

Fall Perchin' Lake Erie's Central Basin

by
Jeff Frischkorn

It was over in less time than it takes to watch a made-for-television movie. After just 90 minutes of lowering weighted perch rigs into 52 feet of Lake Erie water the five anglers were stowing their gear and battening down the hatches. While the perch were kind and generous, Lake Erie was showing its temperamental side with waves lifting the hull of Marv DeGreen's boat by as much as four feet.

Even so the fact that the boat's cooler was enriched by 150 plump, sweet-smelling yellow perch was cause for celebration.

"This is some kind of wonderful," said charter captain Steve Jager. "Another day in paradise."

The trip to heaven began as a

busman's holiday for DeGreen, Jager and Ron Johnson, all Grand River-based charter captains. By a fluke the three normally busy fishing guides were each without a hired charter on a recent weekday afternoon.



Lake Erie's Central Basin is a prime spot for perch in September and October. On any given weekend you can see hundreds of boats in several different 'packs' over the favorite perch hot spots.

That was good fortune for Bob Ashley of Mentor and myself. We'd have the opportunity to join the three charter captains on a yellow perch fishing trip out of the

Grand River. This way the three fishing guides could keep on top of where the perch were actively feeding. That, of course, was as good of an excuse as any. These guys love to fish and the thought of even an afternoon off was an alien and unacceptable

alternative. They knew their boats would soon hibernate on storage racks, surrounded by deep snows and water-freezing temperatures.

"Once again the weather report got it all wrong," said Johnson as we watched the three to occasionally four foot swells. No matter, for the wind and the waves created the

perfect perch fishing chop. We had enough of a roller coaster ride to keep our perch rigs riding up and down from the lake's bottom.

The fishing gear was pretty much

assembled when DeGreen shut down the boat's engines and released the anchor. Based on their experiences the three charter captains had attached sinkers weighing at least two ounces to each of the rigs.

"There's a lot of current down there and you need the weight to keep the perch rig from running away," Johnson said. Hardly had the perch rigs touched bottom when the fish began inspecting the baited offerings. Usually one fish was hauled aboard but enough double and triple headers were raised to spark more than a few "he-haws" and "yow-ees" from the quintet of fishermen.

"You might as well put that second rod away," Johnson said, looking at my pair of fishing outfits. "It'll only get in the way." Johnson was correct as the perch came so fast that the need for two outfits was outweighed by the simplicity of the technique. We only had to lower our rigs and then let the fishing lines go slack for a moment. Next was to jerk the rods up to set the hooks and then reeling in anywhere from one to three perch.

The fish were then deposited into a plastic kitchen trash can for temporary storage. "When the can's full there's about 100 perch in it," DeGreen said.

In less than an hour the trash can held a treasure of 100 fish. At that point Jager stopped fishing and offered a running sports television-style commentary. He cajoled when I raised three perch only to see two of them eject themselves before

being swung aboard. And Jager offered a bravo when anyone hauled up a particularly impressive perch.

"The perch are really nice size this year, and we're not catching any gobies and few sheepshead out here," DeGreen said.

And so the fishing trip was over only a short time after it had begun.

Walleye are fine and few things excite me more than a thrashing steelhead trout but when it comes to filling the freezer with fillets, and having a ball doing so, nothing beats Lake Erie's autumn run of yellow perch.

Fall is the prime perch season on Lake Erie. The past few years have been good to perch fishermen with limit catches often taken.

With perch selling for up to 14.00/pound in the grocery stores, many fishermen work to fill their freezers for the winter months.



Lake Erie Walleye Migrations

*Great Lake's walleyes are known to be highly nomadic;
some even migrate hundreds of miles*

by
Michael Veine

The inline planer board surged rearward signaling a sizeable fish on the business end. After a five-minute fight, I slipped the net under a thrashing, chunky six pounder. While I unhooked her, I noticed a dull, metal tag protruding from that tooth-lined mouth. On my charter boat, it's policy to release all pre-spawn female walleyes along with any tagged fish: Unless of course they are of trophy proportions and are headed for the taxidermist. Using needle nosed pliers, I rotated the tag around and wrote down the tag information in my fishing log. I also recorded the time, date, weight, length and capture coordinates in my log. We then released the fish so further study would be possible on the fish. Later that month, I collected all the tag data from April captures and sent it to

the Michigan DNR. A few weeks later and I received a letter thanking me for my assistance. The

letter also contained information on each fish. The six-pounder had been tagged two years earlier near

Monroe, MI., less than a mile from where I caught her. In just two years that fish had nearly doubled its body weight and had grown six inches longer. Since we released that fish, it is now possible for someone else to catch it and provide additional growth and migration data for the study. Who knows, maybe some day she'll show up in my landing net again weighing over 10-pounds. Ah, wishful thinking.



