

Why Shabbona Lake ?

By Denny Sands

Rockfest 2000

Why has Shabbona Lake continued to be Illinois' Top Fishing Lake? The answer was again given emphatically last Saturday, February 12, 2000. Shabbona Lake is so productive because of the Fishermen and the Fish Biologists who constantly upgrade the habitat at Shabbona Lake. It is located in Southern DeKalb County, about halfway between Rockford and Chicago. It is a man-made impoundment which reached pool level on May 3, 1975.

Despite being 25 years old, the lake continues to produce trophy size fish, including the current State Of Illinois Record Muskie. Last year it produced the biggest Bass ever caught at Shabbona Lake, at 7 lbs. 10 oz. Also there was three giant Muskie caught, a 47", 48" & 49". Several Bass over 20", stringer upon stringer of Crappies, Catfish averaging between 5-10 lbs, Bluegill averaging 8" - 9" and potential State Record Walleye & Muskie inhabit Shabbona's fertile water.

But most lakes reach there initial potential and then fade off dramatically. But not Shabbona Lake. WHY?

Let's look at what happened last Saturday, February 12th, 2000, and I think you will see the answer.

The Shabbona Lake Sportsman Club has had an idea to make large rock piles in Shabbona Lake for habitat improvement for the past several years. The lake basin is mostly farmland with little hard bottom structure. When they made the lake in the early 70's the IDNR placed fish cribs, brush piles and submerged trees for habitat. They put a rock bar made out of 3 broken up silos, but it was a long narrow bar that has mostly silted in.

So there was a need for hard bottom structure for Walleye and the newly introduced Smallmouth Bass. The club finalized a concept of placing large rocks out on the ice and pushing them through opened holes in the ice to make large pyramid rock piles. The Club made an offer to match the cost of 5 semi truckloads of rocks, load for load, with anyone or any club that would buy a truckload. Each load of rock would cost approximately \$150.00. The goal was to get 10 semi loads of rock, about 200 tons

NOW THAT IS A LOT OF ROCK! 200 TONS!

The date was set for February 12th, 2000. Rockfest 2000 was about to become a reality! Donations began to come in. Shabbona's Lakeside Bait, Tackle & Boat Rental- \$150.00, Quad County Muskie Hunters - \$150.00, Smallmouth Bass Alliance - \$150.00, D.R.I.F.T.

Club - \$150.00, DeKalb Anglers - \$150.00, Mike Chronik - \$150.00, Anonymous Member - \$150.00 and Anonymous Friend \$50.00.

The rock was ordered. The date was set firm. Fish Biologist Al Pulley gave his blessing. All we needed now was lots and lots of HELP!!! And a little good weather!

We got everything we asked for and much, much more! Plans were made to place rock down through the ice at two locations. The first was over the existing rock bar. One or two large humps were to be created with 2 semi loads of rock which had been placed on Pier #2 by Somonauk Point. The second location was on the old Indian Road as it enters Shabbona Lake on the North end. We wanted to cut 3 or 4 holes in the ice starting at a water depth of 8' going out to 12'. 4 semi loads of rock waited on the shoreline on Indian Road to become Walleye and Smallmouth Bass habitat.

On Friday, February 11th, we had a dry run to test out our theories. Since none of us had ever done anything like this before we needed a test day. None of us had even cut a hole in the ice with a chain saw before. How were we going to move rocks weighing several hundred pounds each? Have you ever heard of the phrase "Good old American ingenuity"? Well it is still alive and well in Shabbona!

A pulley system to drag the rock across the ice, with a tractor on shore, was developed by Larry Kimpan. 400 pound rocks slid magically to the awaiting holes. Smaller rock was moved by hand, buckets or sleds. The chain saw actually cut through the ice very easily. Now all we need for Saturday was more manpower!

Saturday gave us perfect weather, light winds and more importantly help from everywhere! Pat Curry donated a full day of bobcat loader work. It was amazing to see him place these large rocks with ease on the trailers, sleds and along the shoreline. Also, to our rescue was Rich Vaupel, Scott Smith and an unknown sportsman from Crystal Lake. They provided two 4 wheel drive ATV's, an amphibious craft and trailers. **WE WOULD NOT OF FINISHED THIS PROJECT WITHOUT THEM!** Also we would not have finished this project without the 75 hard working volunteers that carried, dragged, pushed, shoved and literally out muscled tons of rocks from the size of baseballs to bigger than a kitchen table.

40 tons (2 semi loads) were placed through a hole in the ice above the original rock pile by pier #2. We had originally planned to make two humps, but as the pile slowing grew in height, we opted to make one larger, taller pile. It topped off 11 feet below the surface in 22 feet of water. A second hump for this area is already on the drawing books for next year.

Indian Roadbed, as it enter the Lake from the North, got about 55 tons (3 semi loads) placed in 4 holes in 8', 10', 12' and 14' of water. Plans are also being designed for next year to place several more rock piles on Indian Road. The Lee City Slicker's 4H placed on the ice a possible 15' X 20" Walleye spawning area consisting of smaller rock to fall in 3'-4' feet of water on the roadbed.

Many people need to be thanked. Jim Mowatt gave two days of work, as well as his aqua view camera for filming of this huge event. Paul Erdman for use of his tractor, carts and trailers, as well as all of the promotion he did prior to the event. Becky Deutsch for getting the word out on the Internet, both before and after the event. Club members Mike Chronik, the Andreini's, Jim Kopjo, Tom Kledzinski, Jerry Wilson, Dick Huggins, the Franchi's, Terry Clark, Roger Shields, Harold Roach, Gary Berg, Scott Meyer, Don James, Larry & Mike Kimpan, Clint Sands, Pam Meskiman, Dave Johnson, as well as club members from The DeKalb Anglers, Quad County Hawg Hunters and the Dupage Fly Tiers. Josh Andreini had chili, coffee and hot chocolate prepared for everyone. Denny Sands and Rich McElligott Co-Chaired the 1st Annual Rockfest!!!

Another 20 tons of rock will be delivered to the North point of the East Bay for shoreline protection. 20 additional tons will be added to the SW corner of the dam on the ice to drop through and make potential spawning grounds for Walleye. This work will be done mainly by machinery. Very little manpower will be needed.

Rockfest 2000 showed what being a sportsman is all about. Several people, many who did not even know each other before Saturday, February 12, 2000, working together for a common goal to better a fishery, not only for themselves, but for others. ISN'T LIFE GREAT !!!