

Michigan's Sleeper for August Kings
By Kyle Buck for Woods -n- Water News
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When you think of Lake Michigan chinook salmon hotspots, Manistee and Ludington automatically come to mind. For good reason, they're smokin'. But right at the end of I-96, an easy commute for most Michigan residents, is the port of Muskegon. And with three major chinook spawning rivers in little over 20 miles of Lake Michigan shoreline, the waters off Muskegon team with kings; especially during the month of August.

Smack dab in the middle is the Muskegon River with its pristine water and miles of spawning gravel. Most biologists agree that the Muskegon is the best river in Michigan for salmonid natural reproduction. So even with an overall reduction in Lake Michigan salmon plants, the Muskegon continues to produce.

Just north of Muskegon, running through the town of Whitehall, is the White. While the White was never formally planted with Chinook, fish that apparently lost their way have created a home brood of sorts and the fall run of kings has continued to increase since the late 60's and 70's.

Just to the south of Muskegon the Grand River, Michigan's longest River, empties into the Big Lake. With ample stocking and some natural reproduction, the Grand receives a huge run of Chinook each August and September.

The Big Lake fishing off Muskegon starts to heat up in mid-July and usually peaks around Labor Day. Early in the month of August it's not uncommon to find

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pre-staging kings right at the pier heads early and late in the day. The best fishing is usually found two to five miles offshore in depths of 80 to 150.

Early in August it's not a bad idea to target near shore waters early, moving deeper as the sun rises. During this time flasher/fly combo's or flasher/ squid combos are top producers. Productive flashers include Dream Weaver Spin Doctors, Luhr Jenson Coyotes and Bechhold Fish Catchers. Productive flies include locally produced Big Weenie brand Chili dawgs and super glo flies. You can find Big Weenie Brand at most local sport shops or visit www.bigweeniebrand.com

While "spinnies" behind divers are always hot during August, spoons ran from downriggers take their fair share of fish as well. When it comes to spoons, glow is good but spoons with super glow paint are even better. Out of Muskegon, MoonShine spoons are most popular, but other super glow spoons like those produced by Michigan Stinger and Northern King, while not as popular, take tons of fish as well.

The meat of a Lake Michigan trolling spread usually consists of downriggers and divers like Luhr Jensen Dipsy Divers. I run mostly spoons from my riggers, but when spinnies (flasher fly combo's), are hot I'll often run a big one down the shoot from my deep (center), downrigger. And if that one starts going I'm a firm believer in giving them what they want. Sometimes I'll load my riggers with spinnies.

If downriggers are cake, divers are the ice cream that sets it off. Running out to the side and behind your rigger presentations, divers (I run at least two, sometimes three

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Luhr Jensen Dipsy Divers per side) often out produce rigger and other satellite presentations combined.

Honestly, if I was told I could only use downriggers or divers, divers would be my pick 99% of the time. Lake Michigan is much clearer than it used to be and most captains have reduced the amount of riggers they run and have doubled up on the divers. Divers run out to the side of the boat and back and in my opinion they present baits to fish that are not intimidated by boat presence. They just plain work!

While early in the season spoons off divers are often more effective than spinnies, when it comes to August kings off Muskegon it's flasher time. I tend to run my flashers 6 to 8 feet behind my divers (go too long it makes it hard to land fish), but it pays to experiment with length. Different flashers have different spins; I like to keep the same brand and size of flasher on each side of the boat.

Line wise for divers it's hard to beat braid. The lack of stretch allows you to run the divers further back and the small diameter lets them dig deeper. My two outside divers are spooled with 30 Lb. Power Pro (8Lb. Diameter). On the inside I run Lee's Seven Strand wire to my divers. While the jury is still out on whether wire gives you more depth, there's one thing I can attest to it really, really produces fish.

One word of warning concerning braid and wire, there is absolutely no give in the stuff. Set your drags lighter than you would with mono, and always use a snubber to absorb the shock of a railroading Chinook.

