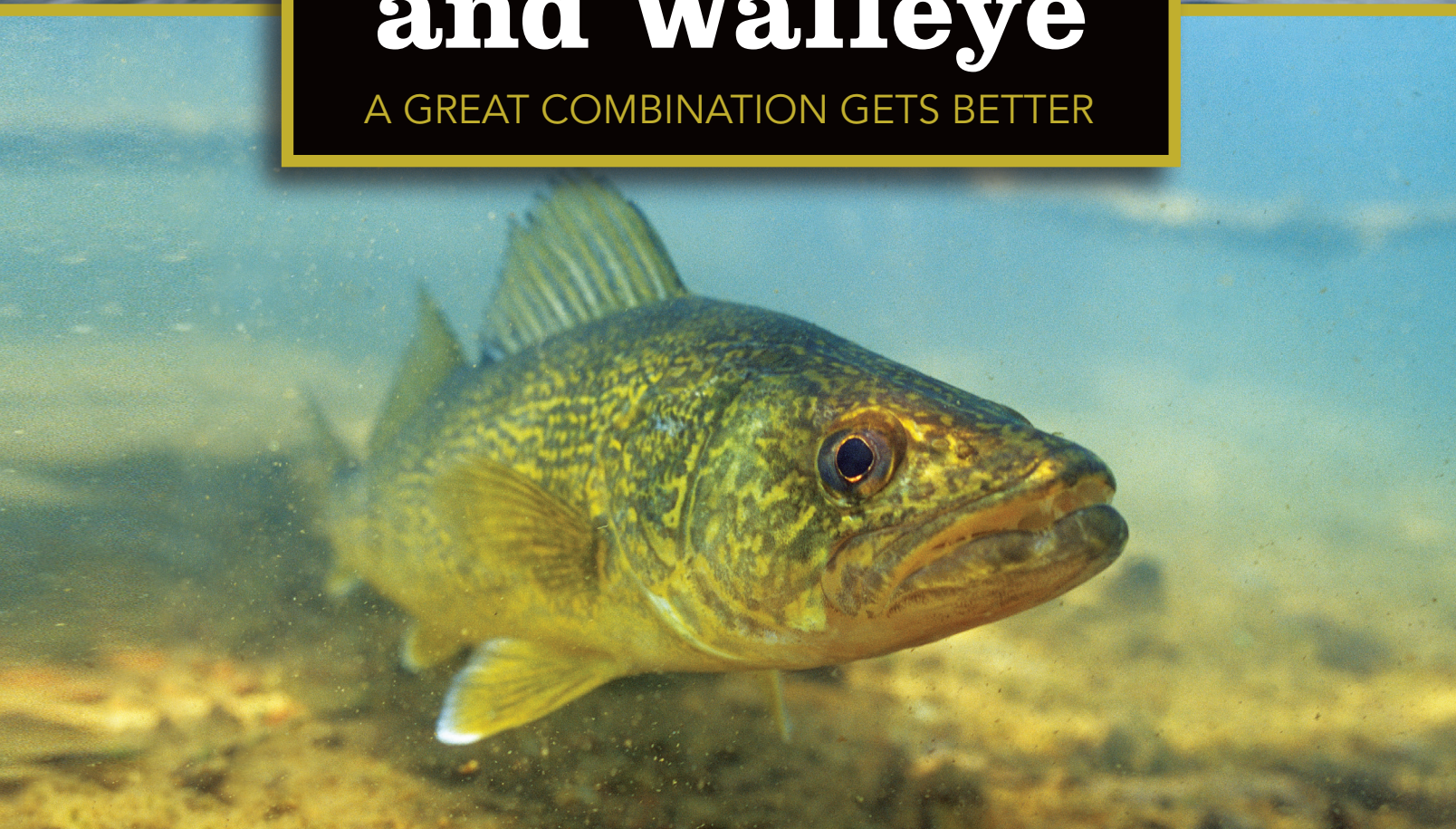




Wisconsin and Walleye

A GREAT COMBINATION GETS BETTER



The Wisconsin Walleye Initiative has allowed for the increased stocking of large fingerling walleye (also known as extended growth walleye) in certain lakes and waters across the state.



DNR FILE

Bringing more walleye to Wisconsin's waters

Walleye! Setting the hook into one of these prized fish sends a tingle up the spine of most anglers in Wisconsin. This largest member of the perch family is the fish most sought after by Wisconsin anglers (even in a state where musky is the state fish). Although walleye are not really known for their fight when hooked, they are excellent table fare, and the fact that they can often be elusive and difficult to catch, adds to their mystique with anglers.

Wisconsin boasts hundreds of natural walleye lakes and hundreds of miles of natural walleye rivers, which has made the state a true destination for avid walleye anglers for decades.

Many premier Wisconsin walleye waters such as Lake Winnebago, Green Bay, the Wisconsin River and the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage continue to be the topic of magazine articles and fishing shows. A large part of tourism in the state is driven by anglers pursuing walleye. Unfortunately, over the last 15 to 20 years, for reasons we don't completely understand, walleye populations in some waters, especially in the north, have declined due primarily to poor hatches and/or low survival of young fish. Habitat alterations or other changes brought on by the appearance of aquatic invasive plants and other animals, or shifts in some fish communities to more largemouth bass dominance may have played a role in the decline.

Harvest and population survey data strongly discount the popular belief that walleye were overharvested. Walleye harvest rates overall have been at low enough levels over the last 20-plus years to sustain good walleye fisheries if everything else in the walleye world was clicking along smoothly in the problem lakes.

State fisheries biologists and researchers have been working to learn why some walleye populations have been declining while others continue to do quite well. This will take time to sort out, but in the meantime, the Department of Natural Resources is taking steps to restore and rebuild walleye populations statewide.

In 2013, Governor Scott Walker and the Legislature approved the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative, providing funding and other resources to rear and stock large numbers of extended growth (EG) walleye into hundreds of lakes. The EG walleye fingerlings are walleye hatched in the spring that are reared to a size of 6 to 8 inches by fall when they are stocked. Although these fish

typically survive very well after being stocked, they are more expensive to rear and prior to 2013, the state's hatchery system was able to raise and stock a limited number of EG walleye a year, not close to what is needed by fisheries biologists for effective walleye population restoration or maintenance.

The Wisconsin Walleye Initiative provided \$8.2 million for state hatchery infrastructure improvements, \$1.3 million extra for annual state hatchery operating costs and a one-time allotment of \$2 million for private sector and tribal infrastructure improvements and commitments to rear EG walleye. The Initiative also provided \$500,000 for the annual purchase of EG walleye from non-DNR hatcheries. With this infusion of funding, the number of stocked EG walleye increased significantly from 142,000 in 2012, to 438,000 in 2013 and 720,000 in 2014.

The Department's overall management strategy is to restore naturally-reproducing walleye populations in the lakes that formerly supported good native walleye fisheries, and to improve walleye populations in lakes that need regular stocking to maintain a good fishery. The Walleye Initiative is just the prescription that was needed to give our problem walleye fisheries a great chance to see a full recovery.

Time will tell, and although it will take 5 to 10 years to see the real signs of success, we are off to a great start and have additional actions planned including increasing EG walleye production and stocking even more in 2015 and 2016, and working closely with Wisconsin walleye anglers, business interests and the tribes to update and improve the overall Wisconsin walleye management program and our walleye fisheries.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ronald M. Bruch".

Ron Bruch, DNR Fisheries Director



Ron Bruch

DNR FILE



The Wisconsin Walleye Initiative

The Wisconsin Walleye Initiative was developed by the Department of Natural Resources and the Office of the Governor to increase the number of walleyes in state waters by expanding production of large fingerlings for stocking in waters accessible to the public. This historic investment in Wisconsin's walleye fisheries will benefit all users and Wisconsin's angling-related economy.

