

# The *Big Water* Advantage

## Giant muskies, and lots of 'em ... that's the lure of fishing big water

By Spencer Berman, Contributing Writer

Musky fishing has seen some extremely significant changes, the biggest of which is the size of the fish we are catching. Today's musky is so much larger. The reason for this can be attributed to a number of different factors including improved electronics, new lures, better fish handling, among many others.

One aspect that has led to the dramatic increase in the size of the muskies we catch is the size of the waters we fish. With stocking programs focusing on putting muskies into larger lakes and streams, combined with a number of large natural lakes improving as a result of different environmental factors, the push for musky anglers to fish big water has never been stronger.

For many fishermen, a large water, say 40,000 acres plus, seems daunting.

Despite these challenges, these waters offer unmatched potential for both big muskies and numbers of muskies that cannot be matched by smaller fisheries. Fishing larger waters is vastly different than smaller lakes and streams, and successful anglers must take into account different factors and use different techniques to assure the highest level of success. It is these major challenges that drive many musky anglers away from larger lakes and back to the smaller lakes with which they have become comfortable over the years. However, by doing this you will inevitably be missing out on some of the greatest musky fishing available. In this article we will look at the many advantages of fishing larger waters and investigate why these benefits exist.

What is "big water" and why can it grow more muskies?

I consider "big water" to be anything that exceeds 25,000 acres. A lake of this size will have the ability to support a tremendous amount of biomass. Biomass is a scientific term that is used to describe how much "stuff" a lake can have in it — how many weeds, how much algae, how many minnows, how many small muskies, all the way up to (of course) how many big muskies. Therefore the higher a lake's carrying capacity (what a lake can biologically support) of biomass, the more baitfish and muskies will be found in the lake. A few prime examples of big, high profile musky waters are Lake St. Clair; Mille Lacs; Lake Vermilion; Green Bay; the Ottawa, St. Louis and St. Lawrence rivers; Georgian Bay; Lake Nipissing; Lake of the Woods; Lac Seul;

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This musky was so big it took the father/son team of Daryl Roche and Dennis Roche to hold it. The musky was caught on a Mag Bull Dawg while fishing with Captain Spencer Berman.



## Big Water

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and Eagle Lake. All of these waters are large enough that they are able to support a huge amount of biomass and therefore grow tons of large muskies.

Why do the muskies grow so big in big water? Most of you have probably heard the saying, "the bigger the bowl the bigger the goldfish will grow." Muskies are no different — the larger the water the higher the growth potential. Obviously, with muskies, there are other factors as well, including genetics, baitfish, climate, etc. Despite these other factors there is little doubt that the larger a water the more likely it will produce trophy fish.

### Record Potential

The proof of this comes in two different forms. First of all, look at all the legitimate conversations about where the next world record will be caught. Almost all experts agree that it will come out of a large water, most likely a Great Lakes fishery, because once again, these big water fisheries have higher

growth potentials. The next form of proof comes when we look at where the largest fish in the last 10 years have been caught. Almost all of the certified and uncertified 50-pound-plus fish have come from very large waters. Places like Georgian Bay and the St. Lawrence produce 50-pound class muskies every year and are the odds-on favorites for the next world record. They are also among the biggest waters containing fishable populations of muskies in the world.

Another important advantage of big waters is their ability to produce more trophy class fish than a smaller system, potentially thousands of 50-plus-inch fish in them. The larger size of the lake increases the growth potential for every musky, giving each of them the potential to achieve trophy size, while the high level of biomass assures that there will be a tremendous baitfish population to feed them. These factors combine to ensure that a very high percentage of the muskies achieve trophy size.

Another major advantage to larger

fisheries is that the muskies in them tend to group up into relatively small areas. These fisheries definitely demonstrate the old fishing adage that "90 percent of the fish are in 10 percent of the water." Add all of that together and you are left with a musky fishery that is loaded with big muskies which love to group together in smaller areas, normally around baitfish. This concept gives you the opportunity to catch multiple trophy class fish in the same day. For example, Lake St. Clair is a 274,000-acre lake that is literally packed with monster fish. For that reason every year we have days during which we catch three or more fish over 50 inches. These results are possible because we are able to get onto schools of very large muskies and thereby catch multiple fish of that size in the same day.

