

# The Eastern Basin Fisheries Outlook for 1999

By  
Joe Fischer

The new year is here, the local boat shows are about to begin, Buffalo's Outdoor Sportsmen's Show at the Agri-Center in Hamburg will take place in March, and best of all I just received my annual Spring Cabela's fishing catalog. Can spring be far away? I know most of you are experiencing the throes of "cabin fever" and cannot wait to wet a line so I'll add a little coal to the fire with the Lake Erie fishing forecast for the spring of 1999. The Eastern basin's environment, as you know, is undergoing a dramatic change with extreme water clarity, low phosphorous levels, Zebra and Quagga mussels, cormorants and the recent discovery of the goby all playing a role.

The extreme water clarity has made it easier for predators to seek out prey which might account for

the disappearance of a good 1996 year class of yellow perch. W. Culligan, chief of fisheries at the Dunkirk New York State Department of Environmental Conserva-



**Eastern Basin walleye fishing should be good this year. Large fish are expected to be as numerous as they were last year. These hawks were taken in July of 1998 off of Cattaraugus Creek, near Dunkirk, NY.**

tion office, commented, "The fall DEC netting surveys seem to indicate that the 1996 class year of perch has disappeared." This is not the first time this has happened as good class years in 1993 and 1994 seemed to have come upon the same fate. In past years if a good young of year (YOY) class of

perch existed one could readily forecast good fishing in future years. It appears that YOY perch are much more heavily predated on than in the past. The culprits may

be smallmouth bass or possibly cormorants who would have easy pickings due to the water clarity. The last thing the eastern basin perch fishery, which already has experienced a precipitous decline, needs is losing another good class year of perch!

The walleye forecast seems more promising as the 1998 year class of walleyes appears to be very good with YOY walleyes appearing in the fall netting survey. It

is to be hoped that they will not have the same fate as the aforementioned perch. "The walleyes grow quite rapidly with some attaining 8" in size by fall, which should hopefully keep predation down" commented Don Einhouse, fisheries biologist at the DEC's fisheries station in Dunkirk. Perch

grow slowly with the average size being only several inches long in the fall of the first year. This makes them a perfect prey for a much longer time for heavy predation by other fish and birds. Walleyes also tend to be more nocturnal and are more active in low light conditions when other predators are not feeding.

The DEC and local sportsmen are concerned about the potential impact on the Lake Erie fishery of 2 relatively new predators, the cormorant and the goby. A recent DEC study revealed that the cormorants consumed approximately 87 million fish from the Southeastern end of Lake Ontario during 1988! This breaks down to 23 million alewife, 26 million stickleback, 16 million perch, 1.3 million smallmouth bass, some walleyes, trout etc. The smallmouth bass fishery in the Southeastern end of Lake Ontario is in a critical state as many of the future class years (5-10 inches) were virtually wiped out by this federally protected predator. Many of these birds are now showing up in numbers from Dunkirk harbor to the Small Boat Harbor in Buffalo and undoubtedly will have some effect on the fishery. The 2 species I worry about the most would be the already stressed perch population and the world class smallmouth bass fishery.

The effect of the recently discovered goby, a small pugnacious little fish, is not certain, but wherever this little fish has gone it soon became the dominant species. The DEC fears that this fish will spread rapidly as it is an excellent bait fish and will be spread unwittingly by

live bait fishermen. The one good piece of information is that the goby does like to eat zebra and Quagga mussels.

Phosphorous levels are low but appeared to have stabilized in the last several years. Phosphorous is essential for the lower food chain (zooplankton, phytoplankton, etc.). Our expert local DEC personnel at the Dunkirk fisheries station readily admit that the lake's ecosystem is changing quickly and the mixing of all the aforementioned predators make it very difficult to predict the future of the eastern end of the lake. The DEC has some new information regarding the nutrient levels but they have not completed the analysis of their data at this time.

What does all this mean in the forecast for the 1999 Lake Erie spring walleye season? I would feel the most concerned about the clarity of water and its effect on walleye. Because of water temperatures and post spawning lethargy a great deal of the early fishing takes place in very shallow water. This water will now be ultra clear with a great deal of light penetration. Walleyes, as you know, do not like bright light and are easily spooked even by bright running lights in shallow water. The water clarity will undoubtedly drive the walleyes deeper which in turn will require you to troll in deeper water and even use small amounts of weight on your lures. Night trolling with body baits in 5-10 feet of water is the traditional method favored by most early season eastern basin walleye fishermen. If you can't get strikes in shallow water I would recommend that you

try 10-20 feet with a little weight about 3-4 feet above your lure. The weight becomes necessary as most body baits like the Rapala or Jr. Thunderstick will only go down 3-5 feet without weight. The walleyes in their post-spawning state are very lethargic and are usually near the bottom and will not move very far to strike a lure. This therefore requires you to add a little weight in front of your body bait to get the lure down to them. I also think that trolling slowly is important because in most cases these fish will not chase a lure. Some of the local fishermen recommend using running lights that are somewhat subdued to prevent spooking the fish. Running long leads (100-200 feet) is also essential.

The lures of choice like the Rapala and Jr. Thunderstick still will work but different colors might work better than in the past due to the water clarity. Colors such as traditional silver and black, Silver and Blue or the Perch color might work better in clear water than the bright colors like Firetiger or Fluorescent Red.

If you prefer daytime fishing the locals like to drift (if the winds permit) in water 15-30 feet with three-way swivels and worm harnesses. The object here is to get as close to the bottom without becoming snagged up. To reduce tackle loss try tying a piece of lighter line to the sinker portion of your three-way swivel. This way when you snag the bottom you'll only lose the sinker and not the harness.

