

# COLUMBIA RIVER WALLEYE BASICS

By

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## **Stizostedion vitreum vitreum**

Say that three times fast and see how twisted your tongue gets. This is the scientific name, which belongs to the walleye, the fastest growing sportfish in North America.

Walleyes are the largest member of the perch family, which also includes perch and sauger. The current world record was caught in 1982 at Greers Ferry Lake in Arkansas and weighed 22 pounds 11 ounces. The Washington State record was caught in 2002 below McNary Dam on the Columbia River and it weighed 18 pounds 14 ounces. The Oregon State record was also caught in 1990 from the same stretch of the river and it weighed a whopping 19 pounds 15 ounces.

The walleye family Stizostedion exists in five species. We will begin with the smallest of the five.

The Volga walleye, Stizostedion Volgensis looks much like the European walleye, but will not grow that big; about 4 pounds. The drawing on the back of the fish is much clearer and it misses the large canine tooth. This specie lives in the rivers that flow into the Caspian and Black Sea, so in the Volga River and even the Donau-river till Vienna in Austria.

The next specie is the Canadian

perch Stizostedion Canadence also called sauger. This specie is almost similar to the walleye, only the drawing on the back can vary. Also it has minimal genetical differences with the European specie. With a maximum weight of more than 8 pounds it is bigger than the Wolga-walleye. It lives in the North West of Canada towards the east into Quebec and south into Alabama.

Even a little bit bigger is the Walleye Stizostedion Vitreum and with a maximum weight of more than 20 pounds, it looks much like the European walleye. The record of a U.S. walleye is 22 pounds 11 ounces. It lives in the same areas as the Canadian perch. Because the sauger and the walleye live in the same area another hybrid specie arose which is the saugeye. Not much is known about this fish, only that it is a small variety, which is not able to breed as a specie.

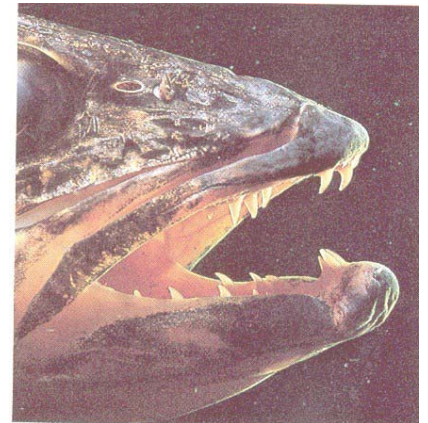
Last, but not least, the European walleye Stizostedion Lucioperca. The biggest one, most commonly called a zander, since in the books they mention species of more than 25 pounds. Originally this specie also lived on the Donau-river and the other rivers in the Middle of Europe. Later this specie was planted in Western Europe and England.

## **The Walleye Look**

Most walleye have yellow-olive backs, yellowish sides, and white bellies, although water conditions can change the fish's colors. In low light and silty water, stream or

river walleye can be pale yellow or grayish. Clean water conditions tend to brighten and deepen the colors, making the yellow tones more golden.

Distinguishing features include a black blotch on the first dorsal fin and a distinctive white tip on the anal fin and lower lobe of the tail. The walleye's body is torpedo-shaped, with a broad and deeply forked tail. Walleye are also well known for the glassy eyes, which allow them to see in low light, and for the sharp spines in the first dorsal fin, anal fin and on the gill covers. Walleye have one other feature that most fish don't too... very sharp teeth! And a razor sharp gill plate!



***Teeth and more teeth and a very good reason not to lip a walleye as you would a bass, and also a reason why dinner rarely gets away.***

The elusive nature of walleye has intrigued fishermen for many years. Anyone who has spent very much time fishing for walleye knows that they can bite like crazy one day and then disappear for a week for no reason at all. When a walleye

decides to quit biting, it is almost impossible for you to do anything to change its mind.

But no matter how unpredictable their behavior, walleye rank among the nation's most popular gamefish and many fishermen pursue them simply for the challenge.

Walleye are strong but they are not spectacular fighters. They do not typically jump like bass or make sizzling reel smoking runs like salmon or steelhead. Instead, they will wage a head-shaking battle, and very stubbornly refuse to be pulled from the bottom of the river or from deep water.

The experts say the Columbia River is the home of the next world record. Many fish each year are caught in the 18 plus pound class and once in a while one in the 20-pound class. This year a 20.35-pound walleye was caught and released in the Irrigon area. There is a report by WDFW that stated a walleye was caught in set nets for the state and they mentioned that it exceeded 25 pounds. This fish was taken in the Columbia River in the Bonneville pool. There have been walleye caught in the commercial nets that have exceeded 30 pounds, but unfortunately there are no known pictures or any documentation of these fish available for the records.

### **Where Walleye Came From**

Walleyes are not native of the Pacific Northwest, and just how the walleye originally got here is unknown. The first known walleye in this region was in Banks Lake, Washington in 1962. Later populations began to show up in Lake Roosevelt, which is connected to Banks Lake by a large pipe and pump. Once in Lake Roosevelt

the walleye were able to spread throughout the rest of the Columbia River, from the Canadian border all the way to the mouth at Astoria. Walleyes have continued to show up in other northwest waters such as Moses Lake, Potholes Reservoir, Billy Clapp Lake, Long Lake, and Soda Lake are all parts of the Columbia Basin Reclamation Project, which distributes irrigation water throughout eastern Washington. The Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife has been planting walleyes in Sprague Lake as well.



### **Why walleye?**

Some of the best trophy walleye fishing in North America is right here in the Columbia River! In the rest of the continent a walleye over 10 pounds is a once in a lifetime achievement. On the Columbia River, avid walleye anglers can expect it every time they hit the river during the peak periods. A trophy in the Columbia River is a walleye over 15 pounds.

If world-class trophy potential is not enough incentive, then how about the fact that walleye are also considered to be excellent table fare. Try some walleye sometime and you won't want any other fish again. The smaller ones are the best eating and contain less accumulative toxins that can be passed on the consumer. The rule of thumb is the best eating ones

are 16 to 24 inch class and those over 24 inches go back into the river. You will find this size the most palatable because of less fat and contaminants in the fish.

But none of this really explains why so many fishermen are gearing up and hitting the river for walleye. To put it in a nutshell it's the challenge, and the excitement of the hunt. You can catch a walleye any-time of the year. All you have to do is put a little time in to find them.

### **The Senses**



### **Vision**

Much of the mysterious behavior of walleyes can be explained by their acute night vision, finely tuned lateral line sense and sharp hearing. They also have a good sense of smell but it does not seem to play as important a roll as in some other species.

Walleye have a very distinct advantage: they see very well in dim light and their prey cannot. This is why they do most of their feeding in dim light.

Because of their light-sensitive eyes, walleye will not tolerate sunlight in crystal clear water. If the water is clear and it is a bright day and no shade in the shallows the walleye will go deep and they have been found as deep as 100 feet

in Lake Roosevelt. They will go as deep as necessary to escape the bright sun's rays penetrating the water.

Walleye do see color, but they do not seem to see as many hues as bass and other species.



The color vision of walleye was tested in a laboratory experiment in which a tiny probe was placed inside individual cones, or color receptors in the retina. The probe measured the amount of reaction to light of different colors. The length of each color bar represents the relative level of response generated by each color.

The longer the color bar the better the walleye will see that color. These color bars will vary from one body of water to another because they are eating different foods. Therefore the best way to find the best color to use in a specific body of water is to experiment.

It is always wise to begin with lures of the longest color bar shown but there are times when you will catch fish on any color you want to as long as it is green, or as long as it is chartreuse. In certain areas of the river different colors will be the predominant one to use. When fishing a new area it is wise to consult the local fishermen to find out what you can about the color patterns but if that is not possible then experimentation is the only avenue to success. Fire tiger, Clearwater flash, black and silver and blue and silver are all great ones to start with and then by experimenting you can tune it to your type of fishing and which color works best for you.

## The Lateral Line

This is the ultra sensitive nerve ending along each side of the body and it detects minute vibrations in the water. The Lateral line sense enables walleye to single out erratically swimming baitfish from the rest of the school. By this manner they will pick off the injured and less fit baitfish, regardless of specie, and they can locate them in very deep and black water where they cannot see. This is why crankbaits and smile blades® that give off a lot of vibrations are so effective in clouded water. Also when fishing a mud line in the river or lake it is wise to fish your bait or lure just inside the mud as walleye are there waiting for their prey to enter and escape their predators in the clearer water.

The lateral line is located along the fish's side. It's the red streak that runs down the fillet. Through a microscope, it looks like tens of thousands of tiny hairs. The hairs lie under a row of scales, which are hollow, filled with a mucus, and transfer water pressure changes to the brain. This is how fish relate to their environment. The lateral line is so sensitive that a fish can feel the smallest of movements. How sensitive is this sense of "hearing or feeling"? With this organ, fish can readily distinguish one baitfish species from another. As a minnow swims by, it gives off unique underwater vibrations that make it identifiable. Every aquatic creature has its own signature, much like humans have a distinctive set of fingerprints."

## Hearing

Experienced fishermen know that walleye in the shallows will not tolerate much noise and it may drive them into deep water. Many times

you will catch walleye when they do not appear on the graph. As you approach them they may swim out away from the boat and then come back in behind it again and always be outside of the fish finder graph. When you locate them and you have made a pass through them with a worm harness, jig or blade bait or crankbait, you will not want to run over the top of them when going back upstream. You need to go out 100 to 200 feet and then run up river to a point where you can begin to make another pass down stream. By doing so you will not spook them as badly as you would if you drove over them. Cranking up that big motor and running back over the top of them is a sure fire way to kill the bite in that area and it will almost guarantee that you will not catch another fish there.

