

## An Open Letter about Walleye Angling Success

Sometimes guests have lots of questions about their trip to Northwestern Ontario's boreal forest. Especially if it their first time for a fly in adventure. Such is the case with a party coming up from the U.S. in North Carolina. Below is the best primer we can offer to those who are fishing in Canada for the first time, or the experienced angler. It is the response that Chrs Clemmons created to the questions. And who better. Chris is a member of our resource writers team, a tournament walleye competitor, and has been coming to Canada from his home in the Chicagoland area for over a decade.

I'm excited to see there's another group out there who's as interested in learning about big walleye as our's. You submitted some great questions to Wayne which I'll try to address one at a time.

But before we get to your questions, I'd first like to present some thoughts, on why I believe Wilderness North's lakes offer trophy walleye potential. Until 8 years ago, my brothers, some buddies and I used to fish Manitoba. We loved catching the numbers of walleye that the province offered, but often came home from our trips frustrated over the lack of size. We'd catch lots of 17 to 20 inch walleye and our largest, for the trip, would typically run about 23 inches. In 2000, I visited the Chicago Sport Show with the intention of finding an outfitter that was affordable and offered lakes with trophy walleye potential (26 inches or better). That's when I came across Wilderness North.

After they showed me their photo album, of larger than average fish, I asked them why they thought their lakes consistently produced larger walleye than the 8 or so lakes we tried in Manitoba? WN explained, First, "We have been promoting a conservation policy for several years." Second, "We strongly recommend that our guests release all trophy fish." Third, "Ontario allows anglers to use live minnows as long as they're purchased in the province." The photo album, along with those three points, sold me on Wilderness North, and 53 master angler walleyes later, our party is convinced that WN's conservation practices and the ability to use live minnows has made a huge difference in our success in catching trophy walleyes.

Robin, lets look at your specific questions:

1) ***Do walleye tend to run in groups as regards to size?*** Yes! Our experience in Canada and fishing some walleye tournaments has taught us that, generally, 12"-15" (male) walleye will run together, 16"-19" walleye will run together, 20"-23" fish will run together, and the 24"-30" walleye will mix in with the last group on occasion. I can't prove this, but I believe the size classes running together probably has something to do with their year classes. Also interesting, is that we've never caught a master angler walleye from an area where 12-15 inchers were prevalent. Nowadays when we come across a spot holding little "guys", we'll have some fun catching them for a few minutes and move on. I believe the key to identifying spots with trophy walleye potential is to find an area that produces a couple of 22"-23" fish in the middle of the day. Sometimes you might pop a trophy at mid-day but, most of the time, the true pigs will move up to feed in that area an hour or two before sunset. Make sure you are on the spot and quietly settled in a couple hours before dark. If it's going to happen that evening you'll know it pretty quick. First, you'll catch some 19"-20" walleye, then someone will catch a couple of 22-inchers, but when someone pops a 24" or 25", you can bet a master angler is somewhere close by. I truly believe the 26"-30" walleyes are always near the 24-25 incher's and when the weather, pressure, moon, and bait conditions are right, the hogs will move up and feed for a brief period of time.

***On WN lakes would one expect to catch the biggest walleyes in deeper water?*** It depends on the time of year. As a general rule of thumb, May and early June are when you should look for trophies to be in 2-10 feet of water near river mouths and or running water in back bays. In mid-June to early July, look for trophy walleye to be at the openings of bays in 5-15 FOW, especially if the bay has a narrow opening or a stream entering into it. Shiners and perch spawn at this time of year and big walleye will feed heavily on them as they enter and exit the bays. By mid-July and August, the trophy walleye will have moved to the main lake points, humps and reefs. During the day you might try fishing in 15-30 FOW. If you find the 20"-22" inch fish, it might be worth coming back to the spot that evening but try fishing a bit shallower. If you land a 24" or 25" inch fish during the day, it's definitely worth coming back to fish that evening. In late August and early September many of the trophy walleye will still be in similar depths as mid-summer (15-30 feet). You might find a few big fish holding slightly deeper but it's not until after turnover that you'll see walleye venturing into the 50-60 foot holes. The period of time that turnover occurs depends on the air temperature and wind conditions but, with a typical fall in northern Ontario, turnover doesn't start until about the time moose hunters are flying back to base camp. Water temp will constantly be in the mid - lower 50's.

