

Now where did they go, we caught them here 2 weeks ago???

by Dennis R. Sands

Fishing at Shabbona Lake, like many other lakes, changes as the weather warms up. The fish adapt to their changing habitat out of necessity. They have to, to survive. We as fishermen have to be sensitive to the fish's movements and we have to adapt our fishing techniques. To be successful, we need to analyze how the lake is maturing into its various seasonal patterns.

Typically, in the early Spring at Shabbona Lake, fishing & catching is easy. The fish are hungry. The forage (fish food) has been thinned out by the Fall and Winter feedings. Basically, in a typical lake such as Shabbona Lake in the early Spring, there is not enough forage to satisfy the predator's (Bass, Walleye, Muskies, Crappies & Catfish) appetite. So therefore, fish are easy to catch in the Springtime.

But where do the fish go after the Spring bite, when everyone is catching fish ? The fish don't leave the lake. They must eat to survive and grow. So, we know that they are in the lake and we know that they are eating and growing rapidly. NOW, WHERE DID THEY GO ? WE CAUGHT THEM HERE 2 WEEKS AGO !

First lets review where they were being caught at Shabbona Lake this Spring.

Crappies - Shallow Brush, Fish Cribs and along the Dam Face.

Bass - Inside weed edge, Weed Pockets, Base of trees stumps.

Muskies - Shallow Bays

Catfish - Off of the Earthen Piers.

Bluegills - Inside Weed Edge.

Walleyes - Dam Face

Now, as we move into Summer, where will they go ? Crappies will move to three basic locations. The first will be the deeper cribs of the original 47 fish cribs and the 3 major brushpiles that are scattered throughout the Shabbona Lake. During mid-day, they will be congregated at the bottom of the cribs on the shady side of the crib or brushpile. As evening approaches, and as the bugs and mosquitoes come out, the Crappies will come up to feed on the insects.

The second location that the Crappies will go to will be the outside weed edge. Several schools of Crappies spend their Summer cruising the weedlines looking for food. The third location is that several Crappies will suspend about 8' - 13' down in the submerged tree tops in 30 feet of water at the South end of Shabbona Lake.

Bass will move into 3 basic locations. The first is the weed beds. The thicker the weeds, the more Bass. As long as the water does not get too warm, Bass will inhabit the major weed beds. The second location is that many Bass school-up and form marauding herds

of attack fish. As yearling forage fish (Shad, Minnows, Crappies, Bluegills) grow, they form schools instinctively for their survival. Individual Bass in the Summer at Shabbona Lake school up themselves and attack the schools of forage fish.

It is very common to see Bass breaking the surface, chasing forage fish. It is just as frequent to find Walleyes or Catfish under the schools of forage fish mopping up the wounded forage fish that float to the bottom and are not eaten by the Bass.

The third Bass location is on the drop-offs next to the feeding flats. Bass will set up on those drops and use them as attack points. Typically, what happens is that the Bass & Walleyes cruise the top of the drop-off in search of food. They occasionally will move up on top of the feeding flat and become schooling Bass preying on a school of Shad that has moved over their feeding flat.

Walleyes, as mentioned above, like to set up on the major drop-offs at Shabbona Lake. But, they also set up on weed points, especially if it next to a drop-off. Walleyes will also suspend in the submerged tree tops in the South end of the Lake. The trees sit in about 30' - 35' of water. The Walleyes suspend just above the thermocline in about 12' - 14' of water. Bluegills and Crappies suspend just above the Walleyes in those same tree tops.

The majority of the Bluegills will settle into the weedbeds. Usually the smaller ones are closest to shore, with the larger ones on the outer edges of the weedline. It is common to catch some of the bigger Bluegills that have recent scars from Muskie attacks.

This leads us to the Muskie. The pride of Shabbona Lake. Muskie during the Summer typically suspend about 12' down. They choose this depth because it is just above the thermocline. Also, from this vantage point they can see exactly what is going on above and around them. They will set up on an edge of a weedbed or they will suspend in the submerged tree tops. They will often remain relatively motionless until they decide to feed, then all bets are off when that 50" monster decide to move.

So, next time your fishing buddy asked you where the fish at Shabbona lake went to, tell him to pick up a copy of Outdoor Notebook or call us at Shabbona's Lakeside Bait, Tackle & Boat Rental, 815-824-2581 or visit us at the shores of Shabbona Lake within Shabbona Lake State Park.