

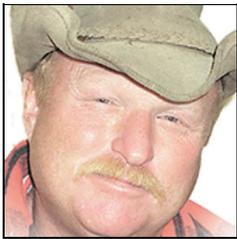
GazetteXtra



34°

| Sunday, February 7, 2016

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Ted Peck

Outdoors talk with certified Merchant Marine Captain Ted Peck.

Ted Peck: Legal trolling will change spring strategies

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TED PECK
Sunday, February 7, 2016



TED PECK

Blade baits, including the Echotail series, are perfect for pulling walleye and sauger out of

Boat launch access to Wisconsin rivers can change overnight during the winter months. One of the first open-water trips of 2016 for me will be on that stretch of the Rock River from Blackhawk Island up to the VFW.

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deep-water wintering holes.

This has been an annual ritual since back in the day

when hooking a single walleye was cause for celebration. Thanks to careful stewardship from retired DNR fish biologist Don Bush and others who invested considerable time and effort, our hometown river is now a serious walleye fishing destination.

Spring fishing on that lazy stretch of river just above Lake Koshkonong has always been a study in boat control and vertical jigging. A quick burst of power from the trolling motor resulting in a line angle less than 45 degrees from rod tip to hook might very well get you a ticket for trolling, which was illegal on the Rock and many other waters across our part of the state.

Countless anglers had to spend time in court convincing a judge they were position fishing instead of trolling to avoid paying a fine. Virtually everyone believed this was a stupid rule. It was finally taken out of the regulations book last July 1.

This will be the first spring that trolling has been permitted on the Rock River. It is a presentation option many anglers are eager to explore. Under new guidelines, anglers can have as many lines in the water as they want—but are limited to three hooks per angler.

Substrata in the Rock River is ideal for trolling. Most of the bottom is hard with long stretches of rocky rubble, which provide tremendous walleye habitat. At night during spawning time around April 1, many walleyes are holding in less than two feet of water.

Between now and late March when water temperatures warm into the low 40s, most of the Rock's walleye biomass will be holding in water at least eight feet deep.

The stretch between Blackhawk Island and the VFW is classic winter habitat. From this point forward, chasing spring walleyes here will be a study in slow trolling upstream then vertical jigging downstream with the current.

There is much more to trolling than simply dragging lures through the water. Speed control and lure presentation are critical to success.

Optimum cold-water trolling speed is 0.4 mph heading upstream against the current. The best way to accomplish this is with a

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trolling motor and an eye on the GPS on your electronics.

Lure selection is also straightforward and simple: a No. 9 jointed Rapala on a three-way swivel rig, a jig/plastic combination or blade bait. Color selection is secondary. My favorites are orange/gold with the Rapala, white plastic and an Echotail blade in Teddy Cat pattern.

Monofilament and jig weight are key when pulling plastics. At a trolling speed of 0.4 mph, a 1/8-ounce jighead will keep your hook just off the bottom in about 10 feet of water when using monofilament line—which floats a little better than superbraid.

In regard to plastic choice, the B-Fish-N Tackle Moxie is a very effective bait profile.

Blade baits are just gaining favor with walleye anglers even though they've been around since Heddon introduced the Sonar in the 1950s. Forty years later, Wisconsin lure maker Mert Wolf came out with the Zip lure, which is now sold under the name Big Dude.

A half dozen years ago, Racine firefighter Justin Blancher introduced his Echotail, a hybrid blade with five line access points that will accept virtually unlimited plastic tails.

Blades are most effective when fished on superbraid line, with line and lure joined by a snap. When trolling, blades are most effective with the snap in the hole closest to the head.

In the interest of full disclosure, I've been on the Echotail pro staff almost from the beginning. Last year we came out with the Teddy Cat, a blade weighing 3/4 ounces. in a 1/2-ounce profile.

Last December I caught more walleyes on the Teddy Cat than with any other lure, both trolling and vertical jigging—probably because I used it more than other lures.

Catching walleyes on a lure you helped design is sweet. Finally being able to troll the Rock River with a Teddy Cat is a dream that has been a long time coming.

Ted Peck, a certified Merchant Marine captain, is an outdoors columnist for The Gazette. Email him at tedpeck@acegroup.cc.

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