

Of The Outdoors | Gary Howey

Fishing In The Weeds

BY GARY HOWEY

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As spring heads summer, water temperatures will begin to warm up and all species of fish will become more active.

The shallower dark bottomed bays are going to warm up quickly, allowing shallow weed growth to blossom.

In many of the smaller lakes and ponds, heavy vegetation can make it difficult if not almost impossible to fish.

If you're planning on doing much fishing this time of the year, you'll need to figure out how to fish the weeds or you'll be spending more time un snagging your bait and retying on your lures. You could leave the shallower weedy lakes and ponds and head for the deeper lakes or reservoirs, but, if you do, you'll miss some of the best fishing around.

In this article,

we'll talk about several ways you can productively fish in the weeds.

There are all types of aquatic weed grow in the upper Midwest and depending on the body of water you're fishing, they'll appear and die back at different times.

In the shallower, clearer ponds, lakes and streams, weed growth occurs much earlier and be heavier than those areas with the dirtier more turbid water.

Most bodies of water have several types of weeds, cattails, bull rushes, lily pads, cabbage beds, hydrilla and wild rice.

All of these produce oxygen and during the heat of the summer is where fish will be because of the weeds comfortable oxygen levels.

When fishing the weeds, you should use heavier line than normal because weeds are abrasive and will quickly weaken or cut line.

Once hooked, fish will bury deep into the weeds and you'll need to pull not only the fish, but also, also a bunch of weeds, so you'll need heavier line to get the fish up and out of the weeds.

Bulrushes and cattails inhabit most ponds, lakes and backwaters of the river. Bass, walleye, bluegill, perch and pike will be using these areas in search of an easy meal.

Let's talk about what type tackle works for each species of fish when fishing in the weeds.

Walleye/Sauger/Panfish

For walleyes, sauger and panfish, a livebait rigs tipped with worms, nightcrawlers, minnow or leeches worked along the edge of the weeds or under slip bobbers are an excellent choices.

The Northland Roach Rig or a slip sinker rig is basic rig, consisting of some type of sinker that allows the line to slip through; these could be Roach sinkers, Bullet Weights, or egg sinkers. Tie a snap swivel below the slip sinker, then; depending on the depth you are fishing would be a snell



PHOTO: TEAM OUTDOORSMEN ADVENTURE
Team Outdoorsmen Adventures Member Eric Brandreit (Big Stone City) with a Northern taken while fishing the weeds.

with a #2 hook.

Tipped with one of the above-mentioned baits, this rig is deadly early in the season and when fished during cold fronts.

With this rig, once the fish picks up the bait, you either drop back on your rod or feed the fish line, because the sinker isn't tied directly to the line, the fish can move off with the bait, feeling little resistance and is more apt to hold onto the bait.

These rigs can be fished throughout the weeds, in the pockets between the reeds and rushes or along the weedline.

Slip bobber rigs fished long the edge of the weed are also very effective. This rig is made up of a moveable or slips bobber, a bobber stop to set the depth, a small split shot (weight) with a small hook tipped with a minnow or leech. These rigs are easy to cast and by using the wind to drift the bait over a productive area, you can present you bait naturally in the areas where the fish are located.

Bass/Pike

The above baits will also work well on bass and pike. Other baits that will work well in the weeds for bass and pike include; spinnerbaits, weedless spoons and buzz baits.

You will also run into cabbage beds and lily pads in our waters, growing from the bottom, spreading out along the surface.

These weeds provide fish with a place to duck in under, avoiding the sun. Since most of the weeds are on the surface, fish can easily cruise through them while waiting for something to drop in for lunch.

In these types of weeds, a weedless surface spoon, floating weedless frog, jig & pig, weedless worm rig, Texas rigs, buzzbaits or spinnerbaits will bring the fish up out from under the weeds to get at your bait.

Try casting a buzzbait, spinnerbait or weedless spoon into the open pockets of the weeds and then power cranking hard on your reel, you'll be able to keep the bait running along the surface just above, allowing it to work over and through the weeds.

With the weedless top water frog, you'll want to cast it right into the weeds, let it set a second or two, allowing the disturbance it made to subside and then slowly work it back across the top of the pads and floating vegetation. Pause from time to time, giving the bass the opportunity to zero in on the bait.

Bass will sense the bait touching down and will follow it across the weeds and come up right through the weeds to get at it.

Once the water boils around your bait, when the fish inhales your bait, you will need to set the hook hard in order to force the bass up out of the weeds.

When using a jig & pig, weedless worm rig or a Texas rigged worm, cast into the open pockets and then work the bait right through the middle of the heaviest cover. Jig & pigs are weedless, so you won't need to worry about snagging up. If you use plastic worms, van be rigged either Texas or Carolina, making them weedless.

Texas rigs are made up of a bullet weight, a large offset hook and a plastic worm. Thread the bullet weight over the line and then tie your hook on below it. Rigged this way, allows the weight to slide up and down your line, letting you work over and through the weeds. Thread your worm on up over the eye and then run the hook back through the worm, making sure you keep it straight, with the hook point just under the surface of the worm, which makes the bait weedless, but still allows good hook penetration with a good hook set.

