

# The Eastern Lake Erie Fishing Report for Summer 2003

by  
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In the past a cold long winter followed by a quick warm-up led to an excellent spawning year for walleyes”, stated Don Einhouse, senior biologist at the Lake Erie Fisheries station in Dunkirk, New York. The basis for this assumption is that the shoal walleyes will spawn later and the quick warm up will hatch the eggs rapidly. The eggs then hopefully will avoid the early spring windstorms in the eastern basin, which can easily decimate a class year of

open lake shoal spawning. Don Einhouse went on to cite historical data which appears to back his theory. If this theory holds true this year could be one of the best walleye spawning years in a long time. I sure hope he proves to be right on this.

The early season shocking surveys on the Cattaraugus Creek again showed a very healthy population of walleyes with over 60 fish collected in less than an hour during one shocking stint. “Many of these fish

will undoubtedly will still be on the shoals and in the creeks when the walleye season opens”, remarked Bill Culligan, chief of fisheries at the aforementioned Dunkirk station. Bill



went on to say that this would probably not be a problem as most females after spawning immediately leave the area and go to open water where they become somewhat dormant as they recuperate from the rigors of spawning. The vast majority of the walleyes caught in the early season tend to be males because of the female’s quick departure. The Cattaraugus Creek incidentally, has become a success story for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC). This Creek was used in a NYSDEC

sponsored 5-year walleye fingerling-stocking program that has appeared to be an unqualified success. It also will be used as the benchmark for another proposed walleye fingerling

stocking program in the Buffalo River a large urban river located within the city limits of Buffalo. Bill Culligan also remarked that the fall netting surveys of 2002 revealed a substantial healthy 2001 class year of walleyes, which are now approximately legal size at 18”.

“The lake wide class years of 2000 and 2002

produced very poor walleye recruitment especially in the western basin, these poor spawning years will have a very negative effect on the walleye fishery for the coming years”, Remarkd Don Einhouse. Don went on to say that there was a good possibility that the commercial quotas for walleye will be reduced in the future to reflect the reduced walleye population. The eastern basin however, appeared to have better walleye survival rates during these poor years so the wall-

eye fishing will probably be quite stable.

The early season started slowly with very few walleyes caught by the near shore night fishermen. This was not totally unexpected with the water temperatures hovering around 45F. This changed rapidly near the end on May with rising water temperatures activating the many male walleyes still occupying the shallow water near Buffalo and the shoals in the Dunkirk Barcelona area. Some limit catches were reported and a lot of fish were caught in late May and early June. It is hard to get a handle on this fishery as many night-time fishermen tend to be tight lipped and not many people are around when these fishermen leave the water sometimes as late as 4:00AM! I generally gauge the fishing success by the amount of boats still present on the water after 1:00AM, if there is still a lot of boats on the water generally fish are being caught!

In the risk of being redundant the standard method employed by most night fishermen is long line trolling in 5 to 10 feet of water over Lake Erie shoals using stick baits such as the No. 13 floating Rapala and Junior Thunderstick. Preferred colors are black and silver, Chartreuse, Firetiger and Blue and silver. If you run one for a period of time with no results change colors or lures. These fish are easily spooked in the shallow water so it is important to be as still as possible and keep the lighting to a minimum when netting a fish. This early season walleye fishery is strictly for the hardy as nighttime temperatures in May can get down to the low 40's and it can be very cold especially if there is a little wind. The positive side of this type of fishing is that it is quiet, gen-

erally calm, and the 2-41b male walleyes caught in the cold early season water are some of the best eating I have ever experienced.

The late cold winter played a major role in the mid spring and early summer (June, early July) walleye fishing with the cold water temperatures keeping the post spawn fish rather dormant and scattered throughout the eastern basin. This led to many long fruitless trolling stints in search of feeding walleye. There was no consistent depth or area where the fish were caught so a lot of time and distance had to be covered to catch a few "eyes". At the present time the summer weather is elevating the water temperature rapidly and the walleye fishing should pick up quickly as mid-summer approaches. I will have more on this in the next issue plus the results of the annual Southtowns walleye tournament which last year produced a record 200 plus fish over 10 pounds. Southtowns website is at <http://hometown.aol.com/ltrm1052/swa.html>.

"We had the best perch fishing in many years", said veteran hardwater angler Herb Schultz. Herb echoed the sentiments of many ice fishermen who were pleasantly surprised by the return of the great perch fishing experienced in past years. This excellent perch fishing carried on into the spring and early summer with many veteran Lake Erie fishermen recording limit or near limit catches of 8-12" perch. As stated in earlier articles, look for the small clusters of boats between

Sturgeon Point and the Cattaraugus Creek and using good emerald shiners is the key to getting started if you want to take advantage of this excellent perch fishery. In my opinion the only fish that is better eating than a walleye is a perch!

Smallmouth bass fishing seems to be increasing in popularity with more and more fishermen taking advantage of this world class fishery. Last year for the first time more trips on Eastern Lake Erie were made with smallmouth bass as the target fish than walleye.

If you desire more information on eastern Lake Erie call the Talking Phone Book Fishing Information Hot Line at 716-844-1111 ext.4142. Fishing information can also be obtained at [www.northeastoutdoors.com](http://www.northeastoutdoors.com) or [www.niagara-usa.com](http://www.niagara-usa.com). An excellent new free fishing "Hot Spot" map is also available This map can be obtained by calling the Erie County Dept. of Environment and Planning at 866-345-FISH. The Erie County and Niagara County Fish Advisory boards used their vast local fishing knowledge in the assembly of these excellent maps.