

“MAPPING IS CRITICAL TO FISHING SUCCESS”

All Spoonpluggers are familiar with our motto “**Knowledge is the Key to Fishing Success**”. This knowledge has been **given** to us by Buck Perry in his “**Green Book**”, “**Study Guide**”, “**Structure Situations**” booklet, and other written and video materials (don’t forget the **DVDs**, back issues of “**National Spoonplugger**”, and even old articles from “**Fishing Facts**” magazines). These encompass **a lifetime of fishing knowledge available** to us. Yet once we become familiar with a good part of this material, **some may find themselves on a “plateau” as far as fishing results**. The “knowledge” that is the key to fishing success is based on Buck Perrys’ written works, but **also includes the knowledge one gains on the water** in both mechanical skills and in the learning of structure. Both take considerable time on the water **practicing to develop skills**. **Mechanical skills** may take a while to learn, but **are straightforward**. **Mapping and interpretation** (learning and figuring out) structure **is more difficult**, and this is where **many fall short**. This is **the area** of knowledge **where we continue to learn** and improve our fishing **throughout our lifetime**. **Fish use structure** in their movements and migrations, and we need to **find them before we can catch them**. In advanced on-the-water **Spoonplugging classes, mapping and interpretation of structure is the main focus**. In these classes, don’t expect the instructor to just “show” you how it is done. **You will DO it with proper guidance**, resulting in the greatest amount of learning.

In March of 2008 I gave a seminar at the “Ultimate Sports and RV Show” in Grand Rapids. It was titled “**Structure: Learning a Lake**”. The terms “Spoonplugger” and “structure fisherman” were used interchangeably. No other fishing approach concentrates on structure as thoroughly as Spoonplugging when the true definition of structure is used. **Structure** is defined as **the bottom of the lake that is different from the surrounding area**. We target the largest fish of all species by finding the best structure situations from our mapping and interpretation information. The criteria for these **best spots** lie in the migration routes that **lead all the way** from the deep to the shallows, and have the **quickest access to deep water**. Obviously, getting details about a lakes’ structures and comparing them to find the best ones **take time and effort mapping**. Using the depth sounder, straining the water with different sized Spoonplugs, and drawing detail maps of the structures to compare, usually gives the most and best information. **Terry O’Malley** has stated: “**If you can’t draw it, you don’t know it**”. **When you** get to the skill level where you **CAN draw good detail maps** of every structure that you fish, you **probably don’t need to draw anymore**. Emphasis was placed on **visualizing the lake bottom** details and getting a “**fish eye view**” of what is under the water. **To catch fish, lures must be accurately placed on structure elements (breaks and breaklines) on the lake bottom**, not in a graph or GPS unit.

Fish behavior was gone over because **knowing how fish move and behave on structure** helps us to locate them more accurately. Their **home is deep water** (normally 30-35 feet) where they spend **most of their time** and **are dormant or inactive**. During activity periods **they can move shallower on pathways** like deer, and **are more easily caught**. **Fish will not cross a flat** void of breaks or breaklines. They **behave differently in the shallows** (8-10 feet and shallower) **than** in the **deep** water. In the shallows they will scatter and can be caught at any depth there. In the deep water they **tend to school up** and remain on or **very close to the bottom**. The **older and larger a fish** is, the less adaptable and **more reluctant he is to come shallow**, due to the instability of conditions there compared to the deep water. **Fish won’t go downhill to get shallower**, so we know that pathways must continue to go shallower or they will not be used. **Fish will pause at breaks and follow breaklines**, so we know exactly where to put our lures to have the best chance to catch them. Most breaklines are described as an increase in depth on a line along the bottom, although at times **breaklines can be formed from current, temperature, and water color differences**, also offering pathways for fish to follow. Further information on fish behavior can be obtained in Buck Perrys’ book “Spoonplugging”, pages 11-26, “Basic Movements of Fish”.

Next mentioned were **“Mapping Tools”** which included boat, motor, rods, reels, line, lures, depth sounder, contour maps, net, anchor, markers, and pencil and paper. As with any task or sport, the **best tools** to do the job **should be** used because they are **most efficient and effective**. Those tools that will best help us **control all depths and speeds** in our lure presentation are selected. As we learn about structure it helps to **join a fishing club** that emphasizes structure (e.g. Lunker Hunter Spoonpluggers), attend their outings (e.g. Muskegon), and attend seminars on structure fishing (e.g. John Bales). Also, we **learn the fastest when we teach others**, and teaching youth to structure fish helps insure the future of fishing.

"The subject of **Lure Presentation** was touched on to show how we **strain the water** with different sized lures (depths) **to find breaks, breaklines, and structure situations**. Once a structure has been located, Terry O'Malley has advocated quickly **doing our mapping first with just the depth sounder and markers**. This allows us to **present lures on the features and depths most likely to produce**. Placing a marker in 8-10 feet on the tip of the feature helps greatly for us to visualize the underwater structure as we troll it. By **feeling the lure on the bottom and glancing at the depth sounder, marker, wake of the boat, and terrain**, we can **gain a true visual picture in our mind of what is there**. Using lures to help us map gives us a chance to catch a fish while we are learning structure. As Buck Perry has said: **“Trolling is our teacher”**.

Some pictures were shown of decent sized fish to demonstrate how all species of fish use structure. Then a slide from Mr. Perrys' study material was projected **where different structures, breaks, and breaklines were compared**, and the **best fishing spot was indicated by interpreting** the detail information on the map drawing. By looking for the **longest, narrowest, sharpest, deepest break to the deepest water in the area**, we can determine where to best spend our time fishing for the **largest fish**. **Recording** information that we find about a structure is important to insure that we **save considerable time when we fish it in the future**. Odds are that when you first fish a structure, you won't catch a fish. **Repeated trips give a greater chance that the fish will be active when you are there**. First, a **letter or number is given to the structure**, and that is **marked on the lakes' contour map**. A **simple line drawing** of the structure is **then made** with pencil and paper. It need not be elaborate or very detailed, just a representation of what you visualize. It is only for your benefit and **doesn't need to be shown to others**. As you fish it **in the future**, you may want to **add more detail**, although some Spoonpluggers, after drawing the map, will tear it up. The very act of drawing it will help burn the details in your mind for the future. **Accurate rifle linesights or a GPS waypoint** will allow you to **return to this structure in the future**.

Even if no fish are caught in the mapping process, we will **leave** that area with knowledge that will **save us** considerable **time when fishing it in the future**. A structure fisherman does **not just fish structure**, he **maps, learns, and records it also**. This is **fishing in an orderly manner to catch fish on purpose**. As Mr. Perry would say, **“Knowledge is the key to fishing success”**.

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