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## Fall Walleye Fishing: Trick or Treat?

*By Chad Richardson*

*Part two of two*

A few years ago a friend of mine finished his masters degree in fisheries biology by studying the food habits of walleyes in the southern Great Plains, at Kansas State University. Mike Quist finished his thesis under Dr. Chris Guy at the Kansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit. Their research confirmed a lot of the suspicions that I had about the food habits of southern plains walleyes and the following information was taken from unpublished data in Mike's thesis.

During Mike's research they sampled walleyes throughout the seasons using gill nets and examined the stomach contents. One aspect of his work was to see how stomach contents related to the thermal regime or water temperature and how the thermal regime may affect growth rates. During the spring months of March, April and May walleye stomachs consisted of midges and other invertebrates along with gizzard shad but shad consisted of 75% of the diet. The summer months of June-August walleyes were found to have a large proportion of invertebrates, freshwater drum, and white bass. Gizzard shad only consisted of 40% of the diet during the hot summer months. Mike also indicated in his research that fish were difficult to catch and suggested that they used a different habitat such as deeper water. Summer also had the highest proportion of empty stomachs. By fall, (September-November) gizzard shad were the bulk of the walleyes diet and consisted of 96% of the diet.

An interesting thing that may help explain this preference for shad in the fall is the ther-

mal regime throughout the year. Many studies have shown that walleyes reduce their activity and seek cooler water when the surface temperature exceeds 72 degrees. Juvenile gizzard shad primarily feed on zooplankton and invertebrates near the surface and prefer the warmest water available during



***Fall can be feast or famine for walleyes. But some of the biggest fish of the year can be caught when the water cools down.***

summer. Do you see a problem here?

Other studies have shown that high surface temperatures like we have here in Kansas can effectively segregate walleyes and gizzard shad during the summer months. This likely explains why most walleye stomachs that were sampled in the summer consisted of relatively little shad and many had empty stomachs. During this time of year our walleyes (contrary to northern walleyes) are inactive and stressed from the high water temperatures. Mike's research indicated that because of the high surface temperatures that southern walleyes are barely able to maintain weight and in some cases lose weight during the hottest part of the summer. This explains why I can catch a skinny walleye during the summer in a reservoir that is full of shad. This all sounds pretty dismal but there is an upside to our high water temperatures. Moderate fall temperatures and mild winters make for ideal water temperatures for shad and walleye to overlap. This means that growth rates are enhanced by up to 150% during fall, winter and spring. Mike found that approximately 80% of our walleye's annual growth in length and weight was attained between the end of summer through October. So even though walleyes to the north are packing on the weight in July and our walleyes are stressed out, they are still able to grow faster and pack on even more weight during our mild fall and winter temperatures but that makes them pretty darn hard to catch in the fall.

So after painting such a dismal picture, how can you catch these fat over full walleyes of the south? Well I don't have any solid research to back up my theories on this one but I do have several years of given it a hard try and this is what I have learned. I figure that walleyes will eat even if they have a belly full of shad but they will need to be provoked and you may need to provoke a bunch of them before you find a taker. I would equate this challenge equal to coaxing a female

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walleye to bite during the spawn. Anyone who has ever tried fishing for spawning fish know that catching a female is pretty tough.

The best approach in my opinion is a crankbait, for a variety of reasons. For starters, you need to provoke the strike and a crankbait fits that bill. Secondly, it's a numbers game; you need to provoke several fish to get one to bite. Trolling crankbaits becomes the best option to locate an active fish. I like to troll and look for fish at the same time. If I troll over a spot that has all the right looks (bait fish and larger fish) but get no takers I will change crankbaits and try it again. If I find a spot that really looks good, I may work it for several hours trying different crankbaits until you find the right one. Because there is a high forage base at this time of year, sometimes I like to experiment with attractors. To me, attractors give the look of a school of baitfish rather than an individual fish (or crankbait) and sometimes make the difference. The attractors I use are made by Mack's Lure and are called "Hot Wings". They are based off of the same principle as the popular smile blades also manufactured by Mack's Lure. They consist of two relatively large flashy plastic blades that counter rotate on a small piece of wire with swivels at both ends. I tie directly to the Hot Wings and then tie about a 3-4 foot piece of line behind the wings, attach a crosslock snap and then the crankbait. The Hot Wings come in several different colors so you may need to experiment with them as well, but generally the silver/gold or blue/glow colors seem to work best for me.

Once I catch a fish I will continue to work over that spot and if I can't get anything to go on a crankbait but I still feel it's a good spot I may switch to a jigging spoon or blade bait and work the exact spot and sometimes that will trigger a fish.

One thing that is different than trolling crankbaits during other times of the year is color. Most of our reservoirs are fairly murky and the fire-tiger colors work best most of the time but I have found that the natural colors out produce the florescent colors in the fall no doubt because the fish are so keyed in on shad. One of the go-to colors and crankbait that I have had success with is the purple iridescence or the purple prism color on a deep little ripper Reef Runner crankbait. They have a purple back with silver sides that closely resemble shad colors. The Reef Runners do not resemble a shad by body

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## Cookin' Your Catch

### Chivieche

While this column is usually about "Cookin'", this particular fish dish should probably be referred to as "Fixin'" because there's no cooking involved. Yes we are talking raw fish here, but don't let that scare you off. This is a popular dish in Latin America, and it is called several different things, including variations of the title you see here.

