

OF THE OUTDOORS | GARY HOWEY

# March Madness: Walleye Fishing

BY GARY HOWEY  
Hartington, Neb.

Well, it's March, and a beautiful one it is, temperatures have been unbelievably warm, and everyone is ready to get out and enjoy the outdoors.

This year, many of the outdoorsmen and women I know have contracted March Madness, no, not because of college basketball play offs; it's because of the unbelievable fishing that's going on right now.

The last couple of weeks, the weather has been excellent for fishing and with the water temperatures on the rise, with the water coming through the dams at 40 degrees, the walleye and sauger will be setting up in close proximity to their spawning grounds, waiting for that magic 47-48 degree temperatures triggering the spawn.

Several of the guys I fish with and I have been taking advantage of the unseasonably warm weather and fishing the river between Ft. Randall and Gavins Point Dam.

On our last trip, as we headed up river, cruising past cabins and trailers that had been damaged or destroyed by the flood of 2011, it was obvious the river has changed dramatically as huge sand bars, or should I say islands appeared before us.

Where there had once been deep holes were now shallow water or acres of sand, in some areas, these sand dunes appeared almost desert like, as when the wind blew, small sand storms would roll out across the islands.

Once we found our way up river, we located a large gravel bar adjacent to a slack water area with 9 to 19 foot of water lying just below, which appeared to be an ideal walleye and sauger staging area.

Throughout the winter and early spring, walleye and sauger will have been moving upstream in search of these ideal spawning areas and then stage in these areas, awaiting the spawn and this area seemed to have everything needed.

Using jigs tipped with minnows, we slowly drifted through the hole, nearing the end of our drift, I felt a slight bump on my line and set the hook. After a short battle, a chunky, but short walleye came to the net, as in the part of the river we were fishing, walleye and sauger needed to be at least 15" in order to be kept, so I released the 14 3/4" walleye back into the river.

On the next drift, my partner, Bill Christensen set the hook on his Lindy rig, bringing our first legal fish into the boat.

On the next two drifts the only thing we could put in the boat were a couple of northern, when Roger Merkel, who was running the boat decided to give up on minnows and switched to a 3" Pearl Berkley Gulp as minnows just weren't cutting it.

A few drifts later, Roger set the hook and brought a good walleye to the boat and before I could get the first fish out of the net, his dead rod started jumping. As fish number one hit the floor, I scooped up the 2nd, another 18" walleye.

This was the beginning of an excellent trip, with Merkel, eating a thousand taking a fish on each of our next two drifts

Well, it didn't take me long to talk Roger out of one of his Gulp baits and shortly there after, I



OUTDOORSMEN PRODUCTIONS PHOTO  
Team Outdoorsmen member Bill Christensen of Hartington, Neb., is pictured with two of the 12 walleyes he, Roger Merkel and Gary Howey took on a fishing trip on the Missouri River.

connected with a good fish. Bill held out a little longer, but after Roger's 3rd fish, gave in and hooked on a Gulp minnow.

On the next drift, Merkel once again connected with a nice sauger, then it was my turn and after a couple of pike and as we neared the end of our drift where the depth started to decrease, I hooked onto a good fish, which fought hard, taking line, my first thoughts were I'd hooked into another pike, but as the fish neared the surface, Merkel who was lurking over my shoulder with the net, yelled, "it's a big walleye, don't horse him, don't horse him," "DUH".

After a short battle, Roger slid the net under yet another big fish, which later proved to be a large male as were all but one of the twelve walleyes we took that day.

On the next two drifts, Bill caught on fire, landing three good fish, allowing us the perfect ending to a beautiful March day on the water, helping us to fill out our three-man limit.

This is the time of the year, when walleye and sauger fishing can be excellent as good numbers of fish are located in the deeper holes adjacent to their spawning areas.

Fishing during and since the flood has been excellent, so look for the fishing on the Missouri

River from the North Dakota border all the way down to Nebraska and Iowa border to be excellent, as the flood waters moved a lot of fish through the dams on down river.