This concept of several 50-plus-inch fish in a day is pretty much exclusive to big waters because they are the only places where you can have so many fish of that caliber that you can hope to encounter more than one in a single day. In contrast, on a smaller water, it is always possible for you to catch a very big fish, and yes, there are even a couple of smaller lakes that have the growth potential to produce some super big fish. However, the ability for a lake to grow the numbers of large fish needed for you to catch multiple big fish in a day with any consistency is something almost exclusive to large waters.

### The Pressure Factor

The last major advantage to fishing big water is the lack of fishing pressure. Large fisheries such as Green Bay, Mille Lacs or Lake St. Clair receive a fair amount of pressure, but when you look at the overall amount of muskies, plus the overall size of the water and then compare that to the number of fishermen, you quickly realize that the pressure is a fraction of what it would be on a popular small water. This overall lack of fishing pressure results in fish that are much more catchable simply because they have not been caught many times before nor have they encountered many lures.



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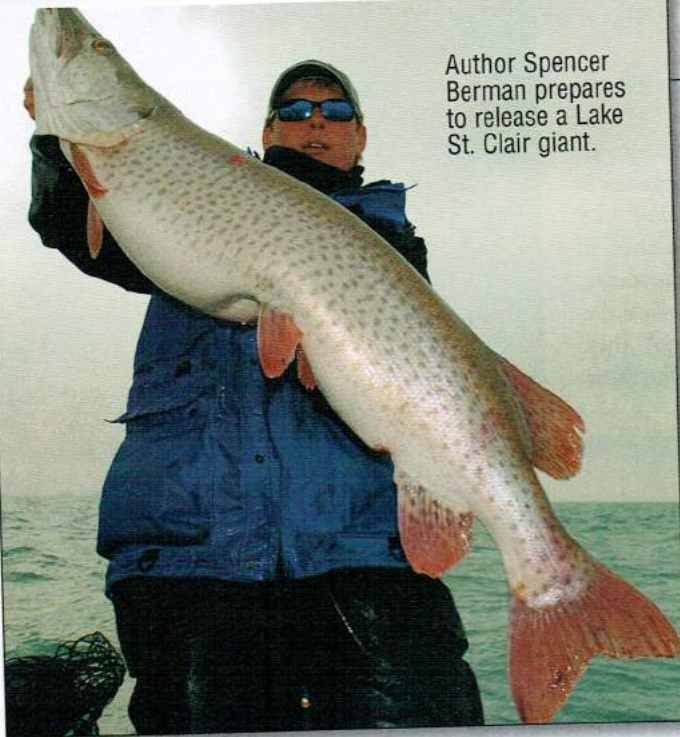
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Another factor that results in the fish being much more gullible is the way the muskies frequently slide on and off structure. On large waters the muskies have a tendency to pull off the normal fishing structure for long periods of time to chase deep water baitfish. By doing this the muskies are able to get away from the constant barrage of lures that they see on popular shallow structure. In contrast, muskies in a smaller lake cannot get away from fishing pressure, especially where it is fairly manageable to target them in deep water

areas. This constant pressure makes the fish much more knowledgeable of lures, boats and fishing in general making them much more likely to follow or not move at all when your lure passes. On the flip side, muskies in larger fisheries can get away from almost all angling pressure for several days if not weeks, and the result is they won't see a single bait for long periods of time. This tends to make them extremely catchable when they do eventually come back into areas that receive fishing pressure.

An example of this is in the Bay of Green Bay. During the first couple weeks of the season the muskies are normally located in the shallow areas that surround the Fox River channel where they spawn. Fishing during this time is extremely good with trophy fish being caught. As the spring turns into summer, many muskies leave shallow water areas and head to open water, roaming the basin and eating open water baitfish, where they become the proverbial needle in a haystack. Very few anglers target the fish in this open water environment, which results in the muskies going a long time without seeing many fishing lures. As fall starts and the water begins to cool down, the muskies begin to move back toward the river where they see a fair amount of pressure and once again are fairly catchable due to having been away from fishermen and



Author Spencer Berman prepares to release a Lake St. Clair giant.

son, really only happens in big water and has a significant effect on angling.

The bottom line is that big water not only gives anglers the chance to target the biggest muskies, it provides the chance for great numbers of fish. Muskies have the opportunity to grow big in numbers, and get away from fishing pressure, resulting in a catchable attitude when you encounter them on the water. It's a terrific scenario.

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[www.spencersanglingadv.com](http://www.spencersanglingadv.com)

lures. This results in a great initial bite as fish first come into contact with anglers, but as the fall progresses, more and more of the fish get hooked and thus become harder and harder to catch. This "rest time" for the muskies, when they get away from anglers throughout the sea-



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