

Waiting for Spring to spring

A late Spring has anglers wondering where to go and what to do. Fisheries biologists and technicians offer some timely tips for fishing in early 2013.

What might anglers expect with a late Spring in 2013? Several fisheries biologists and a technician offer insights and fishing tips to help anglers have a successful fishing season opener.



Chip Long – Peshtigo

With the opening of fishing just weeks away, I'm wondering if the ice will be completely gone! The extended forecast (next 10 days) has the local area hovering around 40 degrees during the day and below freezing at night well into next week. With that said, water temperatures may rise to 50 degrees on some lakes by opening weekend. My general rule of thumb has been after the first three nights of consecutive 55-plus degree temperatures, the fish will really turn on. In a nutshell, opening weekend this year will undoubtedly be slower than last year. When it does warm up, fish will move up quickly. I anticipate a few fish kills this spring because the water will warm up fast, increasing stress during/after spawning (i.e. Columnaris).



Russ Warwick – Hayward

When we have a late spring and ice-out we usually have the best early walleye fishing. The male walleyes are still shallow and are very hungry. Fish can be caught on jig and minnows or slip bobbers. Crankbaits can work near dark. Slow presentation is a must since water temperatures are still low. The same applies for northern pike, which will be in the shallow weeds and feeding. It's looking like bass and panfish will be very early pre-spawn on opening day so target deeper water than normal and focus on "staging areas" outside of traditional spawning grounds.



Dave Seibel – Antigo

What a difference a year makes! It is April 9 as I write this. Winter is hanging on longer than usual. The small farm ponds

still have white ice and they usually open up at least a week before most lakes. The forecast calls for three days of rain, freezing rain, and then snow, potentially heavy snow measured closer to the foot mark than in inches.

What will opening weekend of fishing bring? If I had to bet -- the ice will be off the lakes, but only by a week or two. Water temperatures will probably be quite cool yet, probably in the 40s or low 50s. Northern pike will be post-spawn and feeding heavily in bays and the emerging plant growth. Walleye will be at peak spawn or immediately post-spawn and will be transitioning from spawning habitats to feeding habitats. Post-spawn walleye like to feed in shallow bays with emerging plant growth and woody habitat. Muskellunge and perch will be at peak spawn. Crappies and bluegills will be in the shallows enjoying the sun warmed water there and the food life. Trout streams will likely still be running high and cool from spring melt waters and rains. Cool water trout fishing may be better in the afternoon, once the water has had a chance to warm and the bug life activates.

Whatever the weather and water temps, there is only one opening weekend. Get out and enjoy it and have a safe and memorable time on the water!



Paul Piszczek – Superior

The fishing season on several Lake Superior tributaries opened on Saturday, March 30, although the open season only applies to the lower segments of the tributaries. This early opener offers anglers the opportunity to catch and harvest lake-run fish. In the Brule River last fall, more than 10,000 fish including brown trout, coho salmon, and steelhead ascended the Brule River lamprey barrier/fishway. Of those fish, nearly half were steelhead that overwintered in the river preparing to spawn as waters warm this spring. Nearly 75 percent of all steelhead in last fall's run measured 18.5 to 25.5 inches, and about one-half of the run ranged from 22.5 to 25.5 inches long. On the Brule River, only the river



A young angler proudly displays a Brule River steelhead, the first of what will hopefully be many.

segment downstream from U.S. Highway 2 to Lake Superior is currently open to fishing.

Lake-run fish can also be found in other Lake Superior tributaries, including the Middle River and Poplar River in Douglas County and the Iron River, Cranberry River, and Sioux River in Bayfield County. The current air temperatures along Lake Superior's south shore are unseasonably cold these days, which makes for variable open-water and ice conditions on the tributaries. Ice may likely exist in the extreme lower ends of the rivers and along the lakeshore, and open water can be found further upstream. When fishing, expect to use a fairly slow presentation with baits such as yarn flies and spawn, as fish move relatively slowly in the colder water temperatures.



Kurt Welke – Fitchburg

Spring 2013 won't be significantly different than any other opener....there is still the timeless unwritten contract between men and their maker and these things called fish. I'd expect things to be a little

colder in the morning at first light and the bite may indeed be slower for fish being pursued with artificials rather than natural baits. I'd put my money on areas with good exposure to sun and whatever heat might have been driven into the system. Like always, I'm looking for collaborative signs – fresh greened vegetation, fish eating birds in the area, disturbance on the surface from schooling baitfish and the presence of wood, rock, and other habitat. I'll fish slower and deeper – no cast and crank -- and try to keep my shadow behind me. I'll be looking

at the weather the days before for prevailing winds and any other advantages I can lever.



