



Northwest Pennsylvania's Natural Musky Lakes

by Jeff Knapp photos by the author

Certain amalgamations go hand-in-hand. Like steak sauce and steak, cheese and crackers and muskies and fall fishing.

Fall has long been regarded as a time when muskies become more active, a response driven by the need to build reserves for the coming winter. While the arrival of the Labor Day holiday doesn't mean the fish will start jumping in the boat, the fall period is indeed a great time to pursue muskies. A collection of small natural lakes in the state's northwestern region is a great venue to do it.

Lake LeBoeuf, Canadohta Lake and Edinboro Lake, three of the seven glaciated lakes located in northwest Pennsylvania, harbor respectable musky populations. Though similarities exist between the three, they differ enough to provide distinctive challenges. They also lie close enough to each other to make fishing multiple lakes in one day possible, a viable option if your physical energy is on par with your enthusiasm.

Bill Logan, of Enterprise, Warren County, has targeted muskies in his area's waters for over 35 years. He shares his thoughts and musky fishing knowledge of these three natural lakes.

Lake LeBoeuf

At 70 acres, Erie County's Lake LeBoeuf is the smallest of these natural lakes. In terms of musky lore, Lake LeBoeuf is well-seasoned with tales of tackle-busting toothy critters.

A look back in the archives of this publication found a story from the September 1932 *Pennsylvania Angler*. The article recalled the experience of Waterford angler Fred King who hooked a large musky in 1906 on Lake LeBoeuf and was able to quickly get a gaff into it. The fish, still green and full of vigor, ripped the gaff from King's hand. Subsequently, King was able to coax the fish out of the weeds, eventually landing the 29½ pounder, gaff and all.

Despite its location in a marsh-type setting, Lake LeBoeuf is surprisingly deep.

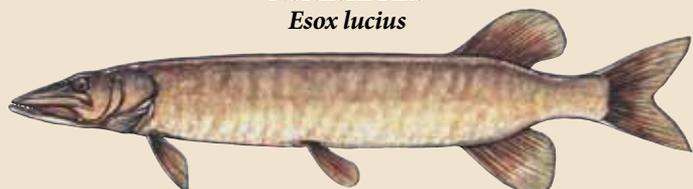
"For a very small lake, it has water at 26 feet deep," said Logan. "There's an island in the middle that has brush and tree growth that extends out into the water. It's like fishing a large donut."

Logan further explained that, with the exception of a small, manmade beach area, Lake LeBoeuf is completely surrounded by a weedy, woody brush that forms the buffer between the

Pike and Muskellunge Identification



Northern Pike
Esox lucius



Muskellunge
Esox masquinongy



Tiger Muskellunge
hybrid: *Esox lucius* x *Esox masquinongy*

Color patterns

Northern pike has yellow bean-shaped spots on yellow-green to gray-green body. Muskellunge has light vertical bars or spots. Tiger muskellunge has dark gray-green bars.

Scales

Muskellunge has no scales on lower half of cheek and gill cover.

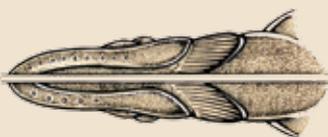
Northern pike has fully scaled cheek with half of the gill cover scaled.

Tiger muskellunge has scales covering two-thirds of the cheek and gill cover area, intermediate between the muskellunge and northern pike.

Jaw pores

Muskellunge has 6 to 9 pores.

Northern pike has 4 to 5 pores.



illustrations-Ted Walke

true shoreline and open water. Bands of lily pads often extend from the near-shore brush out to the first drop-off. In most places, the depths drop fairly quickly into 4 to 7 feet of water, and muskies and northern pike will often tuck up close to the shoreline cover.

Lake LeBoeuf is pretty much a bowl with a couple of exceptions, ones that tend to hold muskies well into the fall. This includes a bar that runs from the north end of the lake and connects to the island featuring submerged vegetation, which grows out into 8 feet of water. There is also a significant weedbed along the west side of the island. Logan's most productive spot is a shoreline connected point near the boat ramp, one that tops off around 8 feet and quickly drops into 16 feet on both sides.

