





GIVING SUMMERTIME WALLEYE THE SLIP

REVERT TO BOBBERS FOR
SLUGGISH SUMMER WALLEYE
(bobber)

By Sara Trampe

Casting out over the smooth mirrored surface of the lake, you watch your bait and brightly-colored bobber sail through the air and plop into the water, causing ripples to cascade over the surface. You flip your bail and wait, taking in the hot summer afternoon.

Watching your bobber in anticipation and awe, it slowly dips below the surface; you reel in your slack, make a sweeping hookset and feel the weight and the tug of a big fish. Then, hearing the zip of the drag as the fish dives downward, you feel the head shakes as the fish tries to dislodge the hook.

Time almost stands still as you stare laser beams into the water, trying to catch a glimpse of what's on the end of your line. And just as you see it's a big walleye, your excitement level peaks, you cry out in celebration as the net scoops, and you successfully bag your catch!

In this daydream, are you a child or dreaming in the present time? The brain usually reverts to childhood and panfish when referencing bobbers, but you could miss out on catching if you disregard bobbers?

The traditional red and white, round plastic bobbers are a classic introductory way to fishing; clip it on, toss it off the dock and keep kids busy catching panfish all day. I bet you still have some in your tackle box.

But does that make bobber fishing too easy? Or an antiquated way to fish that you grow out of as you learn new techniques and gain skills as an angler? No, it's not, and it shouldn't be.

Slip bobbers are a great tool. Continue utilizing bobbers with your advanced skill set and learn to determine when to use them to put more trophy fish, especially during notoriously difficult conditions, in your net.

Cork and Float components

A bobber is simply a device made of a floating material - typically balsa wood, cork, foam, or plastic - that is used as an indicator to detect a bite by pulling it under the surface; regularly referred to as floats or corks and used interchangeably with the term bobber. Floats have been around for thousands of years, used by millions of anglers, have hundreds of

variations and dozens of uses.

The two most common types are spring and slip bobbers. The easiest explanation of a spring bobber is that they are clipped onto the line in a fixed position, are best for non-windy, shallower water conditions, and are frequently used for panfish. A slip bobber is a moving bobber that slides, or slips, freely up and down the line, can be used year-round for many different species and many different applications. Let's delve into the details on the how, what, where, when, and why to use them. It may not be as simple as you think.

The five main components of the slip bobber rig are the following: bobber stop, bead, slip bobber, weight, and hook. The bobber stop is tied on first, followed by the bead, then the slip bobber is then threaded onto the line, and the hook is tied to the end. After sliding the bobber up the line, attach your split shot, or an alternative to the weight and hook combination is using a jig head for a power corking approach.

Let's break down the terminal tackle and components on what I use and why, and explain why slip bobbers can be a top pick presentation.

First is the bobber stop. You need something to stop your slip bobber, thus setting your depth. While there are multiple variations, such as an egg-shaped rubber stop, bead stops, tying your own line, two- or four-hole plastic stops, or a nylon tie, I prefer the nylon tie.

The nylon tie has a small profile to move through the eyelets while reeling and casting smoothly, is easily adjustable, and is

readily available at most tackle shops. All bobber stops have pros and cons; just decide what works best for you.

The nylon slip knot comes packaged on a plastic tube that easily slides onto the line, then slip the tube out from underneath the knot in the opposite direction so that you can remove the plastic tube from your line. Next, pull the knot tight enough to stay put but loose enough to be able to slide to your desired depth, where you will cinch it tight.

You can trim the tag ends or leave them. Leaving them provides more visibility when watching for the bobber to meet the knot and easier adjustability, while trimming them allows for further, smoother casting due to less friction caused when traveling through the eyelets.

The distance the bait is held off the bottom is determined by the distance between the bobber stop and hook. The farther away from the hook, the deeper you are set. The bobber will stop at the bobber stop and turn vertical, indicating the hook and bait are suspended in the water column.

If the bobber is lying sideways, there is no weight on the end of the line; several factors can cause this, but the most common is that your bait is lying on the bottom. Simply put, you are set too deep and need to adjust your bobber stop.

