

Long Weekend Smallies

With May Long weekend right around the corner, anglers across the regions are no doubt getting excited and geared up for the upcoming walleye season, ready to load the boat into their favourite lake, and kick off summer.

While walleye opener is certainly a great time to be out, as fishing is generally quite good, there are other things that peak my interest at this time of year, one being chasing smallmouth bass. As much as I enjoy walleye fishing, there's nothing like battling an energetic bronzeback, known for their exceptional fights, and acrobatic manoeuvres, making for some incredibly exciting angling opportunities.

Some of the best bass fishing I've had comes very near to the walleye opener, near the end of May. During this time of year, when water temperatures move into the 60°F, bass become more active, and are into their spawning stage, usually spawning from mid May into June. As the water warms, and during all phases of the spawning season, smallmouth can usually be readily accessible to anglers, found in the shallows, usually in water averaging 2-10ft deep. As spring progresses and the water warms, they start to move a bit deeper, and begin transitioning into their summer

habitat, but during this time of year, bass can be readily located, both in great numbers, and large in size.

Often while fishing for bass during this time of year, anglers can see bass cruising in the shallows, and can cruise the shoreline casting as you go can be a great tactic. Targeting areas with structure in shallow water like sunken trees or logs, boulders, or around docks is your best bet, as fish usually concentrate around these areas.

One thing to consider at this time of year, is actually fishing bass when they are actively spawning; usually the females will spawn, and leave the nest site, males will stay and guard the nest. You may want to avoid pulling them off the nest, as it leaves the young unprotected and vulnerable to predators, and as bass around nesting areas can be fiercely protective, they will likely hit anything in sight. Often these areas are apparent, and you may see a small, circular cleared patch on a sandy or rocky bottom, somewhere the fish have cleared as a nest.

Depending on the area you are fishing, there may be certain size and limit restrictions during this time of year; in Zone 6, immediately surrounding Thunder Bay, the seasons have recently changed, and the bass season is open year round, with no restrictions, whereas in neighbouring Zone 5, near Quetico Park, there is a limited season until June 30, allowing only one fish under 35cm to be harvested. Protecting these large spawning fish. Now whether or not the season is restricted where you are fishing, like anything, returning that large breeding stock back into the population is always a good idea, and often

with bass, its not hard to harvest enough for a meal, allowing you to let the larger breeders go. While talking about eating bass, it's one species that's often overlooked, but can be very similar to eating walleye, and can offer anglers more opportunity to bring fish home, or give you a chance to give your favourite walleye lake a break by bringing home a limit of bass.

Fishing bass in the shallows can be incredibly exciting, as you often see fish swimming about, and you also see them aggressively chasing your bait. Some of my favourite and most productive small-mouth baits would be a plain and simple floating Rapala, a brown tube jig, and a top water bait like the Rapala skitter pop. It's hard to match the excitement

level when fishing of watching a hungry smallmouth smash a top water bait.

When looking for areas to target bass, its generally very wide ranging, most anywhere with cover, bass can be found, as well as areas near river mouths, creeks, culverts, rip rap, rocky/weedy shoreline, or anywhere that attracts bait. Bass are plentiful, and are found in many north western Ontario lakes, so if you don't know of any, do some research; look at the Crimestoppers maps for fish species, do some reading online or talk to friends. One recent and great new resource is the new Fish ON Line program on the MNR website that shows maps of area lakes, and provides information on the lake, and fish species in it.

Whether you're not a die-hard walleye angler and looking for a change, having a slow day, or just looking for something to fill your walleye fishing weekend, spending some time chasing bass can be a worthwhile investment. It can also be a great opportunity to bring out your children, spouses, family or friends, and have some fun together.



Corine Noyle with a smallmouth.

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