

Pat's Picks For Spring Walleye

By Pat Milburn, Anglers' Inn, Sugarhouse

JIGS

Jig fishing for walleye is one of the most productive methods all year long. It is especially effective in the spring when the walleye are concentrated for the spawn. Feather jigs, hair jigs, tubes, Foxee jigs and curl tail grubs in pearl, chartreuse, glow, white, orange and two-tone colors are all effective walleye lures.

Generally these jigs are either tied on or threaded onto a lead head hook. The lead head hooks vary in weight depending on the presentation and the depth of water the angler is planning on fishing. For super slow presentations and/or very shallow water use 1/32 to 1/16 ounce lead heads. For deeper water and/or faster presentations use larger sizes, from 1/8, 1/4 to 3/8 ounce.

Lead head colors vary from plain lead to glow, pearl, chartreuse, orange, green, etc. These colors either match or contrast with the jig body. Picking the right combination of colors will help stimulate strikes and various color combinations should be experimented with until the angler finds which combinations work best.

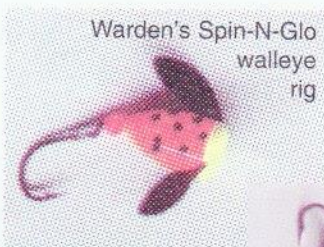
CRANKBAITS

Countdown Rapalas number 5, 7 and 9 in silver, chartreuse, firetiger; Shad Rap Rapalas in the same colors and Model "A" Bombers are effective walleye baits all year long. When the walleye are up in the shallows in the spring and again in the late fall, use the shallow running or floating forms of these baits. In the summer and winter, when the walleye are deep, use the deep runners and the rapid sinking forms.

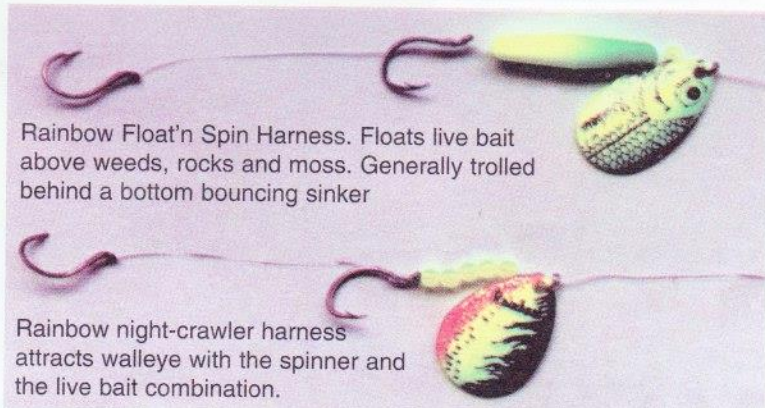
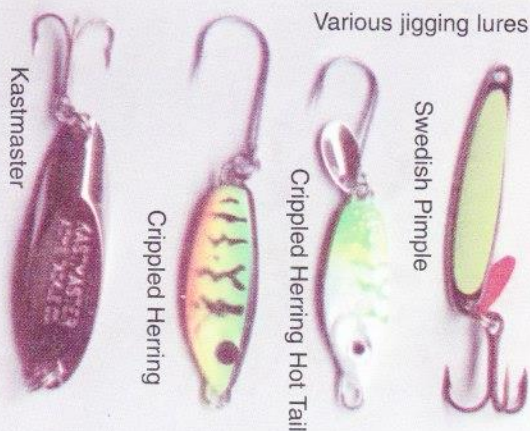
Other varieties that are effective include the Rattlin' Rapala and the Blue Fox Vibrax Minnow Spin. The Rattlin' Rapala gives the added dimension of a rattling noise as the lure moves through the water. The Minnow Spin combines the flash and attraction of a tuned spinner with the action and look of a sinking balsa body.