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# Booking A Lake Erie Charter Fishing Trip

## *What Questions To Ask and What You Should Expect*

Lake Erie offers some of the best angling opportunities in the United States, and the Ohio Charter boat fishing industry can provide anglers with safe, productive, and memorable experiences. This fact sheet will help experienced as well as new clientele charter a trip and increase their satisfaction while on the water.

### **The lake has changed**

Fishing on Lake Erie has changed from the 1980s, when fish were caught from June through August using a weight-forward spinner. Other times

of the year and other fishing methods have become productive, too, even though you can still book a drift/cast walleye charter, still no doubt the most popular trip in western Lake Erie.

Many changes have taken place in Lake Erie with fish populations, exotic invaders such as the zebra mussel and the spiny water flea, increased water clarity, and

You can now book a charter just after ice-out to jig for pre-spawn walleye, in April to cast lead-head jigs for spawning walleye near the reefs and near-shore areas, or

during post-spawn time to pursue the walleye by drifting and casting. If you desire warmer weather, you can secure a trolling or drift/cast trip in the summer months. In the late fall, you can fish when walleyes are putting on the "feed bag" in preparation for the winter months. You may want to fish for walleye and smallmouth bass during the same trip, or you can take a charter strictly for



**Charter fishing on Lake Erie can be a wonderful experience. Be prepared to ask the Captain plenty of questions. You'll enjoy the trip all the more if you're familiar with and comfortable with the ways of the Captain.**

changes in productivity levels (the food web). Anglers too have changed and are willing to try angling at different times of the year using different techniques.

smallmouth.

Pre-spawn and spawn angling didn't become popular until the late 1980s and the concept of late fall nearshore and night angling for walleyes is still catching on.

Trolling, used by some during the '80s is now common lakewide.

Do you like the idea of trolling using a variety of methods, such as planer boards, dipsy divers, and downriggers? Or are casting and jigging more to your liking? Would you like to experience the deep water angling found in central Lake Erie waters, or do you prefer the shallower, island-studded western basin?

It's your choice. Trips can be planned for a specific time of year, using a specific fishing method, and for a particular fish species. All methods have their time and place, just as different seasons of the year result in different sized and numbers of fish caught and different kinds of satisfaction gained by the angler. The choices are many and trips need to be thought out carefully.

The choice of captains is yours, too. Many anglers have found it takes years of trial to find a charter captain who best meets their needs, desires, and budget. Lake Erie's charterboat industry has grown from less than 50 captains during the 1970s, to over 1,000 today. Most captains are superior boat operators, excellent anglers, and have a good knowledge of the lake, weather, and where to find fish. Most will also go the extra nautical mile to make your experience memorable. However, to avoid the occasional bad charter, you need to know what to ask and expect of a Lake Erie charter captain.

### Questions to ask

#### ***What is the full cost of the trip?***

Is there a deposit? Is it refundable or applicable to another trip should an unforeseen circumstance warrant cancellation? How far in advance do you need to call to change a reserved date without forfeiting your deposit? What is included in the cost: bait, ice, tackle, fish cleaning?

If you reserve a sleeping room at a hotel, cabin, or condo, ask if their deposit is refundable if you should need to cancel the trip for whatever reason, including bad weather.

#### ***When does the charter begin and end?***

When should you be at the boat ready to go? When do you return? Most charters are run on a "dock-to-dock" basis. If the trip is eight hours, dock to dock, don't expect eight hours of fishing. Most captains will spend a little extra time fishing if you are close to catching your limit or you haven't been successful. Be sure to determine before you go whether there will be a charge if extra time is provided by the captain.

To avoid any surprises, ask if the captain runs more than one trip a day. Let's say your charter is 6 am to 1pm, dock-to-dock. Fishing is slow, but starts to pick up around noon. When you ask the captain the cost of a few more hours, he states that he has another trip in the afternoon and needs to leave in ten minutes. This isn't what you want to hear, now that the walleye have started to bite.

#### ***Make arrangements to contact the captain a day or two before***

***the trip*** to check on forecasted weather conditions and to confirm the time you are to be at the dock. If you have a delay or need to cancel at the last minute, call the captain or the marina immediately. Don't leave them sitting at the dock all day waiting for you. Your deposit will not cover the cost of a lost charter. By calling if you need to cancel the captain is free to pick up a walk-on trip or spend the day another way.

***Is the charter for hours on the boat or for catching your fish limit?*** Consider carefully the trip duration clause, such as "eight hours, dock-to-dock, or limit." If your intention is to spend eight hours on the water, you may be disappointed when, after catching your limit of walleye in four hours, the captain heads back to the dock. If your desire is to hire a captain for eight hours on the water, be sure to state that request when booking your charter. Regardless of what you're fishing for, there are always other species of fish to catch if you "limit out" early. You may even want to take a side trip to the islands or grab a bite to eat down in the Cleveland flats. Discuss it with the captain before reserving the charter date.

***Make sure the charter fits your mode of angling.*** As previously stated, changes with Lake Erie have altered the way we fish. If you book a pre-spawn walleye charter but expect to be casting weight-forward spinners, you are in for a surprise. Likewise, you may be surprised to find the captain geared up to troll for walleye during a July charter when you expect to drift-and-cast. The point

is, all methods of angling can be productive during the right time and place, but it may not be the type of angling your party expects. Discuss your preferences with the captain and determine if the charter captain's method or time of year fit your needs and desires.

***If you or members of your party are not experienced anglers,*** make this known at the time you book your trip. It should be the responsibility of the captain and crew to teach you proper angling methods, and this service should be part of the charter. After all, you didn't charter a cruise, you chartered a fishing trip.

