

And The Cubs Win The Pennant !!!

400 Muskie In 4 Months !!!

By Denny Sands

Now I ask you, which is more probable, the Cubs finally winning the World Series or 400 Muskie being caught out of one lake within 4 months. This could be the year that both happens. The 400 Muskie have been already been caught out of Shabbona Lake. Now all we need is for the Cubs to win the World Series. Now that would be an awesome year !!!

Shabbona Lake is located in Southern DeKalb County, about halfway between Chicago & Rockford. It is a 318 acre manmade impoundment that is loaded with Muskie. It is known as the Muskie Capital Of Illinois. Since 1982, Shabbona Lake has four State Of Illinois Record Muskie caught and verified, including the current State Of Illinois Record Muskie 37 Pounds, 13 Ounces, caught April 1, 1997.

Every millennium there are certain years that unexplainable events happen and all we can do is just accept it. Maybe it is the alignment of the of the sun, moon and stars. Or maybe it is just fate. But for whatever reason, in the Spring and into the Summer of 2001, over 400 Muskie have been caught at Shabbona Lake (and as of the writing of this article, the Cubs are still in 1st place).

Lets take a look at the fishing season at Shabbona Lake, with an eye towards what could be another record breaking Fall for Muskie at Shabbona Lake. As we entered into April, the baitshop at Shabbona Lake State Park, Lakeside, received numerous reports of Muskie catches. Many reports of Muskie striking crappies, bluegills and bass as they were being reeled in also we reported. Several other reports of Muskie strikes we reported daily.

We were receiving reports of 4-5 Muskie being caught daily, with the best day a report of 11 Muskie caught by just two anglers one morning before 10:45 AM. We thought that this would last just a few days, but it went on for 3 ½ half months, only slowed down by the heat wave of mid July.

No taking out any supernatural intervention, what happened. What caused this Muskie explosion at Shabbona Lake? It has always been the top Muskie lake in Illinois, but 400 Muskie in 4 months? Why?

We started out with a very dry Spring following a very dry fall of 2000. This made the water at Shabbona Lake very clear. Visibility was exceptional. The usual spring runoff of muddy water never occurred. This was followed by a deep weed growth as the light penetration allowed the plants to grow deeper than usual. Muskie were having an easy time seeing forage and they were hungry and active. The forage, was finding shelter in the expanding weeds.

Another important factor was the maturing of several year classes of Muskie that have been stocked in Shabbona Lake. About 8 years ago the Muskie stocking program at Shabbona Lake had been cut back by the IDNR for various reasons. Several fishing clubs in response to this got together and purchased Muskie from Leech Lake Minnesota. These were barred Muskie and have been mistaken by many anglers this year as Tiger Muskie. These stocking were followed up by an aggressive stocking program by the State Of Illinois DNR. Now there is a very healthy population of Muskie in Shabbona Lake.

Add to this, the fact that the spillway barrier was preventing our annual loss of Muskie over the spillway. Unusual combinations were starting to form. We were unknowingly setting up a sequence of events ready to trigger the 400 Muskie phenomenon.

Now add to this a nice Spring, weather wise, which brings out the anglers and BOOM. It happened. Muskie after Muskie was caught, seen or hooked day in and day out. Not only were the Muskie hitting Crappies and Bluegill as they were being reeled in by anglers, Muskie were seen repeatedly following another hooked Muskie back to the boat. Bass have been known in the Spring to swim along side of a hooked bass, but Muskie? Quite a sight!!!

The water was so clear that on a typical day you could not help but see Muskie, even if you were not fishing for them. Now this water clarity is unusual for Shabbona Lake. It is known as a stained lake. So the Muskie were taking advantage of the clear water conditions and they were on a 3 ½ months feeding frenzy.

Now what does that mean for this Fall? The water this Summer got very warm with the July heat wave, but the fish at Shabbona Lake survived the heat very well. The water got a typical Summer algae bloom and a thermocline formed at about 14 feet. This restrained the water and cut back some of the weed growth.

But what about this Fall? The lake will clear up again unless we have a wet Fall. Typical weather in August and September for Northern Illinois is dry. By September we could very well be entering another Muskie bite to rival this Spring. The conditions are there.

Fall has always been known as big Muskie time. This Fall could be known as a record breaking lunker Muskie time. Remember Charlie Book's State Of Illinois Record Muskie, 48 3/8", 34 pounds, was caught on October 15th in 1994. Last Fall several large Muskie we caught by

Muskie anglers using large suckers, slowly trolled behind the boat. The anglers would cast the shoreline, bringing the Muskie out near the boat. The Muskie would then see and strike the sucker.

Get out your calendar and plan several trips to Shabbona Lake this Fall. It is almost a sure bet that a couple more hundred Muskie will be caught at Shabbona Lake this Fall. As far as the Cubs winning the World Series