Like the Texas rig, the Carolina rig uses a slip sinker with a couple of subtle changes: below the weight, you attach a snap swivel and then tie an 18" to 2-foot leader with the same style hook your plastic worm. This allows the plastic worm to float up making this rig deadly for bass cruising just off the bottom. All of the baits mentioned above will work well in hydrilla and wild rice.

With spinnerbaits or buzz baits, the key is to getting your bait running in an opening in the weeds, then skip over and across the weeds, with spinnerbaits, you will want to let your bait drop into the open pockets.

You will want to hold your rod tip high, allowing your bait to drop slowly into the open pockets and the crank hard on the reel as the bait settles into pocket allowing your bait to spin fast enough to slide up over and hop across the next clump of weeds.

Summer fishing can be hot in many ways, once you've figured out how to fish the weeds, hot summer days on the water will be a lot more enjoyable and productive.

Gary Howey, Hartington, Neb. is a former tournament angler, fishing and hunting guide. He is the Producer/Host of the award winning Outdoorsmen Adventures television series, seen on the MIDCO Sports Network Thursday at 5:30 pm and Sunday at 10:00 am. He and Simon Fuller Co-Host The Outdoor Adventures radio program on Classic Hits 106.3, ESPN Sports Radio 1570 in Southeastern South Dakota and Northeast Nebraska. In Northwest Iowa, it airs on KCHE 92.1 FM. If you are looking for more outdoor information, check out www.outdoorsmenadventures.com.

OUTDOORS DIGEST

State Campgrounds Fill Up For Memorial Day Weekend

PIERRE – Even though it was gray and drizzly, thousands of avid campers made the most of Memorial Day Weekend at South Dakota State Parks. The majority of state park campgrounds were full, and cancelled reservations quickly filled.

Water traffic was high all weekend as fishermen dodged rain showers and headed out on the lakes. Some visitors even hit the beach, taking advantage of Monday's warmer temperatures.

State park camping reservations can be made online at www.campsd.com or by calling 1.800.710.CAMP.

Survey Suggests Good Recovery For Many Wildlife Species

LINCOLN, Neb. – All wildlife species surveyed during the 2015 April Rural Mail Carrier Survey appeared to have a good overwinter survival heading into breeding season. Those species also appeared to have rebounded from the severe winter of 2009-2010 and the drought of 2012-2013.

Species surveyed were pheasant, bobwhite, prairie grouse, wild turkey, cottontail and jackrabbit.

Barring adverse weather conditions during the nesting and brood-rearing seasons and suitable habitat availability, populations appear poised for a good production year.

Compared with April 2014, the relative abundance of all species reported in the survey was higher in 2015. Increases in regional and statewide numbers for pheasants were significantly higher in all regions except the Northeast, where the numbers were comparable to April 2014. Bobwhites were significantly higher in the Southeast and West Plate regions, as well as statewide, but comparable to April 2014 in all other bobwhite zones. Cottontails were significantly higher statewide and in the Central, Sandhills, Southeast, and Southwest regions, but comparable to April 2014 elsewhere. Wild turkey, although higher, were not significantly higher than in April 2014, regionally or statewide.

The survey was conducted April 6-9 by 442 rural carriers, who made observations of species while traveling 193,688 miles of rural roads in 88 of Nebraska's 93 counties.

The survey was conducted before the recent heavy rain, unseasonable snow and cool temperatures across much of the state. It is possible some of the breeding population was lost to these events, but it is likely that the nesting season for most game birds was not impacted. The next scheduled survey is in July.

'Biggest Season Yet' On Tap At Post Playhouse

The Post Playhouse at Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford will begin what is being billed as its biggest season yet Friday, June 5.

The popular attraction will present five shows on a repertory schedule through Aug. 9. Opening the first three Fridays in June, in order, are "The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas," "Grease," and "Cinderella." The remaining two, "All Shook Up" and "A Man of No Importance" will open the first two Fridays in July.

Throughout the summer, 73 shows will be offered and the playhouse has ramped up its offerings of matinees. The second weekend in July the Playhouse will begin featuring double showings on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, in addition to three shows on Saturdays, followed by a matinee on Sundays.

Also new this year, one popular pricing option has been expanded. People can buy five-show "subscriptions," in addition to the previous four-show option, at considerable savings over what it would cost to buy tickets individually.

Cook: Going With The Flow On Remote Minnesota River

BY SAM COOK

(c) 2015 Duluth News Tribune (Duluth, Minn.)

LITTLE FORK RIVER, Minn. _ No sooner had we pulled the canoes up the river bank than we heard the distant growl of thunder. The river men, with 16 miles of the Little Fork River northwest of Cook behind them, knew what to do.

With a minimum of conversation, they moved with purpose, rigging tarps, grabbing dry firewood and pitching a tent. The thunder closed, but by the time the first rain drops began to pelt the tarps, we were set.