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Other sets I consider satellite presentations include highline, lead-core and copper. High lines, spoons or plugs trolled with little or no weight can be very effective in cold water situations when the fish are high in the water column. When I run high lines I like to use releasable in-line planer boards such as the Church Walleye board and rig a speed bead 5-10 foot in front of the lure to keep the "bird" from sliding all the way to the lure while fighting fish.

With lead-core I like to set the Church board so it does not release by wrapping the backer line through the release, around the release post and back through the release. Then when a fish strikes, you reel the board into the boat and then take it off by hand. Quick tip: when reeling the board to the boat keep the rod tip low, this will keep the board from diving.

I like to have rods set up with various lengths 3, 5,7,10 colors (10 yards per color), to cover several different depths. I like to run several lengths per side Note: always run your shallowest (shortest) on the outside and the deepest (longest) on the inside.

Magnum spoons seem to be the most productive from satellite presentations. I'm not sure but I believe, that these large spoons trolled well away from the boat create enough commotion to attract fish from further distances. Monster spoons, some big enough to make people think they're too big, like the Northern King M80 often produce surprising results.

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Most captains run copper line just like lead-core. I like 45# Howie's copper wire. The advantage of 45# copper is that it achieves approximately twice the depth of 27# lead-core of the same length. Noting that copper dives much faster and deeper than lead-core, keep your copper on the inside of the lead-core.

One word of warning concerning long line satellite predations they aren't meant to be run in traffic and honestly, they are the responsibility of the anglers that run them. The guy who is on the radio constantly yelling "Hey, I have lead-core out", won't be the most popular guy in that port.

Later in August, when the kings really start staging for their run up river, plugs like Luhr Jensen's J-Plug, Tomic and Silver Horde Plugs come into play. J-Plugs tend to work best at slower speeds, but Tomics and Hordes can be trolled fast and can be successfully combined with spoon presentations.

When kings are staging off the Muskegon pier heads the common term combat fishing often comes into play. Especially on week ends. While no one likes to fish in crowds, myself included, there are times when that's the place to be. Fishing the pier heads takes a little common sense and often when it comes to line sets, less is more. Running two, maybe three downriggers and two short divers is often the best remedy for close quarter fishing. Not only does it make things easier when it comes to maneuvering, Lots of hardware in the water often spooks shallow water kings.

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Even at the peak of the run, fishing around the pier heads often slows as the sun gets high. I believe this has more to do with boat traffic spooking the fish, than the actual time of day. Heading deeper often puts more fish in the boat, but keep an eye toward shore. Often when all the boats head out, you can sneak back in and put a few more pigs in the box.

One advantage to the port of Muskegon is that if the Big Lake is raging, the west end of Muskegon Lake is a violable option for catching kings. Love sick salmon forgo water temperature moving into the deep water were they sometimes hold for weeks.

The key to catching these stressed out kings is slowing down (no faster than 2 mph), and fishing wide wobble baits like Luhr Jensen J-Plugs. Hot colors for Muskegon Lake include silver red head, green scaley and anything that glows.

For up to the minute fishing information and all you Big Lake tackle needs contact: Shoreline Service Bait & Tackle (231) 759-7254. Information on charter boats can be obtained by calling Great Lakes Guide Service (231) 638-5752.

www.GLGUIDESERVICE.com

Muskegon doesn't get near the press that Manistee and Ludington gets. Much of the reason for this is because compared to those ports Muskegon isn't a charter boat Mecca. Most of the captains in Muskegon are natives and love the port they fish. And at least in my opinion, most Muskegon fishermen are pretty free with information. Just turn your marine band to channel 68 and listen. It's usually enough to put you on fish.

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Less than four hours from Detroit at the end of I-96 you'll find the port of Muskegon with three major spawning rivers and tons of kings. And if everyone in the family doesn't care to fish, there are museums and shops not to mention Michigan's Adventure Michigan's largest amusement park.