

TAG.....YOU'RE IT

A DAY ON THE TITTABAWASEE TAGGING WALLEYES

BY: MARK SCHALLER

A couple of weeks back I was talking to my friend Barry who works for the wildlife division of the Michigan DNR. I had a few days off and I was asking him if he had seen any crows flying around up his way. He told me he hadn't been paying attention but he had another proposition for me if I was interested. He went on to tell me that the fisheries people were going to be tagging walleyes on March 30th and he asked if I wanted to help out. I jumped at the chance and told him "what do I have to do?" He told me to meet him at his house Sunday night with my warm clothes and waders and he would do the rest. So after the weigh-in of our first tournament I hopped in my jeep and started the drive north to Midland. If any of you remember the weather that day then you were probably thinking the same thing I was as I was driving north in the snow..."I have to be nuts". Fortunately the weather the next day was a different story.

Monday morning I awoke to the smell of fresh baked cinnamon rolls compliments of Barry's wife Elizabeth. Once I polished those off we were on the road to the Midland DNR field office. Barry and I were the first ones there so he showed me around for a bit. About 5 minutes later Chris, the biologist in charge, showed up and I was introduced. The rest of the crew soon arrived, the boat was hooked up and we were on our way. We were headed to Dow Corning property on the Tittabawasee river. The DNR have had permission to use this site for several years now. There is a boat access just downstream from the coffer that prevents the walleyes from heading upstream. It is a lot like the one down on the Huron River in Flat Rock. Because we were on Dow property I was not allowed to take any pictures, all the pictures you see here were provided to me by the DNR. After we checked into the Security office we were escorted down to the river site. Once there we piled out of



the trucks and into our waders. My job for this day was going to be helping out the guys netting the fish in the collection boat. As the two guys up front netted walleyes they would pass the net to me and then I would dump

the fish into the live wells in the center of the boat. Sounded simple enough to me, judging by the water conditions I figured this electric shock boat would bring up a couple of walleyes at a time.....I couldn't have been more wrong.

Once we got into position the guys up front (Shaun and Jeremy, 2 off duty Midland Police Officers) would lower the electrodes into the water and the boat operator would turn on the generator. Once he did that the water literally came alive with fish. Walleyes and suckers were all around the boat. Shaun and Jeremy would scoop them up as fast as possible and then swing the nets back to me. I had to dump them quickly so that they could get back to the fish. I had would have never believed that there were so many walleyes stacked up in the river. This would go on until we had the live well full which would be around 100 walleyes.

They wanted to tag and clip a couple of dorsal spines off of 800 walleyes that day so they were keeping us busy. After the tank was full the generator would be shut off and the electrodes would be pulled out of the water. Then it was off top the holding pen for the fish. Once there the 3 of us would pick up each fish by hand and put them in the pen. On the day I



was there the biologists were standing in the pen, they were literally knee deep in walleyes all day long. After the live well was emptied we would head out for another load. We repeated this process 8 times that day and on



our last trip we netted our biggest walleye, a 12.10 pound female. After the last netting trip I helped out with logging the info, it was at this point of standing near the pen that I realized my waders had leaks in both legs. Each fish was measured, sexed, had two dorsal spines removed, a tag placed on the lower lip and then released back into the river. All this info would be written on an envelope along with the spines for data entry and analysis later.

By the end of the day I was very sore, my left hand covered in dorsal spine pokes, I was covered in slime and I would do it all again next year if given the opportunity.

