

MAY 1998

\$2.00



Woods-N-Water News

Michigan's Premier Outdoor Publication

**BEAR
MAULS
HUNTER**

**MOTOR
CITY'S**

Muskies & Walleyes

Long Lining

BROWNS

1998 Deer Season

PROPOSALS

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TURKEY TIME

- Finding turkeys
- Doubling up on tough toms
- Tactics for tricky turkeys



Greg Hobbs' record book gobbler.
See story inside.

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For decades, Hayward, Wisc., has laid claim to the title "Muskie Capital of the United States." It's a moniker it may soon have to relinquish if Michigan's Lake St. Clair muskie population continues to boom. Where anglers in other states might fish for years to capture one legal-sized muskie, diehard Lake St. Clair muskie addicts often boat hundreds of huge, trophy muskies in a single season, all in the shadow of metropolitan Detroit.

Fact is, Lake St. Clair's muskie fishery is unequaled anywhere in the world, and there are indications that it should get even better.

"The muskie fishing on Lake St. Clair is as good as anyone can remember right now," said Mike Thomas, Fisheries Research Biologist at the Mt. Clemens Research Station. "all indications are that the muskie population is doing very well in Lake St. Clair."

Thomas said that a number of factors have combined to facilitate the explosion in the numbers of this top-of-the-line predator. Thomas sighted a decrease in exploitation, cleaner and clearer water, and an increase in macrophytes of submergent plants as the reasons St. Clair's muskies are flourishing.

Pollution abatement was a critical first step in starting the lake's rebound and surprisingly, zebra mussels have added to the cleansing effect. With better water quality, a tremendously diverse aquatic plant community began to bloom on Lake St. Clair. The weeds are important because they provide a substrate on which sediments can settle and hold while causing a filtering effect on suspended particles in the water.

Clear water favors sight-feeders, like muskies. The microphytes also provide required habitat for aquatic insect communities which support baitfish, as well as yellow perch and walleyes, that muskies feed on. It's a classic example of a healthy, thriving food chain.

Thomas indicated that one type of submergent vegetation, chara, is particularly important to Lake St. Clair muskies. Vast beds of chara have become increasingly common in the northern part of the lake, near Anchor Bay, where many of St. Clair's muskies spawn.

Muskies are broadcast spawners and the crevices and niches in the bottom-hugging chara makes for ideal muskie spawning habitat and allows for better survival of young muskies. Once muskies hatch, there is a bounty of food for the growing fish. New attitudes in the angling community toward catch and release of muskies has insured an ample breeding stock, too.

Unlike many locations across the nation where muskies are sought, catching muskies on Lake St. Clair means speed trolling. At over 250,000 acres, trolling on ex-

