

Summer Musky

When picking water to fish during the early musky season, shallow stained water flowages top the list. The more shallow water that is available in the flowage, the more active muskies will be. Try to avoid flowages where most of the water is deeper than twenty feet. Deeper flowages will have a greater amount of water passing through and take longer to warm. The size of the flowage is important, since a smaller flowage will also warm more quickly. The smaller the flowage, the more active muskies will be once the season opens. Besides numbers of muskies, often these flowages can often produce a few big fish in the early season.

One example of a prime early season flowage, is Caldron Falls in central Marinette County. This 1,200-acre flowage has plenty of shallow muck bays filled with wood, fresh cabbage weed and feeding muskies. Muskies will spawn in these bays and remain there as long as forage is present. While musky fishing can be challenging on Caldron Falls, if you put in your time you can connect with quality muskies. Over the years, I have developed a few patterns that have produced consistent catches of muskies.

Shallow muck filled bays loaded with wood are prime areas to fish on the season opener. The combination of muck and wood warms quickly. With the warmer water temperature, even large females can recover quickly after spawning. Large trophy muskies will relate to extremely shallow water under these conditions. Not only will they move into the area to feed, but they can also remain there for long periods. Both downed wood and stumps can be equally productive. Look for wood next to an inlet entering a bay to be a prime feeding area. Largemouth bass, pike, and panfish will relate heavily to an inlet, and since muskies are at the top of the food chain, they won't be far behind.

When fishing wood, it is important to be mobile, and concentrate only on active fish. Use caution when moving into the shallows, being careful not to spook a large musky. Both bucktails and shallow running crankbaits are effective at this time. If you are fishing with a partner, then you should use both presentations. When choosing a bucktail, use a smaller blade and a slightly neutral color dressing. Although the water may be stained, there is good visibility in the early season. Rust color, black/chartreuse or black/orange are

top colors. Leave the bright fluorescent colors for mid summer. Small bucktails with rubber bodies are also deadly in spring.

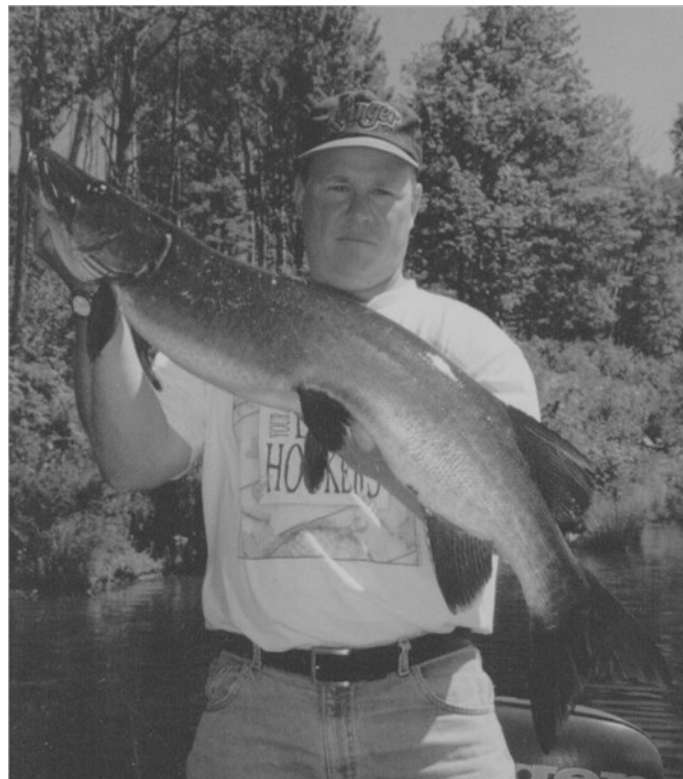
If stable weather patterns are the rule, use a faster steady retrieve with the bucktail. After the passing of a cold front, use a slower retrieve on the bucktail. Although most strikes will occur in the first few feet of your retrieve, it is important to make a figure 8 back to the boat.