***Any talk about Drop Shot fishing?*** That's a good question! Two things I've learned over the years walleye fishing; Always experiment with new things and never knock what other anglers are trying. (Knocking has come back to bite me in the behind too many times). We once had a situation where absolutely nothing was producing, so I rigged up a drop-shot. The drop-shot saved the day! If you're confident something might work, try it!

***Would you recommend big chubs or minnows to take in for deeper walleye?*** I strongly recommend taking some minnows! Like I said, we believe minnows are one of the keys to our success with big walleyes. In retrospect, I believe there are probably about the same number of trophy walleye in Manitoba as Ontario but because we were never allowed to use live minnows in Manitoba, we'll never know. I can understand why Manitoba is trying to protect their lakes from invasive species but, at the same time, I have complete faith in the quality of bait Wilderness North provides.

***I purchased some 20 Lb Suffix braid (equiv to 6 Lb test). Should I use a mono leader or since the depths are dark can I tie my jig directly to it?*** Most of WN's lakes are tea-stained and most of the time the walleye are so aggressive that using a braided line direct to a jig will not hurt your chances of triggering bites. In addition, braided line will help you detect light strikes in deep water and especially help with getting the hooks set into the tough jaws of those trophy walleyes.

***I've found braided lines to be tough to cut. Will this help if a pike hits my jig?*** Yes and no. The tensile (or true breaking strength at a steady pull) of a super braid in relation to its small diameter is far superior to monofilament. However, the one thing we all forget is that the 6 Lb. diameter of 20 Lb super braid is the same diameter as 6 Lb mono. A 6 Lb diameter braid has about the same abrasion resistance as 6 Lb mono. Yes, super braids are tough to cut with a sharp pinching type tool but for abrasion resistance braid is not much better. Try this experiment. Take a 20" piece of 20 Lb braid and a piece of 6 Lb mono and one line at a time, pull them taught between your hands. Then have a buddy shave a sharp knife across them. You'll probably discover, as I did, that both lines abrade about the same. Braids are best known for their hydro dynamics, sensitivity and low stretch power.

***I have seen some glow worm products and glow jigs, has anyone mentioned great success with these type baits?*** My brother Brad swears by glow jigs, especially pink glow jigs. I would guess that, of the 53 master anglers that we've caught in the past 8 years, pink jigs have accounted for 50% of them. The rest were caught on chartreuse or orange jigs and slip bobbers. We'll use a jig and twister or shad body to search for active walleyes but once we feel a spot has trophy potential, we'll remove the plastics and go with nothing but meat. We have a saying, "You can fool most of the fish most of the time but rarely can you fool the big ones." We believe the "real meal deal" gives us a better chance of fooling the trophy walleyes.

***Have you heard of any good walleye spots on the lake we fish?*** I haven't fished your lake but I'm sure Alan, Wayne or Mark could help. The thing to remember is that key feeding times for trophy Canadian walleye occur early and late in the day. If you find a spot that produces a couple nice size walleyes during midday, try the spot again during the prime times.

***We found a spot 6 feet deep, with grass. The area is the size of a football field and drops down into 40 feet of water around it. We caught several big pike and lots above 30 inches, I would guess there were good walleye there also, as I'm sure that's what the pike were feeding on.*** Six foot deep, weedy flats with deep water near by can be fantastic walleye producers in June, July and early August. Interestingly, the pike and walleye will coexist during the summer. However, about the third week in August, when the weather starts to change from summer to fall, pike go on a feeding frenzy and will drive the walleye out of the weeds. This is when pike live up to their nickname "Slue Sharks" and the walleye don't want anything to do with their attitudes. The area that you describe would probably be great in the summer for walleye, and using a 1/16 oz jig or a slip bobber pitched into the open pockets would probably be your ticket. But in the fall, you might want to try the closest land-based, sharp breaking rock point or bluff. Those walleyes that were driven from the weeds will use these steep structures to their advantage to pin down schools of bait in the fall.

