

OUTDOORS

No shortage of muskies for a reason

Late summer and early fall means big muskies on Lake St. Clair, and plenty of them. Fishing for these toothy predators has been fantastic lately and success appears attributable to several factors.

Clearer water in Lake St. Clair, partially a result of zebra mussel infestation, is a boon to sight feeders like bass, pike and musky, and their populations have increased markedly. Michigan DNR fisheries biologist Mike Thomas of the Lake St. Clair station explains it this way.

"With the improvement of water clarity, Lake St. Clair appears to be returning to some of the conditions it was in before man and the industrial revolution swept through," says Thomas. "With clearer water, sunlight penetrates deeper, stimulating underwater plant growth.

"This gives more cover to forage such as minnows and crustaceans, thus increasing their numbers. Sight feeders like bass, pike and musky feed more efficiently in clear water, which means their populations should rise. With the practice of catch and release, their average size should also increase."

A popular method of trolling on Lake St. Clair is running two 5-foot rods directly in the prop wash with the lures running a mere 4-feet astern, only inches below the surface. Most anglers now carry planer boards in their musky hunting arsenal. These take the place of the once popular outriggers and heavy 12-foot rods formerly used to keep lures spread out and away from the boat.

Muskies require fairly heavy tackle for several reasons. One is to get the fish to the boat as quickly as possible so it can be released in good shape. Another is that fast trolling speeds (at times approaching six mph) really put a strain on gear.

Reels are generally large level winds spooled with 50-pound test braided Dacron line and 100-pound mono leaders. Fireline in 30-pound test is popular for musky trolling lures off planer boards.

Believer lures and Spike's Spoons in a variety of patterns take a lot of St.

Clair muskies as do large spinners, huge A.C. Shiners and No. 18 Rapalas. Musky lures require the size and color patterns necessary to catch these toothy critters and must carry super tough hooks and strong connecting rings to remain intact under the stress of battling a Great Lakes musky.

There are no secrets on Lake St. Clair, and if other knowledgeable anglers are abandoning one area for another, it is because the fish have migrated. August sees an eastward movement into Ontario waters up to the Ruscom River and Stoney Point.

When September rolls around, and depending on weather, the fish continue a slow eastward movement past the Black Forest to just off the Thames River.

Here are some areas that are known to produce musky in late summer and early fall. Most are in Ontario waters and require an Ontario license. Unlike the U.S. side of Lake St. Clair, where we have a two-rod per person regula-



Finding muskies, such as this enormous one, is not uncommon on Lake St. Clair. Improvement in water clarity is one of the factors that have greatly improved fishing conditions.

tion, in Ontario, each angler is only allowed one rod.

Area 1 — Belle River and the Belle River Hump are two of the first stops as musky begin to migrate through the Ontario side of Lake St. Clair. The mouth of the Belle River will hold musky in water depths of 4 to 12 feet.

Just north of that and east of Buoy "H" is what's known as the Belle River Hump. The "Hump" rises from depths of 15 to 19 feet and trolling large minnow type baits off planer boards near the edges of weedbeds can produce some monsters.

Area 2 — The area north of the

Ruscom River's mouth and east to Stoney Point also is known for holding musky. This is generally the second stop along the musky's migration route into the cooler and deeper waters of eastern Lake St. Clair. Again, successful anglers will work weedlines in 8 to 12 feet of water. Active musky and weedlines are just about synonymous with one another.

Area 3 — The waters from the Black Forest north and east to the mouth of the Thames River are rich in forage for bass, walleye, northern pike and especially big musky.

Baitfish here include emerald shiners, sheepshead, suckers, shad-

and small walleyes. This is one of the most productive areas in Lake St. Clair at nearly any time of year. This is the place to pull out all stops and use those giant sized plugs, spoons and spinnerbaits.

There are a number of excellent boat launches along the U.S. side of Lake St. Clair; here are two of them.

Metro Beach has an excellent facility just south of the Clinton River. To get there from I-94 head east on the Metro Parkway to the park. A daily park sticker plus launch fee is required.

Harley Ensign Memorial Access is at the mouth of the Clinton River and reached by heading east off I-

94 on North River Road 1.6 miles to Bridgeview Road. Proceed half a mile south to South River Road and turn left for three miles.

For perhaps that musky trip of a lifetime here are several guides I can highly recommend. Capt. Tom Arlington can be reached at 1-810-725-8233 and Capt. Don Miller can be reached at 1-313-429-9551. These are two real pros with tremendous success records.

For fishing information and lake conditions, call the Lakeside Fishing Shop at 1-810-777-7003, Angler Rod & Sports at 1-810-329-2253 or Outdoor Adventures at 1-810-765-4430.