

Postspawn Reservoir Walleyes

by In-Fisherman



In spring, prespawn walleyes move to specific shallow locations ranging from about one to six feet deep. In reservoirs, walleyes often migrate to the current of feeder rivers or smaller tributaries in creek arms, keying on gravel and rocky sections near incoming rivers and tributary streams, main-lake points, and shorelines. Some walleyes may even spawn on riprap along the faces of dams and causeways. During years of high flow, even flooded shoreline terrestrial vegetation may provide a place for spawning.

Last spring, during an In-Fisherman Professional Walleye Trail (PWT) tournament held on Lake Francis Case reservoir in South Dakota, the tournament coincided with the tail end of the walleye spawn, which gave anglers the opportunity to witness interesting walleye behavior associated with spawning.

Early in the mornings, walleyes could be seen thrashing and spawning in the shallows. The most intriguing behavior, though, was watching anglers hook, fight, and net a fish, only to find one or two additional walleyes flopping in the net. The males were so aggressive that anglers frequently netted multiple fish that followed and chased a hooked walleye right into the net.

Although it's rare to actually net walleyes following a hooked fish, instinct during the spawning period is to follow and chase other males that are possibly chasing a female, or pursuing food. In fact, the next time you're fishing during the walleye spawn, consider looking for other walleyes following behind or below those you hook. You may be surprised at how many walleyes are following.

Again, males are the aggressors and remain competitive throughout the spawn. This aggressive behavior often starts a few weeks before the spawn and lasts for several weeks after peak spawning. Some of the best walleye action of the year is targeting aggressive males in key shallow locations.

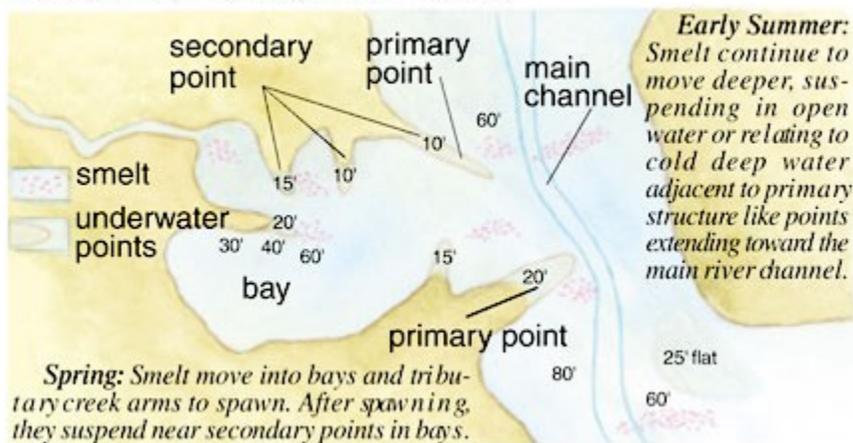
Females, on the other hand, often stage slightly away from spawning sites, yet seek warmer water during the Prespawn Period while their eggs mature. They generally don't spend much time at the actual spawning site. In fact, once they move in and drop their eggs, they almost immediately vacate the area.

To catch postspawn females, key on adjacent deeper structure. The action likely won't be as fast as the shallow bite, but classic deeper spots offer the best opportunity for larger females. Look for females staging on main-lake points or holding along the edges of old river or creek channels. In creek arms, primary points near the main river channel or midlake structure like submerged islands or humps are potential spots.

POSTSPAWN RESERVOIR VARIABLES

During postspawn, many things can dictate walleye location. Fish can be found in deep water within upstream creeks and river sections, suspended in the midsection of the impoundment, and in the shallows of creek arms. Depending on conditions, a percentage of a reservoir walleye population may key on shallow forage, while others key on coldwater baitfish out deep, and yet others search for food both deep and shallow.

Reservoir Smelt Patterns



Forage types, abundance, and seasonal movements noticeably affect walleye location. Forage abundance also can have a big effect on walleye location. With abundant food in the shallows, walleyes may stay shallow or at least move shallow to feed. Available food allows walleyes to feed relatively quickly and easily without expending much energy.