Logan typically uses flat-sided crankbaits and minnow baits in either white or silver patterns. He also likes sinking rubber lures like the Bulldog.

Lake LeBoeuf is annually stocked with about 350 musky fingerlings each year by PFBC. While there is no horsepower restriction, boats cannot exceed no-wake speeds. The PFBC has an access area off Water Street in Waterford borough.

Canadohta Lake

Of the three natural lakes discussed here, Logan considers Crawford County's 169-acre Canadohta Lake the best for muskies. When Commission biologists surveyed the lake in 2006, they collected good numbers of muskies up to 48 inches long. The agency currently stocks the lake annually with 425 fall fingerlings and 425 spring yearlings per year.

"Canadohta Lake is one of the few lakes in the state that has a nice bed of submerged cabbage weed rimming most of the lake," said Logan. "In some areas, these weedbeds are thick with a wall of weeds at the drop-off. In other places, they are intermittent, tapering off more sparsely. But, muskies use both types of areas there."

Whereas submerged weeds like milfoil and coontail are clingy, cabbage weeds (a variety of pondweed) are more crisp and easier to fish around. In places like northern Wisconsin, where musky fishing is as popular as deer hunting is in Pennsylvania, cabbage weeds are often called musky weeds.

Canadohta Lake's clear waters run as deep as the mid-20 foot range. The bottom is mostly sand and silt, with only a few areas having some gravel-sized rock.

"There are three decent-sized points in the lake," said Logan. "One is very obvious, found on the east side of the lake, about two-thirds of the way down the lake. It's right next to the park and restaurant. There's also a point on the northeast corner of the lake where a creek comes in. And, there's one in the southwest corner where a small creek enters the lake."

Though Logan has taken Canadohta Lake muskies in water as shallow as 5 feet and as deep as 24 feet, he spends most of his time hammering the outside edges of the weedbeds, which extend out to depths of around 8 to 9 feet. Typically, these weeds, especially ones in deeper water, stay green well into the fall. He said Canadohta Lake muskies don't seem to have a color preference. Jerkbait, such as custom jobs like those made by the late Ed Latiano of Ellwood City, are among Logan's favorite Canadohta Lake baits.

There's a 10-horsepower restriction on Canadohta Lake. The PFBC has an access area on the lake's west shore, off of Mount Pleasant Road.

Edinboro Lake

Whereas Lake LeBoeuf and Canadohta Lake are removed from major highways; the same isn't true of Edinboro Lake. Edinboro Lake, Erie County, is only a couple miles east of Interstate 79.

Edinboro Lake supports a nice musky fishery. When surveyed in 2008, the Commission netted a significant number of muskies. Most of the fish were in the 30- to 34-inch range with the biggest being 40 inches. The agency stocks muskies each year, currently 480 fall fingerlings and

480 spring yearlings. Over the past 10-plus years, it's been stocked with both fingerling and yearling stage muskies and is part of an experiment comparing the survival of these two different aged stocked muskies.

For habitat, Edinboro Lake is the most diverse with a nice mixture of wood, weeds and drop-offs. Logan is particularly fond of some of the stump fields, particularly ones found along the western side of Edinboro Lake. A small dam on the lake's outflow, constructed decades ago, elevates the level a few feet above the original level, thus stumps are common on shallow flats.

This 245-acre lake contains good levels of submerged vegetation, both milfoil and pondweed. As with the prior two lakes, fall anglers should spend some time exploring the deeper green weeds. In many areas of the lake, a significant breakline occurs at the depth that was the original lake shore. Many Edinboro Lake muskies are taken by trolling near this edge.

There is no horsepower restriction. Public access is provided by the Billings Recreational Complex, which is located off Route 6N along the lake's southwestern shoreline.

Brood stock lakes

Though it's now fall, anglers should take note that both Edinboro Lake and Canadohta Lake are brood stock lakes, which means that though catch and release fishing is permitted from April 1 through May 31. No muskies can be harvested during that time. ☐



When fishing Lake LeBoeuf, use flat-sided crankbaits and minnow baits in either white or silver patterns. Hard jerkbaits work well on Canadohta Lake.



Lake LeBoeuf, Canadohta Lake and Edinboro Lake all have muskies in the 40-inch range.