

“Both sport and commercial fishing are important economic and social activities in many eastern Lake Erie communities, such as Fort Erie, Port Colborne and Port Maitland,” said Tim Hudak, MPP for Erie-Lincoln. “This plan will lead to increased economic and tourism benefits for these shoreline communities and will boost Ontario’s economy.”

Under the plan, fishing for walleye by commercial and sport fishermen will no longer be permitted from March 15 to the second Saturday in May. This will protect walleye during spawning time. New lower catch limits will be set for the commercial harvest of walleye and yellow perch. Anglers will now have a daily limit of 25 yellow perch on the lake and 50 when fishing in Long Point Bay. The walleye daily catch limit in the lower Grand River and the eastern basin of Lake Erie will drop to four from six fish.

One of the key parts of the habitat component of the plan will be to improve walleye movement over the Dunnville and Caledonia dams to allow the fish better access to high quality spawning and nursery habitat in the Grand River.

The first moderately good year-class of perch and walleye in the 1990s appeared in the Eastern Basin in 1998, and are early signs for cautious optimism. These year-classes will become vulnerable to fishing in 2000 and will need to be protected from overharvest so we can build from them, according to Canadian officials.

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The most recent fisheries management efforts come from our friends on the North Shore. In January of this year the Canadian Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) announced a Five-Year Plan to improve fishing in Eastern Lake Erie. The plan calls for protecting walleyes from gill netters and sport fishermen during the spawning season from March through Mid-May. Protecting walleyes from gill netters? Now there’s an oxymoron for you. The plan also calls for reduced quotas of commercial harvests and reduced bag limits for sport fishermen, both for walleye and perch. Many sport fishing advocates say the plan, although a good start, does not go far enough to protect the eastern basin fishery, which has been in rapid decline the past two decades. I would agree with this assessment and will continue to wonder why our Canadian neighbors won’t just bite the bullet, as we did here, and simply **BAN ALL GILL NETTING ONCE AND FOR ALL!!!**

On a lighter note, as editor and publisher of this magazine, I took great pride in preparing our computer systems for the Year 2000 and took every possible precaution to guard against the now infamous millennium bug. I tested our systems and software, purchased a new “Y2K” compliant computer etc., etc. So confident was I that everything would work just right come January 1st, I didn’t even bother to stand watch over my computer in my home office during the “Midnight Rollover”. Did all my painstaking efforts pay off? Uh, No! On that early January 1st morning I discovered that a large contingent of very loyal subscribers showed up on a report with subscription expiration dates of September 1, 1900!! Don’t panic. All is well now as the expiration dates were quickly changed back to September 1, 2000.

With the new Millennium we also are ushering in a new look to our Magazine cover. The original “Fish in the Lake” cover (since 1995) has finally been replaced with a new logo. Hope you like it!

With this issue we welcome Mark Hicks and Mark Martin to our staff of writers. Both Marks are well known outdoors writers and bring years of experience and knowledge of Lake Erie and walleye fishing with them. Welcome aboard guys!

Till next time, good fishing!

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Understanding Pre-Spawn & Spawning Walleyes

by
Mike McClelland

Much debate has occurred over the years about fishing and walleye activity during the pre-spawn and spawning period. Unfortunately much of the information that has been passed along has been based upon mis-information or just plain ignorance. Understanding walleyes and the proper techniques to use during this period will help you greatly improve your fishing success.

Many well intended anglers nationwide have questioned the ethics of catching walleyes during the pre-spawn. Remember this: It doesn't matter whether a female walleye is caught during this time period or in the summer, the net effect is much the same. Simply put, provided that anglers don't over harvest the key spawners, (the three to six pound females) during any time period throughout the year, fishing pre-spawn walleyes won't have a negative impact on your favorite fishery.

Always practice good conservation skills not only during this time period, but through out the whole fishing year.

