Walleye Timing Here's where and how to catch a spring limit

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[http://www.outdoorlife.com/sites/outdoorlife.com/themes/bonnier_theme/images/post_icon_24.png](http://www.outdoorlife.com/node/1005004928) **7**

The odds of catching walleyes are best in spring. On Minnesota's showcase walleye lake, Mille Lacs, for example, creel records show that 50 percent of the annual walleye catch usually occurs within a month of the mid-May opener. That pattern is typical of most major walleye waters, although the dates of the heavy harvest vary depending on regulations and latitude.

Fishing is great for a few weeks before spawning, but once spawning begins the action grinds to a halt for a while. Your challenge is to plan your trip to take advantage of either the pre-spawn or post-spawn bite. In some states, however, pre-spawn fishing might not be an option because the season is not yet open.

Walleyes in a big river might spawn several weeks earlier than those in a nearby deep lake. And the spawn in a shallow lake might occur somewhere in between. Here are some tips on timing your early-season walleye trip and selecting the most productive fishing methods for your water.

water open.

With water temperatures in the 30s or low 40s, walleyes are still in the early stages of the pre-spawn period. They might be found holding in light current and feeding sporadically. Prime locations include the edges of the main channel, deep holes and washouts around wing dams and other current breaks. Look for the fish at depths of 12 to 20 feet during this period, but they might be much deeper. I've found walleyes in water more than 30 feet deep, and sauger deeper yet.

**My favorite technique in the early pre-spawn period is vertical jigging.** Tip a 1/4- to 3/8-ounce short-shank jig with a 2- to 3-inch minnow, then drop it to the bottom and hop it along as the boat drifts downstream. Actually, there's a little more to it, especially if there's any kind of wind, which affects the speed of the drift relative to the current. The idea is to keep your line as vertical as possible. **That means you'll have to drift at exactly the same speed as the current. With an upriver wind, use the trolling motor to pull the boat downstream; with a downriver wind, pull it upstream. Keep adjusting boat speed until the line stays vertical. This way, you'll be able to detect even the lightest strike.**

Another fine point: Experiment with the intensity of jigging action until the walleyes let you know what they want. When they're feeding actively, they may prefer strong twitches that lift a jig a foot or more from the bottom. But more often, subtle movements of only an inch or two will catch more fish. And when the walleyes are in a funk, don't twitch at all; just hold the jig a few inches off bottom and let it swim along. Keep adapting the depth of the jig to the bottom contour.

Toward the end of the pre-spawn period, when the water temperature rises to the mid-40s, walleyes begin moving into their spawning areas. Look for them along gravelly, rocky or riprap shorelines brushed by light to moderate current. Spawning areas that have a wide 4- to 8-foot-deep shelf protruding from shore hold more fish than those that slope sharply.

More trophy-caliber river walleyes are caught toward the end of the pre-spawn period than at any other time of year. If I could fish for only one week in the year, the last week of the pre-spawn would definitely be it. Not only are the fish tightly concentrated in their spawning areas, but they're feeding much more heavily than they were earlier in the pre-spawn.

**Unlocking Shallow Lakes**

Shallow lakes might provide anglers who don't live near rivers with their first opportunity to catch walleyes. Shallow lakes lose their ice cover before deeper lakes in the same area. They also warm up more quickly, so the walleye bite starts sooner in the spring. In some northern states, however, early-season walleye fishing might not be an option because the season is closed. Be sure to check state regulations before wetting a line.

**As a rule, shallow walleye lakes are much easier to fish than deep lakes because locational patterns are far less complex. The walleyes are almost always oriented toward shorelines in early spring, so there is no need to explore deep structure or cover. Because of their fertility, shallow lakes normally have discolored water; consequently, fish have a comfort zone of turbidity and might feed at depths of only a few feet throughout the day.**

My strategy for locating walleyes in shallow lakes is simple: I run the shoreline, watching my depth finder carefully for shelves that extend well into the lake. A productive shelf could be the extended lip of an underwater point or just an extension from a straight shoreline. I seldom find walleyes on shelves more than 10 feet deep and the fish often hold at depths of less than 5 feet, especially when the shelf is buffeted by an onshore wind.