When you go over the top of walleye they may get out of the way for another reason; they may think the boat is a larger predator. As you pass overhead and they see the belly of your boat they may actually hug the bottom more tightly or they may go into very deep water with a lot of structure for protection. When running your electric motor the sound may actually be a lot quieter for you but in fact may give the walleye another interpretation that of a predator looking for a meal to devour.

## Smell

Laboratory tests show that fish can detect odors in parts per million. However the sense of smell does not seem to be as pronounced in walleye as other species, nor does it seem to have as much influence on their feeding habits. Scent does have some effect on the walleye but not as much as say salmon, steelhead, trout or even bass. In dark low clarity water it will be the

sense of hearing and the feeling of the vibrations from the lateral line that will direct the walleye to its prey much more than the sense of smell. When using scents for walleye you will want to use those that have been formulated for walleye, as it will give you a better chance at success. It may, however, be the little extra item that helps to trigger a strike that may not have occurred if the scent were not there. There are several scents on the market and the Catcher Company makes a very good scent for walleye called walleye feast. It can be purchased in a paste, Smelly Jelly or in a liquid, Sticky Liquid. Food

Walleyes are a cool-water species. They prefer large, moderately fertile lakes and rivers. Walleye eat a wide variety of food throughout their life. They eat zooplankton soon after they are born, then small fish and insects, as they grow larger. As an adult they survive mostly on other fish, making them one of the top predators in the food chain. In the Columbia River their diet mostly consists of crayfish, perch, pikeminnow, sculpins, suckers, carp, smelt, shad smolts and salmon smolts with the amount varying on the time of year. Feeding habits will vary somewhat but for the most part they do not suspend in the Columbia and will therefore be foraging for food within the 1 to 2 feet of the bottom of the river.

In the Columbia River walleye are considered bottom dwellers. This doesn't mean that walleye live in deep water. Walleye can be found in as little as two feet of water when the current is raging and the shallows are out of the main stream and they can be as deep as 60 feet or more. Generally the walleye can be found in depths of 10

to 30 feet and for most fishermen that is the place to start looking for them. Within these zones walleye will be found generally within a foot or two of the bottom and spend most of the time with their bellies right on it. This is where they feed and you must get your lure on the bottom to be successful.



***On the bottom the prey has little chance to escape, as they cannot see the walleye approach. The walleye cannot only see its prey but also tracks it with its lateral line and the vibrations the prey emits.***

When the smelt are running those near the bottom will become food for walleye. Walleye do like to eat smelt. Likewise when the shad smolts are in the river and venture too close to the bottom, they too will be eaten by walleye. It is important to match the hatch or match your lure to the food source the walleye are targeting. Salmon smolt that have been crippled by the turbines and the dams will also drift too close to the bottom and become lunch or dinner. Anytime you have minnows, regardless of species, acting abnormally and are crippled or stunned, they become food for every other species of fish that is present. This is the rule of nature and it holds true for all species.

## Bait

Bait is a very big subject and depending on what body of water and where you are depends on what you will want to use. Many mid-

west states allow live bait and minnows are very effective. However, in Oregon and Washington live minnows are not allowed and the only live bait one can use is either night crawlers or leeches. Leeches are great and do work well in many areas such as Moses Lake, Pot-holes Reservoir, Lake Roosevelt, Banks Lake and many other areas. In the Columbia River where a lot of current is typical their success rate is only marginal and the best selection would be night crawlers. Where current is most pronounced leeches cannot work their magic because the current will not allow them to swim naturally as they can in a lake or reservoir. Many of these lakes and reservoirs have leeches naturally. If they are black leeches then you want to be sure to use the black ones and if they are brown use the brown. If you use black leeches where the brown ones are native your success will not be that great but they may work somewhat. Crawlers are the best bet for live bait in most areas in Oregon and Washington.

In some areas you can find freeze dried shiners in the stores and if you use 2 or 3 hook harness try hooking the shiner up through the head and put one on each hook. The best ones are the larger sizes 2 to 4 inches long. It will make the fish think there is a small school and the bite can be exciting.

If night crawlers are your choice of bait, as they are for many walleye fishermen, then there are some important factors that need to be brought up. First you need to keep the crawlers cool and well fed. They can be kept for long periods in the refrigerator and with an occasional changing of the bedding they will last for a long time. Plump wiggly 4 to 5 inch crawlers that are very lively are the best for any fish.

There are bait boxes on the market that are insulated and ones that freezer packs or ice can be added in a separate compartment to keep those crawlers cool. Even on a very hot day this bait box works its magic. This Keep-It-Cool Bait Box by Hagens is one of the best on the market and it can be used for crawlers and leeches. It can also be used for salmon eggs, herring as well as other types of bait for other types of fishing. This is an item that most fishermen need but do not have. The Styrofoam cups the crawlers come in will bake them if left in the sun or in a warm area can have very ill effects on your worms. Hot containers are not a place to put your crawlers and it can have a drastic effect on your fishing. Some of the best worm bedding fishermen can get is Magic Worm Bedding, your crawlers will like it more and last longer. Another food that works well for crawlers is the moss that grows in the grass. This the worms like very much and it will feed many and using a spray bottle with cool water in it works well for keeping the moss healthy and your worms happy. If leeches are desired then precautions need to be taken to keep the water clean. Depending on how many leeches you are caring for and how big the container is depends on how often the water needs to be changed. Taking care of your bait is an important step in walleye fishing and it will make a difference as to how successful you will be. However, remember that leeches do not do as well in the lower Columbia River as do night crawlers.

## The Spawn

Walleye can spawn in lakes, reservoirs and rivers. These areas are usually 1-8 feet deep and have a gravel bottom or rocks up to soft-

ball size. Their eggs require constant aeration and in the rivers they will choose areas that do not have a lot of current but some current is necessary.

The exact water temperature at which they spawn depends on latitude. In the North they spawn at 40° to 44° and in the South it will be 50° to 55°. Typically in Oregon and Washington it will usually be when water temp is 47° to 52°. Pre-spawn begins when the water temp gets to about 42° and remains there for several days. Once the water temp rises to 47° to 52° and is constant for 3 to 5 days it triggers the spawn. Walleye will stage for the spawn in 30-50 foot of water then go up into the shallows of 1 to 8 feet to spawn. Walleye are broadcast spawners and do not make a nest in the gravel like salmon. They will hover above the gravel or rocky bottom and females broadcast spawn from 40,000 to 600,000 eggs. Eggs will stick to the rough surfaces of gravel or lodge between larger stones, where current or moderate wave action keep them aerated and free of silt until they hatch one to three weeks later and the male is right there to fertilize them. Not all the females will spawn at the same time and the spawn may be on for one to three weeks. If the temperature cools drastically it can cut off the spawn in mid-stream. If there is several reoccurring cold spells the females will just reabsorb the eggs and not spawn at all. Once the spawn is over the females may not be on the bite for a month or so while they are recuperating but the males will remain in the general vicinity and be fairly active. Once the females have recuperated they go on a feeding binge that won't quit and if you are there it could be the best walleye bite of the year.



In the Columbia River females in different areas may spawn at a widely variety of times and these spawn times may be as much as 2-3 months different in time. At Umatilla it may be in March, in Rufus it may be in May and in the lower Columbia below Bonneville dam it could be in July.

## Lures

The selection of lures can be just as important when fishing for walleye as it is for any other species. However, in some sections of the river there are certain rules. The most common lures used are crankbaits or plugs, worm harnesses, blade baits and jigs. It is best to troll the worm harness downstream and pull the crankbaits upstream. This way you will find the areas holding the aggressive fish and when they are located you can key in on them with jigs or blade baits. However that is not to say that trolling crankbaits downstream will not work. It will work but you have to remember that your plugs will tend to dive deeper when trolling downstream that they will when trolling upstream.

There are several effective crankbaits that work for walleye such as Rapalas, Power Dive Minnows, Hot Lips troller model, Kaboom Shiner, Hawg Boss, Reef Runner and there are many more. Do not eliminate a lure because you think

it is too big! Big fish like to eat big baits and they will take crankbaits that are 12 to 16 inches long. You do not feed a lumberjack a child's menu at a restaurant and expect him to get full; he is still going to be hungry. It would have been better to give him a big meal to begin with instead of several small ones. BIG fish have BIG mouths and they will eat BIG fish! Another item to put into the pot of variables is the using of shallow diving crankbaits and taking them down with a bottom walker or a weight on a drop line off a three-way swivel. This too can be very successful and it will give a different action to your lure than a deep diver will have. Both these methods work well for walleye. Again there are several colors that work, some better than others and you will have to experiment to find which ones work best for you.

There are several types of harnesses and some have the standard metal blade in either a Colorado, deep cup Colorado, willow leaf French or Indiana style. These blades have a very different effect on the harness and how much lift it will create on the lure itself. The deep cup Colorado blade creates the most lift to your lure. The Colorado, the Indiana and finally the willow leaf will create less lift in that order. The one you choose will depend on if you are using plastic or glass beads or just how heavy the lure is you are trolling. Speed is an important factor and the bigger the blade the faster you must troll in order to keep your harness off the bottom. The deep cup Colorado blades also take more speed to get them to work properly. Speed is a factor that is critical and can mean the difference of success or failure.