***Some captains and mates are criticized for catching more than their personal limit*** during a charter to 'help' their clientele fill the cooler. Because a boat limit – and not a personal limit – is enforced on Lake Erie, this is entirely legal. They are entitled to fish and to catch their limit, yet you have paid for the right to catch and keep your own fish. If this concerns you, discuss it with the captain before you send a deposit. According to many surveys of charter clientele conducted by Ohio Sea Grant, the experience of being on the lake and having an enjoyable time with friends and/or family is more important than a limit catch. Give some thought to what you really expect from your day on the lake and what is truly important to you and your party.

***If your party does limit out,*** and the captain and mate offer theirs to you, refer to your fishing regulations. It is illegal to possess more than your daily limit within ¼ mile

of the lake, except at your motel, camp or cottage.

***Don't ask for a guaranteed limit Catch*** The number of fish caught will depend on a variety of factors, including the desire of the fish to bite, weather conditions, concentration and location of fish, availability of natural food, water temperature, and your degree of ability with rod and reel.

If you feel you need to catch the limit to justify the cost of a charter, just check out the price of walleye and perch fillets at the local fish market. Your share of six-person charter costs much more than if you were to buy your fish at the fish market and stay home.

Charter captains will provide you with every possible opportunity to catch fish. Even though they would like your business in the future, they cannot make fish bite. And if fishing meant catching a fish with every cast or limiting out during every trip, it wouldn't be called fishing, it would be called catching.

***What should you bring?*** Ask what is provided with the base cost of the charter. Generally, on six-person charters, bait, rods and reels, lures, and ice are provided. Always specifically ask if there is an additional cost for these items. On occasion, anglers arrive at the dock to find that "provided" really means "available for an additional fee."

***If you are expected to provide your own tackle*** such as a head boat charter, and are unsure of the appropriate items to bring, ask. As

the lake changes, so do the fishing techniques. What you may use on a pre-spawn or spawn walleye charter will be dramatically different from what lures would be productive during June or July.

***Always bring more bait than you think you'll need.*** Bait is generally provided on six-passenger charters, and is not used on trolling charters. A head boat trip will require you to have your own bait. Again, ask if you are unsure of the appropriate bait to purchase.

***Ask if a separate cooler, besides the fish cooler, will be available for storage*** of beverages and lunches. If not, consolidate all of the party's food and beverages in one small cooler. Don't forget to bring another cooler that you will leave in your car to ice your fish down for the ride home.

***Ask about the crew and boat.*** With the increase in chartering on Lake Erie, there are individuals who run charters without the required licenses. Many of these individuals are not qualified to operate a charter vessel, their boats may not be equipped with mandatory safety gear, and they may know very little about fishing on Lake Erie. Ask to see the captain's valid U.S. Coast Guard and Ohio guide licenses if in doubt. They are for your protection against unqualified individuals.

***When you arrive at the boat,*** the responsible captain will show you where life jackets are stored; one Coast Guard-approved life jacket is required for each individual. If you have young children, make sure children's life jackets, approved for

weights of less than 90 pounds, are on board. You should also be instructed in the general operation of the the boat and/or marine radio in the event something happens to the captain (unless a first mate is present).

***Be sure the boat has a working marine toilet*** that you are permitted to use.

### **What is expected from you**

An enjoyable charter trip relies not only on what the captain and crew provide for you, but also on how you interact with them. The following suggestions should be considered to ensure a good experience for you and the captain and crew, to help protect their investment, and to make their jobs easier.

***Consolidate tackle*** if you are asked to bring your own, or if you prefer to use some of your favorite lures. A small tackle container can easily fit into your boat bag. You may want to combine tackle for your party of six into one tackle box. The point is to not clutter the boat with unnecessary gear. If you bring your own rod and reel, make sure they are in good shape, with a new line, and that they are adequate for the species for which you are fishing.

***Take precautions against motion sickness*** if you are prone to it. Check with your family physician for medication to suit your needs. Some over-the-counter medications can cause drowsiness, may interact with prescription medications, or could aggravate a health condition. Avoid greasy foods the

evening prior to and the morning of your charter. Avoid alcoholic beverages before and during the charter. Seasickness has ruined many charters for unsuspecting individuals. Remember, the water doesn't need to be rough to produce motion sickness. A calm day with a slight roll to the water is all it takes.

If you are in doubt at all about whether you may become seasick, follow the above precautions and take medication.

***Dress properly for the day.*** In a small boat bag, pack sunglasses, sunscreen, insect repellent, head protection (cap), towel, rain jacket, and other protective clothing adequate for the weather. For early spring or late fall charters, gloves, a wool cap, and a warm jacket may be necessary. Shoes with soft soles are required; they keep you from slipping on a wet deck and protect the boat's finish.

***Be on time for your charter.*** By arriving well before your charter departs, you can load your gear, purchase forgotten items from the marina store, and take care of those "last minute" things that always seem to cause delays. Being on time will put both you and the captain at ease. Being tardy in your arrival can take away from your fishing time, because the captain and crew may have other things to do after your charter and may need to return on schedule.

***Don't abuse the alcohol privilege*** if the captain allows alcoholic beverages to be brought onboard. Nobody likes an intoxicated individual; if you plan to get drunk

while fishing, do everyone a favor and stay home.

The U.S. Coast Guard enforces a zero tolerance for drugs of any type on a charter vessel. If illegal drugs are found on a charter vessel, the boat may be forfeited, and time in a correctional facility is a reality.

***Conduct yourself responsibly while on board.*** Abusive actions and language may not be appreciated by others and can reflect badly on the captain. Remember, the captain's name is generally painted on the side of the vessel.

