

REV UP FOR
MOTOWN MUSKIES!

SPECIAL NIGHT-BITE ACTION ISSUE

Musky Hunter

NORTH AMERICA'S MUSKY AUTHORITY

SEPTEMBER 1995



- HIT THE SLOP WHEN IT'S HOT
- RELIVE THE LEECH L. UPRISING

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Musky Hunter

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1995

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"Night Strike," by wildlife artist Terry Doughty. Contact the artist at: 1065 Alfred Street, Brookfield, WI 53005, (414) 786-1480.

MOTOR CITY MAULERS

"The biologists used terms like 'huge,' 'extra large' and 'jumbo' when referring to the fish we saw."

Believe it ... Detroit ... Motown ... muskies

By CAPT. MIKE J. ZIELINSKI

In Michigan, Lake St. Clair is synonymous with muskies and musky fishing. This is not news in the world of serious musky angling. What might be news are the musky happenings just south of Lake St. Clair, along the Detroit River.

Many big muskies are products of large river systems. The St. Clair River-Lake St. Clair-Detroit River-Lake Erie complex is really one giant river running from Lake Huron to the Niagara River. With all this fast-flowing water, Lake St. Clair flushes itself about every 18 months while Lake Erie completes the job approximately every five years. This seems like an instant in time when compared with Lake Superior that requires nearly 1,000 years to accomplish the same task. As a result, this system is able to correct many of the ills forced on it by man over the last century.

Since industrialization began along the Detroit River nearly 200 years ago, this 28-mile stretch of water linking Lake St. Clair with Lake Erie has been subjected to horrendous environmental damage. It peaked during the 1960s, when so much industrial waste was added to its swiftly flowing waters, that fish consumption advisories and total fishing bans were enacted. The discovery of high levels of mercury, other heavy metals and toxic wastes roused the public's ire, which finally became a political issue in the 1970s. Under the Detroit River Remedial Action Plan (RAP), major steel, chemical, and automobile manufacturers were legislated into cleaning up their acts. Those that didn't were either fined into submission or left the state entirely, causing some economic hardship during the 1970s in the Detroit Metro area. There is still a long way to go in this area.

With the initial stages of the RAP plan functioning, the Detroit River started to cleanse

itself. While far from pristine, the fast-flowing waters began to take on a greenish hue. The sheen of an oil spill along its surface was now only an occasional happening, and investiga-



The lure selection of Captain Don Miller bears the scars of many battles. Facing page — Miller with a nice musky from the Upper Detroit River aboard his boat, the "Musky Hunter."

tions were conducted to discover the sources to stop those that did. Boat traffic increased dramatically, and walleye fishing, long a mainstay of the river, became phenomenal. Each spring, anglers from across the Midwest head to the Detroit River seemingly in tandem with the walleyes. By the mid 1980s, the Detroit River was touted as the hottest spring walleye spot on the continent, with no closed season and a seemingly endless supply of trophy walleyes from Lake Erie. Then the zebra mussel population explosion hit.

The water in the Detroit River went from green to blue, as clarity increased dramatically.

The mussels, which filter about a half liter of water per day, were removing, among other things, the green algae from the water. Without the algae to absorb and retain solar heat, water temperatures began to cool. The now clearer water allowed sunlight to penetrate deeper than anyone could remember. Submerged vegetation flourished in the depths newly exposed to sunlight. This increased plant growth also added to the improving water clarity.

A subtle but pleasant (for anglers) change took place within the Detroit River's musky population as it began to build to numbers never seen in modern times. Muskies were being hooked regularly by spring walleye anglers who would fill the bait shops with glowing tales of huge fish that inhaled five-pound walleyes being brought to the boat. Ice fishermen setting tip-ups for pike on the frozen bays, canals and marinas along the shore of the river began to lose their rigs to big fish that just took the shiners or suckers and headed off, stripping all the line and in some occasions actually snapping the tip-up during the process.

On the Detroit River, serious walleye anglers employ a trolling system called hand-lining. It utilizes 60- to 90-pound steel braided line spooled onto a large, spring-loaded reel attached to the boat's gunwale. Long, slim, sinkers weighing up to 2 pounds are used to get the line to bottom in the Detroit River's heavy current. Up to four leaders made from 25- to 40-pound monofilament and ranging in length from five to 40 feet are connected to the mainline. Large stickbaits such as Nos. 11 and 13 Rapalas, Storm Thundersticks, and Bomber Long A's are run off the leaders. Its simplicity makes handling particularly effective for walleyes after dark but also vulnerable to spawning muskies.

From late March through late April, the muskies seem to be everywhere in the Detroit River, and the handline trollers come in contact