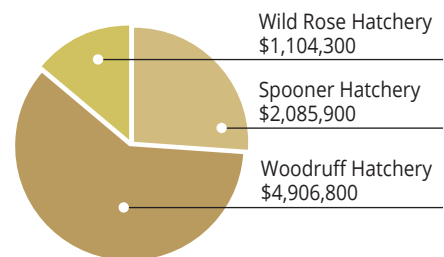


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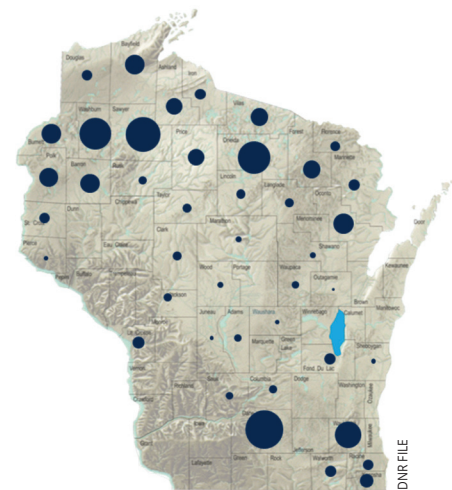
THE WISCONSIN WALLEYE INITIATIVE FUNDING INCLUDES:

- \$8.2 million to fund hatchery capital improvement to expand production at DNR state fish hatcheries, primarily at the Art Oehmcke Hatchery in Woodruff, the Governor Tommy G. Thompson Hatchery in Spooner and the Wild Rose Hatchery in Wild Rose.
- \$1.3 million each year for DNR state fish hatchery annual operating costs.
- \$2 million in one-time funding for a competitive grant program for municipal, tribal and private aquaculture facilities to improve their infrastructure and enhance the capabilities to stock additional large fingerling walleye.
- \$160,000 in one-time funds for the University of Wisconsin-Extension to continue its work with private aquaculture.
- \$500,000 annually starting in Fiscal Year 14-15 to purchase large fingerling walleye for stocking from private fish farms.
- \$250,000 annually to expand the summer Tribal Youth Program, a state-tribal partnership that gives high school-age tribal youth the opportunity to work on natural resource-related projects.

ESTIMATED BUDGET FOR HATCHERY REPAIR AND MAINTENANCE PROJECTS



2014 LAKES AND WATERS STOCKED WITH LARGE FINGERLING WALLEYE



DNR FILE

NUMBER OF FISH STOCKED:

The number of large fingerling walleye (6 to 8 inches) increased significantly with the infusion of Wisconsin Walleye Initiative funds. In 2013 this total was over three times the previous high number of large fingerlings produced annually.

Year	Large Fingerlings Stocked, DNR Hatcheries	Large Fingerlings Stocked, Private Fish Farms	Total Large Fingerlings Stocked	Number of Lakes and Waters Stocked
2013	416,506	21,965	438,471	99
2014	506,891	212,779	719,670	151
2015*	-	-	787,000*	-

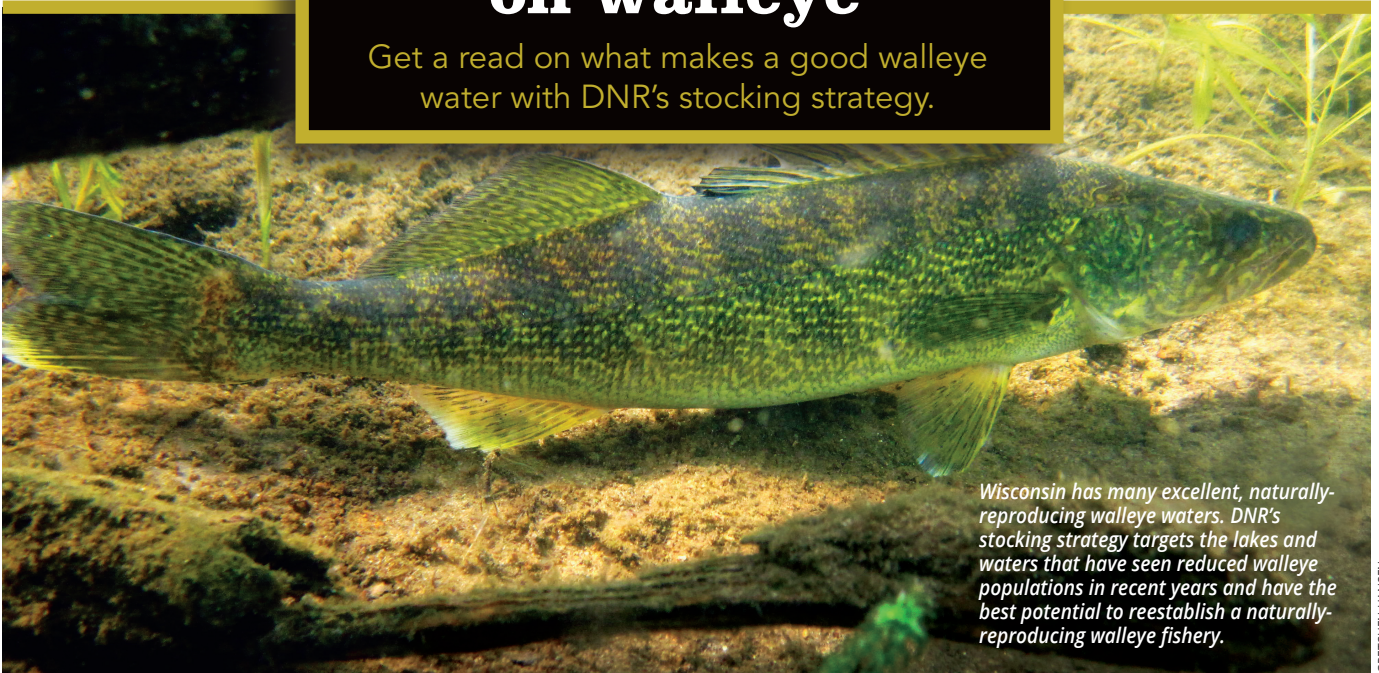
*Total number of large fingerlings stocked in 2015 is proposed. Breakdown between DNR and private fish farms and the number of lakes and waters to be stocked is to be determined.

In addition to stocking large fingerlings, the Department of Natural Resources and private fish farms are also continuing stocking small fingerlings (around 2 inches) and fry (tiny fish without scales or fins).

A complete listing of all lakes and waters stocked with walleye is available on the DNR website. Go to dnr.wi.gov and search "walleye."

Keeping an eye on walleye

Get a read on what makes a good walleye water with DNR's stocking strategy.



Wisconsin has many excellent, naturally-reproducing walleye waters. DNR's stocking strategy targets the lakes and waters that have seen reduced walleye populations in recent years and have the best potential to reestablish a naturally-reproducing walleye fishery.

GRETCHEN HANSEN

Natasha Kassulke

Friends refer to Danny Plautz as “the walleye whisperer.”

Raised on fishing, the Muskego native who now runs a cleaning service with his dad in Milwaukee, grew up following his dad to fishing tournaments and casting, jigging and trolling on Big St. Germain Lake in Vilas County while vacationing in northern Wisconsin.

He competed in his first tournament when he was in fifth grade.

“I’ll never forget it,” the 32-year-old recalls. “It was so windy that my dad had to tie me to the front seat of the boat...I’ve been hooked ever since.”

Today, Plautz is a professional walleye angler and in 2012 he won his first National Guard Fishing League Worldwide Walleye Tour Championship, netting \$85,000 in prize money thanks to a four-day total of 15 walleye caught by casting perch, crawfish and crank baits. It was an emotional win for Plautz, whose dad also finished in the top 10 in that tournament.

