Let's Talk About Fisheries

...Tyler Lancaster

There are definitive reasons why our lakes and those around us are full of fish. Many contributing factors influence a healthy fishery. Some of these factors can be naturally occurring and some can be the work of man.

Number One: Healthy Fisheries - The Natural Way - There are many naturally occurring factors that can make a fishery either productive or unproductive. Lakes are in fact even classified differently due to these natural processes. The basic types of lakes are Oligotrophic, Mesotrophic, Eutrophic, and Hypertrophic. The main differences between these lake types are water clarity and amount of biological productivity. Oligotrophic lakes have very clear water, few plants, and not much life while a hypertrophic lake is by far more lively with high levels of bio production, turbid water, and many fish. In order for a lake to remain suitable and productive, nutrient levels need to remain stable. This is where a remote lake proves much safer and balanced than a lake close to development or city. Increased levels of phosphorus and nitrogen can be added to a lakes system by way of lawn fertilizers, and agriculture, via runoff. Excess phosphorus and nitrogen actually causes more plant growth which can make a lake become much more clear (not good). The extra number of plants will absorb the nutrients before they can become available for algal growth. Fish become very spooky, the extra light will greatly affect walleye, a species that is very light sensitive. Really in a sense, this boils down to lake location being my "number one" for a healthy fishery.

Number Two: Healthy Fisheries and Good Luck - Some lakes just got lucky with style and structure. When I talk of structure, I talk mainly of areas in a lake where fish can thrive due to water inflow and oxygen, rock piles, drop offs, large weed beds, and most importantly, prime spawning areas. In some lakes, for example Trout Lake in North Bay, Ontario, spawning areas are very few and far between. The lake trout season has been closed there for over 10 years now due to very poor reproduction levels. When a fish is forced to spawn in an area that is not adequate, mortality rates of the eggs and young increase drastically, due to a number of different reasons including predation, temperatures, current, etc. This will obviously influence the productivity of a lake. Other structure such as rock piles, weed beds, and drop offs provide mature fish with excellent feeding areas and ambush points. These parameters are very important in sustaining a highly productive fishery.

Number Three: Healthy Fisheries and Man - Man's influence is probably one of the most important factors. Naturally occurring elements can help build a very strong fishery, but man can alter that very quickly. When man follows certain guidelines and ethics, a fishery can safely be fished recreationally. We call this conservation angling. In fact, most of our returning guests here at Wilderness North report an increase in numbers and size of fish over the last several years. These reports relate directly to our Conservation fishing policies.

Conservation policies are a key element in a strong fishery. Leaving larger, spawning sized fish in the lake, and taking less total fish out of the system, can in no way harm a lakes population. We all remember the days when guys would come back in to the dock with stringers of walleye weighing 50 lbs. Those days are long gone. Conservation limits in our region allow each fisherman to have in their possession at any time, only two walleye, one under 18" and one over 18". We take it one step further and encourage both of those fish to be smaller than 18". The impact of these practices can be noticed in a very short period of time. So it's simple. Let's all be conservation anglers so our children and our children's children can be as well.