***Don't throw any trash overboard.*** Charter vessels have trash cans on board for a purpose. Please help keep Lake Erie clean.

***Respect the captain's word as law.*** View the charter boat as the captain's home, and treat it with the same respect. If the captain asks you to do or not do something, there is a good reason for the request.

***Promptly pay the balance for your trip fee upon return to the dock*** unless a prior arrangement has been made. If you have been provided with all the services you agreed to, it's your responsibility to settle your account. If you or members of your party have a concern about something that happened during the charter, discuss it with the captain privately and in an adult manner.

***Tipping the captain and crew is customary*** if you feel they did their best to provide you with a good trip. Chartering is a service

industry. A few extra dollars is a nice way to show your appreciation to a captain and mate with good personalities, senses of humor and honest efforts to show you a good time.

**Plan your charter well in advance.** Prime dates (weekends) and certain times of the year fill up fast. Many individuals will book charters a year in advance to secure a specific date with a favorite captain. If you verbally commit to a date, send a deposit to clinch your deal. Don't expect a captain to hold a prime date for you without a deposit; chartering is a business, not a hobby.

### What can you fish for?

Walleye charters are the most popular on Lake Erie, and can be booked anytime from ice-out until –mid-to-late November. Some captains are even offering November and December nearshore or shoreline night walleye trips. Many charters in the central basin offer the opportunity of catching steelhead (lake-run rainbow trout) while trolling the depths for walleye. Smallmouth bass charters are very popular and can be booked generally from May through October lakewide. The success rate has been exceptionally good for bass anglers during the '90s, with many captains offering a combined walleye/smallmouth charter. Yellow perch charters are most popular during the fall months, although you may be able to book a spring nearshore perch trip during the spawning season. Combinations trips for yellow perch and smallmouth are also increasing in popularity.

Don't forget the one-on-one charter adventures, specifically, ice fishing trips in western Lake Erie during the winter, and steelhead fishing trips to the rivers and tributaries of the central basin during the fall and winter months. Not everyone offering these trips is a licensed captain, because these trips do not require a boat; but an Ohio guide's license is required to provide these services.

Many charter captains also offer specialty trips, such as moonlight cruises to the islands, or trips to the famed "Cleveland Flats," or to the Cleveland Indians ball games. Other captains may offer snorkeling and/or scuba diving trips. Be sure to ask your captain about other Lake Erie adventures they may offer.

### Chartering is a bargain

Owning your own boat is a rewarding experience; you are the captain and have the option of fishing when and where you want, scuba diving, snorkeling or swimming, overnight trips, exploring, water skiing, or simply going for a leisurely cruise with the family. Yet, for many people, owning a boat is not an option for a variety of reasons. And trying to justify owning a boat with the dollar value of the fish you expect to catch in a season is a lesson in bad economics.

During 1994, Ohio Sea Grant conducted a research survey of the Ohio charter fishing industry. It was found that the average charter operator had to make more than 41 trips per year just to break even.

Since capital costs of boat ownership are similar for a private individual owning a 27-foot vessel, you would need to make at least 41 trips to financially justify owning a boat rather than chartering!

Consider your cost of ten-six-passenger walleye charters in Lake Erie to be divided among you and five friends. Your share of these ten charters wouldn't come close to the cost of docking a 25-foot boat at a Lake Erie marina for one season. And we haven't mentioned the value of experience gained in boat handling and angling that can be provided by a charter captain.

Granted, owning your own boat has many personal advantages and rewards that are difficult to place a dollar value on. Economically speaking, however, the cost of Lake Erie fishing charter is truly a real bargain. (For those interested in more information on the costs of owning and operating a charter business, contact the Ohio Sea Grant College Program for additional fact sheets and research publications).

*Reprinted in part, courtesy of Ohio Sea Grant. Author, David Kelch, District Specialist.*

Lists of Lake Erie Fishing charters can be found easily on the world wide web.

Visit [www.walleye.com](http://www.walleye.com) and you'll find three such charter directories, one for each of Lake Eries distinct basins; Western, Central and Eastern.

# The Great Walleye Comeback

by  
**Rick Kubb**

**H**as walleye fishing on Lake Erie always been this good? To the younger angler, it may seem so. Should you ask the over 40 crowd, those of us that have fished the lake for a number of years, you would likely hear another story.

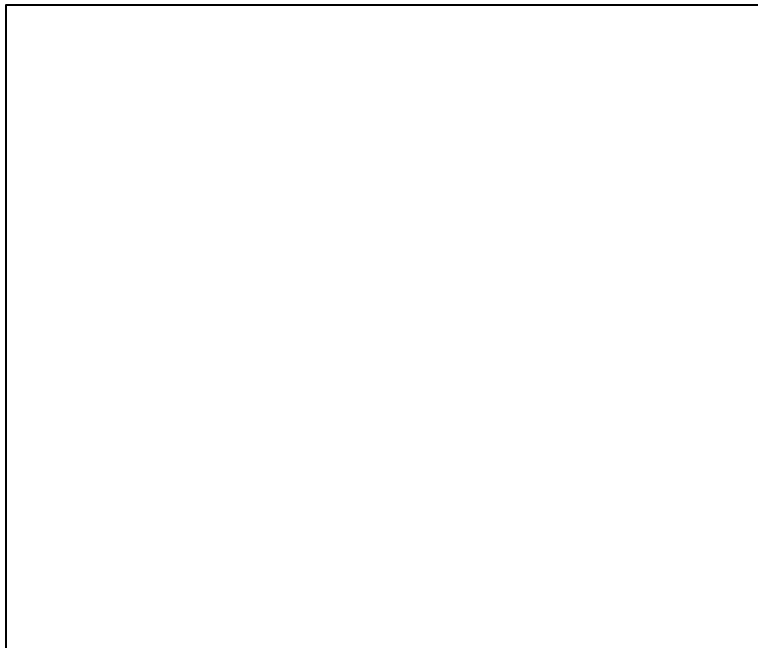
Given the current state of walleye fishing in the lake, it may be difficult for some to imagine a time when there were virtually NO walleye to be caught. This was in fact the case.

