

# Peck: Trolling the way to go on basin lakes

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Special to The Gazette  
June 4, 2017

Perpetual high-water conditions this spring make access to many fisheries across Wisconsin difficult, with fishing success not much better.

Lake Koshkonong is a happy exception to this rule—at least the part about fishing success.

Trolling has always been an effective way to get hooked up on this shallow, generally faceless 10,000-acre basin in the Rock River system. With few structural features to attract baitfish, the baitfish and all other creatures up the food chain are continuously on the move.

Current and wind are major drivers of fish location on faceless basin lakes like Kosh. When the Rock River is rising, action is usually better near Blackhawk Island on the east end of the lake. When the Rock is falling, you'll usually catch more fish to the west around Thiebeau and Carcajou points.

Wind pushes zooplankton, with baitfish in close proximity chowing down and larger predators eating baitfish. If wind has been coming out of the same direction for a couple of days, you can expect to find more active fish stacked on the leeward side of the lake.

These rules of thumb are only starting points. Little tricks often determine whether you'll need a landing net with a very long handle or are simply washing lures.

Trolling speed is a major factor. Most hardbaits work best when trolled at 2.2-2.8 mph. Spinner rigs and streamer flies need to be pulled slightly slower at 1.5-1.9 mph. You'll find boat control easier and fishing better when trolling with the wind.

Most serious fishing boats today have electronics with GPS. One of the most important GPS features for trolling is SOG—speed over ground.

Sometimes you can achieve optimum trolling speed with just the electric motor. Sometimes the big motor is needed to bring your fishing presentation into productive parameters.

Either power source can be used as a rudder to point the boat where you want to go, especially in a fairly stout wind.

When trolling a basin lake, the more you can spread lines out behind the boat, the better your chances of finding fish will be. Planer boards have been part of the trolling presentation since the early 1980s.

Wisconsin regulations allow three lines per angler. But experience teaches running three boards on each side—or just three boards on one side of the boat—is the most efficient way to catch fish.

On a stained lake like Kosh, pegging lures 10-30 feet behind the planer boards usually brings quick results—once you have the bait profile, color and trolling speed dialed in.

The best place to start is with a lure which has been catching fish on Kosh for over 30 years: the #5 blue/white Rapala Shad Rap. This lure has been a favorite Koshkonong touchstone for me since it used to cost just four bucks.

In those years when the lake was running low, the shallow version of this bait caught a lot of fish. A couple of years ago Rapala came out with a lure called the Scatter Rap. It has a wide, specially designed bill which produces a lifelike, erratic action. This year Rapala came out with a deep-running Scatter Rap which I can hardly wait to try in deeper water up north next week.

Even though erratic action tends to trigger strikes, the exact speed which triggers strikes must be determined first. The best way to accomplish this is working across the water in a lazy "S" pattern.

Most strikes will come when the boat is in the process of turning. Lines on the inside of the turn will track faster, lines on the opposite side of the boat slower. Take note of which lures are producing the most action and modify speed and lure choice as the fish quietly tell you what they want.

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