You probably won't have as much luck graphing walleyes in shallow water as you would in the depths; a better option might be to cast a jig or crankbait. Once you find a likely looking food shelf, use the trolling motor to keep the boat within casting distance and then make a few "sample" casts to determine if the fish are there.

Once you find a shelf with some active feeders, toss out a marker and fan-cast the area thoroughly. If you catch a few fish on a crankbait but the action winds down, switch to a jig and minnow and try that rig before you move on. The slower presentation should put a few more fish in the boat. Even in windy weather, I seldom use a jig weighing more than 1/8 ounce. If it's relatively calm, a 1/16-ounce model works better yet.

Hitting the Low Points

In many cases, the bite in deep lakes lags behind that of nearby shallow lakes by as much as a month.

As in shallower lakes, early-season walleyes tend to be shoreline-oriented, but their depth range is much more varied. On a calm sunny day you might find them at depths of 25 feet or more, but they might be shallower than 5 feet on a windy day or after sundown. It's possible to find a few walleyes anywhere along the weed line, but points and inside turns generally hold the most fish. Another prime location is a shallow hump within a short distance of shore.

When I suspect the fish are deep, I spend a lot of time scouting with my graph. I normally try to follow the weed line, looking for the telltale marks that could be walleyes.

Once I spot marks that might be walleyes, I lower the trolling motor and work a jig or slip-sinker rig baited with a minnow or leech through the fish zone. Walleyes in clear water are often fussy, so it might take a bit of experimentation to determine the bait and presentation they prefer.

Live bait is almost always the best daytime choice. At night, try a shallow-running crankbait.

**Early Spring Walleye Fishing**   
By Sam Anderson

Spring walleyes are the first focus of fishermen as winter turns to spring. In order to be successful it is necessary to understand some basic patterns of walleyes at that time of the year. In the northern states, the walleyes can spawn anytime from the middle of April to the middle of May. This timetable is affected by how early we have warm weather in the spring. My experience has shown that walleyes do not spawn at the same time, but some start early with the majority spawning during the ideal conditions and some will spawn extremely late in the spring, especially the younger females. The males arrive on the spawning beds first with the females following when the water conditions are ideal.

What are ideal conditions? Conditions that ignite the spawning activity are water temperature, rock or rubble shore lines, and in some cases, the length of day light. While this last item is an arguable point, I know for a fact that fall feeding patterns are trigged by the day light hours, an item for a future article. The reason I believe this is a factor is the fact that on late ice-out years, the walleyes will spawn under the ice. Water temperature is a known factor, for starting the spawning activity and the water temperature is also very important for maximum reproduction. A spawning temperature of forty degrees Fahrenheit will start the spawning action and fifty-two degrees is the top end of spawning temperature. Rock and rubble are important structure for a successful hatch. The eggs must have something uneven to fall into to be protected from small predator fish which will feed on the eggs. To provide ideal spawning conditions the water temperature should warm slowly and constantly with no severe temperature swings or wave action during the gestation and hatching period. The north and east shorelines are usually the areas where the majority of the walleyes spawn. While the fish do not know east from west or north from south, what makes these shore lines most desirable is the fact that the sun penetrates the north and east shore lines with the hottest sun of the day. Therefore, the water is the warmest close to shore and in some cases, the ice can be ten feet from shore with the lake covered with ice, yet the walleyes will spawn.

When the spawning ritual is complete, these battered and exhausted fish move to the deepest structure of the lake to rest for four to ten days. After the rest period, the walleyes are eminently hungry and that's when they move back to their spawning areas and the early spring action is at its best.

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New emerging weeds are usually the best area to find these fish but also rock and wood shore lines are outstanding locations. Keep in mind that wood cluttered bottoms are one of the best spring walleye producers, but you might have to carry a large supply of jigs. Use a very, very slow retrieve technique as the water is still cold and the fish metabolism is low and they will not attack or chase a fast moving meal. Work a likely area for and hour or more, and if any fish is caught, keep working the area or any similar area, since walleyes are a schooling fish. If you have the misfortune to hit a cold front ( as little as five degrees lower than average from the day before) you will find that the walleye action will be noticeably slower.

http://www.walleye411.com/underwater-world-of-walleyes/

“Smooth” means walleyes cannot feel anything unnatural when they take the bait. The best weight is the minimum amount of lead (or its equivalent) required to get the bait close to the bottom. Typically a single split shot can work. Most tip-up spools spin freely without much tension. Check each spool. Grease them if necessary, or remove the spool and use steel wool to smooth the axle. Any tip-up that cannot be made to run smoothly goes in the trash.