A combination of commercial overfishing and pollution killed off the walleye fishery between 25 and 30 years ago.

### The Crash

Lake Erie's walleye fishery during the early and middle 1950's was comparable if not better than today's stocks. In fact the largest catch (7,000 tons) on record occurred in 1956. At that time however there were not fish management programs in place to protect the walleye populations.

After 1957, the walleye stocks collapsed in a dramatic way under the weight of commercial overfishing (see chart). The low point in walleye catch (just 196 tons) occurred in 1969. Further, in 1970 it was discovered that levels of



mercury in walleye tissue exceeded safe guidelines and the commercial and recreational fishery for walleye was closed in both the United States and Canadian waters.

### The Comeback

After 1972, mercury contamination declined due to the reduction of pollutants discharged into the lake

from primarily the chloralkali industry. The ban in fishing was lifted. At this time the Great Lakes Fishery Commission sponsored a special committee to study the remaining walleye fish stocks and formulate a plan to ensure a

successful recovery of walleye in Lake Erie. A sophisticated fisheries management plan based on a quota system was implemented and the walleye population soon began to recover (see chart). Sport fishermen again turned their efforts toward walleye. Catch-per-unit-effort rose slowly during the 1970's then increase sharply from .12 fish per hour (or 8 hours/fish) in 1975 to .61 fish per hour (or 1.5 hours/fish) in 1976 in

Ohio waters. The combined estimated harvest in 1982 reached 4,000 tons.

Of course today our walleye stocks seem as strong as ever. Learning about the decline and recovery of walleye in Lake Erie should help all of us more fully

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# Reflections of a Champion

By Ted Takasaki  
with  
Scott Richardson

**T**he glow hasn't dimmed since I won the 1998 In-Fisherman

Professional Walleye Trail Championship at Bismarck, N.D., at the end of a tough three-day tournament on the Missouri River in late September.

Winning the championship has been the high point of my fishing career. It just doesn't get better than this. I began dreaming of this moment when I began fishing professionally 10 years ago, and the reality is even better than the dream.

The thrill of sitting in a boat towed around the indoor arena of the Bismarck Civic Center to the cheers of a crowd of 6,000+ is an experience I will never forget. The fact that my wife, Lori, was sitting with me clutching a bouquet of roses and our daughter, Kristi, was between us waving an American

I don't think those people were



cheering for me as much as they were celebrating the fact that the Bismarck championship signals a

coming of age for walleye tournaments. Walleyes are finally winning the respect they deserve. First prize was \$100,000 in cash and prizes, the largest purse ever awarded at any walleye event.

I am also proud to be the first person from Illinois to win a major PWT event. That fact coupled with fellow Illinois angler, Mike Gofron's, achievement as 1998 PWT Top Gun of the Year (an honor I won in 1995) should underscore the fact that anglers from Illinois can catch walleyes with the best of them.

And, finally, the PWT championship comes to me at the same time that I have a healthy, happy family and while I am enjoying success at Hewlett Packard, where I work as a full-time computer systems salesman. I

log 50,000 to 100,000 miles in the air each year on business in addition to the miles I roll on the

odometer as a traveling fishing pro. I am truly blessed.

That's not bad for a boy from the small town of Chatsworth in Central Illinois who never knew what a walleye looked like until after I graduated from college. Dad had taken me fishing as a kid for bass, panfish and catfish, but never walleye. I was with longtime friend John Campbell on a trip to West and East Lake Okoboji in Iowa when I caught my first one. This was just after graduating from the University of Illinois at Champaign in 1982.

I said, "Hey John, what's this?"

"I'm not sure," John said. "I think it could be a walleye."

We eventually became the 1991 Masters Walleye Circuit Team of the Year. Today, Campbell is an outstanding walleye angler on the PWT. He also was invited to compete at this year's Championship.

Believe me, winning didn't look likely when I arrived in Bismarck the week before the tournament. I was fishing against the 39 top ranked pros at the end of the PWT's five regular season qualifiers. This was one of the toughest Championship fields ever. It included nine of the top 10 PWT money winners, 60 percent of past winners, eight of the past nine Anglers of the Year and two pros who have fished every PWT Championship. The field also included Rick LaCourse, who was amongst the competitors based upon his win at the championship the year earlier. The final competi-

tor was Charlie Christofferson, the PWT's top-ranked amateur.

Add to that the fact that the fishing in the Missouri River was as tough as tough could be. For one thing, tournament boundaries began at Bismarck on the north then stretched southward through 50 miles of the Missouri River made treacherous by shifting sand and low water. The river dropped three feet in one 24-hour period during pre-fishing, rose again and then continued to drop slowly during the tournament.

Another problem, the timing of the event was too early to take advantage of the fall migration of walleyes from Lake Oahe northward into the Missouri River. Many of the fishermen chose to travel the hour or so each way south into Lake Oahe from the launch site to look for fish in the upper end of the main lake itself. Our southern boundary was the border with South Dakota.