***Do walleye tend to hang around a certain bank or hump, or do they roam around during the day?*** If there are Cisco's in the lake, big walleye will pretty much suspend and follow the Cisco's around all day. The key is to find a large hump or point where the walleye can herd the Cisco and pin them down. If you're lucky enough to be there when this happens, you might hit the mother-load. On lakes that don't contain Cisco's, we believe that the majority of trophy walleye rest during the day in 30 to 35 feet of water. Your best chance at a midday trophy is to fish in the 20 to 35 foot range, fish extremely slow and hope that one of those big girls didn't get enough to eat for breakfast. However, on cloudy windy days, it's a whole new ball game. Big walleyes could move up to feed at any time. We've seen reefs, troughs and points that are dead on calm, sunny days become hog magnets when the wind starts to blow. If you find a spot that looks good but you don't catch anything, try fishing it again once the weather changes.

***In a spot we called the walleye hole, we caught fish in the 20 inch range during the day. Would bigger walleye move in after dark?*** On a gin clear lake the larger walleye would most definitely move in after dark, but our experience on the tea-stained lakes is that the walleye fishing shuts down after dark. We've had our best big fish success two hours before dark 'till about a half hour after dark. The fishing shutting down has always baffled us because the actual water clarity in tea-stained lakes is quite good. Maybe Alan and Wayne know a good fish biologist in the area who can shed some light on this.

***I noticed only one walleye on the Master Angler was caught on a plug. I'm thinking about trying a deep diving crank bait down about 25 - 30 feet. Any idea why all the walleyes seemed to be caught on Jig and leech, I'm guessing no one fishes deep water with plugs?*** Robin, I think you hit the nail on the head. If you think about it, 80% of the anglers that fish Canada for walleye fish jigs 80% of the time. That doesn't leave much of a chance for deep-diving crank baits to shine. I like your idea a lot and if you look at the way many walleye tournaments are won, it's usually trolling a crank bait of some kind.

Just keep in mind that your best chance for success using a crank bait, is to have your lure in front of as many fish as you can, as much as you can. In other words, when you pick a spot to troll, make sure its a large area and you mark fish on your graph across the entire expanse, otherwise, you'll spend too much time trolling out of the strike zone.

***Do Walleye see a chartreuse & orange jig in deep water better than a black colored jig, or does depth remove all color and all look black?*** There is a lot of debate about depth and color. I believe that most everything (except glow) turns gray in water over 20 feet but two-tone jigs at least create contrast, and contrast is easier to see. However, our group's thinking is that if you're using meat it doesn't matter. Use the color that you've caught the most fish on and have the most confidence in.

***In front of the cabin, a great rock pile exists and falls off into 25 feet than further. Any suggestions on how to approach this spot?*** If the first and second breaks aren't too steep, I would slow troll a jig and minnow around the deep edges during the day. However, if there's wind, clouds, or it's the evening, I would try the top of the rock pile. One of the most productive presentations we've found for Wilderness North's trophy walleye is slip bobber fishing. Use minnows late and early in the season and minnows or leeches in the summer. I think the key to tricking the truly big 'eyes is to give them something that they really want (like live bait) and present it as naturally as you can. Also, once you find a spot with trophy potential, shut down your motor, even in moderately deep water. Lastly, be as stealthy as you can and be patient. They'll move in for you!

Robin, thanks again for your great questions about locating and catching trophy Canadian walleyes. I hope my long winded answers help you to unlock the true potential of the lake you fish.

Also, would you mind if I give Wayne a copy of our correspondence to be used for an article, as we get closer to the season? I think he could use our information to help other guests who have the same questions and passion for walleye as you and I. (We promise to keep your lake's name a secret)

If you have any more questions or need more detail about the ones you asked, please don't hesitate to email or call. Also, if you would like to share some of your pike success tactics, I'm always willing to learn.

Hope you find those pigs and have a great season!

Thanks  
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walleye and pike trophy fishing.

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