Much of Plautz’s success lies in his ability to cast at a rate of four-casts-per-minute, but more importantly, in his skills at reading waters for walleye.

Plautz approaches professional fishing tournaments just as he does more recreational fishing. He studies the waters he fishes, takes copious notes and looks for patterns. For walleye, he likes big lakes, but also looks for currents and enjoys fishing rivers, reservoirs and along dams.

Plautz says he is excited by the state’s new emphasis on walleye stocking and that it is not just stocking waters, but stra-

tegically looking at those waters that stand the best chances for natural reproduction — the lakes he knows and reveres.

As the walleye fingerlings that were stocked last year are settling into their new homes, anglers like Plautz, and the DNR staff and their partners who are making the stocking possible, are watching and optimistically waiting for the results.

Results that Plautz says hold promise for a younger generation of anglers that includes his 5-year-old daughter Maggie, with whom he already enjoys sharing the family fishing secrets.

Factors influencing walleye reproduction

Understanding factors controlling walleye reproductive success (recruitment) has been a long-standing goal in Wisconsin’s fisheries management program, explains

Gretchen Hansen, Ph.D., a DNR fisheries researcher, who has been instrumental in the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative stocking strategy and helping identify those lakes that are most likely to have the greatest stocking success.

To do that, Hansen along with researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and other DNR fisheries staff, reviewed 2,717 walleye recruitment surveys conducted throughout Wisconsin from 1989 to 2012 by the DNR and the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC) as part of annual monitoring. From those surveys, they created a statistical model to predict walleye recruitment success (defined as fall young-of-year walleye catch rates of greater than 10 fish per mile) with 80 percent accuracy based on various lake variables including lake area, growing degree days (growing season and

Danny Plautz, who won his first National Guard Walleye Tour Championship in 2012, says the Initiative holds promise for a younger generation of anglers including his daughter.



COURTESY DANNY PLAUTZ

lake temperature), conductivity (the total dissolved solids in the water) and shoreline complexity.

The research revealed that walleye are reproducing better in bigger lakes and in lakes with low conductivity, and in smaller lakes that have cooler waters with fewer growing degree days, Hansen says.

The relationship between shoreline complexity and walleye reproduction success is more complicated and needs more research, Hansen says.

"Using this model, lakes that score high in supporting a naturally-reproducing walleye population get higher priority for stocking," she says. "We are testing tools we have as managers and using adaptive management from stocking to experimental regulations and closely watching the walleye communities to see if they are working."

Working closely with Hansen is Joe Hennessy, DNR treaty fisheries coordinator and team lead for the statewide group (comprised of DNR and university partners, GLIFWC and Conservation Congress members) charged with implementing the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative.

The Initiative is designed to increase production of fall fingerling walleye (also called "large" fingerling or "extended growth" walleye). In the past, the stocking program had limited funding and concentrated on spring (or small) fingerling walleye, stocked in June, which were cheaper, but had a much lower and more variable survival rate.

"In the past, we had a pretty limited number of these larger extended growth fish to stock and a very high demand for them," Hennessy explains. "We had a prescribed stocking rate of 10 fingerlings per acre so that's what we did. But with this Initiative, we wanted to determine if that's the best stocking rate, or if more or fewer fish might be better. We also asked, 'Where are these fish going to survive best and have the best potential for natural reproduction?' Using the data from Gretchen and the researchers who were working with her, we prioritized stocking in those lakes."

Hennessy worked with the walleye team to take a list of lakes statewide for which fall fingerling stocking was requested and assign stocking rates to them ranging between 5 to 20 fall fingerlings per acre. The waters and lakes that already have natural walleye reproduction are not stocked, rather the team stocks fish where there is high potential to reestablish a walleye population.

Hennessy points out that stocking more fish is not necessarily better. The key is to stock fish where they have the best chance of surviving, especially during the winter months.

"The walleye we are stocking are a pret-

ty good size but it's a hard time of year," Hennessy says about the importance of winter survival. "If the walleye fingerlings don't get in there and start eating right away, all of a sudden things can get real lean, real fast."

Good, naturally-reproducing walleye lakes also need spawning habitat.

"That means having windswept shorelines, lots of shallow cobble," Hennessy says. "Walleye rely on wave action to oxygenate their eggs so that's why they tend to go for those big windswept shorelines. And part of it comes down to home field advantage. If you have a big lake with lots of rocks and not a lot of weeds, it's advantage walleye. But if you start to play in a shallow lake with lots of weed cover, then that's going to be a big advantage for bass, bluegill and musky."

Hennessy says surveys will be conducted to continue to monitor the stocking success and it will likely be five years or more before the adult return on the stocked fingerlings is known.

Hennessy says the best walleye fishing in the state will always be in large waters with natural reproduction like the Wisconsin, Chippewa, Fox and Mississippi rivers, Green Bay system and Winnebago system, which he describes as a "walleye producing factory," but good opportunities exist statewide.

"Our goal is to diversify the opportunity to catch walleye, and no matter where you live, bring you more places to fish close to home," Hennessy explains.

Each season has its charm

But stocking fish in waters where they are likely to have the best chance of natural reproduction only goes so far in putting fish on the table. You also need to know how to fish for the season.

Fish location and movement are paramount factors in each season as fish are found in different habitats within each period.

Plautz challenges anglers to try the shoulder seasons. Summer is popular but Plautz argues that each season has its charm.

"A lot of people are missing out on great walleye fishing by only fishing for them in the summer," he says.

In the spring, reproduction is the main motivation and fish migrate toward traditional spawning grounds.

"Fall is a great time to fish for walleye because they are preparing for the winter and schooling and putting on the feed bag," Plautz says. "I think fall is when you can catch some of the biggest fish."

In winter, walleye become even more sedentary and do not feed as often. Tip-ups become the fishing tool of choice.

"I love ice fishing," Plautz says. "But don't forget to look for tributaries where there is some water movement."

Not sure where to find walleye or how to read the waters? Plautz suggests asking bait store owners where to go. And what's the best time to fish for walleye in Wisconsin?

"Anytime you are fishing for walleye in Wisconsin is the best time," Plautz says.



Natasha Kassulke is editor-in-chief of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.

WILD WALLEYE WATERS

Wisconsin has many excellent, naturally-reproducing walleye waters. Some of the best walleye fishing is found in these waters, accounting for 84 percent of the walleye caught by anglers in Wisconsin. These waters do not need to be stocked and produce walleye populations that are 3 to 10 times higher than waters that are stocked at even the highest levels.

For a list of these top walleye waters, go to dnr.wi.gov and search "walleye."



DNR fisheries biologists take notes in the field. Understanding factors controlling walleye reproductive success (recruitment) has been a long-standing goal for the DNR.

DNR FILE

How to have reel success with walleye

Walleye fishing tips for any water and any season.



© LEN HARRIS

Summer is a popular time for walleye fishing, but anglers can have great success in the spring and fall "shoulder" seasons when walleye are hungry and on the move.

Lisa Gaumnitz

Steve Gilbert, Skip Sommerfeldt and Brian Uttech boast more than 120 years of walleye fishing between them, most of that time spent chasing ol' marble eyes in northern Wisconsin. They share some basic walleye fishing tips that are pretty universal for lakes and waters across the state.

Gilbert, longtime DNR fisheries biologist in Vilas and Oneida counties, considers walleye "the toughest fish to catch" because they have a typically low abundance per acre and require a more finesse-type of fishing. His best advice?

"There's no substitute for time on the water. If I have friends coming up to fish with me on the weekend, I'll go out and fish a few days to figure out the bite. You've got to experiment to see what they want and when they want it. This is true with all species of fish, but with walleye fishing it can change by the minute."

Uttech grew up fishing and has been putting people onto walleye as a fishing guide in the Eagle River area for the last 30-odd years.