“Clean” means minimal terminal rigging and low-visibility line. Fluorocarbon line can be an advantage. With monofilament, use nothing heavier than 8-pound-test. Tie the hook at the end of the line, not near the sinker. Walleyes should not be able to feel the main line rubbing against their sides.

Toward the end of the ice-fishing season, into March in many areas, walleyes may begin gravitating toward their spawning areas. They will move more and be more aggressive. Tip-ups will still work, but many expert walleye anglers prefer jigs tipped with minnows. This allows them to be more mobile. Pulling and setting tip-ups, and then drilling new holes for tip-ups, is time-consuming. You can often catch more walleyes through one jigging hole at a time, allowing for moves, than you can with a string of tip-ups.

**OPEN WATER IN RIVERS**

Rivers offer many anglers their first late-winter/early-spring open water fishing opportunities. Some rivers, particularly below dams, remain ice-free throughout winter, even at northern latitudes.

Two distinct behavior patterns will be seen from late winter through early spring. During late winter, walleyes usually will hold where they do not have to fight a lot of current, but they will take advantage of good feeding opportunities. In most cases the walleyes you find in stiff currents will be the smaller males.

Sometime in early spring, walleyes begin moving toward their spawning areas, generally in an upstream direction. This movement triggers better fishing because it makes it more likely for the walleyes to find your baits and lures, and because it forces the fish to feed more (owing to their having to expend energy).

While walleyes are still holding in calmer areas, slowly drifting with a live minnow rig is a hard method to beat. If you are confident that you have located walleyes, still-fishing is very effective. Walleyes tend to react more quickly in rivers than in lakes, though, so artificial lures can also be effective.

One of the most important things to do now is identify what walleyes are eating. This does not necessarily mean you should identify the exact species of baitfish walleyes are eating. All you need to know is some basic information. If walleyes are feeding on darters, sculpins or other bottom-dwelling fish, use a jig-and-minnow rig to keep the bait within inches of the bottom.

If walleyes are feeding on shiners or other fish that tend to suspend above the bottom, rig with live minnows on floaters to keep them above the bottom. Fishing minnows under slip-bobbers, or fishing them vertically on measured line, might be the best method if the forage is more than three or four feet above bottom.

You should be able to determine if walleyes are feeding above the bottom by observing the small marks on your sonar rig or Fish Finder. If you see no baitfish marks, assume that walleyes are looking toward the bottom for their food.

Another feeding situation you should be aware of is when walleyes are feeding on insect larvae such as mayfly nymphs. This is not well known, but it is very common. The easiest way to determine this is by examining the stomach contents of a freshly caught walleye. Insect larvae will appear as dark goo. Use a magnifying glass to get a better look. (Digestion takes much longer during winter, so identifying stomach contents is easier.)

A good clue that walleyes are feeding on insect larvae is when you find  
them over soft bottom, or in an area where there are a lot of dead leaves on the bottom.

Minnows will catch walleyes in this situation, but you might get better results using small black marabou jigs. This requires great patience, because it takes a while for tiny jigs, no more than 1/16 ounce, to sink to the bottom in even a mild river current. Fish these jigs very slowly to keep them close to the bottom because insect larvae also move very slowly.

Walleyes get into much stiffer currents once they begin staging in anticipation of the spawn. They become considerably more aggressive. Minnow rigs are effective if you find a concentration of walleyes, but the real trick is finding them. This calls for fishing methods that cover water faster than live bait rigs. One of the best is trolling with stick baits.

Keeping baits and lures very close to the bottom is important in spring. This can be done by either of two methods: using deep-diving stick baits or using shallow-running stick baits behind heavy weights. The latter is a more precise method. Deep-diving stick baits can only dive so deep without weight being added to them. Then, if weight is added, the deep divers are so far below the weight that precise control is difficult. With shallow-running lures rigged a couple of feet above the weight and with the weight bouncing on the bottom, you know the lure is working just above the bottom.

