

Current Walleye Now

Open Water River And Tributary Fishing

BY JOHN ANDREW

To fish moving water walleye instead of lake walleye presents several new options and learning curves for the walleye angler. The traditional jig and minnow still works well for the river angler, although where you present this offering is the critical concept to your success. Simply casting to a weed line or along some underwater logs may still apply, but to a much smaller degree. Current is now the biggest friend or foe depending on your ability to read the water and locate the walleye.

You may already know some productive locations throughout the course of the open water season, but fishing near a dam during springtime is a good place to connect with walleye. These fish instinctively migrate upstream or towards the head of current areas. Even very light current areas will attract walleye and this type of behavior lasts year 'round, just less than during springtime. After the spawn is over, depending on the size of the tributary or river, the walleye will move towards less current. Deep water holds less current, which is where you will find the walleye resting. Female walleye may reside slightly deeper than the males.

Remember, deep is not the only answer; less current is the key ingredient. These low-current locations can be in the bends of the rivers, below riffles that drop into deeper water, behind wing dams, behind large wood obstructions, islands, the down current side of sand bars, bridge pilings and even other creeks entering the river or tributary. Fishing a river that has a steady water level most of the year is another critical concept for open water success. Rivers, creeks and tributaries that drop significantly in water level every year after springtime are less likely to sustain a large population of walleye. Although, there will be some fish present year 'round in the deeper water sections. Having several diverse opportunities in the moving water environment you are fishing simply gives the angler more options to capitalize on.

Fishing other areas besides the dam in springtime can also be productive. Working bridge pilings works well in springtime and even right through the summer. A jig and minnow or drop shot rig has been working even better as of recent times, rigged with a crawler, leech and minnow. You will want to fish all the pilings of the bridge. Some will produce better than others. Watch your graph and slip down the current behind the piling, as there are certain pilings that create a small hump or small sandbar anywhere from 30 to 150 feet back from the piling. This is a hot spot that is mostly overlooked by the angler. The drop shot rig is also overlooked by most anglers. Use it because it works very well. Another technique and the critical concept will be the length of line to your bait and the length of line to your weight. Once you discover what length of line is working, the walleye simply can't resist how the drop shot rig keeps your offering gently floating right in front of their faces.

Creeks that enter the river may produce a sandbar of varying sizes that provides growing weeds, wood structure current breaks, rocky edges or a drop off right at the creek mouth. All these areas are good contact points for our fish.

This location also provides good action for the shoreline fisherman. Live bait and casting artificial minnow baits are good choices. A good pair of chest waders or hip boots may be required. Casting to the seam or current break that the smaller creek produces is a good starting point for the shoreline fisherman. Diving crankbaits may be the lure of choice. Getting down deep enough to escape the main flow of current is the recommended target. A crankbait of the right color, size, correct depth control on the retrieve and time of day can be all that is needed for a consistent, day-after-day catch. Water levels need to stay very close to the level that you are seeing during this timeframe. A depth change on the river of only seven or eight inches can spell disaster for this location. The fish will leave



Midsummer river walleye caught by Vicky Dawson from Madison, Wis., on the Brule River Wis., while fishing with the author, John Andrew.



Ken Wissen caught these walleye while river fishing with the author, John Andrew.

this area and search for better current breaks.

Wing dams that are built by man or natural are very good locations during all timeframes. These structures push the current away from shore creating a strong current break. This location is good for casting or presenting live bait, especially during normal to high water periods. We need some visibility in the water. Dark chocolate milk colored water is not good. Water clarity plays a big role in your success as do water levels. Eight to 16 inches of visibility is OK, but 16 to 24 inches is a lot better. Casting from shore can produce a lot of fish if you are standing in the correct location when fishing wing dams.

The deeper pockets of water that are located inside the main channel or just off the main channel are also very good locations, as these spots will not have as much current and at times can hold some of the biggest walleye. Look for these depressions with your depth finder and fish them slowly.

Islands produce large current breaks in all rivers. Some of the breaks may be deep alongside the island and other breaks will be on the long, extended, underwater point on the down current side of the island. Another good break may be between the island and shoreline on the shallow side—not the main channel side.

At times, in front of the island there is a shallow bar that has formed as the water depth changes—look for this. Using a floating minnow bait on a properly weighted drop-shot rig and moving slowly up current along these breaks can produce some big 'eyes. Perhaps not



Jim and Mike Trevers of Chicago, Ill., caught these walleye while fishing the Turtle River in Wisconsin with the author, John Andrew.



Midsummer river walleye caught by Karen from Chicago, Ill., on the Wisconsin River with the author, John Andrew.

many fish, but some big ones. The newer flat-sided floating minnow baits seem to be working better than the old standard

floating minnow baits. The length of the leader to the weight and the length of the leader to the minnow bait and your speed control is your critical concept to your success. Then your color, boat control, staying in the slackest water of the current break and setting the hook on the slightest tick or tap will yield the best results.

Slack water areas will always produce the most fish. Some of these spots will be as small as your boat or smaller, and some will be large and they'll be under the fast moving water your boat is in. Make no mistake about it; if you have a good population of walleye in your local rivers or bigger creeks and the water table stays consistent throughout the year, you

will catch walleye during the heat of the summer. You will even catch them during the daytime when everybody else says they have to go out on the lake at dusk and fish in the dark to consistently produce fish. The big creeks, small and large rivers have cooler water in the summer and much more dissolved oxygen than lakes will have. This keeps the current walleye a little more aggressive and feeding.

Casting floating minnow baits at dusk and at night on rivers can be extremely productive, especially during the spring and again during fall. Discovering these high percentage areas is going to produce some of your biggest walleye of the year. Certain tributaries of the Great Lakes have some shoreline casting areas that are very secretive for trophy walleye and certain small rivers flowing into the lakes are world-class destinations for some elite clients and guests. This is also true for many, many inland lakes that have small rivers and large ones alike with moving water into and out of those lakes.

Tight lines!

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