One of the best spinner blades on the market is the Smile Blade® by Mack's Lure® and it will impart an

action to your lure that tantalizes any fish. It is also a mylar blade and it can be trolled slower than any other blade on the market today. There are many colors that are available and it is a blade that can be used for any fish in the northwest. They come in six sizes and have gotten a reputation of bringing home the fish. Most generally the 0.8, 1.1, 1.5 and 1.9 are the Smile Blades that are used for walleye with less emphasis on the 1.9.

Double Whammys®, Wedding Rings®, Cha Chas®, Wally Pops® and Boogie Baits® are also hot lures for catching walleye and they work very well in the Columbia River as well as in the lakes of eastern Washington. Another attractor that can be used with any crankbait, or worm harness is what they call Hot Wings®, also made by Mack's Lure it is an added attractor that really adds a lot of flash to your lure and makes it more visible and it has a vibration that it gives off to help attract the walleye. The great aspect about the use of smile blades® and harnesses with them is that they will work at extremely slow speed and at fast speeds too. When trolling in the lower river speeds of 1.3 to 2.3 MPH should be considered as a starting speed for trolling.

Remember, what works well below Bonneville Dam may not work at all in the reservoirs above Bonneville.

The length and weight of your bottom walker is another area that is overlooked in many cases. Length can be from 6 inch to 16 inches and from 1 ounce to 5 ounces depending on the flow.

Your line should be no more than a 45° angle when it enters the water. It is impossible to cover all the combinations here and one

must do some practicing to acquire satisfactory results.

One more thing about speed, and it is one that will not work many times but there are those instances where it will really trigger a bite. Once in a while you will do better power-trolling crankbaits at 5+ MPH then you will at slower speeds. It will cause a reflex strike and you will target very aggressive fish and can cover a lot of water rapidly.

Another great Mack's Lure product is the Sonic Baitfish®. This is a lure that can be jigged, cast and retrieved or trolled and it is a multi-specy lure and works for walleye, salmon, tiger musky just to name a few.

## The Tidal Affect

Only below Bonneville Dam will the tides have an effect on the walleye. For many it does make a difference if it is high slack, low slack, incoming and outgoing. Depending on the severity of the tide so depends the current in the river and if you add the effect that the spillways from the dam have on the current and couple all them together it can be an enormous task to really figure out where to go, what to do and how to fish in certain areas at certain times in order to catch this elusive fish. When you have high water in the spring and the dam spillways are wide open and if there is a bull ebb tidal effect, you may not catch anything at all. All these factors will have a specific effect on the walleye, where they go, how long they stay there and how far they will move to another location or what they will bite on and if they will bite at all. Under these circumstances walleye may move as little as 50-100 feet and in others they may move as much

as a half-mile. It is no wonder why many fishermen get discouraged when trying to catch walleye in the lower Columbia River in particular. It may take years to really figure out how the tides effect the walleye and if you can glean some credible info from those who have been fishing walleye for a long time you will have put a valuable asset into you assault weapons for catching walleye. The tidal effect has a great bearing on walleye and it is a factor that cannot be overlooked when fishing for walleye below Bonneville Dam.

## **The Walleye Chop And Fishing The Wind**

Many times one will hear walleye fishermen talking about the walleye chop. This is the condition of the water and they are typically referring to a rough surface and generally white caps up to a foot high. In many cases fishing for walleye can be enhanced by the conditions of the surface of the water and it will actually be better when it is rough. In some areas the fishing will be great and the catching very poor until a little breeze cuts across the water and stirs the surface. This at times is a big advantage for the fisherman. There are areas in the Columbia where walleye bite well only if the wind is blowing and there are waves and rollers 4-6 feet high. The weather can be cold and blowing and sometimes and heavy rain blows in across the horizon, now add to this the surface chop on the water and you can only imagine the difficulty of boat control and boat control is everything!

Most people will not fish in these conditions. Still there are those die-hard walleye fisherman who are out fishing for walleye and

they just can't seem to give it up. These fishermen are the ones that many times are catching those big walleye. These diehards are getting those 16, 17, and 18 pound fish. They are practicing their skills in some of the most terrible conditions. Practicing in these conditions helps one understand the currents and the wave action.

By fishing in all types of conditions the walleye fisherman has learned the walleye's travel patterns and habits and what depths they tend to be in certain conditions. And most of all he knows the different places where the walleye WANT to be. The fair weather fishermen usually do not do as well, but that should not be such a surprise. He has not put in his time, he has not practiced enough nor has he learned what the walleye want, for lures, for shelter, for resting. The walleye chop can be the difference of catching or just fishing.

Wind can be a major factor in fishing for walleye and it can both enhance fishing as well as making it impossible to fish at all. One of the reasons wind makes walleye fishing more effective is simply because it increases options that you have and it adds more ways for you to present your baits. The up and down motion of the waves gives your rods an additional up and down action while you are trolling and it increases the erratic action of your lures. These conditions really make it better to put your rod in a pole holder and leave it there. It will add to your presentation when waves are rocking the boat. By spreading the rods out as far as possible at a 90-degree angle with the boat you will also be covering a wider area of water in a single pass.

The wind will allow you to target

shallow fish without scaring them. The wind will create dirty water, and the walleye can't see your boat because of the surface chop. The wind also allows us to fish close to the fish because waves camouflage pressure changes caused by the water displacement of our boats, and this many times will cause the walleye to swim out away from our presentation path if we did not have the wind.

Water displacement from the boat hull is very important and often overlooked. Walleyes don't necessarily have to see to know what's going on around them. Walleye have a unique sensory organ, called a lateral line and this lateral line will transmit vibrations and erratic bait movements as well as the pressure changes caused by out boats as we float over them. Although the walleyes lateral line doesn't recognize or identify the hull displacement as an angler, he does recognize it as something about 18 feet long, and that's something big enough to eat him! This may not be the exact reaction of a walleye, but it is known that his senses will alert him to change quickly from the offensive to the defensive. Most walleye fishermen find that it's a tough bite if the fish are on the defense instead of the offense.

When the wind blows, a dramatic change occurs in the world of the young fish. The waves start rolling ashore, stirring up the water. This dirty water with suspended solid particles reduces visibility for all fish. Walleye will react as if heard the dinner bell and move into this muddy water to feed, using their lateral lines as eyes. If you can only see three inches into the dirty water, that's all the farther anything else can see in it as well.

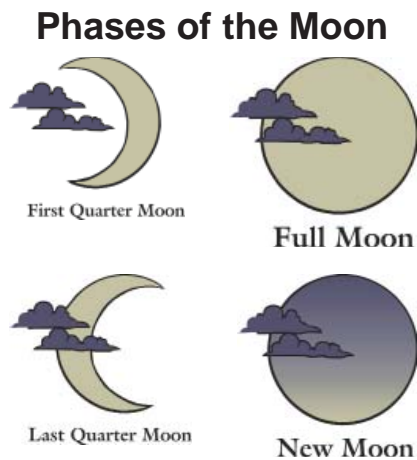
The small fish act as if they're more comfortable in the dirty water. They can't see movement and this eliminates their defensive shield. They're off-guard and also actively feeding on the suspended particles. The walleyes slide into this dirty water along with the big waves and go on the offensive. They detect the signature of the minnows water displacement, ease within a few inches, flare their gills and suck in a volume of water surrounding the baitfish. This draws the water in through their open mouth, filters the flow through their gill rakers, and traps the unsuspecting baitfish in their mouths. Neither fish ever sees the other one! Its easy to understand why dirty water, wind, and big waves act like a dinner bell for walleyes.

Wind can also create new structures in shallow water. These structures are called mud-lines. Waves crashing against a shoreline or on an exposed point often wash clay into the water creating what we refer to as mud-lines. This mud or suspended particles normally suspends in the top two feet of water. Phenomenal fishing can occur within the first 20 to 30 minutes of the creation of a mud-line. I watch for this constantly in tournaments. If it's a flat calm day and the wind starts to blow, I go immediately to the closest point or flat of shallow water where I believe fish may be holding. When a new mud-line is created, there's an immediate movement of fish into the shallow water. What happens on this early movement into shallow water is a "feeding binge". It becomes a walleye feast because the eating is so easy. When full the fish move back into their comfort zones until they are hungry again. A few days of the wind blowing into the same areas will support a mud-line that does hold fish, but it can't compare

to the frantic action during the first 20 to 30 minutes of its creation.

A basic fundamental in walleye fishing is: Fish the Wind. If there is no wind it could be a long day. On the Lower Columbia River the wind is a big factor and can be the key to your success but there are many instances that even without the wind the fishing is great.

Although we associate mud-lines with wind, other events such as boat waves, rain, or run off, also create areas of dirty water that will hold fish. Look for them and recognize them, and by all means don't pass them up.



The phases of the moon do play an important part in walleye fishing as well as fishing for many other species.

During the full and the new moon we find the strongest tides. This is the time in the Lower Columbia River where the tidal effects on the walleye will be at its greatest.

Typically the time period from the full moon to the new moon will be the best period of each month to fish. And if you fish 3 days either side of the full or new moon you will find this time to be the most productive and the time when you will typically be most successful. However, each day out from the full

or the new moon will decline a bit in fishing productivity.

