



Jose Armenta and his 2-year-old son, Jose Jr., fish at Utah Lake in Provo. April is that annual spawning season, and some say it's the best time to catch walleye.

FISHING

Walleye – king or pariah?

DWR seminar on the controversial fish is April 18

By Ray Grass
Deseret News outdoor editor

UTAH LAKE — Here in Utah the walleye is a fish you either love or hate.

No middle ground. Those who revere this bug-eyed relative to the perch say it's simply misunderstood, that it's easy to catch, good to eat and a real fighter.

Those in the opposite corner say it's not misunderstood, just misplaced. It should go back to eastern waters from whence it came. They contend the walleye is impossible to catch, eats too much and responds like a log when hooked.

Even the ardent walleye fishermen have to agree that in some waters, like Deer Creek, where it was illegally planted and then set upon ravaging the poor trout and yellow perch, the walleye is an impossible catch.

Even when it comes to the best time to fish for walleye, there's a dispute.

Consensus among the lesser walleye fans is that the only real chance at catching walleye is during the annual spawn, which is

going on now. Even then, a good many of those caught are foul hooked or snagged as they congregate to woo one another.

Ray Schelble, a member of the Rocky Mountain Anglers and a fan of the walleye, contends that despite the reported catches along the shores of Utah Lake, this is not the best time to fish for walleye. "Fish after the spawn. That's the best time. You can catch them anywhere, anytime. Well, almost," he said.

To help his cause, Schelble and other members of his club, Utah Outdoors Magazine and officers from the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources will be holding a walleye seminar.

The seminar will be April 18 in the DWR offices, 1594 W. North Temple. It begins at 7 p.m. and is free.

Curriculum will cover such topics as how and where to fish for walleye, hot lures and techniques and where they can be caught in Utah.

Part of the confusion over the fish, best known for its distinguishing large eyes and sharp canine teeth, is the fault of the fish itself.

Take, for example, the fact that fishermen are currently catching walleye out of Utah Lake, but not from its neighboring water to the south, Yuba, despite the fact there are large numbers of fish in both and the fish are spawning in both waters.



Jordan Rodgers, 10, left, and brother Jake, 14, of Holladay fish for walleye at Utah Lake. Fish is center of controversy in Utah. Anglers either love or hate it.

"We think, maybe, it's because the fish are concentrated near the inlets to the Provo and Spanish Fork rivers at Utah Lake, where at Yuba they spawn along the shoreline," said Charlie Thompson, chief of fisheries in the Central Region of the DWR.

"When they're not spawning in Utah Lake, they're scattered and harder to find. In contrast, when the spawn is over at Yuba the fish go back on the feed along the shoreline, and that's when they're more vulnerable."

Walleye fishing at Yuba will remain good through May.

The concern Thompson has for the fish in Yuba is that the walleye, which is born with a huge appetite for other fish, will eat until the cupboard is bare and then die from starvation. It happened before.

"Which is why, for the past couple of years, we've encouraged fishermen to keep the walleye they catch," he explained.

"There doesn't seem to be the same problem in Utah Lake. We've had good populations there for three or four years. The food base there is different."

There are good numbers of walleye in Yuba, too. During recent gillnet the DWR caught more than 800 fish along the shorelines. A few of the larger ones measured in the 28-inch range, but the average was

around 20 inches. Right now the fish are fat, happy and healthy.

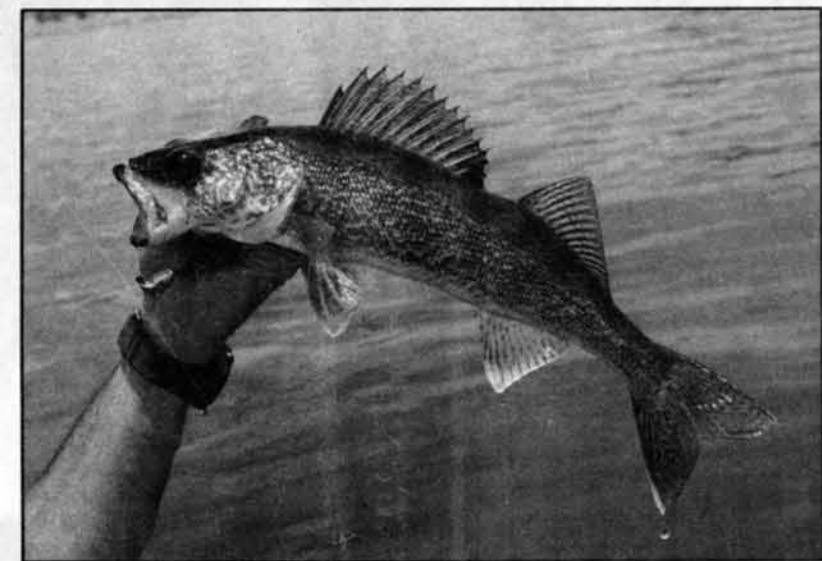
The walleye was first introduced into Utah waters in 1951. It was planted in Gunnison, Delta, Yuba and Utah lakes. Since that time, it has expanded its range, often by illegal means. Unscrupulous fishermen catch walleye at one location and transported them — alive — to another location, which is what happened at Deer Creek. Wildlife officers, in fact, apprehended one individual with live walleye headed in the direction of Jordanelle Reservoir when the reservoir first opened.

The walleye is a very prolific fish, which can make it a problem in waters where it isn't wanted. One 12-pound female can produce upwards of 388,000 eggs.

The limit in the tributaries is two fish, and only one of those may be over 20 inches. The limit in lakes, including Utah and Yuba, is six.

Fishermen at Utah Lake have been using everything from bottom bouncers to crankbaits and lures to catch walleye.

The true fans of the walleye, however, are staying home and sharpening their hooks and setting up rigs, waiting for the time when the spawn is over and they can take to the waters and prove, as they'll be telling their soon-to-be students, the walleye isn't hard to catch, simply misunderstood.



A walleye