

On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

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Coming And Going On The Wolf...

Post-spawn walleyes, pre-spawn whitebass cooperate

By Dick Ellis

Guide Randy Williams of New London watched as the wet-fly carried over the river to disappear into the soft flow of the Wolf. With the line riding current downstream, Williams ripped the florescent fly in, quickly reeled back the slack, and ripped again. The sting of a large whitebass spelled the end of a mini-drought and the beginning of another day of excellent fishing on the famous vein above Fremont.

The whitebass run that draws anglers from all over the Midwest and places afar is just starting on the Wolf and is even more popular, Williams said, than the spring spawning run for walleyes that he also labels "spectacular." On this late April outing just prior to the opener of Wisconsin's inland fishing season, we would be targeting post-spawn walleyes moving back downstream to Poygan, Butte Des Morts, Winnebago and Winneconne and whitebass moving up off the lakes to spawn.

Just below our boat, we



With an early morning goal to catch both post spawn walleyes moving down the Wolf River to resident lakes and pre-spawn whitebass moving up, Gordy Pagel of Appleton and Guide Randy Williams did just that Wednesday. About 10 walleyes and 15 whitebass fell to the anglers."

had watched our partners, guide Louis Woods, owner of Wolf River Outfitters of Fremont and Gordy Pagel of Appleton harness a good walleye. Soon, they had moved even further down to find walleyes in good size and numbers in a cooperative mood to their drift

tactic vertical jigging minnows.

It's only a matter of time...on this morning a very short time... before Woods and Williams find fish. The guides have an arsenal of answers when the whitebass aren't playing and the walleyes won't bite. Most vital to their quiver

is experience on the system, and a "back of my hand" familiarity of the lakes and connecting river. Woods has learned this water over a literal lifetime of fishing and in addition to his guide service owns a Fremont-based resort, campground and baitshop with boat rental. Retired teacher Williams was introduced to the spring runs by his father and never stopped fishing the system over the last three decades.

Monday, after Woods' walleye broke the ice, the Wolf challenge was short-lived before Williams took us further upstream to find the whitebass willing to take a fly, a small crankbait or a Wolf River Jig every five minutes. We would eventually quit on the whitebass before they quit on us and found walleye action every bit as steady toward Fremont where Woods said they would be.

Depending on the stage of the runs and whether fish are in pre-spawn mode or post and coming or going, the guides



The Wolf River offers great fishing, isolation and wildlife like this Great Blue Heron fishing for a meal in cattails near shore.

have a variety of tactics that mean probable success. The recently adopted fly tactic often presenting three flies on one line have occasionally landed two walleyes in one retrieve. On the river or lakes, other approaches include slip bobbers, trolling cranks, crawlers sometimes with boards, long-lining jigs or wolf river rigs, dragging a jig, drift jigging, and the list goes on. On a walleye down run, as one example Williams said, when traveling fish actually move back toward the lakes tail-first in the current, working a rapala or shad rap in shallow water near shore is often effective. "The last couple of years the walleye run has really been good," Williams said. "Walleyes for Tomorrow (WFT) and the sturgeon clubs have really improved the spawning habitat and the walleye fishermen are

releasing those nice big females and keeping the small males for eating."

According to the guides, there is never a shortage of good fishing year-round on the system. The walleye run begins as soon as the ice goes out. Even as the main thrust of the walleye run winds down, fish remain in the river ready to gorge on the pike fry hatch off the northern spawning marshes. The whitebass run will continue throughout May.

"There is just so much action with the whitebass," said Williams, who is often hired by Wolf River Outfitters to handle overflow clients. "There is no limit (size or number), and it really is a bigger draw than the walleye run. The weather is nice, the fishing is great and people come from Texas, Illinois, everywhere in the Midwest. The

river fishing is fantastic and it just keeps getting better and better."

The action doesn't stop when the runs conclude. Woods sounds like a talking calendar when he lays down a schedule of what anglers can expect as the months burn into summer and fall, including Winneconne crappies right now and summertime Winnebago perch.

"When the whitebass leave the river the walleyes turn on again in the river," Woods said. "I've never believed all the fish come back down in April. A lot come down in May and June. When those minnows hatch from the early northern pike spawn, every fish in the river is waiting for them. There is no reason to leave. They stay and eat."

Returning walleyes are also targeted on the lakes through June, many by anglers trolling with planer boards over crankbaits like rapalas, shad raps or rattle traps. Dragging a jig and crawler is also popular. Smallmouth bass, Woods said, in quantity and quality hit from now until ice-up, with Woods catching and releasing five smallies at 16 pounds his last trip. Channel, flathead and blue catfish will provide good fishing from the third week in May through late September. Largemouth bass fishing is very good from mid-May through June.

Woods called July the best multi-species month for fishing, including "awesome" bluegill angling, catfish, northern pike and walleyes on the lake. "In July, if you would

drift the river with a night-crawler you would catch 100 fish a day," he said.

Although northern pike fishing usually means smaller fish throughout the summer, August means huge pike, some in the 40-inch plus class, on the submerged eel grass flats of the system's lakes. Throwing buzz baits is the key to triggering the big fish strike.

"But August is really the worst month for me because I'm so focused on one species," Woods said. "How can you not fish for these crappies? They taste great and there are so many to catch. In September, the whitebass and walleyes also follow big schools of shad coming up the river, kind of like a recurrence of the spring run."

"I think that the fishing here is as good or better than it was when I was a kid, and it was great then," Woods said. "Everything is right here that a fisherman would want to target. We're bringing Canada back to Wisconsin. It's like Canada. You can catch as many fish but it's right in your backyard."

For more information on resort rentals, camping, guiding service or boat rental on the Winnebago system, contact Louis Woods and Wolf River Outfitters at 920-446-3116, www.fishwolfriver.com or guideservice@wolfriver-guide.com. Contact Randy Williams and Williams Guide Service at 920-982-2771, www.wilfish.com or Williams@athenet.net. *W_o*