The brightness of the full moon on clear nights does have an affect on the fish and there are indications that the nocturnal movements of the plankton, invertebrates and bait fish all will help to trigger the predators like walleye to feed more aggressively then they would during the new moon and they will feed in areas where they are not normally found. The power of the moonlight goes far beyond the effects of the light that is gives off.

Twice daily we have major activity periods and these are when the tidal forces are the strongest. This is during the high and low tidal periods. This is a natural rhythm of nature and many animal behaviors are linked to these natural rhythms such as sunrise and sunset, lunar cycles and even the shifts in the weather. These rhythmic adaptations affect the metabolism, the physiology and the behavior of fish and they not only react to favorable conditions they seem to be anticipating them.

The days on either side of the full moon consistently tend to produce trophy walleye than other days.

Fishing peaks in the lunar month will coincide with the peaks in the lunar phases. The day the moon is in the first quarter, full, new or last quarter is the time when the bite tends to be the best. And fairly good catches can be made during these peak times. Walleye catches coincide more closely to this period than do salmon, trout and steelhead, but not as closely as small and largemouth bass or channel cats.

The best times to fish for walleye during the full moon is between



dark and 1 to 2 A.M. This seems to be a key feeding time for the walleye and it is when most fishermen will do their best.

## Fishing a Cold Front

What is a cold front? It can be a 25-40-degree temperature drop, a nasty thunderstorm, or a howling east wind, and on the Columbia River this can translate into massive waves and white caps. A cold front could be all or none of the above. Does it really matter? No one in their right mind is going to fish until after it passes anyway, so who cares?

If you are going to fish walleye on the Columbia River it is important that you learn to recognize cold front conditions. Even more critical is the time after the cold front has passed as this can be tricky and often can be hidden behind the disguise of a perfect fishing day when every thing you do just doesn't work and you are just can't seem to connect with old marble eyes. The perfect fishing day and all has gone wrong. It's the day you've taken off work and have a friend from the mid west and you really want to show hi how to catch BIG walleye. It's a day in which the weather is so perfect that cold front never enter your mind, at least not until the day is over and you're trying to explain to your friend why you didn't get a single hit. Failure to recognize a cold front is the major reason that many fishermen have several days each year of poor fishing success, and they just can't figure it out. If you are going to fish walleye you will need to learn to expect, and must recognize and accept cold front conditions. These conditions can vary with each stretch of the Columbia River.

When you tell your friends, "the fishing has been absolutely fantastic and everything I have been doing is catching fish, and everything I am using has been working", you had better watch out because a cold front is coming! The fishing will change abruptly!

## Recognizing A Cold Front

Consider this: The bite has been fantastic for the last 3-4 of days, and you're hoping the winds will calm a little and the high waves will subside. As you pull into the ramp the next morning, everything you wanted has been granted by the river gods, the wind is calm, the water is flat and you don't have 5-8 foot rollers and chop to fight. The water surface looks like a mirror. The sun is shining in a clear blue sky, and it's 20 degrees cooler than it was yesterday. It's going to be the perfect fishing day – WRONG! This is what you call a major cold front and you need to be able to recognize it. Many times the perfect fishing day is the worst day to catch fish and what it ended up being was a great day for a boat ride. When the weather changes, you change! I hope you don't plan on using the same thing as you did the day before, because it is not going to work! After you've made your first pass where you fished yesterday fish and didn't get hit, you do not need to change color, you do not need to change your bait and you do not need to change your presentation because these tactics are not going to work and why? It makes no difference what you do, you can't catch fish that aren't there! What you need to do is to accept the fact that this is a cold front and the fish have moved to another area. For you to be successful you must change locations and as well as changing your presentation. Cold fronts

will trigger a defensive reaction in walleye. Walleye that were doing nothing but chasing food yesterday will not be chasing food today but will be looking for security and safe locations. It makes no difference of the time of year; cold front fishing is basically the same kind of fishing that you will experience in the fall when the weather is somewhat unstable. One should look for the walleye in the same locations and fish the same presentation during the cold front and you will have better success.

If you have had hot fish scattered on a flat such as the upper end of Reed island, Skamania Island and many other such areas or on the top of a long shallow point such as the upper end of Ackerman Island before the cold front comes through, they will be gone, but not far. You will need to start checking the closest drop-offs, at depths of anywhere from 10 to 30 feet. Be sure to check out the steepest drop-offs, check the current eddies on a break and be on the lookout for inside turns and on these structures. This is where good electronics is a must, if you are planning to be really successful. Cold front fish can easy to locate especially if you know where they feel more secure in these conditions. Once you have located these fish you will also find that they are exceptionally hard to catch because they are primarily looking for security not food!

Remember cold front fish are cold fish. They'll be in deeper water, tightly schooled and typically found on the most vertical structure. Cold fish require a longer time to react. Use a presentation that keeps your bait in their face for a longer period of time, such as vertical jigging or blade baiting or dragging a Mack's Lure Wedding Ring®, Double Whammy® or Wally Pop® with a

Smile Blade® slowly through them. Patience is the key, and a slow presentation is the one that will make you successful.

## The Four Seasons

### Winter and Early Spring

Early in the year the Umatilla, Ir-rigon and Boardman areas are a great place to be walleye fishing. These areas can be hot fishing during this time and even though the water is cold and the air temperature may be freezing there could still be a hot bite. February and March in this area has been know to produce many huge walleye in the over 18 pound class.

Most people will dress up in all their cold weather gear and dare to face the elements of cold, wind and possibly rain or snow and they may get a few walleye or even just one or two big ones for the day. But this time too is a great time to be night fishing and the bite can be much better than during the day. Late winter and early spring this middle section of the Columbia River is one of the best places to be fishing for walleye.

There are also areas to fish for walleye below Bonneville Dam and they extend all the way down to Longview. The walleye here are just as big as in other sections of the river and like the other areas you may only get one or two fish a day in the heart of winter but the quality is better and they are bigger and in the trophy class. Ough Reef is a local area that can be good fishing but it too can be difficult because of the water level and the rocky structure in that area.

### Spring

The Umatilla area is still good but

the winds can be devastation and the waves huge and boating safety can become a major concern especially when you are trying to fish in 10 to 14 foot waves. The weather can turn on you in a minute and what was flat and fishable water at 9 A.M. may be a boater's nightmare by noon. Weather watching is a must!

From the end of March and in through April walleye fishing begins to pick up in the Rufus and Biggs Junction area on the Columbia. It is a very good place to go and there are typically a lot of smaller fish for those looking for a great meal. 16 to 22 inch walleye are common and a few very large fish can also be taken. In this section of the river the weather can also play havoc with your fishing. When you look down river and you observe what appears to be a darkening of the water or you may see a little white on the water it is definitely time for you to get going and most generally you will not get to the docks before you get hit with weather you do not want to fish in.

### Summer

The Umatilla to Boardman area is really producing a lot of fish and you will catch a lot of smaller ones and a few trophies may be encountered.

The Rufus area is also continuing to be good but could be hot one day and cold for a couple days and so on.

Late June and especially in July and August the lower Columbia begins to get hot and many fish in the 10 pound class can be caught. The Portland Vancouver area on the Columbia really doe not turn hot until after the first of July and it will last up into September. This is

the time to catch a lot of walleye.

### Fall

September in the lower river can be good but it will begin to taper off and you will notice that the quantity of walleye will not be there but the quality will increase but you may only catch a couple of fish a day. This will continue through November. During this time period both the Lower Columbia and the Mid Columbia are great places to fish. The Umatilla area can produce some very nice walleye at this time of year. Typical catches can be in the 4-10 fish per day and 3 to 16 pounds.

### Winter

Fishing for walleye in the winter is good if you catch one or two nice fish in a full day of fishing. Of course there are exceptions to the rule and there will be days that you cannot do anything wrong and the next day you can't do anything right!

Walleye fishing in the winter especially at night when you know the river can be an exceptionally rewarding adventure.

### Walleye in the weeds

Seldom do many walleye fishermen fish the in the weeds for walleye because most have been convinced that the best place to get walleye is in an area with a hard bottom or in the rocky areas. This is an area that most walleye fishermen avoid and it can be a mistake not to fish the weedy areas.

Walleye will move into the weeds to find food, shade or cooler temperatures.. There are many types of baitfish that use weedy areas for cover and this provides a cruising walleye a meal while making

their way through the tangle and maze. On bright and hot summer days walleye will use these areas because they can be 5-8 degrees cooler than the surrounding water. In Moses Lake when the temperatures are high you will find walleye in the 2-foot deep areas that are full of weedy cover. They will move into these areas before going into deeper water.

Not all weeds will attract walleye. The best weedbeds are in or near deep water, however there are exceptions to this as in Moses Lake in eastern Washington. Broad leaf weedy plants will tend to hold more walleye than the thin narrow leaf plants.

You will find walleye in the weeds almost anytime of the year; but it is best fishing in the summer when the temperatures are elevated. Another reason to fish here in the summer and the fall is because the young baitfish are seeking cover from their predators.

Fishing along the edge of the weeds is easy and a very effective method of catching walleye, making sure to keep your lure as close as possible to the weed beds.

When fishing these areas you may snag a branch of the weeds and you will feel a tug or jerking sensation giving you the impression it is a walleye. On the other hand if you treat it as if you just hooked a weed it may in fact be a walleye and you just missed him if you did not set the hook.

Jigging is an effective technique to use in the weeds themselves, but along side the weed beds worm harnesses and crankbaits can be very effective especially when the crankbaits match the color and size of the baitfish living there.

