Season's greetings

Walleyes are hitting in strung-out spawning session

The book of Ecclesiastes tells us "there is a time for all seasons under heaven."

Now is the season for Rock River walleyes to spawn a future generation in spite of what local weather and river conditions have been dictating.

TED PECK

The fishing diary I've kept since 1976 has proven more important than an expensive graphite rod when it comes to consistently bringing walleyes to the landing net. Good lure presentation won't do you any good if you're fishing in the wrong place at the wrong time.

My diary says walleyes are spawning right now in Rock River, even though moon phase says the run should peak a week from now.

Consistently high water levels in the Rock this spring have pushed walleyes into spawning areas they haven't used for several years. Walleyes do not spawn in fast water. They spawn in slack water near fast water, primarily at night.

Ideal spawning areas are over rocky rubble bottom in this quiet water which may be less than two feet deep.

Even with all the snowy-blowy weather we've seen lately, it doesn't take long for shallow, quiet waters to warm to 45-48 degrees which goads female walleyes into dumping their eggs.

For some reason this magic moment occurs several degrees cooler on the lower Wisconsin River. Walleyes from the Dells dam south tend to spawn in 43-45 degree water.

The lower Wisconsin has considerably more volume than the Rock. Several days either side of April 1st is spawning time on this water, too, because of the walleye's preference for slightly cooler spawning temperatures here.

You may recall the arrival of faux spring on March 20. That warm, spring sun and calm winds put a burner under Rock River's waters and some fish spawned. Some fish are spawning right now. A few more will drop their eggs here next weekend.

The strung-out nature of Spring 2009 and consistently high water have made it difficult for most anglers to ride herd on an aggressive walleye bite. Hey, that's fishin'.

Perhaps the best strategy for getting your string stretched by a Rock River walleye during the next 10 days lays in fishing where the fish are going to be, rather than where they've been.

After walleyes spawn they slide back downstream at a leisurely pace, generally holding a little higher up in the water column. If dragging a jig along the bottom isn't producing in a sweet-looking spot, try a few casts with a swimming retrieve which puts that twister tail a couple of feet off the bottom. You just might experience an "Eureka" moment.

The next couple of weeks will be critical in determining your walleye fishing success in the spring of 2011. That is when many little walleyes hatched this spring will be approaching that 15-inch legal size.

If river levels drop substantially during this time frame, recruitment from the '09 year class will be limited. However, if the Rock continues to run belly-full through much of April– providing good nursery areas for little walleyes back in flooded shallows and swollen tributaries– the walleye boom we've experienced for the past four years will continue.

Lake Koshkonong and our Rock River have evolved into a walleye destination for anglers from all over the Midwest. Ecclesiastes also tells us there is a time to sow and a time to reap.

Credit WDNR fisheries biologist Don Bush and volunteers working out of the Bark River hatchery with the sowing part. We seldom think of Bush when netting a Rock River walleye or pheasant specialist Brian Buenzow when the dog delivers a ring neck to hand on a crisp Octo ber morning.

Now is the time to reap that walleye bounty. Please consider releasing any fema walleyes which are still full eggs. You are literally holdi the future of this resource i your hands.

Ted Peck, a certified Merchant Marine captain, is an outdoors columnist for The Janesville Gazette. E-mail him at tedpeck@acegroup.