

Wall-to-wall walleyes? No, but at least more

nce I moved to Cadillac in 1974, the fishing has aged. The 1980s my ice fish-catch was at a 50-50 mix like and wall-

hen the sea- opened in May, for the month or so, the evenings would be a ter of boats rored off the of 33 Road, Lake Mitchell. I run min- s or night ivers off slip er rigs, let- them lie on ottom with reel bails open as we all sizes of fish, none of for a walleye to pick



Dave Foley

On the Outside

up the bait. Most nights we'd catch a couple and sometimes a five-fish limit. Now you rarely see a boat there. In the early 1990s it became hard to catch walleye in Lake Mitchell and Cadillac, a fact that was verified by DNR net surveys. Net catches in Lake Mitchell that averaged 11.3 walleye in 1988 and 1993, now yielded just 2.9 walleye in individual nets in 2003. Whereas nets in 1988 and 1993 contained what caused such a rapid



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Interest is high as fish technician Bob Kerry shoot thousands of walleye fingerlings into Lake Mitchell.

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"I have one of the original Higbee's Stream Map of Pennsylvania on my wall behind my desk. It's the best thing available as far as streams are concerned. I use it all the time for reference. I don't know of anything more extensive, and it is the most accurate map out there as far as streams are concerned."
-Dave Wolf, PA Fish and Boat Commission
"It is in showing where to find out-of-the-way trout streams that makes the map such a treasure to the fisherman."
-Joe Gordon, TRIBUNE-DEMOCRAT, Johnstown, PA

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LOST STREAM MAP
e STREAM & LAKE MAP OF MICHIGAN resembles another map - known to Pennsylvania anglers as the "Lost Stream Map."
e "Stream Map of Pennsylvania" was completed in 1965 after a thirty-year effort by Howard Higbee, a former Penn State Professor.
Professor Higbee succeeded in creating a map of the highest detail possible - a map that shows every stream and lake. He painstakingly plotted by hand, the location of 45,000 miles of streams onto a 3 by 5 foot map. The map sold extremely well - until it was lost several years after it first appeared in print. Incredibly, the printer used with the original drawing and printing plates, declared bankruptcy, then carelessly hauled Higbee's 30 years work to a landfill.
A few remaining dog-eared copies became a prized fisherman's possession. Professor Higbee was offered \$400 one of his last maps. And state agencies were forced to keep their copies under lock and key.
After he told Professor Higbee that reprints were impossible, because the maps were printed in non-photographic ink.
In 1991, at the age of 91, Howard Higbee's dream came true. Computers made it possible to reprint the map. Using an updated map, Howard said, "I never thought I'd live to see this day."
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smaller than 16 inches. Most of these were judged to be 8 to 9 years old. Apparently natural reproduction was no longer occurring in the lakes. The only remedy would be to introduce young fish from an outside source. Beginning in 2004 and continuing in 2006, 2008, 2011, 2012 and 2014 the DNR

collected walleye fingerlings from ponds managed by the Mason County Walleye Association and planted them in numbers ranging from 30,000 to over 300,000. In 2008, 7.5 million tiny fry were planted. Most anglers agree that the walleye fishing in our lakes today is better than it was a few years ago, however, even with stocking, the walleye population in Lake Cadillac and Lake Mitchell is likely smaller than it was in the 1980s and early 1990s. The quality of the fishery will depend on periodic plantings as natural spawning is almost nonexistent. Yet the question remains, what caused such a rapid

decline in the walleye population in lakes Mitchell and Cadillac. The exact reason for the end of wall-eye spawning is unknown, but it may be due to the sudden increase in the numbers of largemouth bass. It used to be that all I caught were smallmouth bass, but then around 1990 I began to hook into largemouth.

The balance quickly shifted. The smallmouth in Lake Mitchell became scarce, while largemouth became abundant. This did not bode well for walleye since studies have shown that largemouth bass prey on juvenile walleye. Walleye, in turn, feed on panfish such as bluegill, sunfish and perch. With walleye numbers declining, the numbers of under-sized panfish increased. This may be why, in recent years, anglers are finding it harder to catch good-sized panfish.

The decline in the walleye fishery, as well as lower populations of perch and smallmouth bass, may be due to a loss of spawning habitat brought about the introduction and rapid spreading of Eurasian water-milfoil. This invasive has increased the acreage of aquatic plants in the lakes and when it dies and drops to the lake bottom, the decaying vegetation spreads layers of silt over hard bottom areas used for spawning by walleye, perch and smallmouth bass.

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acts as mulch to promote growth, not just of Eurasian milfoil, but native weeds as well. Chemical treatment of the lakes which has reduced the presence Eurasian milfoil and nuisance vegetation should also improve the habitat for walleye.

Until the late 1990s, the first week of June was notable for the mayfly hatch. For several days, masses of flies would rise from lakes, covering the windows and screens of lake-side homes and floating up on beaches.

Although an annoyance to residents, the larvae and flies were a food source for walleye and other fish. About 20 years ago the hatch disappeared, its demise likely due to the toxic effect of copper sulfate which had been sprayed on the water to kill snails that were part of the cycle that spread swimmer's itch.

The copper in this chemical does not dissolve and the buildup of this element on the lake bottom over the years likely reached a level that killed the mayfly larva.

Last week standing on the Lake Mitchell boat launch watching a tube from the DNR fish planting truck fishing 90,000 walleye fingerlings into the lake (another 30,000 would be planted in Lake Cadillac), I wasn't thinking about the past. No, I was looking ahead four years when in this class of 1.5 inch fingerlings would be reaching the 15-inch keeper size. While the "good old days" of walleye catching may not return, savvy anglers know there's plenty of fish to be caught right now.