"There are so many resources out there that weren't there when I was younger, so in many ways, it's easier to fish for walleye," he says, and advises contacting local bait shops and using the Internet to get lake information to help figure out where to go. He also suggests printed maps

which have GPS coordinates for known fish holding spots.

Skip Sommerfeldt, longtime DNR fisheries liaison to the U.S. Forest Service in Park Falls, fishes walleye year-round and notes that fishing for walleye can be very productive.

"Remember, bigger is not better for eating quality with walleye. The best eaters are in the 12-inch to 15-inch size (if allowed by the harvest regulations) and catch and

release also works with walleye. Today's 20-inch release may be your 28-inch mounter several years down the road!"

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

The regulations, seasons and bag limits for walleye vary across Wisconsin's different waterways, so make sure you know the rules for the waters you intend to fish before heading out. You can get this information on the DNR website (dnr.wi.gov, search "fishing"), at a DNR service center, or check at bait shops or by asking the local fisheries biologist.

Fishing from a boat is a popular way to angle for walleye. Remember to register your boat and to pick up a copy of the handbook of Wisconsin boating laws and regulations. A Wisconsin boating safety certification is required for operators born on or after Jan. 1, 1989. For more information, to register your boat or to sign up for a boating safety course, go to the DNR website (dnr.wi.gov, search "boating") or stop in at a local DNR service center.



Winter ice fishing for walleye can yield big results.

COURTESY DANNY PLAUTZ

Spring walleye fishing

Wisconsin's regular fishing season opens the first Saturday in May and that's a good time for walleye anglers to hit it hard. Walleye have typically finished spawning, and post spawning is a good time to go. The fish are hungry and there's not a lot of food available, both of which make them vulnerable at that time, so even an average angler can have success. DNR creel surveys show May is when the biggest proportion of walleye is harvested.

When to fish

The May bite usually occurs early and late in the day. You'll want to come in at 9 a.m. and get out on the water after 5 p.m. for the best bite. The males will congregate next to the best spawning habitat (rock/cobble) at this time.

Where to fish

Look for cobble-type shoreline. As spawning comes to an end, bigger fish move into shallower, warmer bays looking to feed. Fish weed lines in these areas. Wading shorelines can be effective at this time of year when fish are in the shallows. Use a hydrographic map of the lake you plan to fish to identify these key areas in advance. Once on the water, don't waste time on unproduc-



DNR FILE

Get all the walleye regulations, seasons and bag limits for Wisconsin's different waterways on the DNR website (dnr.wi.gov, search "fishing").

tive spots. If you don't get a bite in 15 to 20 minutes, move on to the next spot.

What gear to use

A jig and minnow works up to early June. Use a 1/16-ounce jig, slip bobbers, live bait rigs or crank baits. Try using different color jigs — yellow, green, chartreuse or red — because on some days, the color can make a big difference. Select a 6 ½- to 7-foot spinning rod and reel combo filled with light line. A mistake many people make is they use too heavy a line. Use 4- to 6-pound test line except when you're using crank baits. Most of the time when I'm using crank baits I use 10- to 12-pound

test line. In June, night crawlers are best on the weed edges. Also slip bobbers or a light jig tipped with half a night crawler can work great just before and during the spring mayfly hatch. As the water warms into the 70s, leeches work great and are durable at these warmer temperatures.

How to fish

Work the jig and minnow right along the bottom. If you're using a minnow imitating crank baits, casting shallow running crank baits after dark along rocky shorelines or outside weed edges can be very productive.

Steve Gilbert

Summer walleye fishing

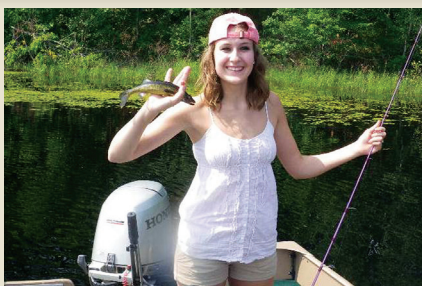
After the spawning run, walleyes disperse to summer haunts where they are generally found until the water begins to cool down in the fall. Those summer patterns will find walleyes associated with structure — any bottom feature such as submerged wood, fish cribs, rocks or changes in lake bottom topography.

When to fish

You get a more active walleye bite in the evening. You're after a quarry that's a bit light shy. Walleye eyes are built for low-light conditions. That said, it's not true that they only bite at night. They are catchable during the day. The fish may still be in the shallow water around the weeds in the early morning.

Where to fish

During the daytime, you will generally find walleye in deeper water where the chop on the lake breaks up the light. As summer comes on, the males sit in the shallows after spawning. The females move along and go to deeper water. Some walleyes will hang around weed beds, so look for



SKIP SOMMERFELDT

Fishing in summer.

cabbage weed, coontail and elodea. Walleyes will be found on mud flats as aquatic insects emerge from the bottom mud to transform from larval to adult stages.

What gear to use

Get a spinning rod with a fast tip and an open-faced reel. The rod tip should be stiff enough that you can feel any nibbling, yet can deliver when you set the hook. Use light line, like 6-pound test, and fish using leaded jigs, 1/8-ounce. If it's quiet water, try a 1/16- or 1/32-ounce jig as that allows the bait to move in a more natural man-

ner. Use minnows, leeches or part of a night crawler most of the time. You also can use crank baits — it depends on when and where you're fishing.

How to fish

The idea is to keep a jig in contact with the lake bottom as you gently drag it along with a slow retrieve. Drop the line from an 11 o'clock position to an 8 o'clock position. When you drop the rod tip you need to crank up the slack as fast as you can to 8 o'clock, then slowly pull back up to 11 o'clock. You should be able to detect any activity there. Generally, when you get any kind of a bite, give it a second or two — and sometimes you need to count up to 10 — before you set the hook. Keep the line as tight as you can at all times.

Sometimes, though, a bait suspended off the bottom is what the walleyes want. At these times use a floating jig head behind a small egg-shaped sinker to get the bait off the bottom. This type of presentation is a variation of a Lindy rig.

Brian Uttech

Fall walleye fishing

Walleyes go on the feed as the water cools. The cooler the water usually means a bigger bite, but you must still use slower presentations. If your type of presentation is not working, try something else until you discover what is working. When you find the answer for the particular day, make some notes about what is going on for future reference. Chances are that when similar conditions exist, your notes from a previous outing will work to help you catch fish.

When to fish

Any time of the day in the fall works. Usually as it gets later in the season, the bite gets better and better. Walleye are putting the feed bag on. The early ice is phenomenal and fall is when you can catch some really big fish.

Where to fish

Explore the edges of any deeper water on a lake as the water gets cold.

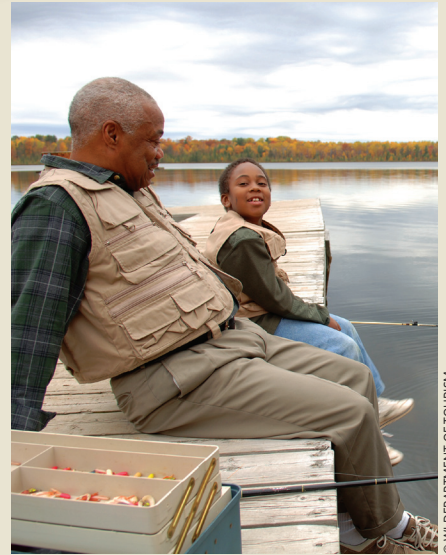
What gear to use

A jig and minnow are most productive in the fall but you can use night crawlers.

How to fish

As fall moves on and the water gets colder, go slower with your presentation. Most of the time walleyes require more finesse. It's one of those feels. If you're fishing on a river system, put your bait right behind of, or ahead of a current break caused by a rock or a point sticking out. Get on the down-current side and drift a slip bobber over the obstruction. There's a good chance fish are hanging out behind those current stops.

