

Walleyes in Flooded Timber by Jason Mitchell

Flooded timber can be a very productive pattern wherever walleye swim. Some fisheries like North Dakota's Devils Lake offer strong year round patterns for walleye in the sticks. While Devils Lake may be the most notorious, the Glacial Lakes in South Dakota also offers similar situations where walleye anglers find themselves fishing amongst flooded trees. Besides the prairie lakes of the Dakotas that have filled from a wet cycle that has flooded the rolling landscape, timber can also be a productive option on flowages and reservoirs. There are perhaps many reasons and theories as to why flooded timber can be so productive from a biological standpoint. First off, rising water or high water universally seems to bring fish in shallow. Freshly flooded terrestrial vegetation is extremely attractive to fish. This high water that is often necessary to flood timber in itself seems to pull fish shallow but when you combine this high water with the cover that flooded timber provides, this pattern becomes even more solid.

From the bottom of the food chain, flooded terrestrial vegetation brings a lot of new carbon into the ecosystem. In a nutshell, this new water becomes extremely productive with a spike in zoo plankton. This added productivity combined with the cover often boosts young of the year fish hatches. As long as the water stays high or continues to rise, walleyes can often be found shallow well into the summer long past when tradition would dictate that these fish slide deeper.

Fishing the flooded timber often takes a different mindset and also a modification of equipment and tactics. On Devils Lake where I have made my living as a guide for several years, we have flooded timber that is submerged by as much as twenty feet of water. Over time, many of the flooded trees have been pushed over by ice during the spring. As a result, we are using our electronics more and more to find the flooded timber. In the simplest form, fishing flooded timber can be as easy as finding a stand of trees sticking out of the water and tying off to one of the trees. One of the most effective and popular methods of fishing flooded timber is using a slip bobber.

Using slip bobbers to fish flooded timber is very methodical but productive. The advantage of using a slip bobber rig is that you can keep your presentation vertical and away from the boat allowing an angler to probe openings and lanes in the flooded timber. The slip bobber also suspends the bait at a set depth to avoid contact with the bottom where snags often occur. With this type of presentation, remember that this is not a case for finesse. Anglers often have to wrestle fish up out of the branches relatively quickly. Many walleye anglers using slip bobbers around the country often use a monofilament line. The durability of braid however makes walleye anglers much more efficient when fishing flooded timber. The downside of most braids however is that the bobber stops have a tendency to slide up and down on the line too easily where resetting the depth is often necessary after catching a fish. This past year, I have stumbled onto a new line called Vicious Braid that is the best line I have found for this type of fishing because bobber stops grip much better. Vicious Braid also absorbs less water and is much more durable and resilient than many of the other braids I have used.

There are a few adjustments anglers can do to their slip bobber rig to make them more efficient in the timber. When we are guiding, what we often do is tie a small snap swivel onto the end of the braid and use lighter pound test mono or fluorocarbon snells where we tie either a plain hook or small jig. The advantage of the snell is that when snagged, the lighter snell will break but you still get your slip bobber along with bobber stop back. Anglers often add a few split shots above the snap swivel but I find an egg sinker works better as the egg sinker doesn't tangle in the net as easy making it faster to flip fish out of the net and get back into the water. Another option when targeting bigger fish perhaps in a tournament setting is to not use the lighter snell and instead tie the jig directly to the braid. Above the jig and below the bobber, tie another bobber stop onto the line to keep from losing the bobber in the advent of a snag.

Specifically for bobber fishing, we designed an eight foot telescoping slip bobber rod that has the back bone and length necessary for good hook sets and for wrestling fish up out of the wood (www.jasonmitchellrods.com).



This rod called the Jason Mitchell Elite Series JMSS80SB is unique in the fact that the rod blank itself is marked with a white dot every foot of the rod blank. This can make you much more efficient and fast when adjusting and setting the depth because an angler can use the rod blank as a ruler, quickly measuring the distance from the hook to the bobber stop. This system is much faster than traditional methods that incorporated clipping a lead depth finder onto the line to set the depth. This measuring method is much faster when fishing depths of less than fifteen feet of water.

The biggest mistake we see many anglers make when we are guiding is how anglers set the hook when using slip bobbers. What I try and teach people when we are guiding is set the hook with the reel. What that means is when a slip bobber goes under, crank on the reel as fast as you can, essentially setting the hook with the reel. Reel fast and you will pick up any slack line and you will see the rod start to load from the fish as you continue reeling. As the rod loads, you can then set the hook but the reeling is very important. A hard hook set does nothing if there is a lot of slack line or if the fish is swimming towards the boat. Reel fast and load the rod. After the rod is loaded where you can actually feel the fish, set the hook if necessary.

Editors Note: The author, Jason Mitchell is a legendary guide on North Dakota's Devils Lake and operates one of the largest and reputable guide services in the upper Midwest. Mitchell's Guide Service can be found online at: www.fishdevilslake.net or can be contacted at: 701-662-6560.