

LUNKER HUNTER SPOONPLUGGERS MEETING DECEMBER 6, 2007

“MUSKY PROGRAM”

Will Schultz, president of the **Michigan Musky Alliance**, spoke to us about their organization. It is mainly a conservation organization which assists the Michigan DNR in promoting, tracking, identifying, and planting muskellunge. Some of their projects include purchasing Iowa strain muskies for planting in Michigan and placing ID plaques at launch sites on lakes containing muskie. They also have a web site at: michiganmuskiealliance.org and a forum on muskies. Their educational meetings are open to the public and their summer meetings occur on the water. Will started with some interesting facts about muskies. **In Michigan, a 2 year old muskie is 24 inches, the same size as a 6 year old northern pike.** Muskies **spawn mostly in rivers** in areas of clean, hard bottoms with current. Spawning in lakes is less successful because silting will suffocate the eggs. To easily identify which is which, pike have light markings on a dark background and **muskies have dark markings on a light background.** Muskies eat mostly suckers (47%), perch (17%), and crappies (7%). In lakes that contain **ciscoes**, that is their **preferred food**. These fish have less spines, which muskies have difficulty handling. Walleyes and bass are farther down on their list. Muskies are **difficult to raise** and are **stocked at about 12 inches.** **Out of 1000 planted fish, only around 50 may reach legal size.**

Will strongly advised against eating muskies because they likely will have a **high concentration of toxins** in their meat. At **42 inches legal limit** and being the top predator, they will probably be tainted. He also encouraged for all muskies caught to be **released to help preserve the fishery.** **A 45 to 50 inch musky is 12 to 20 years old**, and those over 50 inches may be over 30 years old. The **big fish are the females**, as the males are quite a bit smaller. **One adult muskie per acre** of lake is about all that can be expected **in a healthy population.** How one handles musky is critical in their survival rate after release, as they are very **delicate** and should not be out of the water more than a minute. Do not bring a fish in the net into the boat, but **keep the fish resting in the water with the net over the side.** The fish can be measured resting in the net with a yardstick or tape measure. A **jaw spreader** is helpful in getting access to the mouth and removing the hook. Use a long **needlenose plier** to remove the hook from the fish. A **coated net is much better** as the hook barbs will not get caught in the net material. The net he brought to show us was a Beckman 32 by 36 inches with a wide, deep pocket. Slightly larger mesh in the bottom can help prevent tail splitting, which can cause heavy bleeding of the fish after release. **If a hook is deep** into a fish where extraction will injure the fish, he uses a small compound **bolt cutter** to cut through the hook. One should have **experience** handling pike if you wish **to take a picture** of a nice muskie. With the camera ready, grab under one side of the lower jaw with one hand and place the other under the stomach to support and subdue the fish. The fish should need to be out of the water only a minute or less for the picture before it is released. If one insists on weighting the fish, weigh the net with the fish in it and later subtract the weight of the net. A quality spring scale gives a faster reading than a digital scale.

Will demonstrated his **knowledge of structure** when he reviewed areas on a projected contour map of **Murry Lake** during his Power Point presentation. He has read Buck Perrys' book "Spoonplugging—Your Guide to Lunker Catches", and **used the terms "Tools", "Structure", "Breakline", "Migration", "Depth", "Speed", and "Contact Point" with familiarity.** He related how the Michigan Musky Alliance has had an online study of Bucks' book on their website. In going over the Murry Lake map, he **shared a number of spots** where he has caught fish and their relative ranking from his experience. He brought a variety of casting and trolling lures from about 8 to 18 inches that he uses for musky. They weighed from 1½ to several ounces. When he informed us that **most of his fishing is done by casting**, one could understand why he looked to be in such great shape! He uses **a variety of crankbaits, spinnerbaits, and jump lures** to control different depths and

speeds. One of his favorites is a large 2 ½ ounce jighead with a 15 inch plastic body and tail that he can use at many different depths.

Casting and trolling outfits were demonstrated and passed around. For **casting**, an **eight foot fairly stiff rod** is used along with a heavy duty **baitcasting reel**. This setup will handle an 8 ounce lure with no problem. He uses **80 pound superbraid line** and a 14 inch **single strand wire leader** that tests at 120 pounds. He also uses a large split ring rather than a snap to attach the lure. Some may feel this setup is overkill, but Will feels that if a fish busts the line or opens the snap and takes the lure, he will probably not survive with it stuck in his mouth. On the **trolling rod** he uses **30 pound mono with an 80 pound fluorocarbon leader**. Trolling speeds can be **from 3 ½ to 7 mph** with short lines, so some give with the mono is important.

Will talked about **area lakes** that contain musky. **Murry** is good because it contains cisco, their favorite forage. Campau and Kettle lakes do not hold large numbers, but can be good at times. **Campau**, which is shallow, can hold fish in the spring. After that, most will move into Kettle Lake. **Thornapple Lake** has always been a consistent producer and should not be overlooked. It was mentioned that they are beginning to plant muskie in **Hamlin Lake** in Mason County. **Natural reproduction** is virtually **non existent in these lakes**, so we must support our DNR and preserve the fishery.

Many thanks to Will Schultz for giving a great and very informative program. We wish him and the Michigan Muskie Alliance the best in their endeavors.

Chase Klinesteker



Charlie Myers and Brent Robbins on Lake St. Claire