



**Early
Spring
Options
Abound**

SOUTH DAKOTA'S

Glacial Lakes Region

[BY DENNIS FOSTER*]

The Glacial Lakes Region of north-eastern South Dakota is becoming a premier walleye destination in the Upper Midwest, with the potential to produce lots of respectable fish as well as trophies. Locals know the score, but the rural nature of the area has kept it largely untapped by most anglers.

AS THE NAME IMPLIES, THIS REGION IS DOTTED WITH WATERS FORMED BY THE GLACIAL ACTION OF THE LAST ICE AGE. MANY OF THE LAKES VARY GREATLY EVEN WHEN THEY'RE ONLY A FEW MILES APART. SOME ARE ALMOST GIN-CLEAR WITH COMPLEX STRUCTURE: BOULDER-STREWN POINTS, ISOLATED ROCKPILES, DEEP WEEDS, AND INTRICATE SYSTEMS OF SHOALS. OTHERS ARE THE TURBID, FEATURELESS DISHPAN WATERS OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH THE PLAINS. WE ALSO HAVE LARGE, SHALLOW, SOFT-BOTTOMED SLOUGHS THAT ARE FULL OF WALLEYES—AND, AS YOU MIGHT EXPECT, SOME LAKES FEATURE ALL OF THE ABOVE.

DOUBLE-ACTION RIGS

12-pound Berkley Trilene XT line, #3 JB Lures Ventilator Blade, #4 Gamakatsu Walleye Wide Gap Hook with 2-inch Berkley PowerBait Grub—rig length 36 inches.

Same setup with a 0.8- to 1.1-inch Mack's Lures Smile Blade.



Dennis Foster often uses these smaller spinner rigs to target both perch and walleyes on shallow sand and gravel flats during spring. He usually runs the rigs on a short line behind boards to keep them away from the boat.

Also add to the mix an abundance of newer man-made structure in some waters—submerged gravel roads, old farm sites and foundations, piles of field rock, stock dams, machinery, and flooded trees. Water levels

began rising in the 1990s, inundating vast areas of farm and pastureland after a record snowfall in the winter of 1996 and 1997. The same sort of phenomenon occurred at Devils Lake, North Dakota, only in South

Dakota the result was many smaller bodies of water, most interconnected by sloughs and creeks. The result has been an explosion in fish populations. Size limits and other harvest restrictions help keep the fisheries in good shape.

Most anglers who visit are immediately struck by the rural nature of the area. Most of the lakes don't have lake homes, much less jet skiers or speed-boaters. That doesn't mean the entire area is primitive: Lakes like Roy have well-known establishments such as Roy Lake Resort, where anglers find great lodging and food, as well as great fishing; and visitors remark on how friendly the area is.

A big draw is no closed walleye season. Ice-out may occur as early as late March on some waters. By mid-April fishing is going strong, with prespawn patterns prevalent on most lakes. On the clearer lakes, longline trolling with minnow plugs is a great way to catch fish. Anglers also cast from shore at current areas or on rocky points. During the day anglers rig or jig, working shoreline areas or shallow structure

with a combination of livebait rigs and jigs tipped with minnows. If the shallows fail, move deeper and fish along the first major drop-off.

As April unfolds it isn't uncommon, because of all the various kinds of lakes, to have several lakes in a 5-mile radius all in different spawning stages at the same time—Prespawn, Spawn, and Postspawn. If the fish aren't cooperative on one lake, you can be fishing another in minutes.

Some anglers have never been on one of our dishpan lakes and at first may be puzzled about how to begin fishing them. Crankbaits shine on these lakes. The fish often are highly aggressive and prefer high-action plugs such as the Reef Runner Ripshad. Troll them shallow or cast to specific structure, including rocky shorelines or any type of cover like the front face of newly emerging reedbeds.

In lakes with flooded structure, I often pitch a short-shank jig-and-minnow combo such as JB's Kracker into submerged trees and work it back to the edge. Another option is to rig a long-shank jig

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like Bait Rig's Oddball, weedless style (Texas rig it) with Berkley PowerBait or Gulp! to reduce snags. The artificials usually are just as effective as livebait. Slipbobbers work well, too. Meanwhile, I fish submerged gravel roads by casting crankbaits, or I use a single-hook spinner rig baited with an action artificial like a 2- or 3-inch Power Grub threaded onto a Gamakatsu Walleye Wide Gap hook, trolled behind a bottom bouncer.

The most notable lakes in the region include Waubay, Bitter, Big Stone, Lake Traverse, Roy, Pickerel, Reitz, and Kettle-Cattail, all of which should be productive this season; but there are many more, including all those better classified as overgrown sloughs.

Due to the cyclical nature of many of these lakes, make sure you have up-to-date information. The Sportsman's Cove in

Webster is a full-service baitshop that lies in the heart of the region and provides current and reliable details on what's happening. They'll also help you get a guide or offer advice on lodging.

Besides walleyes there's excellent fishing for perch, bluegill, and crappies, along with overlooked and underutilized trophy pike and bass. Cooperative fish, a never-ending walleyes season, great scenery, and genuine hospitality are the ingredients that make this a great place to live—or visit. ■

***Dennis Foster is a guide from Mellette, South Dakota: 605/887-3451 or 605/450-1069, eyetimepromotions.com.**

CONTACT: Sportsman's Cove, 605/345-2468, thesportsmanscove.com; Roy Lake Resort, 605/448-5498, roylakeresort.com.