The size, shape and angle of the lip on these lures, in

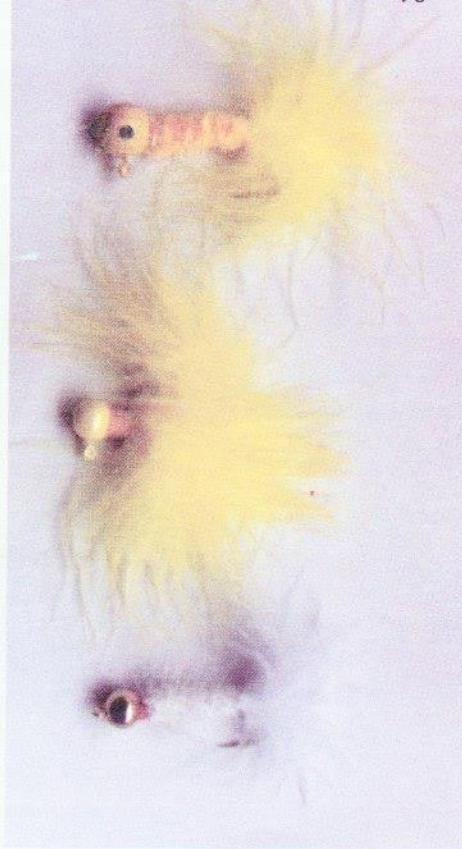
conjunction with the speed they are pulled through the water, determines the amount of action the lure has and the way it performs. How fast or slow the lure dives or sinks is largely a func-



Walleye catching spinners



Several sizes and kinds of feather jigs



tion of the lure design (floating, sinking, deep running) and the speed of the retrieve or the trolling speed. Choose the lure shape and design that will get down to the fish and then stay there.

SPINNER RIGS AND WORM HARNESS RIGS

Generally used in conjunction with slip sinkers or Bottom Walker/Rock Runner trolling sinkers, worm harness rigs and spinner rigs are deadly for walleye. Walleye love worms, small minnows and leeches and these rigs make it easy to present the walleye's favorite foods right in their feeding lanes.

Troll one of these rigs behind a bottom walking sinker and the odds of catching a big walleye will be dramatically improved. These rigs are best during walleye pre and post spawn and then through the summer and fall. Walleye don't eat much during the actual spawn so success will fall off then.

Remember that it is against the law to fish with live minnows in Utah and game fish minnows are generally not allowed as bait, dead or alive.

At Willard Bay it is against the law to possess gizzard shad, dead or alive. At Deer Creek Reservoir, yellow perch are off limits, dead or alive. However, they may be used as bait (dead) at Gunnison, Yuba and Willard Bay reservoirs and dead white bass may be used as bait at Utah Lake. Most of the tackle shops sell frozen minnows and fish meat so it shouldn't be hard to get some meat to tip your rig with.

FLOATING JIG HEADS

If you are going to fish in an extremely rocky, brushy or mossy area, where touching the bottom with your lure means a sure snag, rig up a floating jig head. The floating jig head can be fished with a curl tail grub, tube, other soft plastic lure, worm, leech or minnow. These lures are especially effective when used in combination with a walking slip sinker similar to those pictured at the bottom left of this page. The slip sinker will bounce through the rocks and keep the rig down in the productive zone but the floating head will keep the hook up and out of the snags. These rigs can be effectively cast and retrieved or trolled.

Again, because these rigs are generally tipped with live bait, they are most effective during the prespawn and from the post spawn through the summer and fall.

Bomber, Model "A"



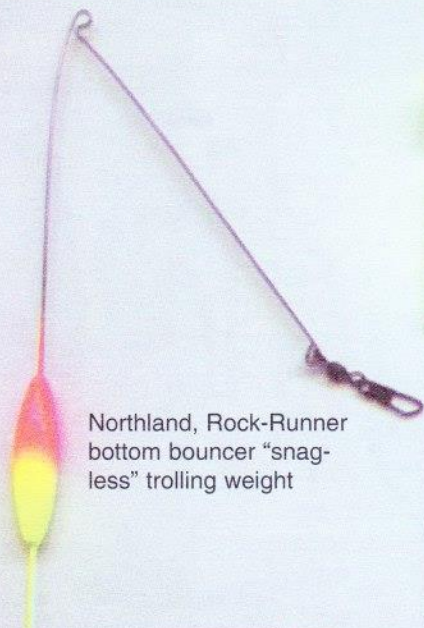
Rapala, Shad Rap, Shallow Runner



Rapala, Shad Rap, Deep Runner



Northland, Rock-Runner bottom bouncer "snag-less" trolling weight

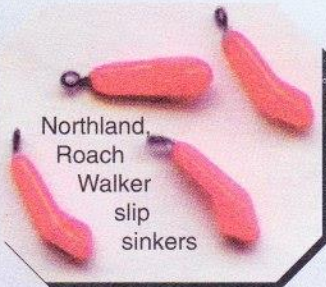


Luhr Jensen "Walleye Bottom Walker" free sliding sinker.