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In heavy currents, such as you might encounter in large rivers, weights of 1 pound or more keep the rigs running close to the boat in depths of more than 20 feet. Anglers who do a lot of this kind of fishing often use hand-held lines or very stiff, short rods. While this takes some of the sport out of catching walleyes, it is very effective.

It is not the current working on the terminal rig that necessitates heavy rigs; it is the current working on the line. As anyone who has ever tried to swim in a river can tell you, the current is considerably milder close to the bottom than it is a couple of feet above the bottom. Walleyes do not generally fight heavy current. This is probably the most significant reason walleyes are usually found close to the bottom in rivers, as opposed to lakes, where they often suspend far above the bottom.

**WALLEYES FROM THE RIVER BANKS**

Anglers who fish from shore get their share of late-winter/early-spring river action, especially when run-off swells river flows. High river flows mean midstream currents will be stronger than usual. This causes many walleyes to linger in calmer backwaters, coves, and on the downstream sides of points, wing dams, tributary streams, or other current breaks.

These places may be covered with ice during the winter. Fight the temptation to ice-fish, because river ice is treacherous. Currents can quickly erode ice. You might drill a hole through a foot of ice, take two more steps and be standing on an inch of ice. If you go through the ice into even a very mild current, you can be washed under the ice.

Any rise in river flow that breaks up the ice can create springtime hotspots. This is a common occurrence during late winter. Because walleyes are reluctant to fight the current, they will stay in the calmer places as long as river flows are high.

As late winter progresses into early spring, rises in river flows are the norm in most areas. Even though walleyes are on the move at this time, they still seek relief in calmer places, if only for a brief rest before continuing their travels. This is a good situation for still-fishing with live minnows during late winter or early spring. Expect to find most walleyes off the edge of the current. Cast baits here or into the current, and then allow the current to wash the bait to the edge of the calmer water.

High river flows are usually muddy. While walleyes can find bait in muddy water, give them a little help by adding some color to your rig. Fluorescent red or orange will be visible for a few feet, or even just a few critical inches, farther than bait alone. Use any type of colored float, but do not try to float the bait too far off the bottom. Thirty inches between the sinker and the bait is about right. The current acting on the float will keep the bait close to the bottom, just far enough to make the bait more visible.

Walleyes generally move upstream during the early spring period before the spawn, so anything that blocks upstream movement will cause walleyes to congregate. Rapids, which slow the upstream movement of walleyes, and dams, which completely stop the run, are hotspots in virtually all walleye rivers. Some of the best fishing in either situation can be done from the bank because the calmer sections are often close to shore. At dams where boat access is restricted, shore fishing is the only way to go.

If you can access retaining walls below dams, fish heavy jigs tipped with live minnows vertically along the edges of the walls, where the current is slowed or broken.

Many of the best walleye anglers in the country fish below the rapids during early spring. These places tend to attract fewer anglers than the dam pools, possibly because getting to them usually requires more effort and fishing them is somewhat more challenging.

Fishing the base of rapids from shore can be frustrating because of snags. River bottoms in these places are typically a jumble of rocks and debris that quickly snag anything that drifts along the bottom.

But by early spring, walleyes will often be more aggressive than they were during late winter and they will chase artificial lures. Try stick baits that run as close to the bottom as possible without hitting the bottom. This requires some experimentation. You must determine which stick bait is best at each riffle. A lure than runs a foot deeper might be the difference between success and failure.

Sinking stick baits will work if they have adequate action at slow retrieve speeds. If you are not satisfied with the action of sinking stick baits, add split shot about six inches in front of the lure.

Experiment also with colors. Fire tiger and other patterns that contain orange are usually best in muddy water. Natural color patterns and blue-black are good for clear water.

**EARLY SPRING LAKE WALLEYES**

Walleyes will be on the move toward spawning locations during early spring. Spawning sites vary from lake to lake. Spawning habitat requires moving water, however, so walleyes ascend tributaries, where they spawn over gravel bars or in mild riffles. In lakes, they generally spawn over shoals with rock, gravel or sand bottoms. In both cases, the water is ty  
pically quite shallow. The movement of walleye schools toward spawning sites may take weeks, and walleyes may stage nearby for several days.