Brian Uttech



Fishing from a pier in fall.

© WI DEPARTMENT OF TOURISM

Winter walleye fishing

In winter, walleye become more sedentary and do not feed as often. I have found that tip-ups fished with live bait can often catch more walleye than jig-pole fishing. The old adage "the bigger the bait, the bigger the fish" is often true, but smaller sized bait can produce more action.

When to fish

Time of day is often very important and this also varies with whether you're fishing on a stained or clear-water lake. On stained waters, the low-light periods are usually the most productive, with the hour and a half before dark often better than the early morning period (and the bite often shuts down right after dark). On clear-water lakes, you may often have to fish after dark to get the best catches, and sometimes all through the night can be productive.

Where to fish

Key spots to look for are gravel bars and rocky drop-offs, weed edges and mid-depth mud flats and break lines where gravel/sand turns to soft bottom. On stained lakes, I like to concentrate my tip-ups in the 6-foot to 12-foot range. On clear lakes, the best depths are usually in the 10- to 20-foot range. However, fish movement does vary and depths as shallow as 2 feet and deeper than 20 feet can often be very productive as well.



Tip-ups are a popular choice for catching walleye under the ice.

What gear to use

Live bait is most often used on tip-ups. I prefer to use medium suckers or extra-large fatheads, but many anglers like golden shiners. Monofilament or fluorocarbon leaders are both good. I usually use 8- to 10-pound test monofilament leaders attached to the nylon tip-up line (a small snap swivel works well for this). I prefer a very small bobber to mark the line. It will keep the line up off the bottom as a fish

runs with the bait.

For hooks, I like to use a double hook (a treble with one barb snipped off) or a single circle hook, and usually in size 8 or 6. I also place two small split shots about 7 to 8 inches above the hook to keep the minnow down near the bottom. For jig fishing, use the lightest line you can get away with. Remember, a fish swimming in the water doesn't weigh very much. A 6-pound line worked slowly and carefully can easily bring in a 10-pound fish if reeled in calmly.

How to fish

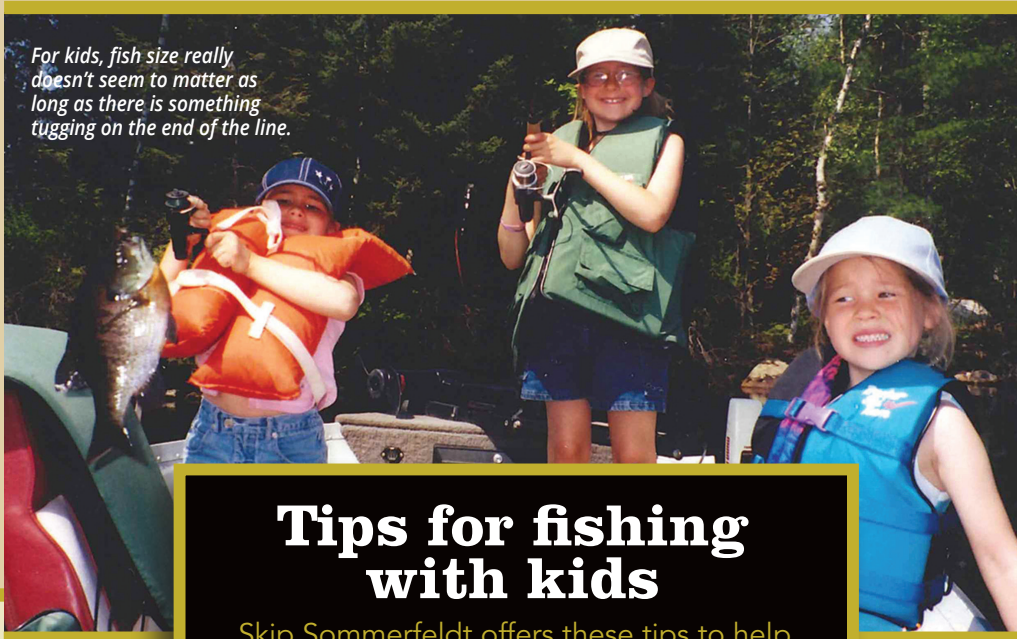
Minnows should be hooked lightly through the middle of the back so they hang horizontally and stay lively. On stained lakes, I set my minnow 4 to 8 inches off the bottom. On clear lakes, bait can be 6 to 20 inches off the bottom as the fish can better see the bait above them and come up to get it. Check your bait regularly and replace any dead or missing minnows. A tip-up with a stolen minnow will not go up no matter how long you wait!

Skip Sommerfeldt



Compiled by Lisa Gaumnitz, a freelance writer in Madison and former public affairs manager for DNR's Fisheries program.

For kids, fish size really doesn't seem to matter as long as there is something tugging on the end of the line.



SKIP SOMMERFELDT

Tips for fishing with kids

Skip Sommerfeldt offers these tips to help parents get their kids started walleye fishing.

■ Know when to start

The most important tips I can give parents are don't start them too young and don't force them to go, especially if the weather is cold or rainy. I really started getting my girls involved in fishing when they were about 5 or 6 years old — when they were old enough to actively participate, hang on to a rod and reel and have an idea of what they were supposed to be doing.

■ Try to find lots of walleyes

Look for lakes or rivers that have high-density walleye populations, with good numbers of small fish. Waters with adult walleye densities less than two per acre can often make for tough fishing, but densities above three per acre can usually provide some sort of action. Walleye density numbers can often be found on the Internet, or by calling the local fisheries biologist. Catching big walleyes is exciting, but can be slow and tedious for a kid. An abundance of small fish can provide lots of action and keep the kids interested.

■ Try shore fishing areas

If you don't have a boat, look for shore fishing areas. A good shore spot for walleye is usually below dams in the tailwater areas. This often involves being near fast water and currents, so kids should wear a life jacket and be closely supervised. This tail-water fishing takes a bit more finesse to master, but it can be very productive throughout the season. Since snags are common, I recommend a simple, inexpensive setup. Use just enough weight to allow a slow drift through the current, and use monofilament line — it is easier to break and doesn't usually leave a long trailing strand like the braided lines.

■ Start with ice fishing

A good way to introduce kids to walleye fishing is through

ice fishing. Try tip-ups instead of jig pole fishing. With tip-ups, kids don't have to sit in one place and watch for a bobber to go down — they can run around, build forts in the snow, slide on a little hill down to the lake, build snowmen — and then come running to catch a fish when a flag pops up. In general, I like to set the tip-ups with large fatheads or medium-size suckers on flats in 8 to 12 feet of water.

■ Keep the gear and techniques simple

For most kids, the spin-cast or closed-face reels are best and easiest for them to use. Spinning gear (or open-face reels) can be okay but are prone to line twisting and tangles. If you do use spinning gear, teach your kids to do what I call, "watch your loops." When they make a cast and click over the bail, have them look at the reel spool and pull out any loops that may be there. It's these often unnoticed loops that create the big line tangles often seen when using spinning gear.

■ Use mostly live bait rigs

Since casting artificial baits and using jig-minnow combinations can be difficult for kids to master, use mostly live bait rigs when fishing with kids. A slip-bobber with a split shot and #4 or #6 hook tipped with a minnow, leech or half a night crawler is a simple starter-rig for kids. Start with the slip bobber set at 8 to 10 feet, and have them cast to deep weed edges, drop-offs and over gravel/rock humps or fish cribs. Then adjust the slip bobber depth to what is found to be most successful.

■ Make a big deal about any fish they catch

To a kid, a hard-tugging 12-inch walleye or 8-inch bluegill is probably more fun than a heavy, ol' 22-inch walleye that they probably can't even hold up anyway. Always have a camera along — it makes a kid proud to get their picture taken with a fish. Again, any size or species of fish will do.