A third challenge, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released tremendous amounts of water from the Lake Oahe dam last fall and with it, a large percentage of the smelt disappeared. The smelt should have provided the main food source for game fish in Oahe and the Missouri River. As a result, even more walleyes than normal abandoned the river in search of something to eat after spawning in spring. When we arrived at Bismarck, the walleyes remained stacked in the lower third of Oahe about 200 miles away. Few resident walleyes stayed in the river and the ones that did were small.

Even before launching my Ranger to search for walleyes during practice, I knew the past two PWT Championships at Bismarck were won at bridges over feeder creeks. At the same time, I realized those bridges would probably be popular spots, so to avoid the crowd, I reached for my map and scouted similar looking spots. On the map, I noticed a bridge over the Cannonball Creek several miles south from the launch site. But, when I got to the mouth of Cannonball to check it out, I found the entrance nearly blocked by a mile long stump field and a shallow, sand flat. I spent almost two hours finding a channel deep enough to navigate to get there.

Imagine my disappointment when I finally reached my goal only to discover the Cannonball was murky and void of current, which are hardly characteristics of a good walleye spot. But, I had invested too much time getting there to leave without at least giving it a chance. After catching a few small keeper walleyes near the bridge, I searched further and discovered the pattern that would prove to be decisive. Walleyes, lots of them, were holding in the deeper holes (8 to 10 feet deep) on the river bends. I suspect they were drawn into the creek to feed on young-of-the-year crappie and white bass and sought protection in the holes when water began to drop.

I caught them jigging with Lindy Fuzz-E-Grubs in hot glow yellow and dressed with minnows tied on with 8-pound Stren Magnathin line on Pinnacle spinning rods and reels. I started with one-quarter

ounce jigs, but adjusted to strong winds by going to three-eighths. I think that decision was critical to the victory. The heavier jigs let me maintain crucial contact with the bottom where river walleyes are found. And, bigger fish don't care if a jig weighs slightly more. They are going to gobble it up.

When the tournament began, I caught four walleyes in Cannonball the first day. But, I thought they were too small to win, so I moved to the main river and trolled Shad Rap crankbaits in search of a kicker fish without success. I finished out Day One one fish shy of the five-fish limit. But, based on the low catches I saw overall, it was obvious other anglers were struggling to find large, accessible fish as well. I was still in the thick of things. On Day Two, I returned to cannonball, boated my five walleyes quickly and moved into first place just ahead of my friend, Gofron. On Day Three I caught five walleyes in the Cannonball again. This time they were the heaviest stringer of the event. My final tally was 14 fish totaling 23.92 pounds. Ron Seelhoff, who had success trolling Shad Raps, was second with 21.14 pounds. Next came Mark Martin with 19.78 pounds, who also fished in the Cannonball. Mark Brumbaugh was fourth with 19.43 pounds and Gofron was fifth with 18.97.

Then came that wild, happy ride around the arena with Lori and Kristi.

I'd like to thank my sponsors, MasterLock, Ranger Boats, Mercury Outboards, MinnKota, Bottom Line, Pinnacle, Stren,

Lindy Little Joe, Gamakatsu, Normark, AquaVu and Flambeau. Without them, I could not compete.

I would also like to thank all of you. Without anglers who are interested in walleye fishing, sponsors would not see a reason to promote the sport.

I thank Campbell for being there with me in the early days as we struggled to learn all we could about catching walleyes. My victory is proof that hard work eventually pays off.

I thank my traveling mates and friends, Vaughn Cornelius, Perry Good and Dale Stroschein, who is retiring next year in order to concentrate on his new resort and spend more time with his family.

And most of all, I thank Lori and Kristi. They are my biggest fans.

I've been asked, what's next for me? It would be great to be the first PWT champion to win back to back titles. Or, maybe I could set my sights on becoming PWT angler of the year, which I have never accomplished.

But, in the big picture, I think my goal is just to be the best that I can be.

Best fishes!

*This article was reprinted courtesy of Ted Takasaki and Scott Richardson. The article originally appeared on Ted's Web site. You can learn more about walleye fishing and about Ted at his web site located at:*  
<http://www.ool.com/takasaki/>

### From Comeback, Page 27

appreciate what we have now in this great fishery resource.

Hopefully, the continuation of modern day fishery management programs and angler awareness will insure for many years healthy walleye populations in the lake and help maintain Lake Erie's reputation as being the true "Walleye Capital of the World."

This article first appeared in Lake Erie Walleye Magazine's inaugural publication in June, 1995. Primary source of information was from: "Dynamics of the Recovery of the Western Lake Erie Walleye (*Stizostedion vitreum vitreum*) Stock." Richard W. Hatch et. al. Published in the Can. J. Fish. Aquat. Sci. 44 (Suppl. 2): 15-22.

## Walleye Fishermen

Send us your questions!

In each issue of Lake Erie Walleye, we field questions from walleye anglers to be answered by professional charter boat captains.

Send your questions to:

Ask The Captain  
c/o Lake Erie Walleye  
P.O. Box 421  
Ballwin, MO 63022

# Ask the Captain

## Lake Erie Charter Captains Answer Reader's Angling Questions

*Q: I'd like to plan an early spring charter to catch some large 'eyes. Typically, when is the best time during the early spring to catch those trophy fish?*

### **Captain Summers responds:**

It's true. Big walleye can be taken in the early spring. The best time to catch the trophies is before they spawn. This is not an exact science. Walleye spawn when water temps reach 40 to 42 degrees. The Walleye spawn first in the rivers because the water is warmer, then a couple weeks later in the lake. Only about 10% spawn in the rivers. The remainder in the lake. One way to know is watch the river activity. Walleye do feed prior to spawning. When will they spawn is anybody's guess. During the spawn the females do not feed, only the males. Also, not all walleye spawn at the same time. After spawning, the large females head for open water to rest. This may take a couple of weeks before they will feed again. It has been my experience that sometime in the last week of April is a good time for the Big Fish. The most predictable time is in the fall, when big walleye are moving west for the winter. September and October off Lorain and Huron are good bets.

