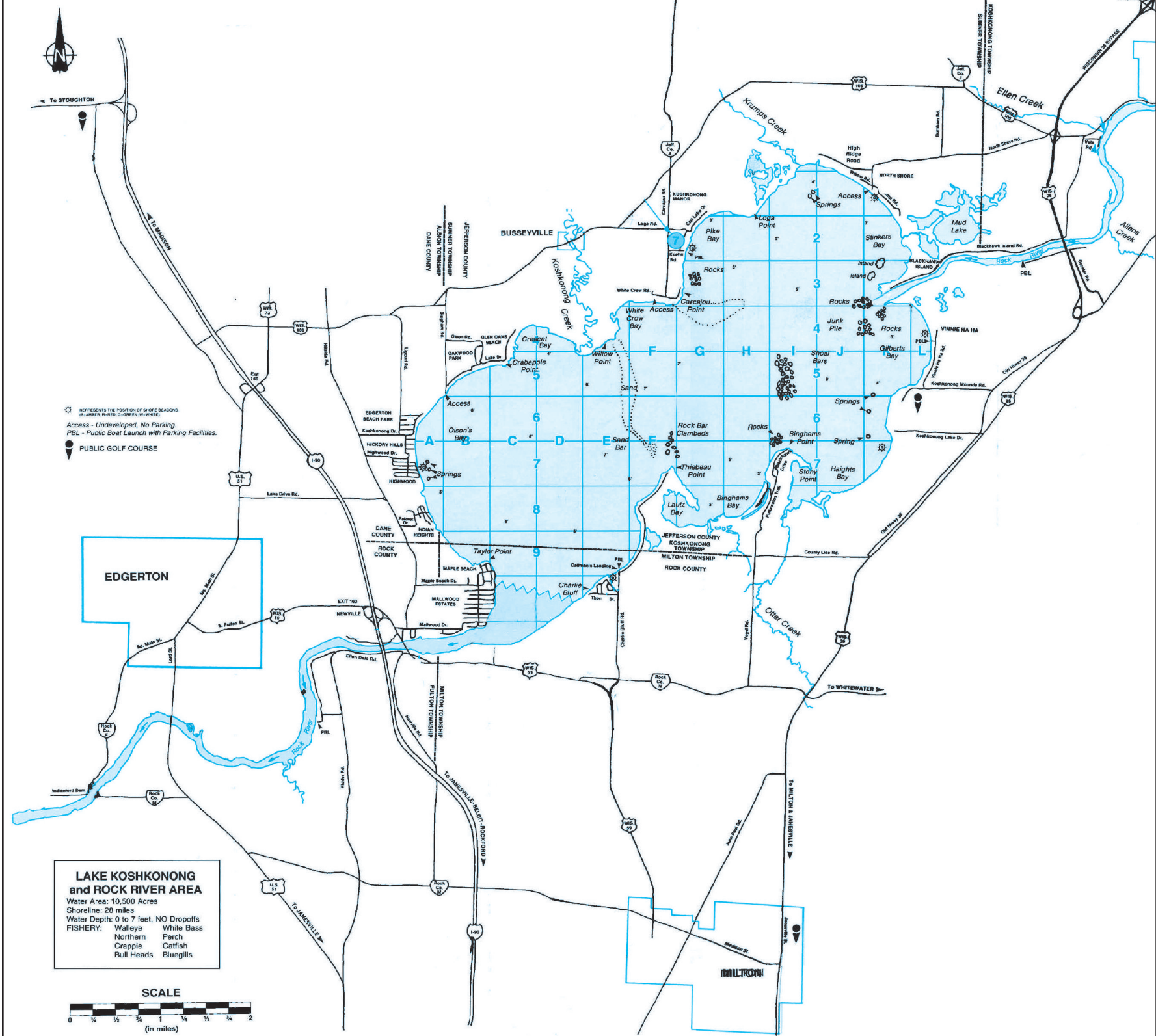


LAKE KOSHKONONG and ROCK RIVER AREA

CAUTION! WINTER - ICE CONDITIONS ARE EVER CHANGING. SUMMER - LAKE QUICKLY BECOMES HAZARDOUS DURING WINDY CONDITIONS. FOR SAFETY PURPOSES, ALWAYS CARRY A COMPASS WHEN ON LAKE KOSHKONONG.