One of the primary ingredients, cilantro, tends to polarize people. Some people *love* it and some people won't touch it. The only way to discover which category you fit in is to *try* it. You may want to vary the amounts of the ingredients (you will see they are pretty general in nature) to suit your tastes. It works with many varieties of fish, which kind of fish you use is primarily based on personal preference.

Dice 1-2 pounds of boneless fish filets and place your fish in very small pieces and place in a big bowl. Cover with three parts of Real Lemon and one part of Real Lime, just enough to fully cover the fish. Now throw in approximately a handful of finely chopped onion, a handful of finely chopped celery, a half-handful of finely chopped sweet pepper and a half-handful of fresh cilantro. Mix in a couple splashes of Tobasco Sauce and Worcestershire Sauce and some salt and pepper to taste. Chill overnight. Eat with tortilla chips or dig in with a spoon. Yum!

## Tip of the Month

### Make Your Crankbaits Come Alive!

by Bill Ayres

We found one of the shortcomings of most lures is you can't do anything other than go faster or slower. Mack's Lure Smile Blades fit right in with my personality. I like to experiment and my latest experiment is a real hit.

We make an ordinary lure come alive. The picture shows the result. The smallest Mack's Smile Blade in Sparkle Silver or Red doesn't hinder any lure's original wiggle or wobble and it is easy to attach.

First take off the treble hook and split ring. Save the split ring for future use. Now tie a piece of 15-pound Fireline 20 inches long to the end of the stick bait with a palomar knot. Slide the Mack's sparkle Smile Blade on, up to the knot. Next take a #4 red bead and put it right behind the Smile blade, lastly tie the original treble hook on the tag end of the Fireline.

But, here comes the trick. As you tie the last palomar and run the line through the eye of the hook and turn right back through the eye again and tie the over hand knot — stop right there and test which side of the loop pulls the treble eye closer up to the bead — pull it up snug. Now put the loop over the treble hook and pull the tag end to lock it. Trim the tag end and it is all ready to go. I've used it on Hot 'n Tots, Reef Runners, Rapalas, and Thunder Sticks.



# Will A Stan's Spin Steal The Show?

*By Hall of Fame Angler Stan Fagerstrom*

The strike came with nerve tangling suddenness.

My spinnerbait had no more than hit the surface when a smallmouth smashed it. "There he is!" I yelled. A minute or so later that fish was glistening in the guide's net.

Think I'm just dreaming? Guess again! You just might get a chance to see it happen. That fish, you see, was among a bunch of others that grabbed a Mack's Lure Stan's Spin spinnerbait during the filming of a Hawg Quest television show in late August.

Hawg Quest, of course, is the interesting fishing show that appears each week throughout the Pacific Northwest, Alaska and parts of Northern California on the Fox Sports Network. The host of the show is Glenn Hall, a likeable guy who headquarters in Roseburg, Oregon. The show was first shown in 2005 and has enjoyed a building audience ever since.

Glenn's capable cameraman and show editor is Taj Gombart, also of Roseburg. Taj has spent most of his life in the film industry. Remember the motion picture *A River Runs Through It*? Taj, while working as a cameraman in the movie industry, had a bit part in that film.

I've often been asked if this or that television personality really knows anything about fishing. Glenn sure as heck does. He'll hold his own in any kind of company. For that matter, so will Taj.

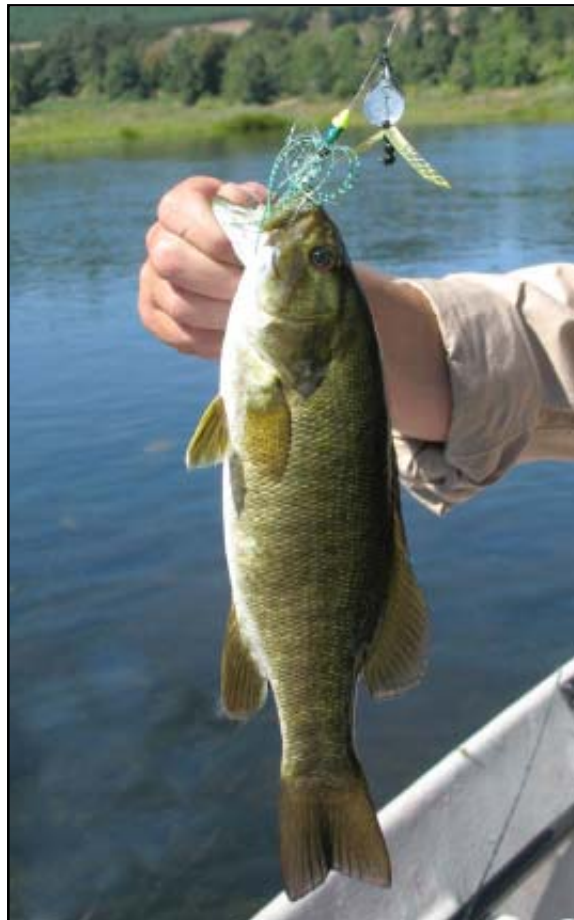
And so will Scott Wolfe, guide coordinator for the fabled Big K Guest Ranch. Scott had suggested to Glenn that I be invited to be a guest on the Hawg Quest show. Any time I have a chance to spend time at the Big K and share a boat with my friend Scott I'm going to grab it as fast as the river's smallmouth smash into a bait.