### **Captain Hepkema Responds:**

The best time to catch a trophy Lake Erie walleye is usually from late March to mid-April before they spawn. During the time the large females are spawning, they will not feed. The smaller, more active males are caught. There is a very short period after they spawn when the larger females will school up and start feeding that may give you an opportunity.

### **Captain Schmidt responds:**

I only charter the central basin. The best time in the Central Basin for walleye, is from about mid May to

late June, this is some of the best fishing on the lake! The walleye are spilling out of the Western Basin into the deeper waters of the Central Basin, they are hungry and tired after spawning, looking for the deeper waters to rest and replenish themselves. The big hens hold here for a short period before moving on to the really deep waters of the Eastern Basin, where they are harder to catch. The Central Basin holds a good supply of males and young hens all summer long so the fishing is good here all session.

*Q: Last summer I fished with some friends in central Lake Erie. The local tackle shops were pushing these "Michigan Stinger" spoons. We purchased a few and wow, the walleyes were nailing them, but not touching larger spoons that worked in past years. Why would the fish take these smaller spoons in favor of the larger ones? Does this vary from year to year?*

### **Captain Ermansons responds:**

Ever since the onslaught of Zebra Mussels in Lake Erie, the water clarity has become phenomenal. Larger spoons and crankbaits that worked so well in the past have become very ineffective. These larger lures are further magnified in the gin clear water and actually spook the Walleyes more than they attract them. The smaller Michigan Stingers have indeed been one of the hotter baits the last 2 seasons but there's a lot of other good spoons and crankbaits that have been working excellent. The key word is smaller.

### **Captain Shellman responds:**

Those spoons were more than likely the same size as the bait fish they were feeding on.

**Captain Schmidt responds:**

The smaller Stingers match the size of the local forage at that time of year. Also I believe it has a lot to do with the idea that the stinger is new, and the walleye haven't seen much of it. The same holds true with a new color, even while using Stingers, however some of the old colors like the rainbow, the blue berry, and sun glasses resemble the prey fish the walleye are feeding on thus they work year after year. Later in the season when the forage is larger, smaller stingers need to be replaced with the old larger King spoons, or a large crank bait. The angler needs to be observant as to water and feeding conditions, don't get hung up on just one way or one thing.

Be flexible!!

**Captain Bioni responds:**

Last year we didn't have much of a spring and bait size was a lot smaller than past years. The smaller spoons seemed to be of similar size as most bait fish. Yes, it will vary from year to year, and from month to month.

**Captain Dubsky responds:**

Sometimes, it depends on the forage they are feeding on. The small stingers work best because the shiners have had an abundant year the past few years. Now in deeper water (60-80 feet), the larger spoons work best.

*Q: Can you recommend a good walleye trolling rod and reel combination? I'll be trolling with Dipsy's. Is a line counter all that important or does counting 'wraps' work just as well?*

**Captain Bioni responds:**

There are many excellent rods on market, such as St Croix, Browning, or Great Lakes. Dipsey fishing demands a good rod in 9 to 10 ft, positioned straight off side of the boat. A line counter is going to give you the exact amount of line to have out, to get into that fishing zone, and return to that zone time after time.

**Captain Schmidt responds:**

I like the Browning Dipsy rod with a Diawa 47LC Counter Reel. Diawa makes a good rod too and any good counter reel will work. I will let you in on a little secret. I use 4 rods on each side for dipsy's. The #1 is a 6 ft., #2 a 7 ft., #3 a 8 ft., #4 a 9 ft., they all have to be the same flex so you get an even bow out of all of them. Use a line you can SEE, I prefer a green braided no stretch. This setup will give you a one foot difference in the tips of the rods and the line makes it easy to tell when there is a change in the rod's position. Small fish, walleye or white bass won't break the dipsy loose and they tend to run out and tangle the other lines, with this setup you can see a change in the position and react to prevent a mess of tangled lines. The line counter is a must as you have to set each Dipsy at a set depth and each rod at a different depth. For more information and an in-depth demonstration, you will have to book a charter, as this is the way we make a living.

**Captain Shellman responds:**

I personally use 7' Ugly Sticks BWD 1100 and Diawa 27 line counter reels. Line counters are not necessary, but they really make it a lot easier, when you run several dipsy's as I do on my boat.

*Q: Last summer while trolling off of Fairport Harbor Ohio in 70' the first day we marked on the fish finder many fish, all day long, but only caught a few. The next day we weren't marking many at all, but nearly caught our limit. Is there an explanation why we could catch so many fish, with so few of them showing up on the sonar?*

**Captain Summers responds:**

The first day the Walleye were deep. The second day they were suspended and were spooked by the boat. You can not mark fish that are moving away from the boat. I often catch more fish when I have no or very few marks. It requires careful operation of the boat. If you are casting, cast down wind. You will get the fish that hasn't seen the boat yet! If trolling, get out the planer boards.

**Captain Schmidt responds:**

This is a simple study of walleye behavior. You found a lot of contented fish in a neutral or non active condition. We see this often. The best thing to do is mark the position and try again later. With me, I keep trying until they finally turn on. With the other group you found, conditions were just right and they were active and aggressive. Even though they were scattered, they were feeding. We find this condition a lot when trying for steelhead; we pick up a lot of unmarked walleye.

