

Thinking Ahead for Big Walleyes

by
Rick Olson

So much good walleye water and so little time. With all of the great angling opportunities available to today's walleye angler, you might get the feeling of being a bit favored. The problem with it all is deciding on just where to start, as you can't be in all places at the same time. An acceptable option is to be in as many places at the right time as you can.

Fortunately for us the right time doesn't necessarily happen in all places at the same time, and can vary greatly. The key is determining what creates a peak condition and then being there when it all happens. Peak conditions include finding numbers of fish holed up in specific locations and possessing a serious snackin' attitude. Another key is finding that particular scenario at a time when the given food supply is at a seasonal low.

Besides seasonal trends there are also cycles in the predator prey relationship whereby the numbers of available predators varies along with the amount of available bait. Spawning success can vary from year to year and may create a surplus or a void. Good spawning conditions

can create strong year classes of walleyes and will result in a predominant size range. A couple of good years back to back can create a wave of fish that may be

effect just how much food is going to be available to all those predators.

A good situation for anglers includes strong year classes of walleyes that have grown into adults, combined with a shortage of available bait. That is a scenario destined to make hero's out of just about anybody, and is a situation you definitely want to take advantage of.

When a couple of strong year classes get into the adult range they begin to eat more and more, and some of what they key on will be what their larger brethren have had mostly to themselves, until now. With a big new eating machine on the scene all of the predators (including the larger models) find the going tougher, and they become more and more vulnerable.

Predicting when a situation like that will take place is over most angler's heads, and even the professional biologists. The thing to look for is trends, as trends can reveal the existence of said conditions. Trends can last for a year or more, and is something to be aware of. Look for a good fall bite to carry over into the winter and into the next spring, and beyond. A tough fall on the other hand, may



The author reveals some of the secrets to finding big walleyes like this one.

followed as they proceed through their expected life cycle.

The same can be said about bait fish and minnows that experience the ups and downs of good and bad spawning conditions, and will

stay tough through the winter and most of the following open water season.

The thing is, when an imbalance occurs mother nature eventually reacts and the situation rectifies itself. When it does, things can quickly go from incredible to pathetic, and is to be expected. If you've been riding a hot bite bubble for several months or more, understand that sooner or later it's going to burst and things could get tough for a while.

Mille Lacs Lake in Central Minnesota has recently gone through a huge swing with the last couple of years producing incredible action, but a big hatch of perch and minnows last spring brought it all to a screeching halt by early fall. Lake Oahe in South Dakota has gone through a major transition as well and is in the process of getting back to normal after a couple of really tough years. Lake Erie doesn't seem to have the numbers it once had but what is there is big, really big. A recent PWT tournament required a twelve pound minimum to win any of the money in the big fish pot. It's all part of the cycle, whether it's natural or man made.

One thing you may find when angling under peak conditions is that there are a whole lot more walleyes available than you may have ever imagined. On the other hand tough conditions may give you the feeling that you've been working the Dead Sea when nothing could be further from the truth.

The effects of a swing are more pronounced on a larger body of water, maybe because of the

sheer number of anglers and the reporting of good and bad results. Whatever the case, it happens on large and small bodies of water alike.

Even systems that rely on yearly stockings to bolster their populations go through highs and lows, depending on how well the fry that are released fare. For whatever reason, a particular stocking will do exceptionally well and create a strong year class of fish and will start to show up as bunch of pesky runts, that is until the year after and the year after that, and so on, and so on.

How you should deal with a particular situation will depend on what you're faced with. For example, if you're riding a high and not fairing that well you better make some moves because something has to be happening some place. Quicker presentations may be in order, like pulling spinner and crawler harnesses, or running Shad Raps through likely areas. If you have your basic presentations down pat, it becomes more of a matter as to where you do what you do.

And if you're working under the negative effects of a low you may have to take your time and work over likely areas with a fine tooth comb. A fine tooth comb may include using slow pinpoint presentations like live bait rigging and jigging. You could try tipping a jig like a Blue Fox Foxee Jig with a leech or piece of crawler and slowly cover every inch of available real-estate in search of the few biters that are left. If you think the walleyes are looking for something moving a little faster you may have work with a quicker

presentation like trolling a crank bait through the same areas, but work it over and over again.

If you can, it would be ideal to follow the peaks and take advantage of favorable situations when they arise but it's not always possible. If nothing else you could use the knowledge provided as an acceptable excuse to lay on your friends after a tough day on the water.

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