In spring, a variety of baitfish species seek similar shallow spawning locations, triggering walleyes to stay shallow to feed on baitfish preparing to spawn. Shad, chubs, and juvenile fish like white bass and perch tend to reside in shallower water, using shallow cover like weeds, scattered rocks, or flooded wood.

Walleyes key on different forage species as seasons change and as baitfish make seasonal movements. In western reservoirs, a spawning run of spottail shiners in June or July into creek arms triggers walleyes to home in on this shallow feeding opportunity.

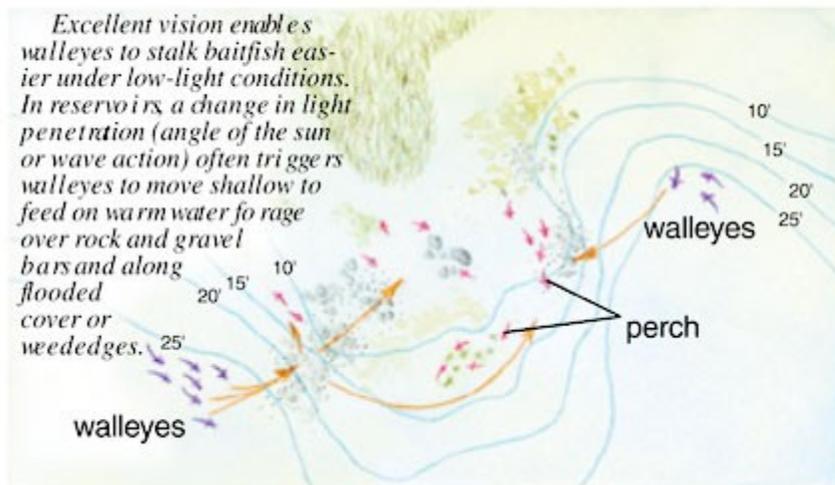
In many reservoirs, self-sustaining populations of coldwater baitfish (smelt or alewives) create deeper feeding opportunities and fishing patterns. As summer approaches, walleyes in reservoirs with coldwater baitfish tend to roam and suspend, often following these baitfish out to open water. If the predominant forage is smelt, by early summer the walleyes follow them deeper, out to the edges of the flats or points, and even out to the main basin where they suspend near baitfish schools.

Water levels also determine how long walleyes remain shallow. During low-water conditions, walleyes tend to quickly vacate the shallows and migrate back out to deeper structure soon after the spawn. When water levels are high, though, shoreline vegetation floods, serving as good spawning cover. The shallow cover also provides shelter for baitfish and young-of-the-year forage. Walleyes may remain in creek arms throughout the summer to feed on baitfish in the flooded brush or grass.

Wind — or lack of wind — alters walleye location in reservoirs. During calm clear conditions, reservoir walleyes may drop deeper, depending on forage availability, water clarity, and temperature. In deep water, walleyes generally are easier to graph, and the exact depth at which they're holding can be pinpointed. They're generally harder to catch, however, compared to walleyes in the shallows.

Wind creates current that often triggers walleyes to move and feed. Wind blowing waves into shorelines, points, and bays mixes sediment into the water, creating a cloud of murky water (mudline). In spring, stained water absorbs heat from the sun, warming the water, which may attract walleyes that have yet to spawn or baitfish preparing to spawn. Either way, fish seek warmer water in spring, and so should you.

Shallow Baitfish Patterns



In all cases, changes in bottom composition, shape of the contour, or depth tend to concentrate walleyes in limited areas, even in the shallows. Sometimes these changes are subtle — depressions, gravel patches. Other times, they're obvious and even visible to the eye — rock slides along shore, flooded wood cover, deep-water swing-ins toward shore.

In reservoirs, what you see on shore often extends out into the lake, indicating the shape and nature of the nearby terrain. Use your eyes to help locate reservoir 'eyes.

Remember, reservoir walleyes tend to roam and they're really on the move in spring. Conditions change daily, even hourly, however. Note weather conditions, wind direction and speed, water temperature, and time of day. Points, windswept shorelines, shallow ledge shale drops, stained shoreline water (mudlines), flooded shoreline vegetation, or riprap are prime shallow locations. Depending on conditions, consider doing some reservoir roaming yourself to find postspawn walleyes

(Courtesy of www.infisherman.com)