The free sliding feature insures more pickups and helps the angler detect light bites. It also allows the angler to feel the bottom without hangups.

An extra weight and beads are also included.

Northland, Roach Walker slip sinkers

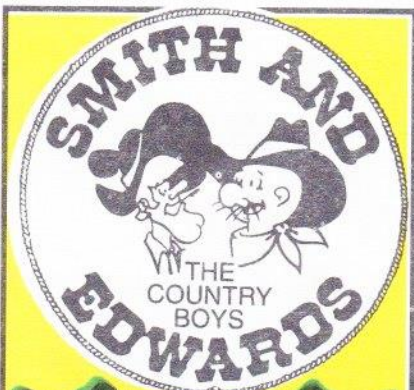


Rapala, Countdown, Sinking

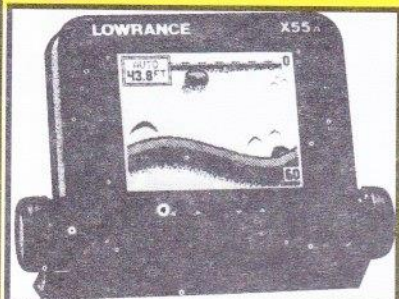


Blue Fox, Vibrax, Minnow Spin

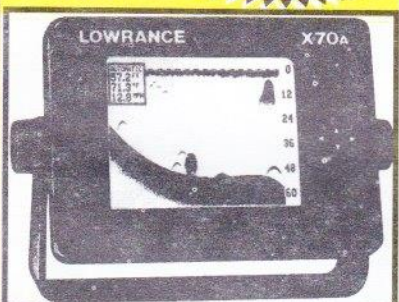




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JIGGING SPOONS

One of the most over-looked methods of taking walleye is vertical jigging with a jigging spoon tipped with a worm or minnow. This technique is most effective during warm weather when the walleye move deep, as deep as 60 to 70 feet at Deer Creek, Starvation and Lake Powell. Use Crippled Herring, Swedish Pimple or a Kastmaster. Vary your jigging motion from short swift strokes to long, slow strokes until you find out which stroke is most effective. Use a fairly stiff rod and a non stretch line for best results.

The new "superlines" such as SpiderWire are ideal when jigging deep. These lines have zero stretch, are extremely thin for their strength, have less drag than monofilament, have no memory and are extremely sensitive. The one drawback is that they are EXPENSIVE.

When vertical jigging for walleye, the fish tend to pick up the lure on the down stroke, when the lure is falling. This makes it extremely difficult to determine when the fish actually has the lure in its mouth and requires split second timing. If your rod is too limber or your line stretches too much, you won't catch many fish and you'll quickly learn all about frustration.

SCENTS

Scents are a big plus when walleye fishing. Dabbing some on your lure or bait can definitely improve your fishing success and the scents will mask any human odors, like after shave, hand lotion, gasoline, cigarettes, sweat, etc) that you might have on your hands while you are rigging up your favorite lure.

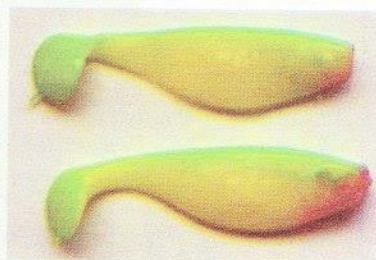
Berkley Powerbait Walleye Attractant Natural Scent and Flavor works well, as does Smelly Jelly Crawfish Sticky Liquid. Just apply the scent frequently to your lure, bait or scent holding device. Some people will even smear the stuff all over their hands before handling a lure. We don't recommend you do this while eating a sandwich or just before lunch. The odor that comes off the liquid scents is pretty powerful.

