



# NORTHERN INDIANA SPOONPLUGGER

VOLUME 11 ISSUE 3

#137

**FOUNDED 1991**

March 2006

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Last meeting was held February 20, 2006 with 17 members and guests present. We welcomed John & Kathy Fribley of Auburn and Eric Kiersey of Angola who had read an article in the paper about Spoonplugging and decided to take a closer look.

Denny Coulardot related a conversation he had recently with DNR fish biologist, Jed Pearson. Jed said that according to their latest survey there were an estimated 5,960 muskies in Lake Webster.

I believe this is also a year for weed control treatment for Lake Webster. It was aggressively treated in 1999 and again in 2002 with SONAR® (Fluridone) to help eradicate the Eurasian watermilfoil. Several follow-up treatments are usually needed to control this exotic weed. The treatment is a two-edged sword in my estimation. There is no doubt that Webster had become choked with milfoil and the eradication of any exotic species, plant or animal, is desirable. However, many of us are skeptical on the chemicals used for treatment. SONAR® is one such treatment. It is said that application has no direct negative impact on fish or other animals. The key word here is "direct". Once plants die, they begin to decompose. The decomposition process uses up dissolved oxygen in the surrounding water as well as producing nitrates. In the past, there have been some pretty amazing fish kills following the application of herbicides to control aquatic weeds. So much depends on the knowledge of the person applying the treatment: dosage, time of year (cold water holds more dissolved oxygen than warm water) water movement (wind or natural movement),

etc. Let's hope they get it right!

Denny also mentioned to check out the Evinrude E-Tec motors. They are a 2-stroke that is competing favorably with the 4-stroke engines. They are injected engines that appear to use less of everything than competitors. BUT, they have yet to make an E-Tec under 40hp. Worth a look.

John Bales gave a talk on the importance of being able to run the first 3 size lures. This was Spoonplugging 101, but it really is SO important in the learning process to be able to run the 500, 400, & 250 AND to be able to use them without the aid of a depth meter. The discipline teaches us how to map structure by "feel" which can be much more meaningful than "seeing" the structure on a depth meter. In fact, once this discipline is mastered, the depth meter becomes an even better tool in the interpretation of a structure.

More than that, the exercise of running the smaller lures without a depth finder teaches us the value of not overcorrecting our boats while contour trolling. This was a habit that was especially hard for me to break when I first began Spoonplugging. Overcorrecting your contour trolling will keep your lure OUT of position more than keeping it IN position.

