

## Overview on Walleye Tactics and Techniques for Western Reservoirs

By

Brian Stangel – ABQ Sportfishing

### **Fishing Crawler Harnesses**

Lure Selection: Mack's Lure Wally Pop or Reelbait Back Bead Spinner tipped with Berkley Gulp Crawlers

Weight of the Line? Fishing in reservoirs generally means that you are fishing in 5-50 feet of water when pulling crawler harnesses, sometimes deeper. You encounter a tremendous amount of cover (sunken brush, sharp rock, etc.) which is very hard on line. We prefer a braided line; the new Fireline Crystal rated in the 14-20 pound range is an excellent choice offering the durability of a braided line with the transparency of traditional monofilament.

Weight of the bottom bouncer? There are many rules of thumb...an ounce per 10 feet of water keeping your line at a 45° angle, a 1 ounce bouncer at 1 mph GPS is half the depth as the line out and the all time winner of as much as it takes to catch fish. These are all fine and good, but we are of the school of thought that once you have a consistent speed and depth, you should use a line counter reel, let the line out to make contact with bottom, shorten it a ~foot and duplicate with your other rods if you are fishing a multiple spread. If you are holding your rod (the most effective way to keep your rig where you want it) constantly dip your rod tip to see if you can contact bottom...you want to make contact, but you do not want it dragging, keep adjusting your depth to be in the "zone". A baitcaster works best and the new Abu Garcia 5500 LC is the perfect reel for these applications as it is very light and has a line counter. Coupled with a Fenwick telescoping 7'9" planer board rod this is one of the ultimate bottom bouncer combos that won't break the bank.

How deep would you fish? Fishing in the spring (March-May) will be done in shallow water. The fish can be found from 2-20 feet of water and you will know where they are holding by utilizing your graph and more importantly when you start catching. Look for fish on or just off bottom. June through September the fish start to migrate deeper and can still be found shallow, but will be found in 25-60 feet of water. October through February can still produce with the fish staying in 40-80 feet of water.

What is the water like? Choppy, smooth? The spring runoff coupled with high winds generally create a nice stain on the water, do not be afraid...this is exactly the kind of water walleyes are seeking this time of year as they are starting to feed actively. As the year progresses the water clears and the fish will become more active higher in the water column with a little chop. Walleye fishing always welcomes a little ripple to get the action going.

What time of day is it? The best time to be on the water in our reservoirs is between 10AM and 3PM. The prevailing winds, even if the day is calm, will blow

an afternoon breeze. No need to catch the early bite for the walleyes...unless you want to hunt that trophy fish.

What is the weather like? Weather year round is generally mild, we get all four seasons...they are just not as extreme. Ideal conditions for fishing are generally steady weather over a few days with little change in pressure.

### **Trolling Reef Runners**

Weight of the Line? We prefer 12 pound Berkley Big Game (any mono with a .014" diameter to match the dive curves in *Precision Trolling*) or Berkley Fireline 14/6

Size of the Lure? Reef Runners in the 200, 400, 600 and 800 series are the preferred choice as you can control depth with a linecounter reel and cross referencing *Precision Trolling* for specific dive curves on all lures.

How deep would you fish? Fishing in the spring (March-May) will be done in shallow water. The fish can be found from 2-20 feet of water and you will know where they are holding by utilizing your graph and more importantly when you start catching. Look for fish on or just off bottom and also very high in the water column. June through September the fish start to migrate deeper and can still be found shallow, but will be found in 25-60 feet of water. October through February can still produce with the fish staying in 40-80 feet of water.

What is the water like? Choppy, smooth? Deeper fish are not triggered as much by surface conditions and can be caught consistently in mid to late summer regardless of the wind. Spring fish will look to key off wind blown shorelines or hang around brush, sunken wood or small to medium rock shoreline.

What time of day is it? Any time of day is a good time to troll if you have located fish, it is a reaction bite and they will eat regardless of whether they are hungry or not.

What is the weather like? Weather can be varied and in the Spring windy and rough conditions are optimal for targeting shallow fish. Mid to late summer into fall the fishing conditions are more dependent on pressure changes and how stable the weather is.

