

# On Wisconsin Outdoors

With the Dick Ellis Experts

May 3, 2010

## Welcome Back

### Anglers usher in a new season on 15,000 Wisconsin lakes

By Dick Ellis

Dave Duwe pitched the bait to a long and narrow, brush shrouded island on Rice Lake in Walworth County while offering a soft word of advice to seven year old Nate, working his own rod on the bow. In a molasses like descent, the Texas-rigged plastic worm disappeared into the dark water. Father and son stood silent, silhouetted in the first light of a new Wisconsin fishing season, waiting for the gentle twitch of fireline that would mean the coveted first strike of the year. When it came, the professional guide rocked back to bury the hook into a big-mouth bass that was soon welcomed aboard, measured, photographed with the first-grade, first-mate, pardoned and released to fight again.

Nate contemplated his father's words and the 10-second battle in the new dawn before arriving at an obvious conclusion about what all of this had meant to the common man just trying to get an honest day of fishing in.

"If you guys didn't take me fishing today, I was going to have to go to Shopko and the mall with my Mom," Nate surmised. "Sometimes I have to do other horrible things like that too if dad has to take other people."

We would have none of that on this day. Opening day of the Wisconsin fishing season is not to be tampered with, especially for a first grader who had announced just that week that the Tooth Fairy, after all, was just parents tampering with his pillow.

"So I had to pay him off," said Dave Duwe during an interview on the eve of our opening morning assault on Rice Lake. "One dollar for the tooth, and one dollar not to tell his little sister. But he won't be sleeping tonight. Opening day is like Christmas. You don't sleep the night before. I never did when my Dad took me. We're carrying on a tradition here."

A tradition also carried on by some 450,000 anglers expected to be on their own fa-



*New morning, new fishing season. Guide Dave Duwe and son, Nate, 7, are in heaven again on opening day in Walworth County.*

vorite water of Wisconsin's 15,000 lakes. Duwe chose Rice Lake because he was specifi-

cally seeking a hard sand bottom, weedy, shallow lake with comparatively warmer water



Nate Duwe, 7, poses with another largemouth bass that was fooled by his plastic worm and wrestled into submission on Rice Lake in Walworth County just before the fish was released to fight another day.

the dropping temperatures. We headed south too, for the 2010 opener targeting pre-spawn big mouth bass with noted southeastern guide Duwe, of East Troy. Rice and Whitewater Lakes are nestled in the Kettle Moraine State Forest in Walworth County, providing a wilderness setting for the southern Wisconsin angler. Most anglers invade Walworth County lakes Delavan and Geneva on any opening day. Duwe though, isn't ready to fight the crowds until later, especially when the shallow, less popular lakes offer a bit of solitude and the real chance for trophy fish.

"This is a catch and release trip for pre-spawn largemouth bass," Duwe said during our Friday night interview with severe thunderstorms pounding the southeast. "These lakes have an up-north feel without the crowds but with a real opportunity to catch a fish five pounds or better. I'm hoping for a couple fish over five pounds tomorrow. But lightning storms like this can shut-off shallow-holding bass."

"Fish in these lakes will spawn in about two weeks," Duwe said. "We're after cruising fish that will be full of eggs. These are weedy lakes. It's best to fish them before the weeds emerge because it will be hard to fish in July or August or even by late June."

Duwe targets the cruising bucket-mouths with the Senko plastic worm, mostly in the green-pumpkin color and usually as a Texas Rig. In the tradition of the "do-nothing worm", the Texas-rigged worm has virtually no action, drops horizontally and is most often hit by the fish on the first drop.

"The slower it works the better," Duwe said. "Unlike other plastic worms, you want to wait before the fish takes it a while before you set the hook. With other worms you feel that tap, tap, tap and set the hook. It's the only worm I use that the bass really eat. It's unbelievable. I had a fish take this worm but lost the fish. I re-rigged and caught the fish with the other one still in its mouth."

Because Duwe likes a power hook set, he uses 30 pound fireline or spiderwire on a medium-heavy 6-foot 6-inch spinning rod or reel. Thinner line will work too, he stressed but the way the worm is rigged invites twists in the line that is much easier to remove with the thicker line. On this beautiful Saturday morning, we would catch five largemouth bass between 14 and 17 inches and lose another five fish before high winds sent us home after 2-1/2 hours on the water. But it was opening morning in Wisconsin, and nothing could go wrong. In fact, we reminded Nate as we motored toward the landing, the closest mall was a good five miles away and nowhere to be found on our GPS points. And that is one tradition we vow to uphold. *OWO*

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and more active fish. Rice has almost no depth over 10 feet. He also fishes nearby Whitewater Lake with 75 percent depths under 10 feet, and shallow Cosmo closer to the ultra popular Geneva.

Opening weekend 2010 was one of the first new seasons that I have not christened from our family's cabin on the Island Lake on the Manitowish Chain in Vilas County. I had been on the chain targeting crappies the week before, but a severe cold front arrived just before we did and shut off a steady bite on spawning fish.

With Bob Johnson of Mukwonago and Manitowish Waters resident Dick Henske, we caught just a handful of crappies on Wild Rice and Clear. Henske and other local anglers from the far north had been on the schools over shallow weeds during an extremely early spawn initiated by unseasonable warm temperatures for two weeks. Another hot lake was High, but productive fishing all went south with



Professional Guide Dave Duwe is a happy man May 1st on Rice Lake in the southern unit of Kettle Moraine as another Wisconsin fishing season is ushered in.