

River Gold

Walleye runs mean great fishing

By Dick Ellis

Spring means river walleye runs and great fishing. Wisconsin anglers look to their own home waters or travel long distances to take advantage of spawning migrations on the Fox, the Wisconsin, the Rock, the Wolf or the Mississippi. Some anglers follow the spring runs dictated by water temperature and the magic 42 degree trigger south to north on the same veins, or jump rivers to find as much heavy action as possible.

Last week, three guides intimately familiar with the Wolf and Wisconsin river systems provided interviews on local runs and methods in Fremont and Wausau. Regional guides and bait shops are great sources of information for the state's major rivers or lesser known waters that also see annual spawning runs.

According to multi-species Wisconsin Guide Louis Woods of Wolf River Outfitters in a Sunday interview, the walleye run on the Wolf River is just beginning but action is very good. Walleyes, he said, migrate up the Wolf from Winnebago, Butte des Morts and Poygan to spawn in the marshes at Shiocton.

"We're catching mostly smaller males right now," Woods said. "If the water level stays consistent, we should have great fishing into mid April."

Woods said that walleyes from different areas on the Wolf River System actually



Anglers from left, Jeff Gagnow, Steve Jordan, Guide Randy Williams and Paul Drzewiecki are shown after another successful day of walleye fishing on the Wolf River. The walleye run on major veins throughout Wisconsin should provide excellent fishing for several weeks. (Photo by Kim Jordan)

enter the river on their spawning migration at different times, leading to extended good fishing. Big females from Lake Poygan are currently on the marshes. Winnebago fish are moving into the river, and migrating walleyes from different areas can actually be visually tracked.

"You can watch the fish moving up the river to spawn at www.wolfrivercam.com,"

Woods said. "Last week we watched and counted 180 big female walleyes in one hour. Expect good fishing as the fish move up the river to spawn and back down again. I also have a daily fishing report at www.fishwolfriver.com or they can call for updated reports at 920-446-3116.

Wolf River Guide Randy Williams of Williams Fishing Guide and Taxidermy



Guide Randy Williams shows off a fat 25 inch walleye just prior to release during the spawning run on the Wolf River. (Photo by Paul Drzewiecki)

Service likes to use numerous tactics when targeting walleyes. When asked what his favorite tactic is, he responded; “What they’re biting on. I target all kinds of species in different ways. The fish like different things at different times.”

On the Wolf, Williams uses hand-lining, trolling crankbaits, trolling crawler harnesses, jigging, slip-bobbers, long-lining, wolf river rigs and casting crankbaits to target walleyes. One of his most recently-adopted and exhilarating presentations though, using flies for walleyes, warrants a closer look.

“My newest tactic is using flies,” he said. “I watched some Hmong fishermen catching fish after fish using flies on a Wolf River Rig. I was fascinated. Eventually, one of their flies stuck in a dock and I saw what it was. A buddy and I tried it. It’s a really aggressive way to catch walleyes and it works.”

The method he said, utilizes a heavy bell sinker on a three-way swivel. The bell-sinker is placed on the short lead. A fly without much hair and without a minnow or other bait is placed on a four to five foot lead. The rod line is a 10-pound braided fireline. Williams makes his own flies but recommends that anglers wishing to try the tactic purchase the flies from Louis Woods through the contact numbers above.

“The technique is to cast the rig across the current,” Williams said. “You can feel when the line hits the bottom because of the braided fireline, which you could not

feel if you were using monofilament. When you feel the bottom, rip the pole four or five feet. The sinker leaves the bottom, the fly comes back straight at you following the sinker until it hits bottom and the fly floats downstream. You rip it again and keep repeating that.”

The method, Williams said, will entice the same amount of strikes as the other more common methods. But, because the fly is on a long-lead drifting downstream into the waiting walleyes’ mouth, the advantage is a significantly higher percentage of hook-ups.

“Once it took me only 45 minutes to catch a limit of big females that averaged 22-inches,” he said. “There’s no minnow, no plastic and not much hair on the fly. It amazes me how many fish it catches. When the whitebass run after the walleyes, though, I’ll use the method with two or three flies on the line and get double and triple hits. But with whitebass the system works better with minnow. And I don’t understand that.”

For more information, contact Randy Williams at 920-982-2771.

Phil Schweik owns and operates Hooksetters Fishing Services which employs numerous guides on the Wisconsin River and inland lakes primarily from Stevens Point to Wausau. Warm spring weather initiated fabulous fishing early, he said, with many walleyes caught staging in deeper holes from eight to 12 feet of water and in one to six feet of water during low-light conditions of early morning and late afternoon. Severe cold shut the fishing down last week but the best is yet to come.

“It’s been a funny year but as the next month progresses, the walleyes will be moving shallower and shallower into one to four feet of water until they spawn,”

Schweik said. “We’ve been catching lots of really nice eaters and a few fish in the 20 to 28 inch class. Earlier we were using one-eighth to one-quarter ounce jigs with a minnow. As the water warms and the fish get more aggressive in the shallows we’ll be using a maximum of one-sixteenth to one-eighth ounce jig with minnows.”

Schweik also uses fuzzy grubs or plastics alone or with a minnow like twister tails or split-tailed minnows like Berkley Gulp, but as the spawn progresses he said a “better” method to target shallow-holding walleyes is throwing crankbaits. He suggests thundersticks, Husky Jerks and Shad Raps worked over the sand in one to four feet of water.

“It’s just starting,” he said. “The fishing is going to get better and better right into late April and then we’ll transition right into smallmouth bass near the end of April. They’ll be stacked up like cord wood with the average fish 16 to 20 inches. There won’t be a lot of smallies under 14 inches.” ^oWo

Contact Schweik and Hooksetters Fishing Services at 715-693-5843 or pschweik@dwave.net or connect with www.hooksetters.biz.

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Spring walleye run on major Wisconsin rivers including the Mississippi, Rock, Wisconsin, Fox and Wolf means great fishing. These Hooksetters Guiding services clients fishing with Guide Phil Schweik found hot action on the Wisconsin near Wausau. (Photo by Phil Schweik)