Now let's get into understanding this calendar period. Walleyes spawn in rocky areas, instinctively



The Author with a prized catch. The spawning for walleyes is temperature driven, usually between 40-45 degrees.

seeking places that receive large amounts of wave action which does two things: oxygenates the

eggs and keeps silt from covering them. These areas should be sought out in the early spring on lakes, reservoirs and rivers. The spawn begins when water temperatures reach 40 degrees and lasts until the water warms beyond 45 degrees. In the period leading up to the spawn, look around. You can use rip-rap, skull-sized rocks or other known spawning areas as your points of reference when searching for pre-spawners.

The quickest and easiest way to find spawning areas is to simply ask. Since walleyes spawn in the same locations year after year, someone will know where the spawn occurs. If you can't learn this information at local bait shops, contact the local conservation officer to put you on the right track.

Pre-Spawn

Once the spawning area has been located the fish staging for the spawn is easy to find with the help of a few simple rules.

Begin at the spawning area as walleyes spawn in the same area year after year. Proceed from the

spawning area and locate the closest 30-foot level of water on the flattest bottom possible.

Whether this depth is found in the backs of bays or the bottom of the lake, 30 feet is the key. If the lake doesn't have 30 feet of water, move to the closest, deepest part of the lake and begin looking there.

The fish can be easily found and are unmistakable. On your electronics, they'll mark as big hooks a foot or two off the bottom. It may not be on a red-hot bite, so fish them with confidence and big baits. Eventually a few will bite and two or three fish on any pre-spawn day is considered a great day.

Once you have located the fish, move your boat to the up-wind side and drift through them as slowly as possible. The best method for taking pre-spawn fish is either Lindy rigging a large minnow four to six inches long or vertical jigging with a 1/4 ounce to 3/8 ounce jig using a large rubber body and a big minnow. My preference is both presentations at the same time. Let the Lindy rig trail 75 to 100 feet behind the boat and set the rod in a rod holder. Always keep an eye on the Lindy rig rod. When a hit is made, open the bail and give the fish a good deal of line and time before setting the hook. Remember these fish are somewhat lethargic and you're using a large minnow, give them some time.

With the Lindy rig rod is in its holder, vertically jig with the other rod. Jigging is easy - simply bounce the jig off the bottom, keeping it as close to vertical as possible. Unlike the Lindy rig, set the hook as soon as you feel a hit. For that matter,

set the hook as soon as you think you feel a hit.

One key to catching walleyes during the pre-spawn is to use big baits. The young of the year haven't hatched yet, so the main food for walleyes are the adult bait fish that have made it through the first year and are now fully grown. Add the biggest body you have to your jigs and cast or troll bigger crankbaits.

Slow Is The Key

Once you've located fish with electronics, remember fishing slow is the key. For jigging or rigging, you can't go too slow. Use your bow mount electric motor on the slowest speed. The slightest breeze will push you fast enough. Use a sea anchor to slow you even more if there is any wind.

Spawning

Walleyes spawn in water from one foot to over 20 feet deep. Rocky and gravel covered shore-lines are the most typical spawning sites; however, if habitat is lacking walleyes will also spawn on sand and in other less desirable areas. An abundance of broken rocks and gravel in water three to 10 feet deep will normally attract the largest concentrations of fish.

Reservoir walleyes typically migrate to the upstream end of an impoundment to spawn. In large reservoirs, such as those along the Missouri River, walleyes have been known to travel 100 plus miles to reach prime spawning sites. Fisheries' biologists have tracked walleyes tagged with radio telem-

etry transmitters from one end of Lake Oahe in South Dakota to the other. Although this long distance may be an isolated incident, walleyes are nomadic creatures that won't hesitate to migrate many miles to find suitable spawning habitat. Rip-rap shorelines near the dams are often prime spawning areas. Trolling crankbaits along this rip-rap edge can prove absolutely deadly on big fish. The best action usually takes place after dark and continues until about midnight.