Minnows generally will be the bait of choice, but don't be afraid to experiment a little bit as if the fish aren't biting on one color bait or minnows, don't beat the water to death just because that's what they bit on the last time you were there, switch, do the old change up and try a different color or smaller jig, change speeds or switch from live bait to an artificial as sometimes, the most subtle change can really make the difference.

Good luck fishing, no matter what species you're after, fish now, fish often and enjoy this great weather we've been having.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb., is a former tournament angler and fishing and hunting guide. His award winning Outdoorsmen Adventures television series can be seen on Fox affiliates throughout the upper Midwest. Outdoor Adventures radio can be heard Monday-Friday on KVHT 106.3 and ESPN 1570 Radio. For more outdoor columns, new products and Game & Fish information check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

## TROPHY SPOTLIGHT



TOP LEFT: Corey Privett caught this 8-pound walleye on Springfield River during a recent outing.



TOP RIGHT: Justin Goeden caught this 9-pound, 4-ounce walleye below Gavin's Point Dam on March 17.



RIGHT: Corey Privett caught this 8-pound walleye on Springfield River during a recent outing.

PHOTO FROM CAPTAIN NORM'S

## Briefs: Bloomfield Sportsmen's Retreat Set

BLOOMFIELD, Neb. — The fourth annual "A Day with the Guys" Sportsmen's Retreat will be held at the Glad Tidings Bible Camp, 89238 544 Ave., Bloomfield, Neb., on March 30-31.

On March 30, shooting ranges open at 4 p.m., and there is a supper at 7:30

p.m. Workshops will be led by presenters such as Bill Lewis, professional archer representing Matthews Bow Co., Primos Calls & Mossey Oak; John Hunt, Professional Hunting and Fishing Guide; Dan Gould, Shotgun 201, and others.

Featured speaker will be Keith Cline from Naper, Neb., who will be sharing from God's Word. Special featured guest will be Rick Buoy, cowboy poet.

Activities include: workshops, prizes and give-a-ways; a wild game feed; outdoor shooting for Rifle, Revolver (must be in Holster), Muzzleloader, Sporting Clays, 3-D Archery Courses; Buy, Sell, Trade Swap Meet (bring good quality usable items); and a silent auction (results at 4 p.m. Saturday).

All-day events include hunting, fishing and wildlife videos. Contests for Largest Deer Rack and Longest Pheasant Feather, etc., will be held, with awards given out Saturday afternoon. All youth must have adult

sponsors.

For more information or to register, call (402) 373-2797 or (402) 373-4433.

## Walleye Egg Collections to Begin in Neb.

LINCOLN, Neb. — The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission will begin collecting walleye eggs earlier than usual this spring because of the recent warm weather. Closures and warnings for boaters and anglers again will be in place.

Game and Parks staff will begin collecting walleyes the night of March 26 at Sherman Reservoir, when the dam is closed, and then during that week at Merritt Reservoir and Lake McConaughy.

Closures and warnings are needed to keep fishing lures and boat props from becoming entangled in nets. Anglers and boaters must avoid Game and Parks boats and nets at all three reservoirs.

At Lake McConaughy, a portion of the face of Kingsley Dam will be closed temporarily to fishing from sunset to sunrise. The northern

third of the dam — approximately a half mile — will be off limits to bank and boat anglers.

The area of the dam closed during walleye egg collection will include the area from the beginning of the rocks on the north end to a point south on the dam that Game and Parks will mark with a flashing hazard light.

In addition, there is a special boating regulation on Lake McConaughy that applies to anglers fishing the dam area April 1-30. From sunrise to sunset, fishing from a boat within 30 yards of the dam is allowed only on that portion of the dam 200 feet north of the outlet, with travel in a counterclockwise direction required.

Walleye netting will take place until the egg quota has been met. Gill netting along the dams at night will capture females while electroshocking boats will collect male walleyes. Spawning operations will take place on the reservoirs during the morning, then the fertilized eggs will be transferred to Nebraska state fish hatcheries for hatching.

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