

## Top 10 Muskie Bite Triggers

Contributed by Bob "Bobzilla" Chochola  
Wednesday, 16 April 2008

It's often been said that you won't catch a musky if your bait isn't in the water. This philosophy keeps the lures splashing from my boat long after most other anglers have gone to bed. If you ask anyone who has had the pleasure of timing a trip around one of ours, they'll probably tell you about our triumphant returns at two o'clock in the morning singing and giggling like a couple of school boys on summer retreat. The giddy arrival is usually accompanied by a big fish story about a behemoth we dredged up from the depths in the middle of the night.

It's often been said that you won't catch a musky if your bait isn't in the water. This philosophy keeps the lures splashing from my boat long after most other anglers have gone to bed. If you ask anyone who has had the pleasure of timing a trip around one of ours, they'll probably tell you about our triumphant returns at two o'clock in the morning singing and giggling like a couple of school boys on summer retreat. The giddy arrival is usually accompanied by a big fish story about a behemoth we dredged up from the depths in the middle of the night.

Our determination to keep the lures going has proven successful so many times that I must stress to you the importance of finding a way to stay motivated and keep casting even if the fish don't want to cooperate. The frustration of not seeing any fish or multiple lazy follows can easily force a musky hunter to an early visit to the beverage cooler hoping for "better luck" in the morning. It's hard chucking those heavy lures all day long when the payoff hasn't come yet. I'll tell you right now, however, you won't find any muskies in the beer cooler and you won't catch a thing with your bait's idol in the boat.

That said, now that I have convinced you to crack-open the beverages later, you're probably thinking we cast 24/7 when we're on a hunt and we don't sleep. Well, if you happen to be one of the guys who shared camp with us over the years you'd say this statement is true. I must admit that Pat and I have an unusual constitution when it comes to casting because we have been blessed with more than our fair share of huge muskies. Each one we get gives us that much more energy to press-on for the next. Who knows? Maybe one day we will be able to go without, but for now even these nocturnal creatures must cop Z's every now and again.

To make our long hours on the water more efficient and to actually allow us to squeeze some sack time into our day, Pat and I have a set of "triggers"; we look for (and some we even plan our trips around), that increase our chances of catching fish. I'll call them our TOP 10 MUSKIE BITE "TRIGGERS."

Here they are&hellip;

CONDITION #10: "Calm Shore vs. Wind Swept Shore";

Everyone should know about casting the windy shore by now. This technique is always a good starting place to find active muskies.

What about the calm side?

A few years ago we fished the opener on Dryberry Lake and got hit by some heavy wind gusts. After fighting a 35 mph wind and large waves for a while, Pat suggested that we look for a calm side where we might find a fish doing exactly what we wanted to do — hide.

As luck would have it the due west wind limited our options. We ducked behind a large island that had a very nice weed bed in a bay nestled on the middle of the calm side and a couple of wind-swept rock points to either flank projecting out into deep water. The bed itself was dead flat calm though and we began casting.

Pat cast to a big SUV-sized rock sticking out of the water at the back of the bay. His lure hit about six feet in front of the huge boulder. "Nobody home!" he said.

I noticed a deep cut in the rock just below the surface and thought it was a good place for a lunker to hide. "Get one cast even closer." I said.

After my suggestion to chuck the bait in tight, Pat obliged and hit the rock square in the middle with a crack and his bait fell into the water right in front of the cut. Pat made two cranks of his reel handle and hooked-up. Ten minutes later we had a fat 52-incher in our net that was easily in the 40-pound class. I'd show you a picture, but while Pat had the fish penned in our basket and I scrambled for the camera (it's bad luck to have it out and ready — did you know that?), the musky reared-up and with one big jump cleared the rim and was gone. Oops!

#### CONDITION #9: "Sunrise";

I must confess that sunrise is a time of day Pat and I know the least about, mainly because we are up until all hours celebrating all the big fish we catch after the sun goes down. I'll get to that later. We do, on occasion, fish the early bite when we are on a lake with a bunch of recreational traffic during the day. Our trip over this past 4th of July weekend to Webster Lake, Indiana is a good example of that. We wanted to get out before the jet skis and wave runners beat the surface to suds. As a result we boated matching mid-thirty inch muskies.

Sunrise brings out the food and it only stands to reason that the toothy critters will be on the prowl too. Now you're never gonna see us awake that early on Dryberry &ndash; for obvious reasons &ndash; but each lake is different and you should gear your hunt to the specific situation you are facing.

#### CONDITION #8: "Cloud Cover Yields to Sunlight";

I believe it is generally more productive to work high light to low light periods, but I will not ignore the low light to high light changes either. Like sunrise, a long period of cloud cover followed by a burst of sun can be a great trigger. Light change of any kind may be the best bite motivator and should never be ignored.

#### CONDITIONS #7 & #6: "Full vs. New Moon & Moon Phases";

I'm sure you've heard the theory that moon phases can affect the musky bite. We have been fishing the full moon for a long time and it has always been very good to us. I've seen such dramatic increases in land critter and waterfowl activity during the full moon that I have to believe it similarly motivates the creatures under the surface. You will notice the buzz about three days prior and then it will suddenly crash a day or two after. It's like clockwork.

