?) and got our fill of perch and headed in. Once on shore, I took the fish to a certified scale and about passed out! The fish weighed 16.29 pounds (I also learned that the old record was also 33 inches long). I then contacted several people to tell them about the good news, and a buddy of mine suggested that we get a second weighing. I took the fish to be weighed at a neighborhood supermarket. When I lifted the fish up to the scale, a 4 inch goby popped out of its mouth! This little incident cost .10 pounds off the original weight of the fish. The fish has since been certified as a new Ohio State Record Walleye at 16.19 pounds.

Well, that's the story on how to catch -or how not to catch- a record. There were so many things that could have gone wrong but didn't, showing that no matter how you plan, if the Man up there doesn't smile down on you now and then, you ain't got a chance! Good luck, and Good Fishin'!

Editor's Note:

Captain Andy Emrisko runs Wave Walker Charters and can be reached at (216) 641-2549

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Walleyes that spawn in natural lakes are often the last fish of the season to deposit their eggs. It usually takes a week or two longer for the sun to warm these large inland lakes to the magical 40 to 45 degree spawning temperature that walleyes prefer.

Trolling rip-rap areas

Troll the spawning areas with shallow diving crankbaits such as a Rebel Minnow or Rattlin' Rogues. Trolling is by far the most effective method I have found for taking spawning walleyes along rip-rap or rocky shore lines. Long-lining crankbaits with eight to ten-pound test monofilament line will produce the best results. Troll at a fairly brisk pace and use a combination of long and short rods to stair-step lure depths to match the angle of the structure. This will keep all your baits in the fish zone.

Set the rods on the side of the boat closest to the rip-rap. Use a long rod (eight to nine-foot) to reach out from the boat and present the crankbait along the edge of the rocks. A shallow diving Rebel Minnow is the ideal lure for the outside rod. The Rebel Minnow only dives two to three feet, but that is enough to keep the lure ticking the stones near shore. Next, set up a shorter rod with a slightly deeper diving lure like the Rattlin' Rogue. Set an even shorter third rod with an even deeper diving bait such as a Wally Diver or one of the new Shad-R baits. By following this procedure, you'll effectively cover the sloping rip-rap edges.

Water Temperature

In the spring, ignoring water temperature can be a costly mistake. Since walleyes spawn in the same places every year at predictable temperature levels, it is a simple matter to determine where the fish are in their spawning cycle.

You can tell by temperature if the fish are close to spawning (pre-spawn) in the middle of it, or finished (post-spawn). This information, in turn, gives you a general idea of where the fish will be.

Peak Walleye Activity

Your best chances to catch a spawning walleye are definitely between dark and midnight. The telemetry studies we've reviewed show a definite trend with the majority of the fish arriving just at dark and spawning until about midnight.

We've also found that fish spawn primarily for about four hours. One fish might pull in and spawn for four hours and be done all in one night. Another may come four different nights and spawn an hour each night. In between these nightly visits, she'll make large movements, sometimes up to five miles as the staging areas can be a long way away from the actual spawning bed. Again, a key to big walleye success during pre-spawn: Be there at dark and don't stay any later than midnight."

Editors note: Be sure to check out Mike's book "Walleye Trouble-Shooting" available for \$14.95 plus \$3 S&H from Fishing Enterprises, P.O. Box 7108, Pierre, SD 57501. Credit cards call toll free 1-800- 223-9126

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The same year (1998) also appears to be a good spawning year for perch, which by many is still considered the best eating of all the fresh water fish. These yearling fish are really "not out of the woods" as they are quite small (3-5") and are perfect food for all the 1998 walleye and our Eastern Lake Erie world class Smallmouth Bass fishery. A good class year for perch is very good news as the population of this fish has been on a precipitous slide for many years. Hopefully most of these delectable little fish will survive and rejuvenate the perch fishing in 2 years.

The DEC at this time do not anticipate as severe a problem as the eastern end of Lake Ontario has had with cormorant predation. The cormorants prefer islands for nesting sites and the eastern basin of Lake Erie is devoid of islands. The only place the cormorants presently nest are Strawberry and Motor islands in the upper Niagara River and the DEC has programs in place to control this population. Without an established residence Eastern Lake Erie only has to deal with the migratory cormorants in late summer and early fall so for the present time the cormorant effect needs to be monitored. I guess the bottom line is that the prediction on the year 2000 fishing would be for a stable fishery very similar to 1999 and future years could be even better as the 1998 class year of walleyes continues to mature.