## Walleye in The Timber and Brush

Many areas in the Columbia River and even in some of the lakes in eastern Washington have timber and brush in the water that provides cover for baitfish or it will provide cover for a walleye so it cannot be seen and allows it to dart out and grab its unsuspecting prey.

You can find walleye around almost any submerged timber, including flooded trees, stumps and logs on the bottom and around trees that have fallen into the water because the bank has eroded. These trees that fall into the water on a steep bank tend to hold more walleye than if the tree had fallen on a shallow flat.

Walleye will move into the brush and thickets in the fall when heavy rains begin and also in the spring when high water is prevalent. Walleye will remain in these areas as long as the water is rising or as long as it stay at this high water level. Once the water begins to drop, even in the slightest bit, the walleye will head to deeper water.

Jigs, crankbaits, blade baits, spinnerbaits and even a worm harness will work well. Those who are afraid to put their jig or lure in the thick of it all will only have a chance to get the most aggressive walleye and you may be missing the chance of a lifetime in catching that huge trophy. Remember the biggest walleye will hang out in the densest and thickest brush they can get into and you will lose tackle when fishing for them in these areas. But it is worth it!

## Walleye on Rocky Bottoms



River and lake bottoms with jagged and broken rocks are some of the best places to find walleye. These areas are also some of the most difficult to fish and you can lose tons of gear.

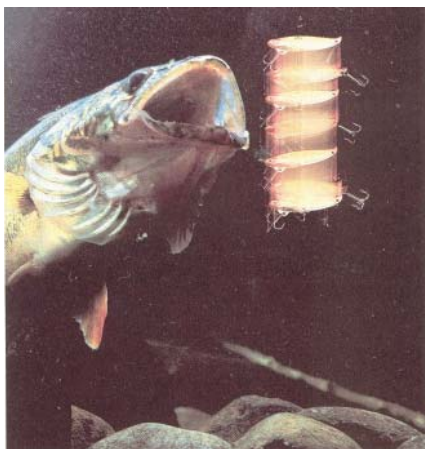
When you are trolling a worm harness you will not want to drag it on the bottom as it will be gone instantly. You need to touch the bottom from time to time and just keep it a short distance above the rocks. You will want to shorten your bottom walker too, or if you are using a three way with a drop weight you must do the same by touch and raise, touch and raise, otherwise the bottom will eat your weight.



Floating rigs work well in these areas and it will help keep your lure above the rocks and out of the crevices.. Jigging and blade baiting is also a great way to fish for walleye here and can be one of the most productive methods to fish for them.

Shallow diving crankbaits and floating crankbaits are also good to use. Both types of crankbaits can be taken down with a weight and if you touch and raise and touch and raise you will add the jigging effect to the action of the lure, which also

adds to the appeal and may cause a strike when all else fails.



These areas will tend to have pockets where the walleye can lay in wait for the food to come to them and by slowly covering the area with a jig or blade bait you will target more walleye than if trolling a harness or crankbait, especially in areas with moderate to fast current.

## Where to Go For Walleye

The Columbia River system extends from the Canadian Border all the way to the ocean and to cover it all would be difficult at best.

Those areas in Washington such as Lake Roosevelt, Banks Lake, Rufus Woods, Moses Lake, Pot-holes Reservoir and many others are all great places to fish for walleye. To acquire knowledge of these areas it is best to contact some of the resorts and local tackle shops to get a general knowledge as to where you might start to fish for walleye. To obtain any in depth info you may want to talk with some of the local fishermen and actually go with them a few times to see where to go and how to fish that water. If this is not an option then you need to be observant and watch where they go when you are in your boat. You can learn a lot by keeping your eyes open to where others are fishing around you and what speeds and what colors.

It may be necessary to go with a licensed guide to see how to fish and where to go in some of these lakes as well as in the Columbia River itself. There are many guides that fish for walleye on the Columbia River system and most of them only fish a small section of the river or they only fish the lakes. To select a good walleye guide you should contact the local tackle shop or ask some of the local walleye fishermen who know of them and find out how well they do, and how often they are walleye fishing. When you are with the guide and you do not understand what he is doing do not be afraid to ask why he did that, why is he using those specific colors and why, why, why. A good guide will give you that info and will help you understand. Be sure to let him know that you are looking for help in learning what to do so you can be a better walleye fisherman or fisherwoman. Most guides will share a lot of info with you; in fact they may give you too much for you to remember and it may be a data overload. It may be that you will want to go with them again.

Up river in the Umatilla, Irrigon and Boardman area is exceptionally good early in the year and beginning around the end of February this stretch becomes a prime area to fish for walleye. This upper stretch of the Columbia River is known for big fish however; weather may or may not cooperate and is a huge factor in successful fishing. The wind in this section of the river can cause huge waves 12 feet or more and conditions can be exceedingly dangerous. It can go from flat water to vertical water in a matter of an hour or less. Here it is a blade bait or jig show early in the year. Harnesses will also work but blade baits and jigs will be the best presentation. The color

combinations of green and silver or green and gold blade baits in a perch pattern or what they call a green mackerel pattern work very well. Another is a chartreuse green scale pattern on a gold background. In the harness one might try a green bead combo with a gold sparkle smile blade® or a laser smile blade®.

The Rufus and Biggs Junction area is another stretch that is good to fish for walleye and it will start picking up in April. From John Day dam down river to Celilo Falls. This area too can have some heavy winds that make boating and fishing hazardous. If you are having a great day and you see what looks like a big ripple on the water down stream you will want to get going and head for the shore. By the time you get there the waves and chop can be a lot more than what you bargained for. Keeping your eye out on the weather is a must in all areas you fish. In this section of the river troll harnesses along the Oregon side of Preachers eddy and then you can continue along the Oregon shore to the bottom end of the rocky bank. This is a great place to get some nice walleye in the 16-22 inch class. On the Washington side of the river starting across from the Rufus boat ramp is the willows and here it is somewhat snaggy and you can jig it, blade it or pull harnesses. Continuing down river will be the car body hole and you are there when you see old car bodies on the bank and in the water. This area is great for jiggling and blade baits but harnesses can be trolled here as well. Below the Biggs bridge the Oregon shore is a good spot to locate walleye and once you are across from Miller Island you can go to the Oregon side of the island and troll downstream to a point below the green can. These are great walleye areas

and produce many good eating size fish.

The Dalles and down river to Skamania, Washington is another great area for walleye but there are some real shallows with huge protruding rocks just under the surface and if you do not have some real knowledge of this stretch you will most definitely want to go with someone who does until you learn the river. This area of the Columbia is not as heavily fish for walleye and primarily because most people do not know where to go. There are several locations that are good to fish but this area is known for its windy conditions and it can pick up and lay down in a short time period. There are many rock outcrops in the river and you should go with one who knows this section before going by yourself.

Below Bonneville dam there is a huge fishery and it runs all the way to Clatskanie, Oregon. There have been reports of walleye in the Tongue Point area but those reports have not been confirmed. In this lower section of the river there are some key areas that hold fish. Here too they can be hazardous depending on water level as in some of these areas are reefs and rock outcrops that can seriously damage your boat if you get too close in low water conditions. In the area around Skamania Island one can fish both side of the island and the upper end has a very large flat that needs to be watched when there is low water. From Skamania Island upstream past the fishery is a good location for walleye. Here in this stretch wind will be a factor and it is usually a daily occurrence. Now that you are convinced that you need to look out for the wind, it is necessary to let you know that some areas in the river are not good

walleye places to fish unless the wind is blowing and there are 4-7 foot rollers or a 2 foot walleye chop. Skamania Island is one of these places when the fishing is better in the wind. Knowing where these places are and being able to fish them will depend on how much time you spend on the water and how big a boat you have. It will also depend on your skills as a boat handler and how comfortable you are fishing in these conditions. One more thought while we are on the subject, do forget to wear your personal flotation device and make sure it is one that can keep you afloat if you go overboard. The inflatable ones are exceptionally good and are in most cases more comfortable to wear and you can have it on at all times and it will not be cumbersome or in the way.

Reed Island, which is near Rooster Rock State Park, is another area that holds walleye from the upstream end all the way down the Oregon side of the Island and downstream to Ough Reef. Ough Reef is an exceptional place to jig and blade bait and you can tell you are there because of the turbulent waters. Crankbaits and harnesses can also be trolled here but the reef will eat a lot of gear.

Downstream and across from Chinook Landing is Lady Island and trolling down the Oregon side of the island can be very good fishing. If you fish the Washington side of the island you will be required to have a Washington fishing license. Below Lady Island and toward Government Island is Ackerman Island and it is great fishing at times. The Washington side of the island is snaggy then the Oregon side and you will need to pay attention to all the piling in the water and there is a couple of big rocks you will need to look out for in lower

water levels.

Both sides of Government Island are good fishing but in lower water years you need to be very much aware of where you are when fishing on the Oregon side of the island. There are some very shallow areas and many sand bars that one can stick a boat on. I-205 Bridge on both sides of the island are good fishing also and large walleye can be taken here on harnesses, and plugs. All these areas have routinely held fish and are good places for the novice to begin.