### **Jigging**

Reelbait Walleye Flasher or Fergie Spoons

Weight of the Line? We prefer 6 pound Berkley Vanish Crimson for the Flasher, be sure to tie a Trilene knot as other knots do not tend to work as well with the fluorocarbon lines and always be sure to moisten the knot before cinching it down. The Fergie spoons are generally fished deeper and we utilize Berkley Fireline in 20 pound test for more sensitivity in deeper water.

Weight of the Lure? Depending on the depth the fish are holding, you will want a variety of sizes from 1/8 to 1/2 ounce. Our preference is the long shank tipped with any variety of Gulp crawlers (1/2 piece), minnows or grubs. The Walleye Flasher is a standup jig that has a tailspinner and the combination is deadly. This year Reelbait introduced the Red Tail and Transparent series which have proven to be solid producers for both walleye and smallmouth. We use 3/4 and 1 ounce Fergie spoons, either are producers, it is personal preference.

How deep would you cast? In the spring we are targeting fish tight to the bank on steep breaklines. We will cast to shore and work our jig back with a skipping motion, generally getting our strikes on the fall. As summer sets in and the fish move deeper and tend to be less "on the move" vertical jigging deep structure can also be very productive. We will also incorporate Reelbait Fergie Spoons into our presentation in fall and throughout the winter. October through February will produce fish staying in 40-80 feet of water.

What is the water like? Choppy, smooth? Spring fish will look to key off wind blown shorelines or hang around brush, sunken wood or small to medium rock shoreline. Deeper fish are not triggered as much by surface conditions and can be caught consistently in mid to late fall through the next spring regardless of the wind.

What time of day is it? Jigging in the spring is favored early and late, even into the evening hours. Deep jigging can be done anytime as fish, especially the larger fish, spend 90% of their time in the deepest water. Fall and Winter jigging with Fergie spoons or similar is best during the day.

What is the weather like? In the Spring changes in weather, good or bad, can turn on a shallow bite. The harder the wind pounds a rocky shoreline, the more likely there is to be fish. The rest of the year you want to look for stable weather patterns that will make the most of your fishing.

### **Rigging**

Reelbait Floating Jig sizes 1/0, 2, 4 tipped with Berkley Gulp Crawlers, Leeches or Minnows...it is tough to beat a live leech tipped on a floating jig however. This is the one occasional exception we make to our own rule of "no live bait" when and if allowed.

Weight of the Line? We use 6 or 8 pound Berkley Trilene XT for the added abrasion resistance. The rig consists of a slip sinker, which in this presentation will slide up and down the main line, used above a ball bearing swivel then attached to a leader of lower pound rating, 4-6 and generally a fluorocarbon like Vanish in clear.

Weight of the Lure? We prefer to fish the 1/0 size of the floating jig however it is more prone to snagging. If you are fishing a lot of cover, downsize your hook appropriately. There is a range of slip sinkers on the market; a good variety is from 1/8 to 3/4 ounce.

How deep would you fish? When you do not know what depth the walleye are holding, start out rigging shallow and then gradually move deeper paying attention to depth and when you intercept fish. As before, spring fish are generally found shallow and then move deeper as the year moves on. The rig is usually fished with a spinning rod so you can hold the line with your finger adjusting quickly to stay in contact with bottom and also for releasing when you feel that walleye pick up your bait. If you detect a strike, release the line allowing the fish to take the bait some before setting the hook. The slip sinker allows this to happen with little resistance to the fish. As a starting point, you can never go wrong in 10-15 feet of water with deeper water close by.

What is the water like? Choppy, smooth? You want somewhat stable water conditions with just a slight "walleye chop". Rigging for walleye can be difficult if it is too windy as you need to move along slowly keeping contact with bottom and your slip sinker.

What time of day is it? As you are moving to locate fish, rigging can be done throughout the day when the wind is calm and you need to cover water in search of fish.

What is the weather like? You want to look for stable weather patterns that will make the most of your rigging. Light to mild wind is preferred, just enough for that "walleye chop".