Although many walleyes prefer to spawn just downstream from dams, the rocky shorelines and tributary streams also attract spawn-laden fish. Not all the fish spawn at the same time or in the same places. This is Mother Nature's way of ensuring that an entire "year class," those particular fish that are born each year, isn't destroyed by floods or other natural disasters.

Walleyes that spawn in rivers are the most predictable of all. Clearly, 99 percent of the fish that enter the river to spawn will physically swim as far as they possibly can before stopping to deposit their eggs. Low head dams, waterfalls, or natural and man-made diversions, usually stop the upstream movement of fish and often cause the concentration of tremendous numbers of big fish in amazingly small areas. At times, the walleyes will be so thick you can feel your lure bouncing off the backs of the fish. Fishing under these conditions can be easy and rewarding.

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Lake Erie Pre-Spawn & River Walleye Tactics

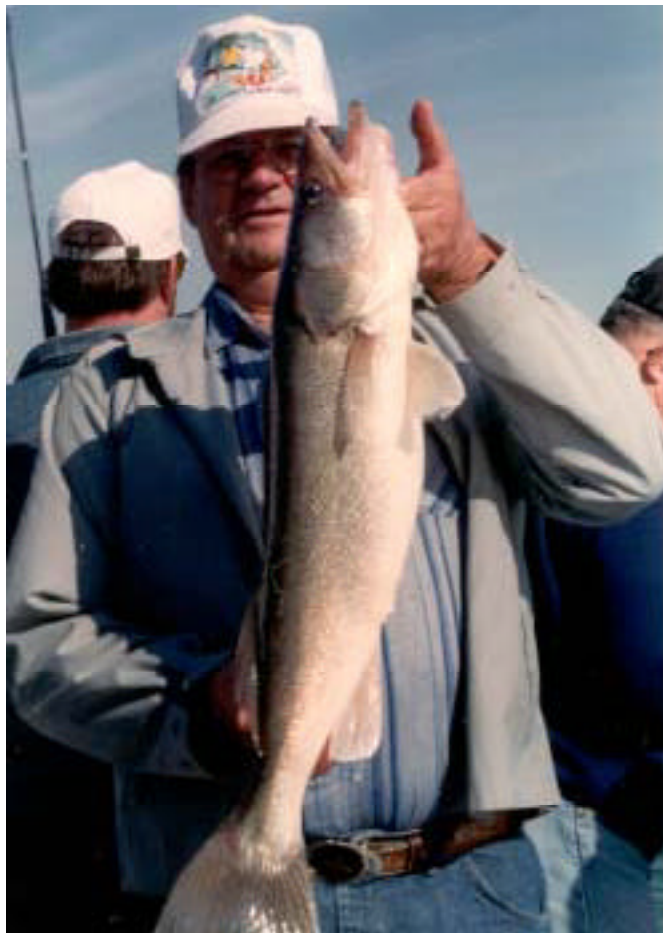
by
Richard Martin

Every year it happens. Like the inexorable ticking of a clock, the days grow longer, two minutes by two minutes. And as they do, Lake Erie walleye eggs and milt begin to mature and hormones trigger off behavior patterns that have changed little over thousands of years.

The fish begin staging south of Green Island, north of such reefs as Clinton and Cone, between North Bass and Niagara, and off the tip of Catawba island, all deep water spots. Then the huge, loose schools and pods begin a slow, measured movement toward the western end of the lake.

Some of those schools head toward reefs like Toussaint and Niagara, others favor flats, beach areas, and rockpiles, and more seek out the Sandusky and Maumee rivers, but they all move and as they do, offer opportunities for the first big walleye catches of the

year. And some of the fish caught will be BIG walleyes!

