



# Crankbaits For Summer Walleye



**Richard Mladenik**

**M**ost rivers with decent walleye populations see consistent action through the summer months. Those same river walleyes that traveled long distances to spawn in the spring are dispersed throughout the river system. Locating walleyes in summer can pose a problem at times but once you find them, unlike their lake cousins, they usually bite. This is not to say that summer river walleyes aren't finicky at times, but for the most part it's all about Location!

All rivers don't produce walleyes in the summer since the river might only have a marginal walleye population. Stick with rivers that are known to produce walleyes in the spring since these rivers will hold the highest population of fish. If you feel adventurous, or just want to avoid other fisherman, then try the lesser-known smaller rivers. These rivers will often yield good catches since they receive less fishing pressure. However, in mid-summer water levels can be low and navigation can be a problem on smaller rivers. You might have trouble catching legal sized walleyes from smaller rivers.

Even though the bulk of the walleyes have left the spawning areas in summer, a certain percentage of walleyes are not too far from spawning areas. The tail waters below a dam will always hold a walleye population regardless of the season and should be one of the first places to fish. There is plenty of current regardless of the water level, and forage is plentiful. The water released through the dam is colder than on other sections of the river as well as being more oxygenated. All of these factors combine for excellent walleye habitat with the only thing missing in summer being walleye fishermen. For some unknown reason, some dams receive heavy pressure in the spring but are deserted in the summer.

Dams will offer walleyes a constant food supply of small baitfish, panfish and crayfish. The water level of the river will be the main factor in determining walleye location. If water levels are low, which they usually are in summer, walleyes can stack up in the deep holes below a dam. Walleyes will hold in these holes during the day and move shallow after dark to feed on crayfish and minnows. If a sufficient food supply is present, walleyes will have no need to vacate the area.

Many dams generate power and there will be periods of high and low water. Expect major feeding periods to occur when water levels begin to rise. As the water level rises, the baitfish and crayfish will be flushed out of their haunts and begin to move shallow. Walleyes and smallmouth will not be far behind as they sense an easy meal as they also head for shallow water. Since power is usually generated on a schedule, you will be able to plan your fishing to these periods. Prime periods for generating power are from noon to late afternoon.

During periods of rising water take advantage of the high walleye activity. Walleyes can be so aggressive that they can strike a crankbait as hard as a smallmouth. A crankbait will enable you to cover water quickly and lets you pick off the active fish one by one. This is one time when you can forget about the walleyes that won't hit the aggressive presentation. You are better off keeping on the move instead of sitting in one spot.

Although walleyes are feeding on crayfish, crayfish imitation crankbaits are not the best choice for walleyes. They are great for smallmouth bass but walleyes prefer to hit brighter colored crankbaits. This is yet another walleye pattern that I discovered while smallmouth fishing. This color pattern has only let me down a few times.

One time in mid-July, my clients and I were catching smallmouth with topwater baits and plastics when the water level on the river began to rise. As the current began to increase, the topwater bite came to an abrupt halt and the pickups on our plastics became fewer and lighter. Before we knew it we were catching nothing. I had my trolling motor on the highest speed in an attempt to deal with the increased current and I had all I could do to hold my boat in the swiftly moving water. I knew that we had to change our game plan and fast.



**Yo-Zuri Sashimi Shad**



**Yo-Zuri Crystal Minnow**

We were on fish so I was trying to avoid a major move. In one last effort, I told my clients to tie on a crayfish imitation crankbait. They had plenty of crankbaits of their own so I did not see the baits they chose to tie on since my all my efforts were being expended in controlling the boat. As we slipped downriver, my clients began pounding the shoreline and it did not take long for one of them to catch a 17 inch smallmouth on the crayfish imitation crankbait. He released the smallmouth and in a matter of a few casts caught another smallmouth.

Within a few minutes the second client had a fish on but to our surprise it was an 18 inch walleye. As I netted the walleye I observed the fire tiger crankbait hanging from the walleye's mouth. I put the walleye in the live well and I thought that if my clients did not want it, I would have the walleye for supper. The action continued and both my clients kept catching fish. The guy with the crawfish imitation crankbait caught smallmouth and the guy with the fire tiger crankbait caught walleyes. The crankbaits they were using had similar action, they were short and had a wide wobble, but the color was definitely different. While it is a logical pattern, I had never seen a situation where one species would only hit a specific color crankbait.

Since that day some twenty odd years ago, I have been using these crankbait color patterns for the targeted species during the summer. It only seems to hold true for periods of rising water, either through surges below the dam or heavy rains. During stable river conditions there does not seem to be a color preference in crankbaits between walleyes and smallmouth. Obviously, this might just be a pattern for the Menominee River, since I have not tried it on any other rivers. However when you are smallmouth fishing and want a few walleyes for the pan, give it a try.