Continuing walleye migration studies will unlock secrets to help protect and enhance the fisheries for generations to come. Photo taken by Michael Veine.

Biologists and anglers from Ohio, Michigan, New York and Ontario, have been conducting inter-agency research on Lake Erie's walleye movements and migrations. The studies have shown that Erie's walleyes are highly nomadic, however they do possess homing



This tagged walleye was caught within one mile of its capture

instincts that consistently brings them back to the same spots year after year for spawning. The migration studies key on that homing instinct. Walleyes are captured using nets and boom shockers in the spawning areas where unique lip tags are attaching to the fish. After spawning, the walleyes disburse out. Eventually, some of those tagged fish are caught and the information is reported back. These returns continue to reveal some interesting and important scientific information on migration patterns. These studies directly help fisheries professionals manage our walleye resources and they also help anglers to key in on the best places to fish during the different seasons.

Bob Haas is a Fisheries Biologist overseeing the Lake Erie tagging studies for the Michigan DNR. Haas says, "During the spring, more than 80% of Lake Erie's walleyes end up in the Western

Basin and its tributaries. The Michigan DNR has been setting trap nets as part of a tagging study since 1978. We have historically netted walleyes just south of Monroe along a spawning reef. Our goal has been to tag 2,000

walleyes each year during the April spawning period. Most years we've been very successful."

Haas went on to say, "On average, anglers catch and report 4 to 5 percent of the walleyes that are tagged. Even though Canadian commercial fishers account for the vast majority of the walleye harvest from Lake Erie, sport fishermen still account for the lion's share of tag returns. In fact, netters rarely report any." Haas commends those cooperative anglers that have participated in this important research throughout the Great Lakes. He recommends that anglers should simply record the information from the tag without removing it. After recording the tag information, ideally the fish should be released so further studies on that fish are possible. Haas does concede though that tagged walleyes may legally be kept.



The Michigan DNR sets trap nets on Lake Erie every spring just south of Monroe along a shoreline reef. Photo taken by Michael Veine.

The recorded tag information or the physical tag can be dropped off or mailed to any participating state's (Ministry in Canada) Natural Resources field office. Make sure to include the exact location where the walleye was caught. Also, please list the date and time of the capture along with the length and weight of the fish if possible. People can also log onto the Michigan DNR website (<http://www.dnr.state.mi.us>) and enter the tag information online. The Michigan DNR will pass the information along to other state or provincial agencies as applicable. If the cooperater provides his or her name and address, some history on the fish will be provided. I've caught and reported over 100-tagged fish to the DNR and I get a kick out of seeing the bio on those fish.

The Lake Erie migration study is revealing some interesting information to say the very least. Most of Erie's walleyes are tagged in the Western Basin, which should come as no surprise since the majority of Erie's walleyes spawn at Western Basin reefs and rivers. It's also no surprise that most of the tagged fish are caught from the Western Basin, which accounts for most of the sport fishing harvest on Erie. Only about five percent of tagged returns come from the Eastern and Central Basins combined. However when the percentage of the tagged returns are factored against the total catch from each Basin, statistics show that Lake Erie's adult walleyes spread out rather evenly all over the system after spawning.

Bob Haas says, "The tagging studies have shown that after spawning in the Western Basin, most adult walleyes migrate east in a circular

pattern. They move eastward along the northern half of Lake Erie during the spring and summer. During the fall and winter, those same walleyes make their way back "home" heading west along the southern region of the lake."

A good number of Erie's tagged walleyes are taken from rivers feeding the Western Basin, especially the Maumee and Detroit Rivers. Surprisingly, a good number of Lake Erie's walleyes end up in Lake St. Clair and the St. Clair River and they don't stop there either. Many of Erie's Walleyes are caught all along the Michigan waters of Lake Huron especially in outer Saginaw Bay. Some have even shown up at Thunder Bay near Alpena and still farther north all the way to the Mackinac Bridge. Research has also shown that as walleyes grow older, they tend to migrate farther. It's interesting to note that walleyes tagged in the Saginaw Bay watershed rarely ever disburse to Lake Erie.

Because Erie's walleyes pay no attention to boundaries, the significance of interagency cooperation is especially important pertaining to the management of the valuable resource. Researchers are taking the next step with radio telemetry studies of Great Lake's walleyes. These and other important projects will help biologists further unravel walleye travel secrets. Walleyes are perhaps the most 743 3.5m5spo tagged in the

critical for the continued prosperity of our Lake Erie walleye fishery.



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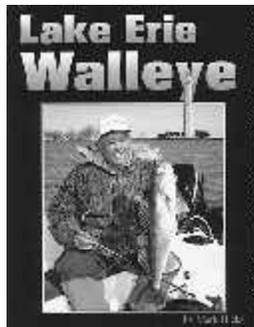
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