No gear? No problem.
Borrow ours!

FISHING WITH KIDS – START HERE!

Would you like to take your kids fishing but don't know where to begin? The DNR sponsors fishing clinics, maintains a map of kid-friendly fishing spots and offers equipment through the Tackle Loaner Program. For more information, go to DNR's angler education webpage at dnr.wi.gov/topic/fishing/anglereducation/.

North or south – walleye catch attention statewide

Walleye fisheries are a boon to Wisconsin tourism.



Greg Bohn, who has been leading successful fishing expeditions for 40 years, says increasing numbers of anglers are practicing catch and release with larger walleyes to help maintain natural reproduction in key lakes. This fish was released in Trout Lake in Vilas County.

JENNIFER SERENO

Jennifer Sereno

Nothing reels people in like walleye.

That's the word from chamber of commerce leaders, business owners, longtime anglers and guides from around the state. Whether anglers are looking for the thrill of the hunt or a meal in the pan, they say, Wisconsin walleye deliver.

In recent years, however, it's become evident that some lakes need a helping hand to maintain what has been a traditionally strong fishery. The Wisconsin Walleye Initiative aims to address the challenge by supporting the state's wild walleye waters and developing a more productive sport fishery in lakes capable of sustaining the prized fish.

In the process, experts from around the state agree, the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative also promises to create jobs, lure more visitors and generate additional business opportunities.

"The Northwoods and walleye — that's been a winning combination since time immemorial," says Greg Bohn, who operates the Strictly Walleye Guide Service in Hazelhurst and has been leading successful fishing expeditions for 40 years. "People come here and they want to experience catching some walleye. The improved

fishery that will result from the Initiative offers a whole lot to our communities. It's a boost we've needed for some time and it will mean increased opportunities for all of Wisconsin."

Steve Suick, president of Suick Lure Co., in Antigo, has seen firsthand how changes in the state's fishery affect the economy. The company was founded in 1939 and with his son Mike now joining the business as the family's fourth generation of leaders, Suick offers a unique perspective on the importance of providing a vibrant fishery that keeps anglers of all ages engaged in the sport over time.

"Our company typically targets musky and northern pike with our lures but we do have some for walleye, and without a good walleye fishery, I think the whole tourist industry suffers," Suick says. "We've seen it happen, when limits on some lakes went down from five fish to one or two fish and it had a detrimental effect. Fishing is a great family sport and once people start catching fish, they can't get enough of it. But if they're not catching fish, they're not going to be coming back."

The frequency of success and perceived

opportunity for positive results out on the water also play a factor in how long people are willing to commit to a vacation that involves fishing. Bohn says his market research indicates the average fishing guide customer spends approximately \$800 per day while visiting, including the cost of travel, meals, extra tackle and gear, accommodations, licenses and other expenditures.

"It used to be that all the lake resorts required a seven-day stay," Bohn says. "Now, my clients are here one to three days. If you envision the thousands of additional people who would be drawn by an improved walleye fishery, it's huge."

And there's no question that walleye do hold special appeal. Kurt Justice, owner of Kurt's Island Sport Shop and guide service in Minocqua, says walleye attract people because they offer an exciting challenge — and taste good, too. Although not as easy to catch as panfish, they do reach an impressive size and are more readily accessible to anglers of all ages and skill levels than muskies.

"There's definitely something about walleye," Justice says. "They provide that opportunity to catch a good-eating fish.

And here in Wisconsin, there's always that possibility of catching a real trophy."

Unfortunately, Justice says, over the past 20 years, walleye reproduction has become less consistent in some lakes. The resulting lower bag limits on lakes where reproduction is challenged creates greater pressure on the lakes and flowages where good natural reproduction continues.

"We've lost a lot of tourism as the fishery has been affected, especially up here in the north," Justice says. "We don't see as many of the serious anglers in May, September and October. And it affects our restaurants, motels and resorts. I look at the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative as something that's really needed."

The economic impact of walleye fishing is felt beyond just northern Wisconsin. Wendy Hielsberg, executive director of the Oshkosh Convention and Visitors Bureau, says her community gains national exposure when Lake Winnebago draws major walleye tournaments. The Cabela's National Walleye Tour held its year-end championship Sept. 18-20 on Lake Winnebago in 2014.

"Fishing tournaments create economic impact for cities hosting tournaments both by attracting anglers to the destination to compete and by creating a festival atmosphere that attracts tourists not engaged in fishing," Hielsberg says. "The media exposure is also lucrative for host cities, as many tournaments come with a media team shooting the tournament, promoting the destination's community and waterways."



Walleye is the most sought after game fish by anglers in Wisconsin and an important part of the state's tourism industry.

DNR FILE



"Fishing is a great family sport and once people start catching fish, they can't get enough of it," says Steve Suick.

SKIP SOMMERFELDT

Tadd Wormet, president of A-F Motors in Adams and a board member of the Adams County Chamber of Commerce, says strengthening the walleye fishery through statewide stocking efforts will help boost the appeal of communities near lakes, rivers and flowage areas wherever they may be. Just as large metropolitan areas highlight urban cultural offerings to attract workforce talent, smaller communities with destination fisheries and other outdoor recreational offerings get an added boost when it comes to luring and retaining skilled and loyal workers, he says. The Wisconsin Walleye Initiative will only help.

"Right now, I'm in the process of hiring a new salesperson," says Wormet, whose car dealership has 17 full-time employees.

He bought property up here because his family loves the area and wants to move up here permanently. He's had a successful career but still wants to continue working for a few more years.

"If it wasn't for the natural resources in the area, they wouldn't be coming here and my business wouldn't have the benefit of this experience," he says. "Most of my employees are sportsmen and women."

The impact of an improved walleye fishery on demand for vacation homes and lakefront properties represents another economic benefit not lost on James Bolen, executive director of the Cable Area Chamber of Commerce and owner of Lake Owen Resort.

"I guarantee, if someone has a phenomenal day on the water, at some point in the next couple of weeks they're going to go online and search to see whether there are any properties available on that lake," Bolen says. "Even before the extended growth walleyes reach legal size, these fish are going to generate some excitement with catch and release because the anglers are thinking long-term. They feel a need to keep coming back."

Bolen contends the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative marks an important change in philosophy that will continue to strength-

en relationships and improve understanding among DNR staff, anglers, environmental stakeholders and those committed to regional economic development.

"This is a much more responsive model," he notes. "This change in approach is not only good for the fishery, it sparks people's curiosity. They want to go see the lakes and learn whether it's working. When DNR did an initial stocking with the extended growth fingerlings in Lake Owen, I put the number out on our Facebook page and it went viral."

The guides and business leaders say that strong level of public interest along with other trends may serve to heighten the impact of the Initiative. Wisconsin anglers are more educated about the resource than ever before and they increasingly dedicate their time, talent and funds to habitat improvements. At the same time, growing numbers of walleye anglers are practicing catch and release, often returning trophy-sized fish to the water to support natural reproduction while keeping smaller, legal fish for the pan.

"I think the guides are really working hard to educate clients on how to catch and release properly," says Roger Sabota, a longtime guide and former teacher from Rhinelander. "I never tell my clients to throw a fish back in, but I make sure they see me do it. Along with the release of these extended growth fingerlings, all of these things will surely help improve the fishery over time."

While resorts and other operations that rely on tourism dollars may never again see a time when families consistently take the extended vacations of yesteryear, businesses may well come out ahead if efforts such as the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative draw visitors back more frequently.

"With the way of the work environment today, it's hard for families to take those long vacations," the Cable area's Bolen says. "But lots of people have figured out that you can work a couple of extra hours during the week, take off early Friday and it doesn't have to impact your work. If people are having a good time and catching fish, maybe you'll see them a couple of times in the spring and fall. You could easily see it turn into three or four shorter trips."