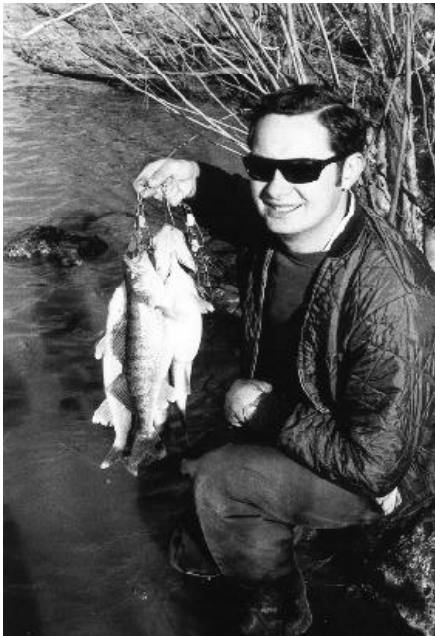


Early Pre-spawn walleyes stage in deeper water south of Green Island, then begin a slow westward migration to shallower waters around the reefs.

It's tough fishing. Some years the ice lingers long, and anglers will

often perform the dangerous trick of walking their boat over thin ice to open water. Foolish. Other years the ice leaves early, and launch ramps in western Lake Erie are free and ready for use. However the weather, once boats can be launched, it's going to be cold. Lake water won't be much above 33 degrees, snow and high winds are always possible, and ice chunks will be floating here and there. which means anglers had best dress warmly and carry plenty of hot coffee. But the fish have no choice and will move, whatever the weather. All that's necessary is to find them and then catch them.

The finding most days isn't difficult. At the beginning of the migration, look for them in the deep-water spots listed above. As it progresses they'll move into shallower water and schools will swim west, many of them passing the tip of Catawba Island. They might be a half-mile offshore, or a mile or several, and depending on when you're able to go, most



Smaller male 'jacks' are typical catches during the river runs' in spring.

could be north of the island, or west and south.

So, one good tactic is to launch at Catawba Island State Park and head a mile or two due west. Then anchor if necessary, or drift if the winds are gentle and drifting is possible. With a fish locator, pinpointing schools and pods is easy, but lacking this basic gear most anglers anchor and fish one spot for 15 minutes then move, and move again. Drifters just keep going, maybe working deeper or shallower on each drift.

Anglers will basically be using ice fishing techniques at this time of year, and that means jigging just off bottom with spoons and jigs. Good choices are Swedish Pimples, jigging Rapalalas, Snakey Spoons, Hopkins Spoons, and Crocodiles. Those who prefer

straight jigs should try those with twister tails, soft flaring maribou, or tinsel tails. Either way it's best to bait all three hooks of spoons or the single hook of jigs with emerald shiners. The minnows bouncing up and down add both eye appeal and flavor to any lure.

Keep in mind that early fish are very cold and therefore very sluggish. A fast moving rig won't attract them, so keep it slow and make jigs easy up and down, rather than fast and jerky. Strikes might be serious hits, but much more often they'll be gentle tugs or maybe just a touch of extra weight on the line as a fish clamps down. So, use a sensitive rod, 6-10 pound test line, and take action at any difference in the lure.

On my last trip for these cold water walleyes, the action was more or less typical. We launched at Catawba State Park, moved out about two miles until the locator showed a cluster of fish below, anchored and started jigging blue and silver Swedish Pimples with shiner dressing. It took less than five minutes to feel that first gentle tug, a slow plunging fish that materialized into a seven pound female.

Then my partners started picking up fish, and I caught more, filling my limit within an hour. And thank

heavens for that. Even with plenty of protective gear, my fingers were wet and growing numb, toes weren't moving well, and the coffee had long gone. We headed back to the dock in a hurry.

It's worth pointing out that not all walleye follow this general migration route. Some move into Sandusky Bay from the Marblehead area and these are the easiest to catch of all. Several years ago I spent a few minutes studying a map of the Bay, and found a spot where the shores pinched in dramatically. That's at the old railroad bridge just east of old Bay Bridge and east again of fairly new Route 2.

Every walleye that takes this route must funnel under that bridge, and it looked like a likely spot. I never got around to trying it, but did pass the information on to a friend who lives up there, and he said, "It's a great place all right. Once we



Fishermen can find walleye action in the western basin Sandusky and Maumee rivers during the spawning runs each and every spring.