

Erie's Bounty

by Bob (Red) Piette

Last year I heard a lot of complaining about how fishing on Lake Erie's Western Basin is not like it used to be. Although the numbers of catchable fish are down from the highs of the 80's, the fishery on Erie remains one of the best around for pure numbers of fish in the 2 to 3 LB class.

Lets take a look at the changes this body of water has undergone.

First, the most noticeable is the water clarity. We now can see down to depths of 15 feet on clear sunny days, years ago on such days you couldn't see more than a few feet. Second, with the introduction of exotic species like the goby and white perch, the walleyes are making use of different food resources at different times of the year now.

How has this affected the fishing?

One, with the clear water the fish are able to see a lot farther. Lures, sizes and colors that were popular years ago are not going to get the job done now. You need to make some changes in your selection, as the fish are able to see it easier. ½ oz. Hot-n-Tots in loud tones or spinner blades in solid colors at one time were the fish getter. You needed larger sized lures or solid colors in the dirty water for the fish to find them. Now the ¼ oz size Tot or a #3 to #6 Colorado spinner harness blade is my most productive with flash color combinations working better and look more natural in the clear water.

Two, in the early part of the year goby's have become a main staple in the walleye diet. But, these fish do not suspend so the walleye's are more bottom orientated and we need to fish accordingly with a presentation and color that more closely resembles what they're feeding on. As the water warms up and the fish change there diet to the open water suspending species of baitfish that's when we need to make the change to those flashy lures like the ¼ oz. Hot-n-Tot. I also can't stress the importance of running your lures at a level with or as much as eight feet above the walleye's you're marking. When walleye's are feeding on open water baitfish they always feed looking up. Running your baits below them make for fine lure washing but you won't get bit. A book called Precision Trolling is something I never hit the water with out.

How I go about it.

Say you're marking fish at 15 feet down and you're running Hot-n-Tots, the Precision Trolling book will tell you how far to let the lure out to achieve that depth. I will start with one lure at that depth and the others will be staggered higher. Say I'm running four rods, one lure is set at 15 feet down the others are set at 13, 11 and 9 feet. All of a sudden the flag on my inline board goes down and there's my first fish on the one at 15. OK that's good but doesn't tell me much yet. Then I get two fish on the one set at 13 feet deep. Now I'll change the 9 to the 13-foot depth with the same color as the one that got the two fish. I'm starting to see a pattern on depth and looking for a color preference. Then the one that I changed to 13 feet gets bit. Now, that's telling me something. Then I'll move the one that's at 11 feet to 13 and change to the same lure color as the two at that depth but still leave the one at 15 for a little longer. If I'm getting less fish on the one set at 15 feet but their bigger fish I'll leave it there. If not I'll change the depth on it to the others but run a color that's slightly different than the others that are catching fish just to experiment with. I'm letting the fish tell me what they want. If things slow down its time to make some changes. If the fish have moved higher in the water column then you need to move your lures up with them. If they're at the same depth, then maybe a color

change is needed. One thing I don't like to see is the fish moving down a few feet. That means their going off the feed. On those occasions, try running a crawler harness and slow down, or look for another pod of fish at the same depth you were taking them before.

My experiences on Erie last year were nothing short of exceptional. I had days when things were so dialed in that my arms got tired reeling in fish. Yes, things have changed, but as long as you change with them you will find that fishing on Lake Erie is still fantastic.

Good Luck, Good Fishing and Have a Great Year

Bob Piette