Hazelhurst guide Bohn says a stronger walleye fishery also will bring in more tourism dollars from outside the state.

"I still have people come from Minnesota, Michigan, Iowa, Illinois and Kentucky, so the fish itself has the ability to draw people from long distances," he says. "In terms of the expanded stocking through the Wisconsin Walleye Initiative, I truly believe that if you stock them, people will come."



Jennifer Sereno is the External Communications Section Chief in the DNR's Office of Communications.



The Wisconsin fishing camp has a rich tradition in our state. No matter the season or water, you can find all the resorts, campgrounds and other places to stay for your next trip on the Wisconsin Department of Tourism website at travelwisconsin.com.

TALES FROM A

Wisconsin fish camp

A tradition that includes good fishing,
good food, good stories and good friends.

Story by David L. Sperling and photos by Don Faust

Every phase of fishing walleye offers special pleasures. Planning your trip, assembling simple gear and plotting your fishing strategies are all part of the experience. Just the thought of hooking fish and preparing the catch for the finest, tastiest meal you can share is great fun.

Yet as much as I crave and prize properly cooked walleyes, our fishing trips were always much more than the catching and eating. The company, the setting, the relaxation, the chance to get together with friends, the jokes and the time to explore some beautiful lakes all combined to form rich experiences and memories. And the longer it lasted, the better.

Our planning sessions used to start in the dead of winter when hope started to warm us during those bleak weeks of ice fishing staring down a drilled hole, waiting for some wayward panfish to send a tiny signal up the line. After a few weeks of catching just enough fish for a meal, we started thinking about the spring walleye trip. We'd get pumped up at winter fishing expos, listen to pep talks at seminars, get hooked into buying a few of the latest sure-fire jigs and baits, and then head to the local tavern for a serious conclave. "The group" that I was invited to join had fished together for a few years tenting at public campgrounds and cooking their meals over campfires. By the time I joined them they were in their mid-20s and the joys of camping in the rain had given way to renting small cabins where beds, heat and a simple kitchen with a stove were a marked improvement.

We'd plan our meals, make our reservations, figure out how many boats we needed to trailer up to the flowage and talk over what gear to pack up so each boat would have a trolling motor, lights, landing nets and so forth. Over time we also took on a little technology. In those pre-cell phone days we kept in touch by equipping each boat with a small walkie-talkie so we could occasionally check-in, learn where the fish were biting and pick a rendezvous spot for a picnic lunch or a midday fish fry. Our group varied in size from about eight to a dozen so we used to plan on five to six two-person crews.

Our destination for those trips was the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage near Mercer in Iron County — just over 19,000 acres of water surrounded by more than 35,000 acres of public lands that are still largely undeveloped. The flowage was created in 1926 by damming the Turtle and Flambeau rivers to make a reservoir that would connect the rivers, creeks and 16 natural lakes into a vast waterscape of channels, rocky bars, woody bays and emergent weed beds punctuated by islands and lots of trees.

I mention the trees because when the



Anglers drift fish near Lake of the Falls, site of das "boot" incident.



Buddies hang out near the cleaning station after a good day of fishing.

flowage was formed they made little attempt to clear out a lot of the old timber. The area remains a submerged stump field where boaters have to pay close attention, use maps, stick to the old river channels and motor really slowly because otherwise you will hit stumps if you aren't careful as you hunt for good fishing structure. So take your time when moving around!

We tried to time our trips for mid- to late May into early June to hit those first few weeks of the post-spawn feeding binge when the waters started to warm up, walleyes were hungry, natural forage

was just starting to pick up for the fishing season and we stood a better chance of finding fish that were in a positive mood to take a bait.

We got in a positive mood as well.

First, we knew we would eat well. Our trips typically lasted a week and each boat of fishing partners was put in charge of one main meal, just in case the fish didn't cooperate. This meant that we were treated to several home specialties including stews, stuffed cabbage rolls, steaks, homemade spaghetti with fixings and grilled ribs. We started the days with homemade



Enjoying a shore lunch at one of the campsites on the Turtle-Flambeau Flowage.

sweet rolls, breads and the like. No one was going to go hungry during the fishing trip! We also planned a shore lunch at least once or twice during the week where all of our boats would rendezvous at an island campsite and we'd bring firewood and a big cast iron skillet. Then we'd assemble a traditional meal that included tomato sandwiches, fried potatoes and onions as well as freshly breaded and fried fish. That was followed by the equally honored tradition of a Fishermen's Nap where we'd take about an hour snooze before loading up the boats to try our luck again in the afternoon.

The flowage offered many options for fine fishing — woody stump fields, quiet bays, weedy river channels, drift fishing off of points and islands and the cascading waters off the Lake of the Falls at the northern end of the Flowage. I looked forward every year to taking at least a few trips up to the falls where we had to snake our way around meandering channels and turns to reach our destination. Foamy waters ran over the rocks into pools where you could pitch a minnow and slowly jig around the rocky river bottom hunting for walleye. The falls was surrounded by a mix of aspen and firs and with the gurgling waters it was quite the picturesque spot. Eagles, osprey and other birds would occasionally swoop nearby in hopes of finding a dead fish for dinner.

The falls was the site of one of my classic fishing adventures. I'd been fishing with another boat for about 45 minutes when my jig hooked into a big one — a heavy fish that did not want to surface. As

I started reeling in, it would slowly head downstream and start to tussle. I'd try to bring it back upstream and it would move a bit, and then head downstream again. Well, my heartbeat started racing as the battle continued for several minutes. I sure didn't want to break the 6-pound test line on my rod but I wasn't making great headway and the fish wasn't really fighting like a bass or a walleye. It was just a real lunker. Finally I worked the fish off the bottom and my partner readied the net. It was a big one alright. I'd say about a size 10 Red Wing. I had caught a rubber wading boot near the top so that every time I lifted it up a bit, the water current would fill the boot and carry it a bit farther downstream. Boy did we laugh hard telling and retelling that story over the years!

Other times the company of my buddies on the water made some of the perils of fishing seem less perilous. I would regularly find that my long-shaft 1958 10-horse Johnson outboard was just deep enough to nick some of those old stumps in the flowage. That old propeller would all too often shear a pin and more than a few times I needed to get a tow from a fellow angler to get to a nearby shore or back to our home beach so I could drag that old boat into the shallows, lift the motor and put a new pin in place. Without the help of friends in our fishing party, a sheared prop pin would have been a real reason for some mild panic because it would have taken a *looong* time to get back to our cabin dock if I had to rely on the trolling motor alone.

Another trip provided an even tougher

test. When I first bought my used boat we were trailering in a caravan coming home from a Mother's Day fishing trip. When we crossed some train tracks in the Adams-Friendship area, all of a sudden my boat trailer tipped violently to the left, I heard this god-awful screeching sound. Sparks were flying and my boat trailer tire was skittering down the road ahead of my car. Everything and everyone ground to a halt and my buddy Mike said, "Well that was impressive."

Apparently I had burnt out a wheel bearing on the trailer because the fitting had not been adequately packed and filled with grease before the trip. I didn't know what to do or where on earth I was going to find help on Mother's Day. Mike calmly said there was a DNR Fire Station just a few minutes up the road and perhaps they could offer some advice. We left my car and boat, went to the station and even on a Sunday, they had a work crew doing maintenance.

Sure enough they knew a local mechanic and put us in touch. That guy said if we gave him an hour to finish his family dinner, he could probably find a bearing in his shop and would bring it out to the "crash" site to make the repair for us. Within three hours we were back on the road and within a week back at home I learned the wonders of Bearing Buddies and zerk fittings to keep trailer hubs working and spinning.