Twitching shallow running crankbaits will often be more productive than bucktails. With the primary forage being either small baitfish or crappie, these baits can be very effective. Smaller six-inch baits, like the Crane Bait, are more desirable since they most resemble the forage. Try to pitch the bait as tight to any wood cover as possible. Often a musky will strike the bait as it hits the water so be prepared. Slowly work the bait back to the boat with short twitches, keeping the bait from breaking water. As with a bucktail, make a figure 8 since strikes will occur at boat-side. Try to match your bait to the preferred forage. Again, the water visibility is good so there is no need for bright colors. Natural color patterns like black/white would be my first choice.

The type of rod and equipment you use will make your presentation more effective. When twitching a shallow running crankbait I prefer a 6'6" rod like a Lamiglas GSW 66 MHC-T. When fishing bucktails I prefer a 7-foot rod like a Lamiglas GSW 7 MHC-T. For twitch baits I rig my reel with Cortland Musky Mono and on my bucktail rod I like Cortland Musky Master in 27 or 36 pound test.

Besides wood, prime areas will also sprout fresh weedgrowth. Some flowages will have an abundance of weeds while others will see only limited weedgrowth. Fresh weeds will hold the most active muskies. Even if the weedgrowth is limited expect to find a few active muskies in the vicinity. In June, weedgrowth can spring up over night so look for fresh weeds each day you head out on the water.

If you are looking for large muskies you need to use a slow presentation. Big spawned out females will hold in the weeds but will not chase a fast moving bait. Over the years my good friend Robert Tomes has boated big muskies with a fly rod while we were fishing a few of my favorite waters. This slow finesse presentation will trigger a strike



Scott Francois with an early season flowage musky

from a sluggish post spawn musky, which would not chase a bucktail or twitch bait. Perch and crappie pattern flies are good bets in stained water. Robert has a new book out that covers fly fishing for muskies.

Plastics can also be twitched over fresh cabbage and will produce a big muskie when all else seems to fail. I discovered this pattern years back when fishing on Caldron Falls with a client from Indiana. The conditions were ideal and we found muskies in all the fresh cabbage we fished, but the problem was we could not get one to hit a bait. We threw twitch baits, bucktails and jerkbaits in every size and color. As a last ditch effort, I took one of my bass rods out of my rod locker that was rigged with a five inch soft plastic jerkbait. After a few minutes I connected with a 38 incher.

When working bass sized plastics for musky you need to refine your equipment and presentation. Most musky rods are too stiff and I prefer to use a heavy action bass rod. Spool your casting reel with Cortland Master Braid in 20-40 pound test, and tie on a Ball Bearing Swivel. For a leader, I tie on about two feet of seven strand wire in 30 to 50 pound test to the swivel and then tie on a 6/0 or 7/0 wide gap hook directly to the leader. The lighter line and light leader will allow the jerkbait to have a slow natural action. If the bait falls too quickly and is too rigid, you will decrease your odds of a strike. Some anglers may think this rig is too light for musky, but I have not lost a fish with this rig. I have also rigged a six inch sucker on the same rig with

satisfactory results.

On many occasions, musky activity will peak during the late afternoon and early evening. However, don't get the idea that all you have to do is be on the water late in the day. On some days, the best action can occur at High Noon, and on other days they will be active sporadically throughout the day. You may have a follow or see a musky cruising the cabbage, and return to the spot late in the afternoon and catch the fish. Returning to a fish has resulted in many a big musky.

I have seldom found peak feeding occurring early in the day, unless we are in a warming trend and the water temperature warms rapidly. Later in summer, being on the water at sun-up may be the only way to boat a musky. Night fishing is also not as productive as it is later in the season. This is one time of year when you will actually benefit from rising late in the day.

Musky will also be most active after warming weather patterns. Stable weather patterns will not only raise the water temperature, but the water won't cool down over night. Cool nights will cause the water temperature to drop and slow down the musky action. If you are fishing after a front, look for the best action to occur late in the afternoon.

The early season can be a time of plenty for all species of fish and muskies are no exception. While there is never a sure thing, you can increase your odds. While you may not get that 50 incher, you should encounter plenty of consistent musky action. Do some hunting and check out new water.


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