## **Boat Control**

Boat control is everything! It does not make any difference as to what the weather is or how much wind is blowing, if you cannot control your boat you cannot expect to catch a lot of walleye. It is preferred to have a kicker and a bow mounted electric motor with autopilot for walleye fishing. By using both motors at one time, the bow mount to keep you heading in the right direction downstream and the kicker motor in reverse pulling you back upstream, can help you sit over the walleye for jigging and blade baiting. If you are trolling and cannot stay in a given path or in the slot because of current or wind, catching walleye in that slot will be diminished and almost impossible. This slot that holds walleye may be a long trough or just a small depression in the river bottom about the size of your boat and if you do not have good boat control you will slip out of the slot and not be successful. It is imperative that the walleye fishermen maintain good boat control in order to be successful in catching walleye. Boat control is acquired by practice and more practice and the more you fish for walleye and the more practice you

get the better you are at controlling your boat, the more walleye you will catch.

Ultimately it is a combination of things that has to happen for you to be successful. Boat control, the right bait or lure, the right place depending on the flow and tidal effect and if you are one of the lucky ones you may just catch that huge trophy that everyone is looking for. If you at first don't succeed, hang in there! If you're striking out, change lures and techniques until you find the right combination that works for you. Keep your hook in the water and never give up, it is the only way you will be a successful walleye fisherman or fisherwoman.

## **Anchoring**

Another technique to catch walleye in the Lower Columbia River is to anchor above a wing dam and move from side to side above it and allowing your lure or bait to move cross current on the upstream side of the wing dam. Typically the current will have created shallow depressions in front of each piling of the wing dam and the walleye will lay in them and gobble up the food as it comes into their reach. By allowing your bait to drift across the edges of these depressions and allowing it to move from one to another you will be targeting several walleye on one pass. Once the walleye takes the bait they will usually dash through the wing dam and entangle your line around the piling itself or on other debris that has come to rest against it. Once the fish is hooked it is important to get them away from that depression as quickly as possible by pulling them forward so they cannot get entangled.

Other small troughs and depres-

sions that are single boat size can be fished the same way and instead of hovering directly above the fish you are upstream from them and this may not spook them as much as it would if you were directly above them. Anchoring and holding in a specific area so it is possible to place your bait where you want takes a lot more effort than just trolling by. For this reason most fishermen will not anchor fish for walleye. For those who want to try this method it is important to have a good anchoring system and EZ Marine in Troutdale, Oregon makes the best. It comes complete with a video and also addresses the subject of anchoring for walleye.

Trolling across the upstream side of the wing dam and allowing your lure to drift into the depressions and the awaiting walleye can also be as effective.

## **Equipment**

There is not enough space or time to try to cover all the types of equipment and gear that is on the market for walleye fishing. It would be very difficult at best to completely cover this subject and do it adequately. The best way to figure out what you need is to chat with some of your friends and find out what they are using and what is working for them and then expand your tackle and rod selection and reels to fit your needs. Tackle boxes also come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and configurations and before you invest in them you may want to determine how you will be fishing and what you will be taking with you. This will determine what type of gear and equipment you will want to purchase. If you are not sure, do not rush out and buy the first thing you see. Wait until you have gotten your feet wet

before you purchase a lot of equipment that you do not need or will not use. You may already have many of the items that you need and may not need to purchase a lot of items. You may be able to get along with what you have and just add a few items of terminal tackle to increase your odds to catch a walleye.

Once you really get into walleye fishing then you may want to upgrade your equipment and obtain specific items that you will be using to fit your style of fishing. There are many things you can do to help cut down your cost. You can make some of the tackle or you can find places that offer special discounts on closeout sales. Many of these are great for walleye and there are some places that offer discounts to those who are members of fishing clubs as well.

Remember to keep it simple! Make sure the tackle you are using has a good reputation for catching walleye! If it does not work for you get rid of it! Do not keep a lot of tackle around if it is not doing you any good. If you cannot catch walleye on it you may want to try it out on another type of fish and if it works well for that species than take it out of your walleye tackle box.

The amount of tackle you need to take with you on any given day will depend on where you fish and how snaggy it is and how much debris is in the water. If you are fishing an area that is very snaggy it may eat a lot of gear in a short time, you will want to take more than what you think you may need. It is difficult to be in an area and the bite is on and you run out of tackle because it is a very snaggy bottom with lots of heavy structure and you failed to take enough gear to get you through the day. At the same

time do not over do it. Taking what you need and knowing how much, what type, and what not to take will come with experience. The more you fish for walleye the more you will learn what to take and what not to take with you.

Set a game plan for the day and stick with it! Many tournament fishermen develop a game plan when they are going to fish a tournament. This is their strategy for how they are going to fish and what they will do, what they are going to fish with, the style of fishing and where they are going to go. This procedure is exactly what the everyday fisherman needs to be doing. Develop a game plan and determine where you are going to be fishing or how you want to fish. You will need to decide if you are trolling worm harnesses, trolling plug or crankbaits, or whether you will be jigging or blade baiting. Many times this will determine where you are going to be fishing specifically dictates what you need to take with you.

Keeping a log of what you do is an important part of fishing. This log can provide you with valuable information in the future and will allow you review what you did and how much success you had with a specific set of criteria. The conditions of the river, the rate of flow, the tidal effect and how high the water was and what the temperature was are parts of the equation that will help you to become successful the next time this criteria is the same. Do not forget to include the barometric pressure readings, also include any weather fronts moving into the area, either cold fronts or heat lows How well you do may depend on how much info you collected for this set of conditions at those same locations. The criteria may also tell you not to go

fishing because the conditions are not conducive to catching walleye.

## Handling your catch

You love walleye fishing. So do I. That's why we want to ensure the future of walleye fishing in the Pacific Northwest by maintaining healthy walleye populations. Research has proven that catch and release is vital to achieving this goal. When fish are plentiful, and fishing pressure is low, keeping a few for dinner is great, besides walleye is the best tasting fish going. But when this isn't the case, your future catch rate depends on your release efforts now. And the best way to increase their chances for survival is with proper handling.

Catching a walleye and releasing it alive is an easy way to improve sport fishing. The state game departments in the NW are not stocking any walleyes in the Columbia River so it's up to us. A walleye that is released alive can continue spawning and growing, which helps maintain healthy populations. Releasing a walleye also makes that fish available to you and other anglers in the future. Biologists have learned that, especially where fishing pressure is heavy, catch and release can make the difference between a poor fishery and one where fish are plentiful and catch rates are significantly higher. However, all fish must be handled properly for catch and release to work. If they are treated with care and returned to the water quickly, survival rates are very high. If fish are handled improperly, survival drops sharply, and catch and release has little beneficial effect.

Thus, fishermen who practice catch and release must know how to handle fish so they can be

returned to the water in the best possible condition.

When should fish be released alive, and when is it okay to keep a few for dinner or lunch? Two main factors enter into this decision: how plentiful the fish are, and how heavy the fishing pressure is. If walleye are plentiful and pressure is light, keeping a few won't hurt. However, if the walleye are scarce and/or under heavy pressure, catch and release should be practiced to help keep the populations healthy.

Gamefish such as bass, trout, walleye should strongly be considered for live release. These top predators are needed to keep other, more prolific species in balance. On the other hand, crappie, bluegill, perch, and other panfish reproduce quickly. In many instances some harvest of these fish is desirable to maintain a balance in the population.

So, if you desire to keep some fish to eat, follow all legal creel and size limits. Then, keep a few smaller fish - 16" - 24" - but let the big ones go. Besides the smaller ones taste better anyway and they have fewer accumulative contaminants and toxins. With this in mind, the following are few specific tips for the proper handling of walleye:

Walleye have sharp teeth, so use a net. Hold smaller fish across the back with light thumb and finger pressure just behind the gill flaps. Hold larger fish with your fingers inserted between the gills and the forward edge of the gill cavity. Be extra cautious not to damage the gill filaments. Also, support a large fish under its belly with your other hand. (Wet your hand first!)

Use pliers to remove hooks. This

results in quicker, less damaging hook removal than twisting and pulling on a hook with fingers.

When unhooking, handle the walleye as little as possible to reduce the loss of the protective film or slime coat, which covers the fish's body. Many fishermen use lip-gripping tools like Boga Grips, or similar ones made by Berkley, and Rapala. These lip grippers allows you to handle the fish without actually touching it and removing slime coat.

Never drop a fish on the bank or in the bottom of the boat and allow it to flop around. This removes the protective film and knocks off scales. This opens the way for infection to set in and can cause the fish to die. Also injuries from the fall can be fatal in themselves.

Don't hold fish in the eye sockets. This may blind it or cause serious eye injury and infection.

Make every effort to remove deeply embedded, swallowed hooks. (Keep needle nose pliers, forceps or a hook disgorger handy.) The latest research shows that hooks will not rust out of a fish. Instead, the fish will die a slow death.

Get a fish back into the water quickly - one minute maximum. This is plenty of time to admire your walleye and take a quick photo and a measurement. Be sure and have your camera and tape measure ready. If necessary you can place the fish in your live well and after it recuperates from a hard fight it can be photographed a little later.

When releasing a walleye or any fish, don't throw it into the water. Instead, release it gently with its head pointed down.

If a fish is bleeding, carefully remove the hook and place the fish in the live well to monitor its progress and if its condition does not deteriorate then return the fish to the river. If the fish is bleeding from the gills then the prognosis is not good. It should not be released until it is certain the fish will recuperate. Most generally when fish are hooked in or bleeding from the gills they will die.

If a fish rolls belly up when released, hold it upright in the water and move it headfirst only (not back and forth) until it comes to, or put the fish in an aerated live well and add ice and walleye saver. Then, when the fish revives, release it. If not you can use snap weights to their lower front pectoral fins and this will help keep them upright while they are recuperating.