Someone already had kindled a fire, and that first whiff of woodsmoke smelled as good as it must have to some cave dweller centuries ago. It meant warmth, hot food _ life.

My partners _ Duluth's Tim Bates, 49; Dick Haney, 73; and lrv Johnson, 75 _ are river men. They have paddled elsewhere, namely the Canadian Shield lakes of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. But given a choice, they prefer to take their paddle strokes on moving water. Haney thinks this must be his fifth trip on the Little Fork, which winds north and west about 140 miles from near Cook until it spills into the Rainy River on the Minnesota-Ontario border. We would paddle 50 miles of it in its wildest stretch for three days in mid-May.

"I've always been a river paddler, seeing what's around the corner," said Bates, associate director of the Univer-

sity of Minnesota Duluth's Recreational Sports Outdoor Program. "A river connects you to the old days, to the people who were here before. The rivers were the high-ways. This river is flowing the same as when the loggers were here. You can sit here and visualize the voyageurs paddling up this river, or the aboriginal people, or the Ojibwe, making their living."

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has mapped 30 rivers and the North Shore of Lake Superior as designated state "water trails." Bates and Johnson and Haney have paddled most of them in northern Minnesota over the past 20 years. Along with previous trips on the Little Fork, they've paddled two sections of the upper Mississippi, the St. Louis, the Big Fork, the St. Croix, the Whiteface, the Vermilion and the Kettle. The rivers are interspersed with some falls and rapids, but for the most part flow placidly from bend to bend. In 50 miles, we would run two sets of rapids.

Lots of critters

The skies had cut loose by the time Haney began simmering a blackened pot full of rice, black beans and fresh vegetables. We had been concerned, with the dry spring, that the river might not be high enough to paddle. Low water can make some rapids impassable. But it had rained before the trip, and with this deluge we would be paddling a rising and turbid river for two more days.

We had seen nobody else on the river that first day. What we had seen _ and

would continue to see _ was wildlife. Two bears that first day. One whitetail. An ancient snapping turtle sunning on a bank. Ducks bursting into flight at every bend _ mallards, wood ducks, teal. Spotted sandpipers, bank swallows, kingfishers, turkey vultures.

The rain continued all night. The next morning, after Bates prepared us a meal fit for lumberjacks _ eggs over easy, venison sausage, hash browns, bagels _ we broke camp. As we were loading the canoes, the rain stopped. We liked that _ until snow, driven by a north wind, began pecking at our rain gear. Snow squalls swirled around us at intervals all day, peppering our raw faces. We paddled mostly in silence, lost in our own thoughts, trying to will red blood cells to our extremities.

Cool fly-by

Once, between squalls, a pair of trumpeter swans flew up the river toward us. They looked improbably white against the gray ceiling, and they were calling in flight _ someone warming up on a bass clarinet. Just before they reached us, one swan flipped on its back, and the two birds appeared to lock feet for a second or two. None of us knew what that was about, but the sight of it was enough to warm our spirits for at least a mile.

The paddling was uncomfortable at best, but all of us had been in similar situations before. One morning, around another snapping cedar fire, we talked about that kind of adversity on wilderness trips. Johnson, sitting on his

camp stool, came alive with a memory from a trip 50 years earlier.

"One of my best days in the canoe _ I must have been 20, maybe 18 _ we went west to east across LaCroix (a border lake in the canoe country north of Ely) all day. Whitecaps _ oh, boy!"

He was paddling now, sitting on his stool, showing us.

"We were just pounding those waves. I'll never forget that day."

He wasn't complaining about that passage. He was ecstatic with the memory, the exhilaration of that challenge so many decades ago.

We all knew exactly what he meant.

Life among cedars

The Little Fork meanders through flat country, its banks flanked with black ash, a few white pines and some of the oldest cedar groves you're likely to see. Many

of the cedars were two or three feet in diameter. We looked for camps each night in one of those cedar copses, stringing our tarps among trees that had seen several generations of humans come and go.

It was good to see the sun again that final morning. Snow had fallen overnight, dusting the balsam fir boughs. Wisps of mist rode the river at dawn. The river had come up another 6 or 8 inches. Small logs and branches, some whole trees, would be traveling with us that day.

Bates stood in camp that last morning, sipping his tea, looking through cedar trunks at the river laden with silty runoff.

"The river of chocolate is flowing on," he said. "Or maybe it's butterscotch."

He thought about that for a moment.

"Either way, it's a sweet

river," he said.

He got no disagreement from the river men. We paddled 15 miles in just two hours to our take-out that day.

It is a necessity of river travel that paddlers have to do some kind of shuttle to get back to where they started. Early on, Bates had declared this would be a low-carbon trip. That's why his trusty 1971 road bike was lashed atop our packs all the way down the river.

At our take-out near the Minnesota Highway 65 bridge, Bates switched to biking gear and made the 37-mile ride to retrieve the van. A good man, Bates.

In a field of dandelions, Johnson, Haney and I took naps in the sun and listened to the swollen river gurgling past.

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