Long underwater points are good places to intercept walleyes as they move. (This is also a good pattern after the spawn.) Casting stick baits over the points is very effective. Retrieve slowly. This can be done either from boats or while wading.

Probably the most reliable fishing pattern for pre-spawn walleyes in lakes is in situations in which walleyes spawn in tributaries. This is simply a matter of the walleyes being concentrated in a relatively small area. Often, all of the walleyes in a lake will spawn in one tributary, or a few tributaries in larger lakes. In the Great Lakes, for example, walleyes from a very broad area congregate in a few larger tributaries.

Hotspots will continue to move upstream as the spawn approaches, starting near the tributary mouth. Later, dropoffs, deep pools and calm areas on the insides of bends get hot. The first good spawning habitat will stop most upstream movement.

In states where walleye fishing season is closed to protect spawning fish, you can sometimes work all of these patterns in reverse following the spawn (as the season allows).

Fish behavior is rarely as simple as you might have read. Each body of water has peculiar characteristics that affect walleyes in different ways. Even in a single body of water, different walleyes, or age-classes of walleyes, will often behave in various ways.

At least one of the tactics described here should get you into the game at most places, but keep your eyes and ears alert for whatever local anglers are doing.

Read more: <http://www.gameandfishmag.com/fishing/fishing_walleyes-fishing_gf_aa026503a/#ixzz3WGfT5wGd>

Technologikal angler:

http://www.thetechnologicalangler.com/Catching-early-spring-walleyes-rivers-part-1.html

Understanding Spring Walleye Migrations

[](http://www.in-fisherman.com/files/2011/06/lead-INFS-110020-MIGRAT-01.jpg)

Walleyes spawn in spring, but spring may arrive in February in Mississippi, March in Kentucky, April in the Midwest, and June in the Far North. And you can’t bet on those dates. Biologists have found walleyes laying eggs in Red Lake, Minnesota, and Escanaba Lake, Wisconsin, as early as April 5 and as late as May 7. Water ­temperature plays a key role. Even here, ideal temperatures vary by latitude. Southern walleyes prefer spawning temperatures between 48°F and 50°F, while their Yankee cousins and Canadian counterparts favor temperatures between 44°F and 48°F.

In the extreme Far North, if those ideal conditions don’t arrive early enough, walleyes absorb their eggs and forego spawning. In the South, on the other hand, walleyes spawn successfully based on what scientists call the chill temperature hypothesis. In order for their eggs to develop properly, they need to spend a portion of winter in water temperatures that dip below 50°F.

**Spring Walleye Migrations**

When walleye migrations begin for spawning, we find as much variation and dissimilarity in their movement patterns as during the rest of the year, although the norm probably is different than most anglers suspect. “Mature members of all self-­propagating walleye populations, whether stream-spawning or lake-spawning, migrate from overwintering grounds to spawning grounds in spring,” says Dr. Peter Colby, former head of the walleye research program of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. “But the fish often aren’t the long-distance runners many anglers believe them to be.”

He confirms what most walleye anglers already know: Stream spawners migrate into creeks and rivers to spawn on rock and gravel substrates. Lake spawners move inshore to spawn on shallow, windswept rock and cobble shoals. In many waters both types of walleyes coexist, a way to ensure effective spawning.

**Colby says that tagging studies indicate that most walleye populations move only a short distance.** “Even in Lake Superior and Georgian Bay,” he says, “a majority of spawners move no farther than three miles from their spawning grounds. Presumably, a migration of similar magnitude is undertaken to return to the spawning grounds the following spring, since evidence now suggests that mature walleyes tend to return to the same spawning grounds year after year.”

He calls this repetitive migration. He points to studies where walleyes were transferred upstream in river impoundments, only to move back downstream, past dams and other barriers, to their original locations. He acknowledges that some intermingling occurs, especially in lakes and reservoirs where spawning sites lie close to one another.

Read more: <http://www.in-fisherman.com/walleye/understanding-spring-walleye-migrations/#ixzz3WGibYd4Y>