Marty Engel – Baldwin

Most flooding and snow melt has occurred by mid-April in the Pierce County area and streams should be at normal base flow for the opener. Barring any significant rain events just before the opener,

trout streams should be clear and trout populations are in excellent shape.

There is still plenty of ice on area lakes as of April 12. Flowages are beginning to open along with the snow melt. This going to be an extremely late ice-out for the area and water temperatures are sure to be colder than on a normal opener. Pike and walleye are predicted to be at the tail end of the spawn. Crappies may be in the shallows. Due to predicted low water temperature on the opener shallow and slow presentations may work best. Also anglers may want to check out shallow bays that warm up quickly.



Tom Meronek – Wausau

Here in central Wisconsin we are going to see a much different opening day than in 2012, in fact 180 degrees different. In 2012, we were in the midst of warmwater fish spawning or nearly done spawning.

Panfish and bass were in post spawn mode and walleye were a distant memory. Not so in 2013. On the Wisconsin River I would expect the walleye to be about done spawning, but just starting a very active post spawn period. The bass will be more difficult to target, as water temperatures may not be optimal. Muskellunge will likely be just starting their spawning activity, making fishing unpredictable. The local inland lakes will likely have cold water which may make fishing more difficult, but anglers finding pre-spawn fish could still be successful. I expect great trout fishing early in the season as the streams will have good water levels and outstanding trout numbers based on 2012 surveys.



Brian Brecka – Alma (Mississippi River)

It's been a cold start to spring fishing on the Mississippi River. Water temperatures have struggled to maintain themselves in the upper 30s. How do these temperatures compare to previous years?

During the last ten years, water temperatures during the

second week of April ranged to the low 50s while averaging in the mid-40s. While the temperatures are low, water levels are increasing. As of April 10, the water level below Lock and Dam 4 at Alma was near three feet high and on the rise. The National Weather Service had not yet predicted a crest level. Although it may crest soon, additional precipitation could delay and increase the crest.

Although our spring weather has been stuck in a cold weather pattern, conditions will change soon. To ensure success, adapt to the changing conditions such as water level, water temperature, flow and forage location. And please use the fishery resource wisely, follow advice about the number of fish meals you can safely enjoy, support conservation efforts and introduce fishing to someone you'd like to see enjoy fishing as much as you do.



Jumbo perch (among other fish) await anglers who venture to fish the Mississippi River.

Anglers have battled the elements and taken opportunities to fish when the weather allows. A recent warm spring day brought a reported 200 boats fishing the river near Lock and Dam 3 at Red Wing, Minn. Lock and Dam 4 at Alma also affords opportunities to fish, and recent reports have anglers doing well on walleye, sauger, yellow perch and northern pike. Especially during the spring, walleye and sauger are the most sought after fish on the Mississippi River. There are fair numbers of walleye ranging from 15 to 20 inches as well as fair numbers of fish below the 15-inch size limit. And spring is the time that 10-pound-plus walleyes are most likely to be caught. Although they don't grow as large as walleye, sauger can be just as plentiful and range to near 20 inches. And don't worry if you're not a boat owner. There are fishing platforms (floats) below several of the locks and dams on the Mississippi River. They're generally privately owned and provide great fishing opportunities.



Heath Benike – Eau Claire

Conditions should be similar to 2008, which was another late ice-out for northern Wisconsin. Walleye will likely be in the process of or just finishing their spawning activities and concentrated at traditional spawning areas. Anglers should target riffles/run areas in rivers and wind-swept rocky shorelines on lakes. Good to excellent fishing can be had for those anglers who take the time to find these locations. Anglers looking to find northern pike should target shallow bays with emergent vegetation. Bass and panfish will also be attracted to these shallow bays because water temperatures warm up faster in these locations. Lastly, trout fishing should still be good assuming we do not get any large run-off events just before opener. Trout are a coldwater fish and are less impacted by the late spring and trout populations are strong on many local waters.



Coming off the drought. With improved water levels and excellent trout populations, why not give Wisconsin trout fishing a try?