



Shallow Water WALLEYES

The Trophies of the Bay of Green Bay Flats

By Jeff Boutin

From the bow of the boat my client yells to me, “Look at all those walleyes!” Walleyes are one of the most sought after fish in the Midwest, and the Bay of Green Bay has turned into one of the top destinations for not only trophy walleyes, but great table fare as well.

It’s a general understanding that, due to the extra exposure of sunlight, the first areas to warm up in late April/early May, are the northernmost shallow bays. It is also a general understanding walleyes are mainly caught in low light conditions, either early in the morning or later in the afternoon or evening. Believe it or not, you can catch walleyes in 3 to 4 feet of water consistently, from late morning through early afternoon, even on sunny days. By the first week of May, which is the opening of the season for fishing, the water temperatures in the lower bay are generally in the low to mid 50’s. When the water temperatures are this cold, walleyes will travel long distances to get to water that might only be a few degrees warmer.

Typically in May, you can find walleyes on those 8 to 12 ft. rock reefs and on the edges of small flats or rocky points. We fish these areas early in the morning, but after a short time, the sun starts shining brightly and the bite starts to slow down or even completely shut off. Do the fish stop biting? Did they head off the reef and go into deeper waters? Here is a story that might answer those questions. Last May, I called my clients to set-up a time to meet at the dock. I usually head out around 6:30 to 7:00 a.m. Well, their idea of fishing was to head out around 9:30 or 10:00 a.m. One of them remarked, “You’re a guide, it’s not a problem, is it?”

I responded, “Nope, no problem, our goal is to catch fish all day long!”

So, the story goes like this: We meet at the launch, go

through the typical safety talk and head out. They climb into the Startcraft and after a 6 to 7 mile ride, I bring the boat to a stop. I start to explain how and where we are going to try and catch a few fish. I go up to the bow of my boat and set the Minn Kota in the water. I set the I-Pilot to head us towards shore and keep my eye on my Humminbird. As we are heading in, I keep my eye on the water temperature; 52 degrees, depth 12 ft., and my mapping, which shows we are coming up on a very large 3 ft. deep sand flat.

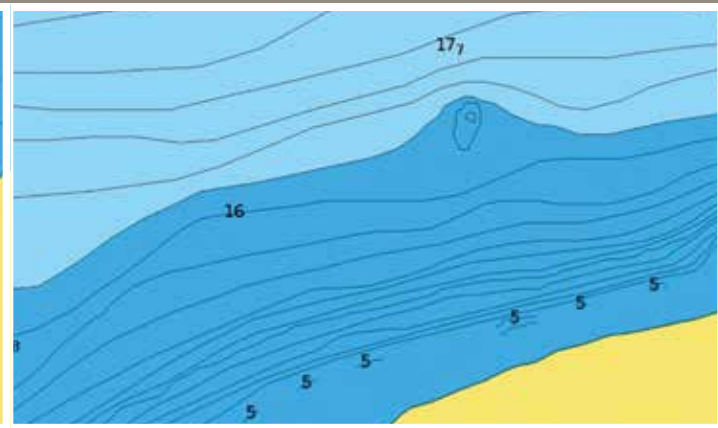
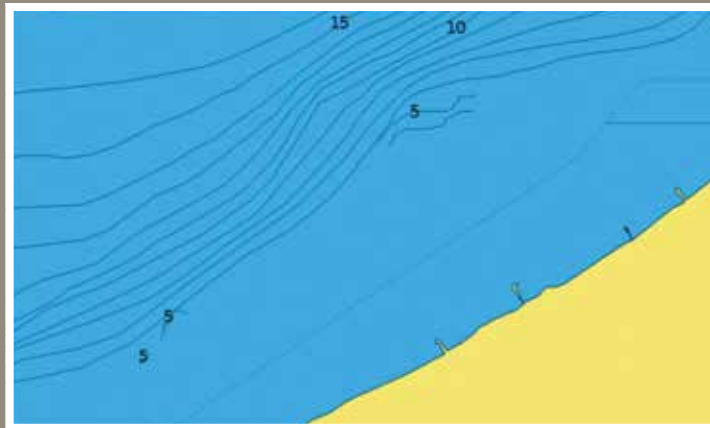
As we start to come up on the flat, my client asks, “What we are doing here? I can see the bottom. The water is crystal clear, and it’s 10:00 in the morning?” I proceed to tell him that this is where we are going to fish.