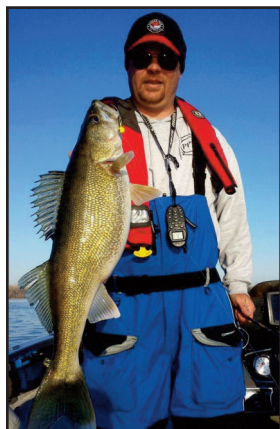


Anglers cover Koshkonong in walleye seminar

By John McLaughlin
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One of the Edgerton area's most important and well-used resources is the sprawling Lake Koshkonong. At nearly 10,600 acres, the body of water is a hub for recreation of all kinds, drawing thousands every year from the surrounding area and beyond.

Earlier this year, many were given a chance to get to know the lake and its sport fishing habits a



Captain Adam Walton poses with an impressive Walleye. (Photo courtesy of Pike Pole Fishing)

bit better. On Sunday, Feb. 19, Harbor Recreation hosted an ecology seminar, with a special focus on walleye angling. Led by Captain Adam Walton, a former fire-fighter and current owner of the Pike Pole Fishing guide service, those in attendance explored what makes the lake productive, and the ways it can continue to yield high numbers of fish.

From a sportsman's perspective, it's important to understand what sets Koshkonong apart from other bodies of water in order to locate and land more fish. The lake, formed as we know it in 1846 after the construction of the nearby Indian-dam, has an average depth of only 5 feet, and a maximum depth of just 7. As Walton noted, however, these are only averages. "It's part of a river system" he said, "so sometimes it gets as deep as 8 or 9 feet." For comparison, Madison's Lake Monona, roughly one-third the acreage of Koshkonong, has a maximum depth of 74 feet.

This unusually-shallow water, due simply to lack

of volume, leads to the lake experiencing abrupt temperature changes, both in warm and cold weather. These swings can seriously impact important fish life cycles. Walleye will generally spawn when water temperature reaches 45 degrees - in Wisconsin this is usually between April and May. However, as has been the case in some recent years, temperatures rise too quickly, and many fish bypass spawning altogether. "They need time in that window of temperature," Walton said. Additionally, too much cold can delay the timing of Koshkonong's algae bloom - a vital food source for walleye fry.

Water depth also plays a role in determining how and where to fish the lake. Its mucky bottom can easily be dispersed by moderate wind, drastically reducing visibility. In these scenarios, Walton recommends changing to a brighter lure, or even one with a rattle, noting that fish will rely on their lateral line, an organ helping them detect vibration, sometimes even more

than their sight.

Wind on Lake Koshkonong can throw around more than just mud from the lake bottom, however: it will also push baitfish in a given direction, and larger gamefish will follow. Walton's top spot on the lake to fish will often be these wind-blown shorelines. "I'll fish the eastern shore of the lake, especially after a few days of strong wind from the west." It's important to note that these locations are relative: with winds from the east, fishing on the lake's west side would be a better option.

Another peculiarity of Koshkonong is its lack of abundant structure: timber, brush, stone formations, etc. These spots are usually excellent locations to fish - they offer safety from predators and baitfish in good numbers. Compared to other bodies of water, the lake doesn't offer much structure, but there are still several of these spots to keep in mind. Walton nodded to a large rock pile in the center of the lake, clam beds at the river mouths, and a gravel bed near Blackhawk Is-

land as productive zones for walleye.

New weed growth is also affecting the lake ecosystem. "A few years ago, people would ask 'What weeds?'," said Walton about the marine flora in Koshkonong. Recent years have seen a massive increase in commercial fishing for carp on the lake, and their harvest (as carp feed on these plants) has caused a spike in weed density. According to Walton, this has benefits as well as drawbacks: some weeds can create cover and larger baitfish populations, but others in abundance are harmful. Algae in concentrated numbers can drastically reduce oxygen levels in the lake, causing fish harm or even death.

Lake Koshkonong is currently being stocked with walleye (in addition to several other species) from both the DNR and nearby Bark River Hatchery. While this contributes to making Koshkonong a productive walleye fishery, Walton believes, along with some at the DNR, that it could be better, and could harbor consistently larger fish. "We

haven't caught one above 18 inches since June of 2016," the captain said.

While many believe in imposing a slot limit (wherein only fish in a specific size range, no larger and no smaller, can be kept), Walton doesn't totally agree. Citing Wisconsin DNR data, he echoed the claim that only lakes with a consistent walleye spawn see full benefits from slot limits: as previously noted, Lake Koshkonong, for a number of factors, has an extremely inconsistent one.

Walton thinks that looking north, at the sustainability models of the Wisconsin River system, could be the answer. Many of these fisheries create smaller seasonal limits, limiting the walleye harvest between March and May (during spawning runs) to smaller amounts. Currently, Koshkonong has a flat, yearly limit, allowing 5 fish above 15 inches to be taken per day. Whatever the answer, Walton is committed to helping people enjoy the lake as the important resource it is, and making sure others are able to enjoy it for years to come.