**Captain Ermansons responds:**

This is a common occurrence and if you ask most anyone who's done a lot of trolling, they will tell you they've experienced the same situation. When you marked a lot of fish, they were inactive. They didn't care about the engine noise or the shadow of the boat and therefore you were able to mark more with your sonar. At the same time they weren't feeding much and just hung suspended as if frozen in time. When the fish are on the move and feeding, they are very sensitive to the boat overhead, even in 70' water. That's why planer boards and directional divers work so well in this area, getting baits off to the side in the "quiet" water.

*Q: What is "Counting Down" and can you give me some tips on technique when casting weight-forward spinners?*

**Captain Summers responds:**

Counting down is simply a method of working the lure at a certain depth. A weight forward spinner drops at 1 foot per second. Counting one thousand one, one thousand two from the time the lure hit the water surface. Flipping harnesses drop at about 2 feet per second. Technique is very important. It's important to cast in the right direction and count down. Cast from the stern or bow, on the downwind side of the boat and always cast parallel to the boat or drift. Retrieve slowly or not at all, depending on the drift speed. Flipping harness must be very, very slow and steady. Weight forward's can be retrieved faster with an occasional pause in the retrieve.

As the boat drifts, your lure will swing around to the point the boat is pulling it. Now is the time to cast again. This is called working the swing! It is the most effective way to catch Walleye while casting. Remember to cast again after it is at the point where the boat is pulling it. Reason? You can't control the depth or the speed. Work different counts to find the active fish. Then it becomes just a matter of repeating the count. I've seen fish at a splash count, 10 count, 15 count and so forth. The swing method is the only consistent method to use. Remember to count to yourself or it will drive everyone nuts. I use the count down method so much that I find myself counting when I'm down in the bow and not fishing. Too much fishing maybe?

---

**Thanks to the Captains for taking the time to answer our reader's questions.**

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Barry Bioni  
My Cyn Charters  
(724) 941-6267 [mycyn@stargate.net](mailto:mycyn@stargate.net)

# 1999 Lake Erie Walleye Tournaments

**April 3rd.** United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Catawba Island State Park. Two person teams. Contact USFA at (972) 713-6207 or Walleye Wise Promotions at (330) 537-8603

**April 21-23.** North American Walleye Anglers (NAWA) Pro-Am Sandusky, OH Contact Jim George of Sportsman's Quest at (800) 224-4990.

**April 24-25.** North American Walleye Anglers (NAWA) Open "Team Challenge". Sandusky, OH. Field limit of 200 boats. Contact Jim George of Sportsman's Quest at (800) 224-4990.

**May 8th.** United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Sandusky City Ramp, Sandusky, OH. Two person teams. Contact USFA at (972) 713-6207 or Walleye Wise Promotions at (330) 537-8603

**June 12th.** United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Lorain - Hotwaters, Lorain, OH. Two person teams. Contact USFA at (972) 713-6207 or Walleye Wise Promotions at (330) 537-8603

**June 12-20th.** Southtowns Walleye Association of Western New York. Several Western New York weigh stations. Contact Pete Paufler: (716) 825-7619.

**June 19-20.** 444 Walleye International Fishing Tourn. Port Colborne & District Conservation Club. Marina H, H Knoll Park in Port Colborne, Ontario. Entry Fee: \$180/team Contact Mike Shatkosky (905) 834-4314

**July 10th** United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Fairport Harbor, OH. Two person teams. Contact USFA at (972) 713-6207 or Walleye Wise Promotions at (330) 537-8603

**June 19th.** The '99 West Cleveland Open. Rocky River Metro Parks Ramp, Cleveland, OH. Contact: Crhis Songer; (440) 835-2892 email: cmsms@aol.com. Entry Fee: \$100-\$124 per boat, 1-4 man teams. Total Purse: Prorated 75% pay out.

**July 10th** North Coast Charter Boat Association. Fairport Harbor, OH. Contact Benjamin Wilcoxin: (440) 354-0211 Pro Division \$400/boat (8 rods max) Amateur Division \$150/boat (8 rods max).

**July 10-11** Walleye '99 Pro-Am. Lake Erie Charter Boat Association. Waterworks Park. Port Clinton, OH. Call 1-800 LECBA10 for more information.

**July 10-11.** New York Walleye Association. Ameri-Can Walleye Classic. Chadwick Bay Marina, Dunkirk, NY. \$150/team (3 man teams). Limit 150 teams. Contact Jim Dolly (716) 695-8199

**July 31.** Fairport Harbor Rod & Reel Association. Fairport Harbor, OH \$20.00/person. (8 rod limit) 90% Payout. Contact Chuck Fievet: (440) 352-2160.

**July 24th** United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Geneva, OH. Two person teams. Contact USFA at (972) 713-6207 or Walleye Wise Promotions at (330) 537-8603

**August 7-8.** Fort Erie Can-Am Challenge Cup '99. Bertie Boating Club. Fort Erie, Canada. \$150/4 man team. Contact: Don McQuaig: (905) 894-1576. 130 boat limit.

**August 21-22** United States Fishing Association (USFA) Lake Erie Circuit. Two day Championship. Ashtabula, OH. Contact USFA at (972) 713-6207 or Walleye Wise Promotions at (330) 537-8603

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**Conneaut Charter Boat Association**

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**Eastern Lake Erie Charter Boat Association**

Buffalo, NY (716) 934-7266  
President: Phil Swiatkowski

**Lake Erie Charter Boat Association**

Toledo, OH (800) LECBA10  
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**North Coast Charter Boat Association**

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**Pennsylvania Lake Erie Charter Captains Assoc.**

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**Sandusky Charter Boat Association**

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