## **Photographing Your Catch**

Good fishing is looming near by and with that the opportunity for countless memories. Memories, with very little preparation, can be saved forever on film.

It is amazing as to how many fishermen find it to big of a hassle to stop for one minute and capture a valuable memory on film. Pictures of family members and friends, taken on the water, are some of the most prized possessions one can have. Pictures help to remember the entire outdoor experience and when life gets you down or you get a little stressed out, all you need to do is look through your photo album.

Once you get used to snapping photos on the water, dead fish on your lawn look bad, and you'll wish you had started earlier. The easiest way to get started is to buy an inexpensive throwaway camera.

Both Kodak and Fuji make these cameras that take very good photos. So do yourself a favor and buy one. Stuff it in a zip lock bag and then throw it in your tackle box, boat or get two one for each so you are never without one.

Once you get used to taking the time to stop fishing long enough to capture a memory or two, you might want to move up in quality to a small 35mm camera with a zoom and a wide-angle lens. Prices vary a lot for these types of cameras. A Pentax WR-90 is a 35mm weather resistant camera that does take great photos. The lens will zoom from 35mm to 90mm and if it gets fish slime on it you just rinse it off. There are some weather resistant digital cameras as well and you may want to check some of them out too. It is much easier to just download the photos into your computer than it is running to the photo shop for more film and to develop what you have taken.

When taking fish photos there are a few things you need to remember:

Always use a flash to fill in any shadows. Shadows always occur under the bill of cap even on the sunniest of days. If you do not take this into consideration it could cost you an awesome shot.

Try to keep your back to the sun. Take a couple of extra seconds to consider the background, do you really want 10 other boats in the picture, when taking a photograph. Will the background give away your secret fishing hole?

Fill the picture up with the two most important items, the fish and the fisherman.

If you aren't prepared to take the



picture then put the fish in the livewell for a while. Let the fish relax while you continue to fish or get ready to take the picture.

Remember that some of the most memorable photos are of friends or family with a small fish, while sleeping, or just after they have climbed back in the boat after falling overboard. All the photos do not have to have big fish in them.

## Livewells

Livewells are an important part of walleye fishing and when catching a large walleye it can be placed in the live well to recuperate and then you can remove it for a photo shoot. Walleye saver is a chemical compound used in live wells that helps to calm the fish, promotes the healing of injuries and it promotes slime coat. By using this substance you actually help the caught fish to resist infection. When you are handling it and removing the slime coat, you are actually removing its protection for resisting disease and infection. The slime coat is necessary for the fish's survival. When handling the fish wet your hands first!

It is also important to keep the water circulating in the livewell to maintain an adequate oxygen supply in the water for the fish. It does no good to fill a live well and just have it full of water. The water must be recirculated through a spray bar or some other type of aeration system or you must continually replenish fresh water in the livewell. One of the best ways to keep the water temp constant is to put your live well pump on manual fill for the first half hour and then on auto fill so the water will be changed every few minutes. This will insure the replenishing of the oxygen and will maintain the water

temperature that the fish is accustomed to. In warm weather you may want to switch it to fill every hour instead of recirculation so as to introduce fresh water into the livewell. In hot weather the best way is to leave the controls on manual fill to keep the exchange of fresh water constant. Ice can be added on extremely hot days but be careful. The shock of placing a walleye into cold water from warm water after a long hard battle can also be fatal. Maintaining fresh aerated water in the livewell is the best option.

## A Process of Elimination

Fishing for walleye is a process of elimination. It is also a learning experience every time we take to the water. Whenever we don't have to work hard at catching walleye then we aren't learning anything new about them. And the more we learn the more fish we can put in the livewell.

If we pay attention, walleye are telling us things even if we aren't catching any. While catching walleye obviously tells us we are on the right track, not catching any walleye also tells us a lot as we continue to fine-tune our presentation and location. Walleye can become so finicky at times to things such as speed, depth, lure choice and color. But when the game plan comes together, wham bam. But, the process of getting dialed in can be a process of trial and error.

It can be very easy to over-think walleye fishing. Keep it simple. Approach each situation, no matter how complex with the attitude that there are always simple solutions. Keeping fishing simple can be one of the more difficult things to do. With the facts and information mixed in with advertising and

myths, learning what works and what doesn't can be a major challenge.

So, where does this process of elimination start? Can we eliminate a location after making one pass with a bottom bouncer and our favorite spinner? The process of elimination begins before you ever get to the water. You have probably heard this a thousand times but getting as much information from people who have been on the water recently can greatly narrow down your search. Get a feel for what depths have been producing fish, which presentations have been hot. Get a feel for the pattern that has been taking place on the water.

You must approach each piece of fishing information armed with one simple fact: fish don't think or make decisions. Fish react to an action. Realizing this, fishing can become quite simple, and the information that you obtain becomes quite clear and starts to make a difference.

While there aren't any hard and fast rules to live and die by, trolling often means eliminating water first. Unless you have a real good idea about fish location, it usually pays to keep covering water until either fish start showing up on the depth finder or a walleye is put in the livewell.

Don't just look for hookups or notice that your depth finder isn't showing you any fish. Your depth finder is showing you so much more if you pay attention. If you are not marking any walleye, that isn't to say that there aren't any fish in the area that you are working. If there are walleyes just left or right of the boat, they won't show up on a screen. Remember that a

typical transducer has a 20-degree cone angle. This means that in 18' of water your depth finder is only showing you a 6' circle below the bottom of the boat. That isn't even the width of most boats.

With an irregular contour or uneven bottom, even the best depth finders can lose walleyes within the bottom as you pass overhead. It's better to turn your zoom level up to 2X in shallow water, 4X if you are fishing deeper than 20 feet. The walleyes are on the bottom so there is no sense in seeing the top of the water on the screen.

In a perfect world we mark some fish and then pull cranks or bottom walkers through those fish and catch fish until the paint is gone from the crankbaits or the blade falls off the spinner. Too bad we don't live in a perfect world. All too often we work for each walleye, trying to establish some kind of a pattern while also realizing that no two fish are the same.

Catching a fish or watching another boat land a walleye is a start to the process of elimination of successful trolling. When you see a walleye, suddenly you have confidence that those marks on your screen are indeed walleyes and not carp or something else.

In one tournament my partner and I were not doing well and we noticed that almost everyone around us were catching walleye. This was getting hard to take and it we had to do something. Since we were trolling the same speed and the same depth as everyone else, it had to be what we were using to attract them to our hooks. After about 4 changes we tried a new setup that I had come up with and we put 6 fish in the boat in 40 minutes. The change was a minor one

but was a crucial step that put all our fish for the day in the livewell. Many times the change is not a major one and it may not seem important to use red instead of flame orange in your bead selection but it does to the walleye, and what makes a difference to them will determine how much of a success you will be at any given time.

Changes in speed or direction are two variables we can experiment with while trolling. I personally believe that changes in speed or direction can bring life and action to any thing that is trolled and trigger fish that are following the lure. Many people often look for a magic speed like 2.2 miles per hour but it often seems like the "change" in speed is what can be so crucial to triggering strikes from reluctant walleyes.

At times there seems to be a preference for a particular speed. Also... some crankbaits work better at different ranges of speed. There are periods where walleyes seem to prefer a crankbait slow rolled at less than two miles per hour. Other times when a crankbait is ripped by at three or more miles an hour gets the attention of a hungry walleye. Crankbaits really have a way of triggering touchy fish, especially when a change of speed is initiated by stalling the boat in neutral for a few seconds, making a few sharp S-curves or by simply pumping the rod.

Speed and changes of speed is something we can experiment with. At the same time we can experiment with lures and color. When you have the right lure on, you will know it but until you have the right lure selected, keep experimenting until a preference starts to emerge.

Most trollers have a couple of old

standby lures that always seem to produce. Every fisherman should have two or three of these "magic lures". Not because of what the lures do in the water, but because of what the lures do at the other end of the line. They instill confidence. When you fish with confidence you fish better. I have a lot of confidence in a particular pattern of beads that I use when trolling bottom walkers and my wife likes a certain color of smiley blade. You can bet that when the fishing gets slow we will have on our "magic lures" until the walleyes start to tell us something different.

But the best lure in the world won't catch any fish if you don't put it in front of the fish. This makes depth the most important factor in catching walleye or any other fish for that matter. For the most part whether you are fishing in 5 feet of water or 100 feet of water you have to have your lure on or very close to the bottom to catch any walleye. I have yet to here anyone catch any suspended walleyes in the Columbia River. Walleye do not tend to suspend in current situation as we have in the Columbia River system, therefore you must be on the bottom to get fish.

The last thing to tinker with is color. Color patterns often emerge and different color patterns seem to produce on different bodies of water. There is a long line of variables to eliminate before color. Have everyone in the boat use a different color to start out the day with. Try and stay with those colors until one person catches 2 or 3 walleyes while everyone else is getting skunked. While color is not as important as other things I don't have to be hit over the head with it to realize that it can make a big difference.

Trolling for walleye is a process of elimination. Pay attention to detail both below and behind the boat while going through the steps that narrow down location and presentation. Watch what the other fishermen are doing around you. Keep a log of each trip you make. A log can be used for future reference. Time spent not catching fish can tell you a lot if you are paying attention.

