



Dual Purpose

Hoosier study benefits walleyes, lures anglers

WALLEYE RESEARCH IS A WONDERFUL THING. The more biologists learn about our favorite fish, the better they can manage its populations, protect critical habitat, and provide fine fishing for the walleye faithful. In turn, anglers who pay attention to the latest findings become more effective at locating and catching walleyes, while better understanding the need for various fishing regulations.



» Research fish were fitted with a surgically implanted radio transmitter plus a yellow spaghetti tag for easy identification.

Sometimes research has added benefits, like alerting fishermen to overlooked opportunities. Such is the case with an interesting project currently underway on Lake Monroe, an 11,000-acre impoundment a short cast from Bloomington in southcentral Indiana.

In March 2008, the state Department of Natural Resources launched an ambitious radio-telemetry study. Naturally, one of the goals was learning more about walleye movements and habitat use. But another main objective was getting Hoosier anglers fired up about the walleye options in Monroe. Problem was, the DNR had built a respectable fishery, and almost nobody was making use of it. Although the reservoir has a healthy population of marble-eyes, a 2007 creel survey revealed that just 5 percent of fishing effort is directed toward them.

"The walleyes are there, but not enough people go after them," says DNR fisheries biologist Dave Kittaka. "We've devoted considerable resources to stocking walleyes in

Monroe and want to promote the fishery." The concept of using research to promote walleye fishing was an attractive option, thanks in part to its successful track record.

A decade ago, John Williams, of the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, conducted telemetry research on Kentucky's Laurel River Lake—in large part to show anglers walleye patterns there. The project yielded positive results, and has been featured in In-Fisherman publications several times.

MONROE DETAILS

Back in Indiana, between March 31 and April 16 (during the walleye spawn), DNR fishery crews surgically implanted electronic transmitters in 33 walleyes, which were captured by electrofishing and large gillnets in two mainlake locations and one tributary, Saddle Creek. Since that time, 1 walleye was harvested, 5 went through the dam to points unknown, and 7 dropped their tags. Four additional walleyes have been fitted with transmitters, bringing the current total of "participants" to 24.

Tracked fish range in length from 17 to 25.8 inches and weigh from 1.8 to 6.7 pounds. Most are males. To simplify identification, a yellow spaghetti tag sporting the fish's DNR serial number is attached to the back of each radio-tagged walleye. (Anglers who catch tagged fish are asked to write down the tag number, release the fish, and report the catch to the South Region Fisheries Office, 812/279-1215.)

Through spring, summer, and well into fall, each tagged walleye was relocated weekly. Intensive, 24-hour tracking of select fish was conducted on a monthly basis. Walleye locations were plugged into detailed aerial maps and posted online at in.gov/dnr/fishwild/3280.htm for anglers to monitor. So far, the results have provided insight on walleye behaviors and habitat use, and piqued interest among the local fishing community.

WANDERING 'EYES

"One of the more interesting findings to us was how heavily walleyes utilize flooded timber in the spring," says Sandy Clark-Kolaks, a DNR fisheries research biologist helping lead the Monroe study. The lake's water levels typically rise 6 to 10 feet in late winter and early spring, mainly from rainfall, submerging brushy stands of shoreline willows and larger mature trees. "Postspawn walleyes, from