

By Thomas Ebi

“Ice out” brings the most boats you’ll ever see on the river... next to when the word gets out the fish are biting! Then it’s a parking lot out there on weekends. Sunny weekdays are your best bet for learning things like jigging or handlining. You’ll have a lot more room to work on your techniques and learn the needed tool of boat control when there are less boats out on the river.

For the newer river rats, I’d have to recommend that you choose to concentrate your efforts on learning one technique for the season. Get completely confident with that technique, then move to another. A few techniques do not carry the longer learning curve to master as some. Trolling slightly faster than the current pulling bottom bouncers down stream with short 1 ½ to 3 ft leaders and small blades. The length of leader will depend a lot on how deep and how much current your fishing. Also early season your going to want (at times) only one colored bead in front of your hook/minnow presentation. Fish can be very finicky! You’ll want to hook the minnow through the mouth and up between the eyes and nostrils right in the middle. There are times where a Phelps floater is the hot ticket. Colors of pink, orange, green depending on the fish’s mood. This same technique works pulling up stream also if you are able to control your boat and maintain a constant speed. Dropping back in speed can cause problems with snagging.

Long lining shallow diving crankbaits in shallow water areas trolling up stream is another technique you don’t see many folks trying this. But mostly due to all the boats jigging making it a very difficult technique to do and get confidence in.

If you really want to learn to handline or jig, I recommend that you make the time to go out with someone who really knows what they are doing. Just like trolling, you’ll learn more in 4 hours of fishing with them than you can trying it on your own for a whole season. You can ask lots of questions thru out the day and get answers while your doing jiggin or handlining.

The Downriver Walleye club tourney’s are the best place to start. You can meet new folks while fishing in another’s boat while you work on learning rod control, jigging actions, and not have to worry about the all important boat control I mentioned earlier. (boat control is THE major part in being a great jigger). Another plus is when in others boats, you get to look at different rigging possibilities. That will help you get ideas on ways to rig your boat.

Jigging is mastering doing 3 things at once! Knowing what your jig is doing, every aspect of your boat, and what/where everyone is around you boat (I prefer foot cable controlled bow mount in the 36 volt/100+ lbs of thrust). Don’t worry about using heavy jigs in the 5/8 and ¾ oz size even in 8 ft of water. Not only will it help you to feel what is going on down there, the big girls are mostly on the bottom in the spring time of year and that’s where you want your jig to be. As close to the bottom as you can get without snagging too much. In that cold water the fish are not coming up as high in the water column as they do a bit later in the year. Just like when handlining, you want your bait to be slow moving and very close to the bottom if not right on the bottom.

Early spring these techniques are the best producers. The locations to fish are posted on many web sites. The DWF meetings will also tell you where, when , how. With the ability to ask questions of the person telling the info!

As the season moves into early summer, slight adjustments to these techniques will put many fish into your boat. And a few other techniques start coming into play. So, come March, get out early as you can onto the water and start working on the technique of your choice. Also, try to learn

something from every trip out there! **Pay attention!** Apply what you learn at the club meetings and what you learn on the water. You'll become a better fisher person, be a happier fisher person, and you'll be writing the next article for the DWF.