

# What Works for Early Great Lakes Trolling?

by John Andrew

As the cold water of early spring brings the salmon and trout of the Great Lakes shallow and close to the shore line for feeding, there are a few good methods and techniques to catch them. We are going to go over some of the simple trolling tactics in this article for all anglers to enjoy.

Using a floating minnow-imitating stick bait can be very productive. One of the reasons we use floating bait is due to the good side to side wobble it has when trolling. This produces a good flash under water also we like the floating lure because we are normally fishing very shallow this time of year with this particular method at depths from two to 15 feet deep and the floating minnow prevents us from getting snagged. Looking for shallow structure close to or connected to the shore line is a good starting point for your trolling to begin.

If we are producing strikes very close to the shore line, we like to use a trolling board attached to our line. This device takes our line and lure close to shore and allows us to keep our boat a long distance away from the shore line so we do not spook the fish allowing us to present the bait in the shallow water right next to the rocks from two to six feet deep.

Flat line trolling is very productive when we want to stay precisely on a depth contour and to keep our baits directly behind the boat. Now, yes you can do this with a down rigger, but when fishing shallow water, we prefer not to use this method of trolling. The singing sound (vibration) that is given off the wire line as you are moving can and does spook shallow fish.

Windy conditions tend to draw our fish shallow and close to the shoreline during early ice out conditions. This also allows us to use different colors to produce the



Using a rubber-core sinker 5 feet above a floating Rapala and 40 feet behind a planer board enticed these coho salmon into striking.

visual contrast the fish need to strike. The color of our baits is extremely important, as many fishermen have been learning over the last few years. There are days when sunny conditions still need bright purple, orange, chartreuse and other bright colors to produce your strikes. This is usually when you maybe fishing deep and the light penetration can be less and brighter colors are needed. It should be noted that during cloudy and windy conditions even shallow fish will strike

certain brightly colored lures.

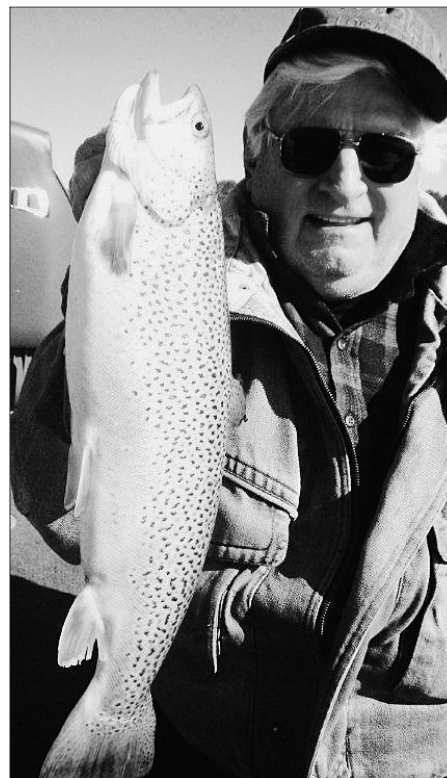
Fishing shallow at ice out is typical and common along the break walls, inside the harbors and shorelines of the Great



On a cloudy day, an orange Rapala was used to hook this fat brown trout while flat line trolling directly behind the boat.

Lakes. Some people simply cast rubber or plastic baits and swim them or jig them back to the boat. This can be very productive for salmon and trout that are focused in a small area as some harbors offer. When trolling shallow, we can slightly weight our floating stick baits with small split shot if needed. Using black and silver is always a good start, although bright pink, chrome and other colors do work well in shallow water. You will need to experiment, as each day the weather conditions will influence which color works the best. There will be times when certain baitfish are present, and matching the color and size of the bait fish will be mandatory for the best catch. Trolling spoons in shallow water does work, but we have had our best success with floating minnow baits. Many people understand the importance of keeping your lure away from the boat as you are trolling. The reason this is so important is due to the nature of the trout and salmon. They are very spooky when shallow, and even when deep, these fish scatter quickly as a boat moves by them or overhead.

Ice has already left some waters, is just beginning to decay on others, and it's the start of another great season of open-water fishing. Let's all take a moment and give thanks for this great resource and the memories it makes. **MWO**



A happy angler caught this brown trout in mid April on a Rapala long-line trolling with a Yellow Bird trolling board while fishing with John Andrew.

John Andrew is a fishing and tour guide in a wide area comprising Vilas, Oneida, and Iron counties, Wis. He holds two world fishing records.

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