Through such bumps on the road, my fishing buddies and I learned to make the best of many situations. Some mornings during our annual trips dawned with

pouring rain, making it clearly way too damp to fish. No problem! We'd just all crowd into one of the cabins, fire up the coffee pot, scramble some eggs and have a group breakfast. While the eggs cooked, out came several decks of cards. At the kitchen table we'd start a spirited game of Uno for eight while at another spot they'd be playing either Sheepshead or Euchre. Those card games would continue all day if the rain kept coming. Everyone had a real good time weighing in as the cards were slapped on the table and the coffee became more "spirited" over time as some libation was slipped into the coffee cups. The little old resort where we stayed also had a bar and game room, so if the weather stayed sour during the day we'd just move the card games into the common lodge area, try our luck at pinball or watch a baseball game if the old TV had any reception. The party continued and we all learned to adapt to the situation and still have a darn good time together.

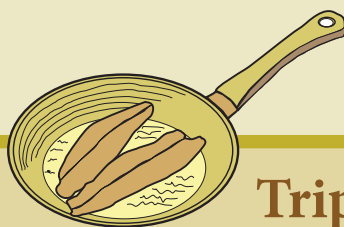
One of my favorite parts of the experience was cleaning fish at the old fish house after we'd had particularly good days on the water. The fish house was a simple open air shed with some ratty screens that kept most of the skeets and flies out. There were some cutting boards, a piece of hose with some running water and a few of the guys who had better knife skills would cut off the fish fillets and prepare them for the pan or the freezer. There was always a stream of trash talk kidding each other about the size of the fish, whether the walleyes were big enough to warrant saving the walleye cheeks for a special treat and so forth.

The smaller fish were deemed "fish sticks" hardly worth the effort to clean up. The big ones were "slabs" that would be carefully packed up and frozen to take home and enjoy with family later in the year. The best fish, in my mind were the 14-16 inchers (all legal catches in those days) that we would keep and fry up that same night for dinner with some fresh spuds and tartar sauce. Man, were those fish tasty crisp and hot right out of the pan. We all had our fill and thoroughly enjoyed the company whether around the kitchen table, the picnic table or the campfire.

The last day of the trip, like any last day of vacation, was always a mixture of sadness and promise — sadness that a great week of fishing and camaraderie was coming to an end, and happiness of the promise of another year and the chance to plan another annual trip of good fishing and good company.



David L. Sperling writes from Madison and is a former editor of Wisconsin Natural Resources magazine.



Triple-dip fried fish

Whether you're frying up walleye or other fish, at camp or at home, you'll enjoy this tasty, tried-and-true recipe from David L. Sperling.

Lightly sautéed fish with a light breading customized to your taste is a cinch. Here's all you have to do to make the triple-dip work for you! All you need are three shallow pans, some paper towels and a few sheets of waxed paper. Plus these ingredients:

½ cup flour
Salt and pepper to taste
One egg, beaten
2 tbsp. water, milk or buttermilk
½ cup top breading of ground corn flakes, Potato Buds or flour

Pans:

Pan one: Place about ½ cup of flour in the pan. Add salt and pepper to taste and mix.

Pan two: Beat one egg and add 2 tbsp. of either water, milk or buttermilk. Beat together and set aside.

Pan three: Place ½ cup of your favorite top coating. If you want a really brown coating, consider processing some corn flakes in a food processor until they are crumbs. If you like a crunchy coating, just place Potato Buds or another potato flake in the pan. If you just want a light, flaky coating and don't care about the color, use seasoned flour.

Directions:

Pat fish fillets dry with paper towel. Dredge the fish in the seasoned flour mix in pan one pressing the flour a bit into the fillet. Shake off the excess flour.

With a fork, dip the flour-covered fillet into the egg mixture on both sides so the egg mix sticks to the fillet on both sides. Let the excess liquid drip back into pan two.

Place the fillet into pan three and gently press the coating into both sides of the fillet to achieve a nice even coating. Place the coated fillet on a sheet of waxed paper and repeat these steps with your other fillets until you are ready to cook the fish.

Heat about ¼ inch of oil in a frying pan until hot. Place a few fillets at a time into the hot oil and cook about 4 ½ minutes per side.

Place cooked fish in a serving dish and hold in a warm oven (175-200° F) until all your fish are cooked. Serve with tartar sauce and coleslaw. Fried potatoes and onions also make an excellent side dish.



Frying fresh fish using a simple pancake batter coating.

EATING YOUR CATCH - MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES

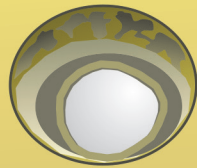
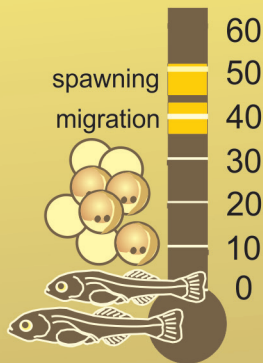
You can get the health benefits of eating Wisconsin's fish while also reducing potential health risks from unwanted pollutants by following Wisconsin's fish consumption guidelines. For more information, go to the DNR fish consumption advisory webpage at dnr.wi.gov/topic/Fishing/Consumption/.



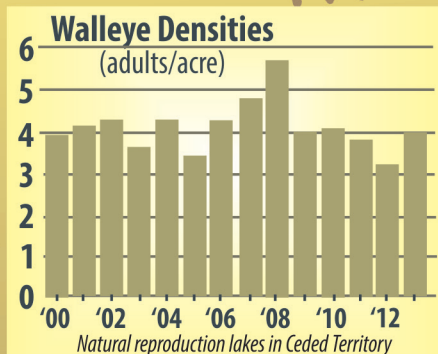
Wisconsin Walleye

Sander vitreus

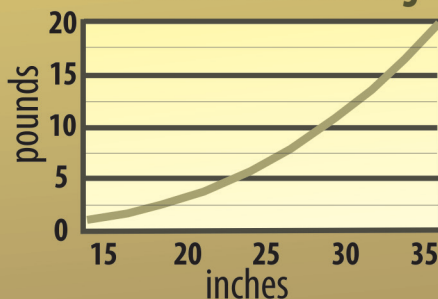
Spawning



The walleye eye has a light reflecting layer that allows it to see in low-light conditions.



How much does it weigh?

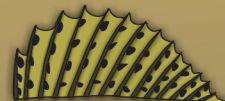
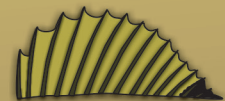


It's nature's way

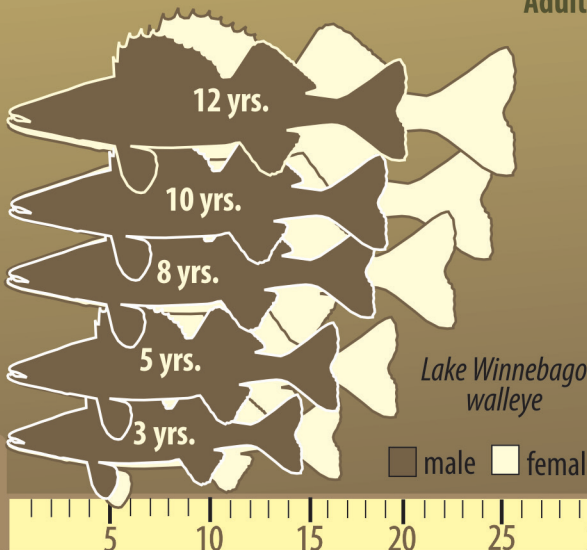
Populations from Ceded Territory lakes



Walleye Identification



Walleye age and length



What anglers want



Dorsal fin with black blotch (unlike the polka dots of a sauger)



Look for the telltale white tip on the bottom of the tail

Data source: DNR Fisheries Management

For more information, go to dnr.wi.gov and search "walleye."

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