Sight Fishing: Smallmouth Bass And Plastic Worms

BY JOHN ANDREW
The Angler's Choice Guide

It was opening day for muskie fishing, and we were casting large 10-inch Slug-Os along the northwest shoreline of Lake Tomahawk, in northern Wisconsin. As we came in range of a double dock with a boatlift, one of my clients made a long, accurate cast between the boatlift and dock. He then set the hook and yelled out, "Got one!" To our amazement, what we thought was a muskie was a hard fighting and jumping, 22-inch smallmouth bass. It was the biggest smallmouth on any lake, anywhere.

That was back in 1987. Over the next several days, we started using smaller Slug-Os and plastic worms on other lakes around docks, swim rafts, boatlifts, logs, boathouses and shoreline brush piles. We had great success, although we were losing a lot of our strikes due to the single hooked bait.

As we learned over the years, springtime, during the cool water time is a great time to sight fish along the shoreline for smallmouth bass. Several lakes such as Trout Lake, Presque Isle Lake, Fence Lake, Lake Minocqua, Pokegama Lake, Katherine Lake and Crab Lake are all located in northern Wisconsin and are great smallmouth fisheries. Remember, this works on other lakes as well, such as: Lake Holiday, Lake Wild Wood, LaSalle Lake, Lake Thunderbird, Heidecke Lake, Lake Michigan and several other Illinois lakes.

We search in shallow water from one to five feet deep, with the help of a pair of polarized sunglasses. The sunglasses cut the glare off the top of the water, and allow you to see down a couple of extra feet into the water.

After experimenting with several different baits, to entice a strike from these shallow fish, I learned long ago that a plastic worm and putting an extra hook inside the plastic worm, tied to the shank of the front hook, allowed us to land several more of our short striking bass.

The plastic worm has made several advances over time, and now we like to use a pre-made and pre-rigged, three-hook plastic worm. This worm has a hook in the head of the worm, then a second hook in the middle, and a third hook located in the end of the worm. This worm is only six inches long and has a straight, narrow shape, like a pencil. This is a very hard-to-pass-up meal to the smallmouth bass. When the bass only pecks at your worm and you set the hook, you have a much higher hooking percentage. There are a few primary colors we have found that work very well; these are black on sunny or windy days, dark green at twilight or twitched on the surface at twilight, dark red on cloudy dark days and motor oil in the middle of a sunny day from noon to 3 p.m. You may catch smallmouth bass on other colors, but this works for us.

We like to be very quiet and move along slowly from spot to spot with our ores or trolling motor. When we are within around 80 to 10 feet of our target, we cast using our seven- to eight-foot-long St. Croix spinning rod and Diawa spinning reel loaded with Berkley six-pound Fire Line in the smoke color. We cast as close to, or slightly past, our intended target. You must watch your line as closely as possible. If there is the slightest twitch on the line, you set the hook and reel fast, to bring the fish away from the cover you are casting towards. This super-line, in my opinion, is the smoothest, farthest casting line on the market. I personally have been using it since 1994.

Deciding to use added weight to your presentation is determined by how much wind there is and clarity of the water. By using a small split shot at the head of your worm, you will have better accuracy casting and your bait will descend faster into the strike zone. In clear water, a slow dropping non-weighted worm seems to create more strikes. The added weight will also allow you to slowly jig the bait back to the boat, or use a slow, steady retrieve.

Sight fishing is best done at mid morning to mid afternoon. Yes, you will catch fish sight fishing at other times of the day, but we do the best at this timeframe. We like sunny, calm days as our top choice. The warmer days of spring, and steady weather patterns—for example: two, three, or four sunny days in a row—are our best times for success. Now, when it is colder, cloudy and windier, we still use the same technique as described above, but we move our baits much slower and use added weight. We also switch colors throughout the day.

As the water temperature warms up to the high 60s and low 70s, and people begin swimming around our good bass areas, we do not venture too close. Mom and the kids do not like hooks around their space, so be respectful to other people enjoying the great outdoors.

You can contact John Andrew, at www.theanglerschoiceguideservice.com, or at 715-892-3020.

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Bliznik, Greear Win Cabela's MWC Detroit Tournament Presented by the North American Fishing Club

A slow-handed jigstroke with Berkley Gulp! softbaits landed Greg Bliznik and Keith Greear, both of Brownstown, Michigan, 43.49-pounds of walleye and first place honors in the Cabela's Masters Walleye Circuit's Detroit River Eastern Division season opener.

"It's a great feeling to win on our home waters," said Greear. Added Bliznik, "We've done well on the MWC before, but first place is what we've been fishing for, and we finally got it!" Given the tournament's Motor City setting, it was fitting that the six year Circuit veterans are sponsored by the United Auto Workers Region 1A. Bliznik works at the Ford Auto Alliance Plant in Flat Rock, Michigan.