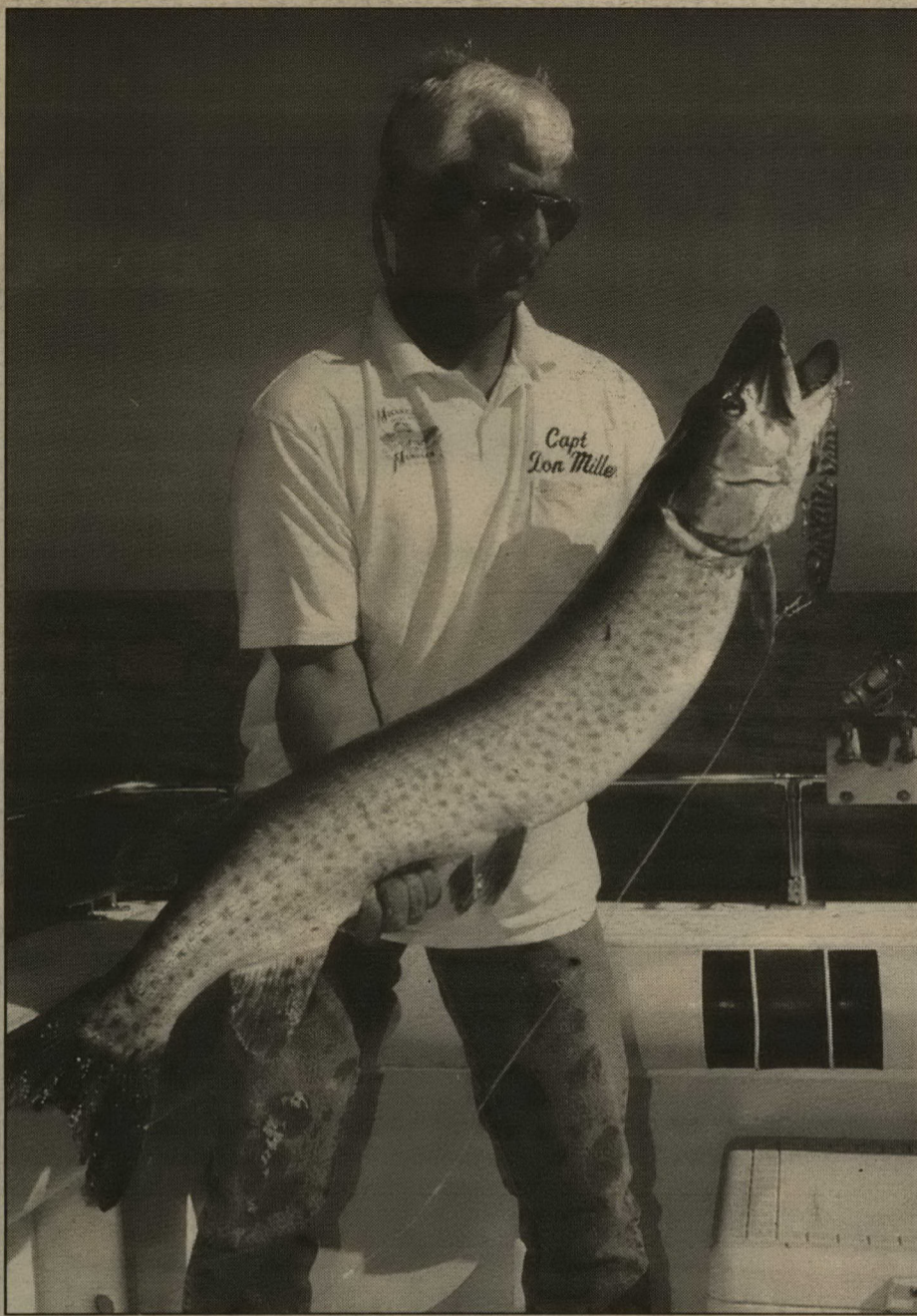


Photo by Mike Gnatkowski

MOTOR CITY MUSKIES

By Mike Gnatkowski

pansive Lake St. Clair represents the quickest and most effective way of covering a lot of water and finding active muskies.

Don Miller, veteran charter skipper, learned the basics of muskie trolling from Lake St. Clair muskie legend, Homer Le Blanc, and has further refined the technique over the years. Miller incorporates a spread of down rods pulling 4 oz. to 1-1/2 lb. weights and

planer boards to systematically strain the water. Trolling at breakneck speeds of 5 to 6 mph, Miller tows 8-inch Believers and T-3 Terminators in frog and perch patterns that simulate muskie forage.

Many of the baits are run from 10 to 30 ft. behind the boat in the boil of the prop wash. Theory suggests that muskies are attracted to the sound and turbulence created by the passing boat. The lures zipping by provide the illusion of a dis-

oriented baitfish to a hungry muskie. Trolling at high speed forces the fish to make a quick reflex-decision strike or miss out on dinner.

Plugs that Miller favors, like the Believer and Terminator, are fine-tuned to run true at high speeds and produce a seductive wiggle. An absolute necessity of any good muskie bait is a strong set of hardware to withstand the savage strike and toothy maw of *Esoc masquinongy*.

Miller highly recommends using quality equipment and terminal tackle if you expect to win a battle of hand-to-hand combat with a big muskellunge. Most quality muskie plugs for Lake St. Clair trolling run between \$7 and \$15.

Captain Miller said anglers will find plenty of big muskies lurking in U.S. waters when the season opens on the third Saturday in June each year. Areas around the North Channel of the St. Clair River, Anchor Bay, New Baltimore, Huron Point and Black Creek are hotspots for early season muskies that hang out in the shallow, warming waters after spawning.

Another popular location is near the dumping grounds off the mouth of the Detroit River. Spoils and channel dredgings there create subtle structure that muskies correlate with. As summer progresses, muskies begin relating more to Canadian waters off the Puce and Belle Rivers. Miller indicated that the 16 to 18 ft. depths off the Ruscom River can be hot in August.

September finds muskies patrolling the depths off Trombley Creek, Thames River and St. Luke's Bay on the Canadian side. As waters cool, a migration toward U.S. waters begins, and some of the biggest fish of the season are taken there during October and early November.

One of the easiest ways of catching the muskie of a lifetime is to book a charter with a reputable captain. Experienced guides know where, when and how to fool trophy Lake St. Clair muskies. Last year, Miller boated 278 muskies for his clients; 25 were entered in the Master Angler Program. All but a few were put back into the lake.

"Graphite reproductions and the new catch-and-release category of the Master Angler Program has made it easier to convince customers to release fish," said Miller. "That way, they get a great mount and the fish lives to fight again." Those interested in booking Miller for a chance at a trophy Lake St. Clair muskie can contact him at (313) 429-9551.

Thirty-pound leviathans don't come easy anywhere you fish for muskies, but with Lake St. Clair cleaning up and greening up, the Motor City might be the best place in the world to land the muskie of your dreams. ■