**NEXT MEETING:** March 20, 2006 at the Kendallville Public Library 6:30 P.M.

**"KNOWLEDGE IS THE KEY TO FISHING SUCCESS"**



# Good Spoonplugging

By John Bales, Spoonplugging Instructor



It is normal for this time of year to have torn apart all of my reels, oiled them, fixed and checked guides and as well as all the other tools to be maintained. Due to the mild winter, we were able to get out in a boat and there are a few of us that just cannot pass that up. Sometimes these other things just have to wait. Very soon we will be starting a new season. A person must set some goals for themselves. To move forward and become better, we need to figure out where we are in our fishing at this time, and where we want to be at the end of the season. You and I know where we are weak and if we want to get better, we have to work on these areas. If we are a beginning Spoonplugger or just need some work on trolling the shallows, we would need to find a lake with good water color and no weeds. If you do not have a lake like this close to home, then find one and make the drive to it. This will allow us to run our lures correctly. I cannot express how important it is for a Spoonplugger to spend a great deal of time (especially in the beginning) on lakes with good color. We would spend enough time doing this until we are able to turn the depth meter off and still locate the bars and fingers running out into the lake. We will learn how to throw markers, get shoreline sightings, make straight line passes, and learn how to interpret structure situations. We will also begin to see how fish movements are related to the weather and water conditions on each trip and on a seasonal basis. We will learn how to anchor the boat and position it for going to the cast. If you do a good job of trolling and then anchoring when the time is right, then you will experience getting into a school of bass on the cast. Spoonplugging is not just about trolling. The trolling is our teacher. It will tell us where, when, what, why, and how in everything that we do. However, once the fish are found, we can catch many more by going to the cast. Trolling is our teacher! If we do not learn the basics of trolling, we have no chance to become a good fisherman, PERIOD! These basics are the means by which you learn the important things for your fishing knowledge and growth. You should never skip over any part of the learning process, especially in the beginning. With each catch, there will be a desire to learn more. With some time on the water and some effort, literally whatever you want out of it will come. For those who feel that it is time to learn how and when to fish deeper, it is time to put your lures down there and find out what is there. Don't just wonder around out there like a lost pup. Take it deeper a little at a time. Make straight line passes and make sure that you cover all depth, a little at a time. Make use of your markers and shoreline sightings or both at the same time. Everything we have done so far has not been done in a haphazard manner. It is even more important that we make sure to do things right, the deeper we go. If you cannot interpret what is there, then don't go there. You would be far better off spending more time working shallower until your interpretation becomes good enough to take the next step. Every body of water is different. Different in water color, in depths, in sizes, in shapes, in features and so on and so on. Let's look at some examples of fishing deeper in just a few fishing situations. Let's start with a Florida lake. The deepest water is 14 feet and it is 1/2 mile out into the lake. It is slot-like and the 14 feet of water is 800 yards across and 1/3 of a mile long. We are familiar with all of the breaklines that exist adjacent to this slot. Our next goal is to find out if there is anything that is different from the surrounding area in and around the slot. In one section of the slot, at 14 feet, we find a shell bed. The bottom is hard and everything around it is soft. We catch a bunch of big bass off of this thing and in five months of fishing it, we haven't seen another person. How did we find this spot? We put a lure in the water and spent a lot of time and effort feeling and learning what is out there. Would you say this is fishing deep?

Let's go to a natural lake that has one hole and is 200 acres, with a maximum depth of 27 feet. This lake has good water color and has a 6 foot weedline. There are two major structure situations and a couple more that could be checked also. In a couple of hours of checking, we find what we think is the best spot in

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the lake. We go to work on this bar which has breaklines of 6 feet (the weedline), 11 feet, 16 feet, and the base breakline is at 21 feet. The 27 feet of water is 50 yards off of the end of this finger coming off of the bar. We go through the whole process of running lures, starting just outside of the thick weedline and ending up with our last few straight line trolling passes ending at around 21 feet. We have not caught a fish yet and are already thinking about what to do next. On our final pass, we are coming down the side of the bar at about 21 feet and run straight off the bar towards the 27 feet of water. We can feel that the bottom is still fairly hard at this point and as our lure passes the end of the bar, we can feel that the bottom is turning soft and mucky. We are about to reel in and make a move when we feel some hard bottom again and about that time, a 5 pound bass runs into our lure. After going to the cast and making our catch, we look around and find that there is a kitchen table sized hard spot that is 20 feet past the base breakline surrounded by soft bottom. We do our homework and get some shoreline sightings for trolling passes and anchoring positions and we have this spot for life. Is this fishing deep?

