

## SPOONPLUGGING STUDY GROUP SEPTEMBER 15, 2005

### “ON THE WATER WITH JOHN BALES”



John Bales with Lake Saint Claire Smallmouth

**John Bales** is one of our **top Spoonplugging instructors**. Recently, Chase was fortunate to **spend 4 days** with John **fishing Lake Saint Claire and the Saint Claire River**. Observing John in action was an education in itself. John's **goal** was to **learn as much as possible about the areas' structure and fishing potential**. **Covering a lot of water** was essential on this huge river and lake system. **Eliminating much water** was accomplished by **checking contour maps, observing the terrain, and trolling fast**. On big river structures, **some trolling runs were 5 miles long**. The **best structures were fished more thoroughly** by trolling, casting, and/or vertical jigging (study Bucks' "Green Book" for what constitutes the best structures for big fish!). **11 hour days were spent searching and fishing**. **One day we covered over 50 miles of water!** Needless to say, one of the key ingredients in **Johns' success** is his hard working **persistence** at Spoonplugging. He **follows Buck Perrys' Guidelines** closely. Every minute on the water was used to learn more. This was carried to the point where yours truly had **little time to take pictures, eat lunch, or make notes!** However, the learning experience was so fantastic that I wouldn't have had it any other way (I did manage to eat my lunches and take a few pictures anyway).

The **weather** for the 4 days was **mostly hot, calm, and sunny**---very tough **cold front conditions!** Other than some panfish, **we never saw a gamefish caught by another boat during all that time on the water.** **Especially no muskies** were seen caught, which was the main fish we were trying to pinpoint. By having lures in the water most of the time and covering lots of territory, **we did manage to catch 4 muskies up to about 45 inches, a few walleye, and several smallmouth bass to 4 pounds.** Most in the river came from water **26 to 35 feet deep** and those **in Lake Saint Claire** (3 muskies) were from walking the bottom or very close to it **in 16 to 18 foot depths.** We **had heard** reports that musky could only be caught in Lake Saint Claire by trolling lures 3-6 feet under the surface and that **one couldn't walk the bottom due to the weeds there.** John did find short weeds on the lake bottom, 3 different kinds to be exact. **His persistence** in learning more about the lake bottom (by getting lures down there) **located hard workable bottom and weed edges** that were trolled, and this is **where the muskies were caught.**

Facts and techniques that were learned on this trip were shared during the program. Actually, much of the information was **a good review of Buck Perrys' written materials,** as **John follows them closely.** Some **pointers** included: how to make a **strong tie with wire line,** how to walk a lure deeper, boat control and **vertical jigging in heavy current,** speed control and **keeping slack out of the line** using jump lures, taking **good linesights** constantly, **wind observations,** the **importance of a walking lure,** using a section of 90 lb. monofilament in front of the lure, and how to walk an 800 Spoonplug on bottom in 40 feet and heavy current. No fish were netted, as John feels this can harm the slime coat on muskies especially. **Much experience is required to land a large fish for a picture without a net.** Most fish he releases at the boat. The more fish are handled, the less chance they will survive when released.

Chase Klinesteker