

Capt. Walt Koch



Captain Walt Koch and I launched his big Lund 2025 into the waters of Lake Delavan with the hopes of catching some of the lake's great bounty of bass and northern pike. It was a foggy morning with an air temperature of 65° and water of 78°.

Our plans were to toss wacky worms up on top of the weeds and work them back to the weed edge, targeting primarily largemouth bass with this technique.

A second technique would be to drag suckers on a Lindy Rig outside the weed edge from 15 to 30 feet deep, looking for pike. We would use circle hooks, a ½ oz. walking sinker, and suckers ranging in length from 5 to 7 inches.

Walt fired up the Evinrude 225 and we headed out to fish between Willow Point and the Yacht Club. Once there, he positioned us with his Minn Kota Vantage, a stern-mounted

electric motor that helps give precise boat control. We threw the wacky worms up to the weed beds and in short order Walt brought a nice largemouth to the boat. The day was off to a good start.

Koch, from the small town of Breese, Illinois, near Lake Carlyle, grew up fishing as a child. He was a farm kid but didn't grow crops. His family raised upland game birds which gave him a chance to fish in the creeks in the surrounding landscape.

My rod bent sharply with a THUNK and I had a bass on, a nice bass, one that rapped the wacky worm. After some acrobatics, I brought it to the side of the boat where Walt deftly netted it. The day was getting even better.

"Walt, where do you guide?"

"Delavan, Lake Geneva, and the Fox Chain of Lakes. That gives me some very good choices for my clients throughout the season. I'll fish the Chain first thing in the spring, then move to Delavan for the Wisconsin opener, and then start on Lake Geneva later when the water warms."

Walt and I each boated another largemouth, the wacky worms doing their thing.

"What do you like most about guiding?"

"Teaching, I think. Especially newcomers and kids. It's great to take a family out that might not know a lot of about fishing, but is excited to learn."

"I try to teach them some of the basic, most productive techniques. For bass, it's wacky worms, drop shooting, and plastics in general. For walleyes, it's pulling a three-way rig with live bait. And for pike, it's Lindy rigging suckers."

I nailed another bass, not a big one, but it was an enthusiastic little fighter. On Delavan, bass are plentiful, provide great action, and the lake holds some ginormous sized fish.

I queried Koch as to what makes a good client.

"That's a good question, Jim. I think most importantly it's a willingness to learn and try new things, to not be afraid of stepping out of a comfort zone. I like them to be interested and engaged."

And a bad client?

"That's easy. One who is late. In second place would be the guy who can't stay off the cell phone."

Koch, currently the president of Walleyes Unlimited, Inc., caters to families and children just like the fishing club he represents. He estimates that 50% of his guiding trips include kids. Walt gives a discount to trips that include at least one child under the age of 18.



Walt and I switched to sucker rigs to target bass and pike. We used long, limber rods because many times the bite is tentative and a stiff rod keeps too much tension on the sucker, causing the fish to simply drop the sucker.

My long rod started jerking, albeit gently, and I watched the rod tip carefully for more signs that the fish was taking in the sucker. The rod began to bend more and more and when I thought it was hooked, I picked up the rod, felt the jerk, and then raised the rod and began to reel. When using circle hooks, you don't set the hook. You raise the rod and start reeling, which results in the fish usually being hooked harmlessly in the side of the mouth instead of being gut hooked.



The fish put up a nice fight on the limber rod and when it came to the boat, Walt harnessed it in the net. The pike was 30" inches and weighed a fat 6# 10 oz.. By the way, Walt and I released all the fish we caught, ten in total, all back into the waters of Lake Delavan, one of the Wisconsin DNR's true success stories.

Koch credits part of his success to his local sponsors, all from Antioch: Triangle Bait and Tackle, C. J. Smith and C. Halings and Son, Marina. They help him with bait, tackle, and marine repairs.

What advice does Koch, a U.S. Coast Guard captain, give to beginners?

First, keep things simple.

Second, start with a split shot rig and hook, and use live bait

Third, read the book Nightcrawler Secrets because it is an excellent piece on live bait fishing

Fourth, buy the best equipment you can afford, starting with the right rod so you can feel the fish. Then choose a reel and the right kind of line for the species you'll target and the conditions you'll be fishing.

Capt. Walt Koch can be reached at 847-710-5453 or by visiting his web site: www.redrockguidingservice.com. The web site has tons of information, a photo gallery, and everything else you need to know, including a monthly newsletter.

If you have some youngsters or beginners you want to teach how to fish, here is a marvelous gift: Hire Walt for an early trip on the Fox Chain of Lakes. Then around opening day in Wisconsin, book a Delavan trip. Several weeks later, go on Geneva. You will learn three really different bodies of water, and several different presentations. Some guides discourage kids, but Walt promotes teaching kids how to fish. They will learn things to retain for a lifetime. How can you put a value on that?

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