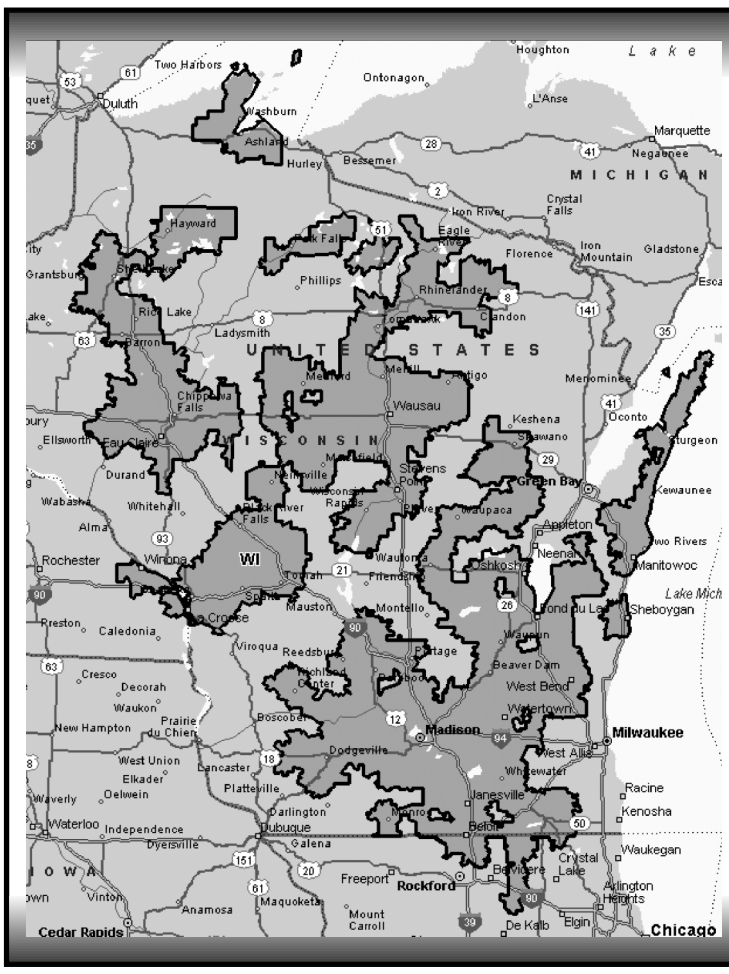
The team jigged 1/2-ounce chartreuse and orange leadheads armed with stinger hooks, and tipped with smelt-pattern Berkley Gulp! softbaits and minnows. "Other teams were jigging aggressively, but we were almost deadsticking," said Greear. "We'd find bottom, then slowly raise the jig a couple of inches." Their top area was an 8 to 10-foot-deep flat protruding into the main channel, Bliznik noted. Jigs were tied direct to 10/4 Berkley FireLine Crystal.

Bliznik and Greear collected the $16,350 first-place check for their efforts, plus a $1,000 Cabela's gift card through the Cabela's Angler Cash program, $500 Berkley Baits prize package, and a portable Oxygenator unit. Jeff Vereeke of Grand Rapids, Michigan, and Joe Lockman of Middleville, Michigan, finished in second with 41.85 pounds, earning $6,820 plus the $1,000 Ranger Cup award, and $500 Lowrance HDS/Elite DSI contingency. Bob Devine and Steve Velte won the $300 Worldwide Marine Insurance contingency for being the highest placing team to request a quote prior to the tournament. In all, the top 22 teams shared the $58,240 cash purse, plus thousands in contingencies and $4,910 in Big Fish Pot winnings.

Day One was marked by a great bite as the 112 teams brought 485 walleye weighing a total of 3,047.69 pounds to the MWC scale—of which a full 91 percent were released alive back into the river. Day Two was cancelled due to strong west winds and resulting low water levels at the Elizabeth Park Marina, making the ramps unusable.

"It's extremely disappointing not to get our teams out on the water on Day Two, especially given the fantastic bite on the river," said MWC executive director Dan Johnson. "Our on-site tournament director, Dan Palmer and local site coordinator Danny Bloxem, reviewed all the options and we had no choice but to call the tournament. We are already working with our Angler Advisory Panel members to schedule a bad-weather day for our return to this great destination in 2012. We thank all of our MWC anglers for fishing this tournament with us, and the Downriver Walleye Federation volunteers for making it possible."

With the mighty Detroit yielding world class numbers of walleye, 81 teams tallied five fish MWC limits. Big fish of the tournament was an 11-pound behemoth brought in by Dave Schmidt and Mark Zillges, both of Oshkosh, Wisconsin. The catch earned the team $2,560 for first place in the Big-Fish Pot.



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