FLIES

Fly fishermen can get in on the walleye action by casting big streamers right up into the rocks during the early spring and again in the late summer. In the spring the walleye will be in the shallows spawning and a streamer on a floating line is just the ticket. Generally short strips and a slow retrieve will work better than a fast retrieve with long strips. In the late summer when the forage fish fry get big enough for the walleye to eat, streamers fished in the shallows can be very effective.

Bright colored streamers (minnow imitations, wooly buggers, zonkers, etc) on a nine foot leader will attract the walleye.

Generally the best fishing will be in the late evening, as the sun is setting or again in the early morning. The secret is to keep casting and moving until you determine



Northland
 Float'n Jig
 Heads

where an active school of fish is feeding.

If you are going to fish for walleye, you have to remember that these fish get big, as big as 12 to 15 pounds and catching a four or five pound fish is quite common. Use a stiff enough rod and strong enough leader to get the job done. Hooking a six pounder on your three weight probably wouldn't be a good idea.

UTAH'S BEST WALLEYE WATERS

1. Willard Bay. Since the introduction of gizzard shad into Willard, the walleye population has gone nuts. The population is rapidly increasing in numbers and in fish size. Look for Willard to be Utah's top producing water in 1996.

2. Starvation Reservoir. Starvation has declined some since its glory days in the late 1980's but there is still a tremendous population of walleye to be had there. The average fish size will be 12 to 14 inches but there is always the chance to pick up a monster, up to almost 15 pounds.

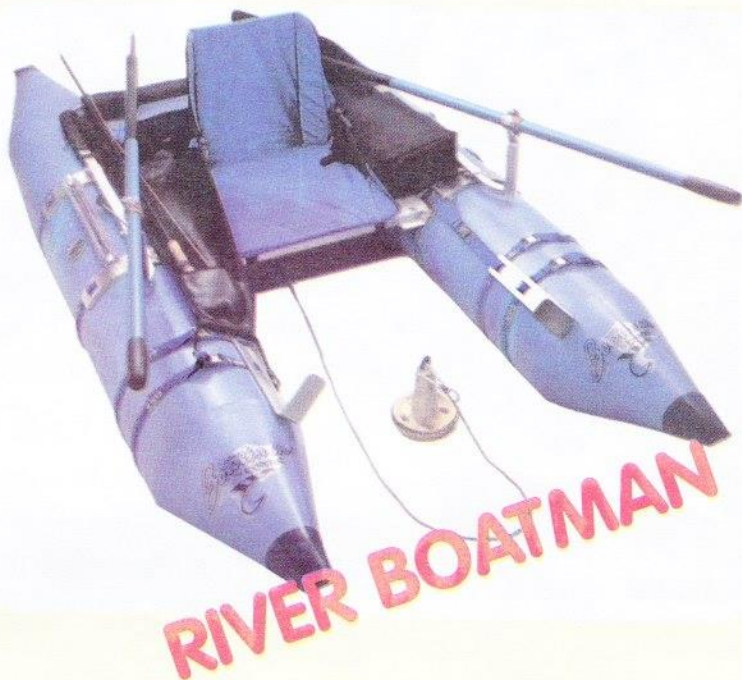
3. Utah Lake. The walleye population has never lived up to expectations in this big water due to forage fish problems. However, there is a healthy and apparently, stable population of fish in the water that range up to about 12 pounds. Most fish will be in the 12 to 14 inch range.

4. Deer Creek Reservoir. The collapse of the perch population dramatically affected the walleye population in Deer Creek and it has declined from its glory days in the early 90's. Still there is a stable population of walleye here and some of them get big. The current state record walleye (15 pounds 9 ounces) came out of the Provo

River, above Deer Creek, during the spawn in 1991.

5. Other walleye waters. Lake Powell (the walleye population is on the rebound here and fishing can be very good during the spring), Yuba (the walleye population has crashed here and fishing will be tough), DMAD, Sevier River below Yuba, Gunnison Bend, and Cutler.

Editor's Note: Pat Milburn is an avid walleye fisherman that has been fishing for 'eyes almost since they were introduced to the state. You can find him at the Sugarhouse Anglers' Inn (466-3921).

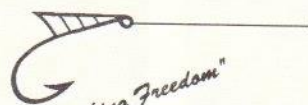


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