During the July full moon, Canadian Shield lakes are lit up almost like daytime. It's remarkable how easy it is to see out there. Just beware of approaching fronts &ndash; cloud cover can turn out the lights in a hurry. All kinds of cool stuff will go on out there at night during the full moon. People always ask me, "Where are the pictures?" What they don't realize is that you can't photograph the magic and even if you could, a picture wouldn't do it justice.

"You just had to be there." I tell them.

Northern Lights, frequent spectacular shooting stars, and communication satellites buzzing and blinking through the star-studded night sky provide a heavy metal light show for a very exciting time to be musky fishing. Bears, wolves, deer, loon, and bats make every minute special when you are out there casting the moonlight.

The soft and subtle light can play tricks on you though, but this is also true for the muskies. We have had so many fish slam into our boat after missing the turn on a figure eight that we have grown to expect it. I had a nice fish crack her head right at my feet one night, scratching her back along the entire length of our boat before she took back to the weeds. Pat hooked her on the next cast and we released a nice 46-incher.

New moon spells D-A-R-K on The Shield. No lights, no moon, just a whole lot of black. Friends of ours fish it and do very well, but all I can tell you is watch out for islands.

What about moon rise and moon set?

I am not the person to consult about time specific information, as I don't keep close track of time. For that I will direct you to Joe Bucher's moon charts published in Musky Hunter Magazine. Joe has made painstaking efforts to put together accurate information on this subject. All I can say is that if you follow his timetables you will contact fish. We have proven him right enough to say that you will too.

We do pay close attention to the rise and fall of the moon. We have had incredible action when the sun is low on the horizon to our west and that big ol' round hunk of cheese is peeking over the trees to the east. You won't ever find us in camp at this time of day. No way! Our best action comes at dusk during a full moon rise (sunset). It doesn't matter to us if it's the gravitational pull or the many changes in light texture at this time &ndash; all we know is that we catch muskies.

#### CONDITIONS #5 & #4: "Wind, Narrows, & Neck Down Areas";

Muskies are a native river fish. Without going into the grand history of the species, I'll say that to know and

understand this element will put you onto some of the highest percentage spots on the lake right away. Growing up fishing The Fox River gives me some keen insight into the musky world simply by my familiarity with the nature of the beast. That nature is current.

Current happens one of two ways on any lake: fast water entering the lake via a tributary and wind moving lake water through a neck down, saddle area, or narrows. Higher concentrations of nutrients and oxygen attract baitfish and active toothy predators won't be far behind. I say "active" because I doubt that a big fish will spend the energy it takes to fight strong current unless she intends to eat something.

These areas provide perfect holding for muskies and any weed patch, rock point, or drop-off has great potential for success. Hold on to your gear in the mouth of a fast moving tributary, because a strike in the white water will rattle your teeth.

### CONDITION #3: "Calm with a Steady Light Rain"

Whenever we wake up and peek out the window to see clouds, calm, and a light rain falling, we go into overdrive. This is certainly one of the best times to be on the water — low light and calm with drizzle will move the baitfish (food). Muskies will hunt on a day like this and a seasoned musky hunter will do the same.

If fishing has been slow due to a long period of hot sun you can bet that it will pick up under thick clouds and a pitter-patter of rain on the glass-like surface. Activity will be high at all battle stations — weed beds, rock points, up on the reefs, and on the troll.

Grab your gear and cooler because it's gonna be a long day on the water.

### CONDITION #2: "Approaching Frontal System"

Just like the full moon stirs-up all the wildlife on a lake, so too will an approaching frontal system. There's nothin' like a falling barometer to kick it into high gear. Everything from sudden light change to calm to drizzle to gusty wind through the saddle areas — it'll all come with a front.

Use caution. A storm front can come out of nowhere and will be deceptively fast moving. ALWAYS PUT SAFETY FIRST... It's not a good idea to take chances. I can't tell you how many close calls we've had scrambling to get off the water. If you see lightning, even if it seems a long way off, dock it and hit that cooler.

We have a group of good spots that are within a short boogie back to camp and we generally stick close with heavy weather on the way. Buy a weather radio and pay attention to the forecast. If you do get stuck out there, by all means, pull your boat to shore and ride it out there.

### CONDITION #1: "Two Hours Before Until Two Hours After Sunset"

We call it "prime time" and if you could see the 8X10's that wallpaper my den you'd realize that this is when we do our best work. If you can only gather the strength for a four-hour casting day, then sleep all day and be out on the water on your best spots in the evening. There are no special instructions — just get out there and cast your brains out! A strike at sunset or after dark is the most exciting strike of all. We are always out hunting at this time of day — always.

That wraps up my TOP 10 MUSKIE BITE "TRIGGERS." I sure hope you find some of them useful out on the water. You should have ten good places to focus your attention anyway. Now get out there and catch a HOG!

---

Bob Chochola is a freelance Writer and Photographer based in the Dallas/Ft.Worth area. Read more of Bob's articles and check out his photo galleries at [WWW.BOBZILLA.TV](http://WWW.BOBZILLA.TV)

Send Bob fan mail at [bobzilla@bobzilla.tv](mailto:bobzilla@bobzilla.tv) This e-mail address is being protected from spam bots, you need JavaScript enabled to view it

On MySpace [myspace.com/muskiebob](http://myspace.com/muskiebob)