Actually, I had the good fortune to fish with Scott a couple of days before the filming was done. We threw a variety of lures at the river's smallmouth.

Various Yamamoto Senkos and other plastic creations caught lots of fish. The Mack's Lure Stan's Spin got the majority of the fish caught on hard baits.

Actually, it was Wolfe who caught the first smallmouth on the spinnerbait that carries my name. Each time I'm in the boat with Scott I marvel at how well he knows the Umpqua. I always keep one rod rigged with a Stan's Spin when I'm fishing smallmouth. One of my rods was rigged with it on the morning I'm talking about, but I was using another outfit. Scott picked up my rod that held the spinnerbait.

"There just might be one in that pocket up close to the bank that will hit this spinnerbait," he said as flipped the lure to the spot he had indicated. He'd taken maybe a



half dozen turns of his reel handle when a smallmouth nailed it.

"Scott," I said, "I swear you know more about where these Umpqua bass are located than that heron over there on the other side of the river. You're as sharp-eyed as that osprey we watched catch fish yesterday."

And I wasn't joking. I've fished with Scott often enough to know just how skilled this dedicated river guide is. Scott's twin brother Richard also guides out of the Big K. So does his father. I don't know of another family group that has their combined years of guiding experience. That experience shows whenever you're in the boat with one of them.

You don't hear of anglers using spinnerbaits for smallmouth as much as you do where largemouth are concerned. Those Umpqua River smallmouths evidently haven't heard they're not supposed to find spinnerbaits particularly appealing. They dang near jerked the rod out of my hands a couple of times.

I wound up taking one of the largest smallmouth we caught over the four days on my Stan's Spin. If you've got a smallmouth trip coming up I've got a suggestion for you. Get yourself a selection of these baits in the quarter ounce size. That's the smallest size available.

When I'm throwing one of these lures exclusively for smallmouth I make a couple of skirt changes. For starters I reduce the number of strands in the skirt by half. I also add a few strands of silver-colored Flashabou to what's left of the skirt. I like the flash that material makes as the lure is manipulated.

I can't guarantee, of course, that the Hawg Quest TV program will show any part of what I'm talking about. It all depends on how the show is edited—what's selected and what's not. But if you run into Glenn Hall somewhere down the line at an outdoor show or some similar event, and you just might because he's becoming better known all the time, ask him if the lure they hung my name on catches Umpqua smallmouth. If he doesn't say yes, you can be assured Scott Wolfe will!

One more thing: What you'll see on the Hawg Quest show is for real. There's none of that "fakey jakey" business you might have seen on some of the other fishing shows. Glenn and Taj show it like it is. And they have fun while they're at it.

I'm not certain when the Umpqua River Hawg Quest adventure will be shown. Glenn thought it might possibly be in December. Keep an eye on the Mack's Lure web site. If I get advance notice of when the show is to

be aired I'll share it with you.

In the meantime, check your TV program directory to see when the other weekly Fox Sports Hawg Quest television shows are presented.



*Here's a nice double Glenn Hall and I took out of Oregon's Umpqua River during the filming of a forthcoming Hawg Quest TV show. Glenn is the host of the popular Fox Sports Net fishing show.*

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shape per say but I think it's the action that entices the fish to strike. The same is true for jigging spoons, other times of the year white or chartreuse is best but in the fall go with the shad imitations such as the Northland rattle spoon in the shad color, or a silver Cicada. If you can't get anything to work jigging, then I go back to trolling in search of another active fish and start the whole process over again.

So, if you are unfortunate enough to live somewhere outside the traditional walleye belt and there is not a fantastic fall bite due to a large forage base, weather patterns or whatever the case may be, learn to "think outside the tackle box" to figure out why walleyes are doing what they're doing. Consult your local biologist for any clues, put together a plan to catch fish, try different things, be patient, be persistent and you will catch fish.

## ***Photo of the Month***

*We want your photos! Send your photos to [bernie@mackslure.com](mailto:bernie@mackslure.com).*



*Capt. Ken Foxxe of Riptide Adventures took this 20-pound coho salmon on friday November 2, 2007 while fishing between bookings. The beautiful location is the Snohomish River in Washington. The fish slammed a black/black Sugar Buns that he had put a small bright piece of pink yarn near the black bead, below the spinner.*

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**THANK YOU!**