Lets go to the St. Clair river. Our map shows an island with some deep water on both sides. It also shows a hump or a delta ridge which runs for a 1/2 mile or so. It looks like some good stuff exists in this area. The deepest holes look like they are from 27 feet to about 45 feet. We begin trolling the weedline along the delta at about 16 feet. We check the whole distance and get nothing. There appears to be a breakline at about 21 feet so we pick a lure that will check that depth and get with it, going back the other direction. At one spot we get a nice smallmouth about three pounds. We anchor and go to the cast and don't get another hit. We continue to troll the rest of the delta at the 21 foot depth and get no more fish. We notice that the base breakline is about 28 feet so we pick an 800 and start checking it back the other direction. At one point, we notice that the 28 foot swings out quite a ways and then back. Just about the time that we start turning back, we get a nice smallie about 4 pounds. A quick shoreline sighting is taken and another pass is made. At about the same spot, another smallie the same size is hooked and landed. Due to the heavy current, we are faced with three choices. We can continue to troll. We can take up an anchoring position and cast heavy jump type lures or we can drift through the area and vertical jig heavy jump type spoons. We decide to try and anchor and we end up with four more smallies about the same size. We decide to look into why these fish were there and find that a 37 foot hole is directly adjacent to this spot. We continue to make passes even deeper and out into the deepest water that is there at 37 feet. We go upstream, downstream, side to side upstream, side to side downstream, all the while taking note of where the deepest water is and where the hole ends upstream and downstream. The whole time, we are letting out more line going upstream to keep the lures walking and when we turn downstream, we take in some line to keep the walk just right. Just about the time that we get close to the end of the hole and we are at 34 feet, we get a musky that is 48 inches. In the next few passes, we get three more muskies. Two were caught just downstream from the smallies but out into the hole at 34 feet. The last one was caught at the opposite end of the hole from the first one but still out in the middle at 35 feet. Is this fishing deep?

In each situation, you could say that the location of the fish, in relation to the depth of the deepest water in the area; "yes", it was catching fish deep. To an experienced Spoonplugger, these are all the same. The depths are different but we still go about our fishing of each body of water the same. We start out as shallow as we can and end up checking as deep as we can reach. There are a couple of questions that we might ask. Would you have put a lure down on the bottom of the 14 foot hole in the Florida lake to see what was there? Would you have made that last straight line pass in our 200 acre natural lake and found that kitchen table sized hard spot? Would you have checked deeper out into the channel after hitting those smallmouth at 28 feet? It is all about the desire to know what is there. The best way to get any fishing question answered and the quickest way is to put a lure down there.

*Good Spoonplugging*  
*John Bales*

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**“The more I learn, the more I see  
there is to learn.”** *E. L. “Buck” Perry*

## **BUCK SEZ:**

Too often, during the pre-spawn and the spawning season, fishermen rush to the water expecting to find the fish in the shallows. They become puzzled when they don't find them there. They tend to forget that how far a fish moves on migration, and how long they stay is dependent upon the weather and water conditions that exist at that particular time. They neglect weather and water, and if the deeper parts of the structures are checked at all—it's a short check—done in a half hearted manner. They return to the shallows **with no regard to where it is** because “the fish just gotta be there—it's that time of the year.”

The pre-spawn and spawning season is a period of changing weather and water conditions. Fish react to these changes just as they do in any part of the season. Weather and water condition can wreck a spawning season. This is one of the reasons why there are missing age groups in most waters. A good rule to follow during this period is; the closer the spawning season the more fish can be **expected** in the shallows. Be happy when this occurs. One trip may be good and the next bad. One year might be good and the next bad.

Regardless how many times I say the speed control will vary during the season—reaching a maximum in hot weather, and a minimum in the colder—I find the average fisherman encounters a great deal of difficulty in adapting his speed control to the season. He has a tendency to forget how much this control can change during the season. He will tend to stick with one speed too long after a reduction or and increase is called for. Maybe he hasn't fished for a couple of months, and doesn't realize the speed factor may have changed. You must remember that speed control can change from a trolling speed with the motor practically full throttle (5-10 H.P.) in the hottest weather, to a speed in the cold part, to a jump type lure that is moving so slowly it seems an eternity between each new cast.

My experience through the years has proven to me that few fishermen absorb anything but the operation and controls that were present when contact was made with the fish—a specific lure produced at a particular place, and in a certain way. They failed at a later date because they assumed where the fish would be, and what it took to catch him. This kind of thinking results in failure. You must never believe that a particular presentation, depth, speed, or color is best. Being neutral in every respect on every trip is a must. Only after fish have been located is it safe to say that something appears best, but certainly not before, nor on future trips.

Whatever the time of year it might be, or whatever the weather and water conditions may be, regardless of how short and slow the movement might be, your best chance of catching fish is by fishing the most potentially productive water. You will never catch fish by fishing where they ain't.

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