He laughs a little bit and tells me how he’s been fishing walleyes for more than 40 years, and never in his life, has he caught walleyes in 2 to 3 ft. of crystal clear water on a bright day, much less at 10:00 a.m. As I get to the top of the flat, I notice the water temperature has jumped up to 57 degrees in the shallows. I start setting lines out and mixing up the colors of the #7 flicker shads. I always like to start with at least one firetiger, and I had a few of the new “Pro Series” to try out. I also mix in the regular color patterns that I prefer to use; the purple chartreuse and chartreuse pearl. I use my I-pilot to set my trolling speed and, because the water is considered cold, I set my speed at 1.4 mph. I will adjust from there. The water, being as clear has it is, I make sure to get my boards far from the boat, the closest being about 100 ft. while I place the others separated by about 25 ft. each.

Before I can get the 4th line out, the outside board stops right in its place. I hear, “Looks like you’re snagged!” as a big grin appears across his face.

I grab the rod from the rod holder and I feel its weight. I let his wife bring in the first “snag.” I hand her the rod and she is grinning from ear to ear. She knows, and now he knows.

The author, Jeff Boutin, with a pair of beautiful spring shallow water Bay of Green Bay walleyes.



Large Flats, shown above, can warm up within a few hours of the sun hitting them. Even if the wind picks up, the colder water will not be able to penetrate the large shallow area.

These smaller types of flats generally don't warm up as quickly. It is too close to deeper cold water, and any wind blowing in will drop the water temperatures.

Then, just like that, a second board stops right in its place. I grab that rod and ask him, "Should we wait until your wife brings in the first snag, so she can reel it in, or would you like to bring in the "snag" yourself?"

As the first fish gets closer to the boat, I have to remind them that the fish will be very close to the planer board, about 10 to 12 feet and they need to keep tension on the line when I release the planer board. I net the first fish, keeping the net in the water, release the board from the second fish, and in just a few minutes, we have two walleyes in the net that are over 27 inches.

As he shakes his head in disbelief, my client says, "Never in my life would I have thought to fish in shallow, clear water."

I look down at the flicker shads that produced two very nice fish. Both fish were caught on the new pro series "Slick Firetiger." One thing about being a guide, you never buy just one or two of a bait's color, you buy six to eight of each color. I proceed to put out more of the same color.

We continue on our way and his wife looks in the water in front of the boat, "Look at all those walleyes!" Sure enough, I go to the bow and look out in front and to the side we see six or seven walleyes swim off in one direction and there's another group swimming off in another direction. Among the walleyes, we also see large schools of bait fish which, at times, would appear to make the water boil. We continue to fish in the shallows for most of the day, catching our limit of eaters as well as bringing in our share of typical Green Bay trophy walleyes.

There were several keys to our success. The most important of them was finding a large sand flat that protruded several hundred feet from the shore. We allowed enough time for the sun to warm the shallow water, and we put our planer boards far from our boat as to not spook the fish. We used our Minn Kota to get us into the shallows quietly, and the final key to our success, we were alone on the water with no other boats to spook the fish.

I have found during the months of May and June, or until the overall water temperature reaches around 65 degrees, walleyes can be found in similar shallow areas like this on a daily basis, and now you can find them too. Good luck fishing. Always be safe. And, have fun!



Jeff Boutin is a member of the National Professional Anglers Association and the Sheboygan Walleye Club. He is running a Free kids fishing tournament in conjunction with The Greater Wisconsin Outdoor Sportsman's Festival, Saturday June 13th, in Oshkosh, Wi. Visit the website at: wioutdoorfest.com Jeff also owns his own tackle company, Team-Outdoors.com and is a USCG licensed Charter Captain on the Bay of Green Bay.

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