## **Practice CPR Catch, Photo, Release**

Remember, practice CPR on all the walleye over 24" that you catch. It's up to us to maintain the Columbia River the world-class fishery that it is now. If you have to have a large one mounted you can photograph it and measure the length and the take measurements on the girth every 2 inches from head to tail. By doing this a copy can be made by many of the taxidermists and the copy will last longer and look better than a skin mount will. And best of all, that trophy is still swimming and getting bigger and on its way to become a state or world record.

With each passing year, thousands of sportsmen and sportswomen join the ranks of catch and release anglers. By following the tips listed here, you will help to protect and preserve our fishing resource.

Washington State Walleye Record weighing in at 19 pounds 3 ounces. The fish was caught in the Tri Cities area of the Columbia River and was caught on a Mack's Lure 1.1 silver scale Smile Blade on February 5, 2007.

## **How do I become a better fisherman?**

Fishing consists of three things: your approach, your attitude, and

enjoyment. These three are all equal in importance. They all must be addressed in order for you to process the large amounts of information available to anglers today. Without these three things, your questions and the answers you need, will remain as individual pieces to a puzzle that you will have a difficult time trying to solve.

## **Your Approach**

Any kind of fishing is very easy to over think. In this subject most of us make mountains out of mole-hills. We have to learn to keep it simple. Approach each problem, no matter how complex it may seem, with the attitude that there is always a simple solution. Keeping fishing as simple as possible can be one of the most difficult things to do. Today in the fishing industry it is difficult to keep the Real Facts separated from and away from being intertwined with all the advertising, the myths, and fish stories. For one to recognize these simple facts can be a major challenge and it can be a most difficult task. Separating facts from advertising, myths, and information designed only to sell you products can be simple. However, you must approach each piece of fishing information with one strategic fact: fish will only react to an action. In order to make fishing simple it is imperative to understand this aspect and then the information that can make a real difference becomes clear.

## **Your Attitude**

The identification of a good fisherman is his smile. Your smile is your ticket to fishing success. Twenty years ago, you couldn't pass another boat without a wave or a smile, and a friendly, hello. You couldn't walk past another fisherman along the bank without

getting a smile and ask, "How are they biting"? Today that is a lost attribute in many areas of the river and instead of a friendly smile it is a threatening glare because that other person is fishing in "your stretch of the river" or he has anchored exactly where you wanted to be. This is really evident when one spends a few days sitting in a hog line waiting for a bite to occur. The more hostile the attitude the less info is passed between the fishermen and the fun and enjoyment has now lessened by a large margin and the fishermen are more interested in how to beat the other guy to that spot in the morning.

We, as a fisherman, don't have enough fishing days in our lifetime to do all the things that could be done and should be done on your favorite rivers or lakes, let alone tackling new waters. If you smile, it will open paths of communications and allow the exchange of fishing knowledge and believe it or not, you may just learn something about that area and how you can catch more fish. Joining a fishing club, attending a fishing seminar or fishing a tournament, are some of the things that will make you a better fisherman. Remember: It all begins with a smile and the right attitude and the willingness to teach another person what you know about your section of the river, about your favorite lake and what has worked best for you.

This does not mean you have to tell everyone your secret place in that river or lake and every little detail. But helping another person to understand what works where and when he should use it will go a long way and the benefits you reap from it may be more than what you gave away.

## Enjoyment

Enjoyment is another part of your fishing equation that must be considered and worked at. Enjoyment and fun don't automatically come with fishing. A fishing trip can at times be a great deal of work and little or no fun at all. Fishing today has changed dramatically from what it was 20, or even 10 years ago. Fishing today is too often squeezed into busy schedules, taking something we should enjoy and savor and cramming it into something that resembles more work than fun. Today fishing trips are high tech, with expensive equipment and all the bells and whistles to go with it, and people often get lost in the tidal wave of new stuff and not enough time to really make it worth while. Too often time is compressed and restricted into small segments that we allow ourselves for fun and enjoyment. This leaves a lot to be desired and replaces fun and relaxation, with frustration and the possibility of a family who hopes they will never hear the word fishing again!

Today's fishing trips leave much to be desired, as they are generally scheduled to fit into a particular time slot. "We've got to get there by 4:00 AM because I have to be back here by noon. This means a quick stop for bait, a few snacks and ice if you're not in too big of a hurry, launch the boat, hit your first hot spot, then the next, and so on. When a fish is eventually caught, it's admired briefly and then quickly thrown overboard and back into the water because you didn't have time to clean it anyway. Soon, your time runs out and it's back to the ramp you go because you have to hurry up and get back to whatever. Then, that night at supper, rather than a recap of all the fun you had, the first thing you tell the kids is, "Don't

forget to clean the boat". And we wonder why our children don't like to fish anymore! We are teaching them how terrible it is to go fishing instead of making it a lasting memorable experience that they will want to continue doing for the rest of their lives.

Twenty years ago fishing was a great event that involved the entire family. Planning started from mid-week to the week before with deciding where to go. Bait shops were called along with all your fishing buddies to find where the hot bite was happening. Kids made sure the grass was mowed and the trash was taken out, and the dog kennel cleaned, being certain not to leave any obstacles that could interfere with their plans to go fishing. Everyone in the family had apart in the planning and preparation to go on this gala event.

Bait gathering was also an event, not just something bought along the way to the river or lake. Everyone went out gathering nightcrawlers and getting worm slime all over your hands and then taking them home and collecting the moss and worm bedding to make sure they would last for the entire trip. Snacks weren't bought or picked up at the drive-through along the way because mom packed the lunch the night before with great homemade stuff that was better than what you could get at the store. Fishing was always for the day, or the weekend or until you were done, and most importantly there were no time limits. Most of the fish that were caught were kept, and even though they may not have been the biggest, dad always acted like it was the most important fish in the boat. Dark was the only time we knew to quit fishing or to be home, but it was always later than that. First, a stop

had to be made at grandpa's place, then Uncle Bob's, and to Dad's best fishing buddies who told us where to go, to show off the catch-of-the-day. Once home the duties weren't cleaning the boat, but clean the fish and listen to mom tell us how she was going to fix the catch for supper. The next day dad would take the film in and get it developed and from then on everyone who came to the house had to see the slide show and the history of little Johnny's first fish. The pictures would reassure the indelible images we had in our minds of a great family outing. These weren't just fishing trips, they were fishing events that involved the entire family and it was an event that everyone enjoyed talking about long after it was over.

It is easy to see how involving others can make you a better fisherman. You can go fishing more frequently, you will be able to meet more people and learn more places to fish and learn different successful techniques. The more you fish, the more you catch, and the more you catch the better you become, and the more fun you will ultimately have. These are three simple things for you to consider so you can build a strong fishing foundation: your approach, your attitude, and enjoyment. Strengthening this foundation will make your fishing experiences, events to remember instead of something you and your family would rather forget. You will be creating important assets of life and they are all those memories that sustain us in our later years.

Measuring and calculating the weight of walleye

Walleye weight = Length<sup>3</sup>  
2700

Walleye weight = Length x Girth  
46

Walleye Weight= Girth x Girth  
x Length divided by 800 will be  
close.

There are several formulas that  
are used to calculate the weight of  
walleye, these are two of the most  
commonly used.

Information in this article has been  
collected over many years and  
is the accumulation of data from  
many different sources.

### Walleye State Records

Alabama 10 lb 14 oz  
Arizona 12 lb 12 oz  
Arkansas 22 lbs 11 oz\*  
Colorado 18 lb 13 oz  
Connecticut 14 lb 8 oz  
Georgia 11 lb 6 oz  
Idaho 16 lb 2 oz  
Illinois 14 lbs  
Indiana 14 lb 4 oz  
Iowa 14 lb 8 oz  
Kansas 13 lb 10.56 oz  
Kentucky 21 lb 8 oz  
Maryland 11 lb 6 oz  
Massachusetts 11 lbs  
Michigan 17.19 lbs  
Minnesota 17 lb 8 oz  
Mississippi 9 lb 10 oz  
Missouri 21 lb 1 oz  
Montana 16.38 lbs  
Nebraska 16 lb 2 oz  
Nevada 14 lb 14 oz  
New Hampshire 12 lb 8.8 oz  
New Jersey 13 lb 9 oz  
New Mexico 16 lb 9 oz  
New York 16 lb 7 oz  
North Carolina 13 lb 8 oz  
North Dakota 15 lb 12 oz  
Ohio 15 lb 15 oz  
Oklahoma 12 lb 10 oz  
Oregon 19 lb 15.3 oz  
Pennsylvania 17 lb 9 oz  
South Carolina 10 lbs  
South Dakota 15 lb 3 oz  
Tennessee 25 lbs\*\*

Texas 11.88 lbs  
Utah 15 lb 9 oz  
Vermont 13 lb 7.04 oz  
Virginia 14 lb 6 oz  
Washington 20.32 lbs  
West Virginia 17.22 lbs  
Wisconsin 18 lbs  
Wyoming 17.42 lbs

World Record

\*Greers Ferry, Arkansas 22 lbs 11  
oz and is world record

\*\*Recently disallowed as a world  
record because true weight was  
unknown and there was not  
enough evidence supporting the  
reported weight of the fish.

Oregon is in 5th place for weight  
and Washington is in 4th place.  
With the quality of walleye we have  
in the Columbia River either Ore-  
gon or Washington will end up with  
the world record.



**John Grubenhoff with the current Washington State  
record weighing in at 20.32 pounds and the fish was  
caught in the Kennewick/Pasco, Washington area.**

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