

Fishing and Outdoors in WNY

Great Lakes fishing heats up

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On the local fishing scene, things are shaping up nicely. Smallmouth bass and walleye are setting up into their summer patterns, which means drifting the lower Niagara River with worm harnesses and jigs for walleye, while the bass respond to a wider variety of presentations.

Traditional drifts for walleye include Artpark, Stella, Jackson, and the Niagara Bar; they normally heat up at the beginning of July and stay productive for the rest of the warm weather months.

Try starting in 20-foot water early in the day and then progressively slide deeper as the day wears on. I have been successful catching walleye as deep as 60 feet on bright sunny days.

When it comes to brown bass, I normally start the day out casting the shoreline with spinnerbaits and crankbaits and switch over to Ned rigs or drop shots if the bite is slow or slows down as the day progresses. After wearing out the shoreline bite, I'll move into 15-20 feet of water to start, with the need to go deeper at times.

On the Lake Ontario front, the bite is on fire! Kings are the prime target right now and they have not disappointed in the least. Good to very good action is being reported lakewide using a mix of spoons and flasher and fly/cutbait combos in 70 to 350 feet of water. The key is find the thermocline, and you will find bait and fish preying on that bait. Lately, the thermocline seems to be 60-70 feet down, but that can change with wind and current.

To get the baits into the strike zone, anglers have been employing a variety of controlled depth methods including downriggers, divers, lead core and copper lines.

It seems like a strong year class of 2-year-old kings, which should be in the 8-12-pound range, but there have also been many 1-year-old or shaker salmon out there. Please take every precaution – and release the small guys as safely as possible, as they will turn into next year's tackle busters. I recommend not even bringing the little ones out of the water.

Also showing up in Lake Ontario boxes have been coho salmon, steelhead, lake trout and an occasional brown trout. These species can be targeted with the same presentations as the kings, but at different locations in the water columns with browns and lake trout being more bottom-oriented, while steelhead and coho salmon often occupy the higher zones of the water column.

The report from Lake Erie is that the walleyes from the west are starting to migrate toward the Buffalo area and should be found in good numbers soon. Each year, the schools of walleye leave the warmer waters of the western end in Ohio and head east to find cooler water temperatures located in the central and eastern basin.

It is estimated that Lake Erie is home to more than 100,000,000 walleyes. I said that right: 100 million catchable walleyes in Lake Erie. The most effective way to target walleyes that pass through New York waters is to locate one of these giant schools and present either worm harnesses or body baits at the depth, which the fish



Whether it's smallmouth bass in the lower Niagara or kings out on Lake Ontario, fishing is strong on WNY waterways. • The upcoming "Reelin' for a Cure" fishing tournament on Lake Ontario benefits women's cancer programs. (Submitted photo).

are marking on the fish finder. Most often, a good number of walleyes can be caught using a three-way swivel and a 3-ounce pencil lead weight to ensure the worm harness reaches the target zone on the bottom.

If the fish aren't on the bottom or cooperating, another option is to use divers and lead core to reach the targeted depth where the walleyes are located. Lake Erie is the shallowest of all the Great Lakes, and a good starting point is 50 feet of water. Then cruise around slowly until you mark fish.

In my opinion, there is no better-eating freshwater fish than walleye.

I love the options that summer fishing presents here on the Niagara Frontier. Knowing that we have world-class fishing, a few organizations have taken the opportunity to raise funds for their not-for-profit agencies through fishing tournaments.

Next month, Catching Dreams Charters (www.catchingdreamscharters.org) and "Reelin' for a Cure" (www.reelinforacure.com) will be looking to raise money for two great causes.

Catching Dreams offers children battling pediatric cancer the opportunity to head out on the water with local charter captains for some fishing and a few hours to forget about the challenges they face every day. I have witnessed how the therapeutic day on the water works and gives these kids a chance to smile.

"Reelin' for a Cure" raises money through a fishing tournament on Lake Ontario and donates funds to different women's cancer organizations. Another unique aspect of the event is that all the teams are comprised of women,

and they have some fun while raising important dollars. This year's beneficiary will be Hope Chest Dragon Boat Team.

Please take a minute to check out both of these worthy charitable causes.

I hope to see you enjoying the local outdoors. Every week, I produce a fishing report (Niagara County Fishing Hotline) and you can access it online at www.niagara-fallsusa.com or by simply calling 716-282-8992, ext. 4, to hear what's up in the world of fishing. It is updated every Wednesday.

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