

INSIDER

FROMSHORE

by Tom Johnson\*

# THE RESERVOIR WALLEYE FLUSH

**W**hen do five walleyes beat a flush? When a reservoir is at flood stage and water roars downstream. The site is any western reservoir impounding torrential spring rains and raging mountain snowmelt. For me, last year's great walleye flush was Chatfield Reservoir, a flood-control impoundment on the South Platte River in the southwest Denver metro area.

As great volumes of water departed Chatfield Reservoir, so too did many fish, including walleyes. Escaping fish have created a chronic problem in many Colorado impoundments, including Jumbo Reservoir in northeastern Colorado and John Martin Reservoir in southeastern Colorado. But the problem isn't confined to Colorado and not only to flood-control reservoirs. The escape has become legendary in some impoundments. To curb "the great escape," fishery biologists have installed fish traps and have introduced upstream-oriented fish species like sauger and saugeye (walleye-sauger hybrid).

Most escaping occurs from two types of reservoirs: flood-control reservoirs and those used primarily for water supply, primarily irrigation. Fish in water-supply reservoirs escape most frequently, therefore they tend to be smaller than fish in flood-control reservoirs. Chatfield Reservoir is a flood-control reservoir.

Water-supply flushes are more short-lived than those on flood-control reservoirs. While the stream below irrigation reservoirs often diminishes to a mere trickle, the river below many flood-control impoundments often holds a substantial amount of water all year. Anglers speculate that many walleyes caught during a flush are unfished river walleyes that had escaped earlier. These fish, along with their more recently flushed relatives, congregate in or near the raging current to feast on gizzard shad and small perch washing out of the reservoir.

Last year, several anglers caught dozens of walleyes and catfish from 3 to 4 pounds, and a few up to 12 pounds, in the raging South Platte current below the Chatfield dam.

While those fish were reportedly caught

on Rapalas, ThunderSticks and jigs, a secret technique, produced the real walleye magic.

## THE SECRET FLUSH TECHNIQUE

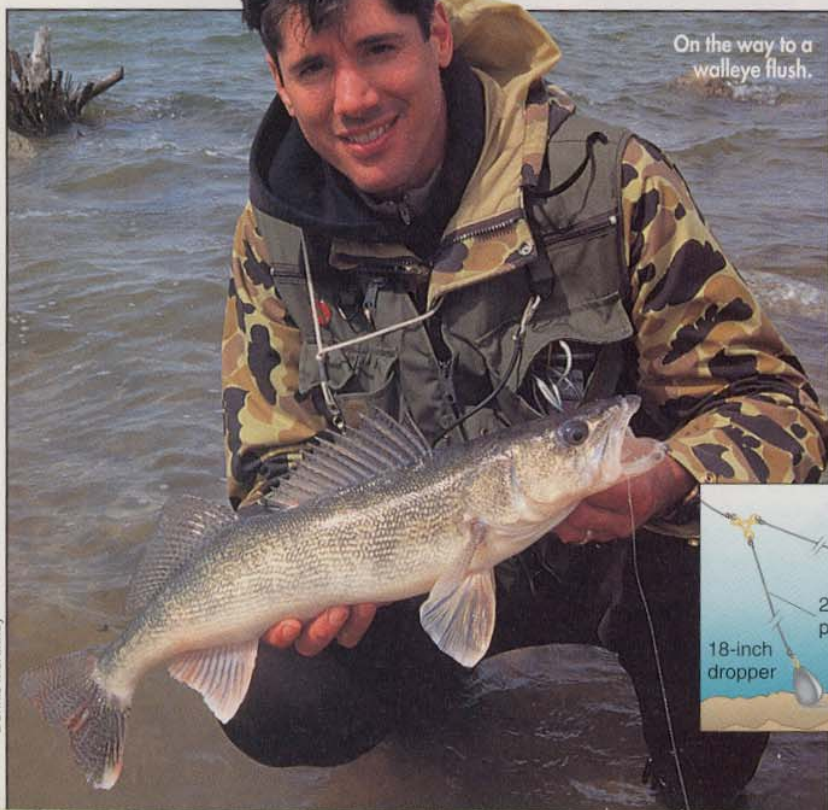
Successful walleye anglers stashed away their boats, GPS systems, and planer boards and headed for the banks of the river immediately below the dam, armed with 8- and 9-foot medium-heavy and heavy-action rods and reels filled with 12-pound-test Berkley XT line. To the end of a three-way swivel, they attached a 12- to 18-inch segment of 12-pound-test line and a single Eagle Claw #6 L757 Featherlite hook baited with a crawler.

To the remaining post on the three-way swivel, they fastened a 12- to 18-inch leader of 2- to 4-pound-test Trilene XL line with a bell sinker of 2 or more ounces, depending on the rate of current flow. The idea was that the rig would fall rapidly and get hung up on the bottom, allowing the nightcrawler to lie on or move just above nearby rocks in the raging current.

Hold the rod so the line between the pole and the water touches the water only where the line enters the current, keeping it from pulling loose. On a strike, drop the rod tip, take up slack line, and with a single upward sweeping movement, set the hook and break the dropper from the three-way swivel. Many anglers use lead weights, though environmentally conscious anglers use more expensive environmentally friendly weights. A small price to have five walleyes beat a flush.

As spring turns to summer in the West, reservoirs already are full and mountain snow packs are just beginning to thaw. The Great Walleye Flush is about to occur. See you on the river. ■

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