The second component is the bead. Don't forget the bead! The bead is used to protect the knot from getting caught in the tube of the slip bobber. Different slip bobber models have different size eyelets, and the knot can sometimes easily fit through the plastic tube. The bead prevents the knot from





going through the bobber.

The third piece is the slip bobber itself. There are many aspects to crafting the ultimate slip bobber, from size and weight combination to eyelets and visibility. And it's not surprising that all slip bobbers are not created equal.

Line wear will create grooves in the eyelet of the slip bobber, and your line will catch in the cracks and prevent the bobber from easily sliding up the line to the bobber stop, rendering it useless. Also, a slip bobber's balanced size and weight are significant when choosing the correct size to use and are dependent on which species and conditions you are using them for. The fish should be able to pull your bobber below the surface without feeling tension. If a fish feels the weight of the bobber, it will drop the bait before you are able to set the hook, so if you have consistent bites but cannot get the fish hooked, your bobber could be too large or too heavy.

I prefer Northland Fishing Tackle's Lite-Bite slip bobbers because they come in multiple shapes and sizes and have high-quality components. The Lite-Bite series bobbers are made from balsa wood and are light enough that fish cannot detect them but heavy enough to support the appropriate split shot and easy castability.

The top antenna, known as the hi-vis strike indicator, is colored bright orange for easy, eye-catching visibility on the water's surface and tipped with a brass grommet eyelet to prevent line wear for frequent and long-lasting use. And with a new line-up on the horizon, it might be time to replace some of the old red and white bobbers gathering dust in your tackle box.

Next, I tie on my hook, which secures the other components on the line. I recommend using size two, four, or six live bait hooks for walleye fishing. The smaller hook is preferred for clear water situations and best for leeches and crawlers. Size four or six hooks have longer shanks and larger gaps more appropriate for minnows, chubs, suckers, and lower water clarity situations.

The final terminal tackle component is the split shot or weight. You can vary depending on the depth you are fishing, but be careful you are still using the appropriate size bobber. The more weight, the faster they fall and easier to cast, but too much weight can't support the bobber and is easier for the fish to see.

I find a number five split shot (one or two) attached about eight to ten inches above the hook is the most effective. Attaching the weights further up the line can lead to tangles, the hook catching the line, creating knots, and difficulty casting; therefore, it's important to keep the weights closer to the hook versus farther away.

Rod and Reel

Generally, I prefer eight to ten-pound monofilament line when using slip bobber rigs because the nylon knot is adjustable, allowing me to change depths, and if I use braid, the tie will set into the line, and it will no longer be feasible to alter the position of my knot. If you prefer braided line, one of the other bobber stops will work better for you.

And the final piece to the set-up puzzle is a long rod with

a moderate to fast action tip to allow longer casts and better hooksets. I use a seven-foot, nine-inch medium-light fast KCR (Kramercustomrods.com) with the best success.

Designed for fishing with slip bobbers in mind, these rods have enough backbone for walleye fishing, a softer tip for flinging baits, and the length allows for longer, more accurate casts and to pick up slack faster when the rod is engaged.

If using slip bobbers for finicky or spooky fish, staying away from the fish is a huge key to your success and the longer rod allows for farther casts. When casting, be aware of casting off your bait because that will definitely lead to a lack of action. A sidearm cast or lob will help keep the bait on. And be sure to read the *Trampe Talk* for further rod breakdown.

Slowing the Pace

Now that we discussed the what and how, let's break down the when, where, and why. Several summers ago, Tyler and I were out fishing for walleye on spots where we had caught them a few days prior, with no luck. The season had progressed from active, chasing fish to lethargic suspended fish.

What causes fish from actively chasing a bait down to needing a more spoon-fed approach? A basic explanation is hot summer temperatures warm the water, warm water and sun grow weeds and algae, which take up more oxygen in the water system. Less oxygen in the system means less oxygen available for the fish, creating slower, more lethargic movements.

But fish metabolism is still peaking due to those same water temps, requiring them to eat frequently. Fish are cold-blooded, and their metabolism is directly correlated to water temperatures; low water temps mean low body temps and low metabolism, whereas high water temps mean higher body temperatures and higher metabolism.

Lower metabolism means eating less often, and high metabolism requires the fish to eat more to maintain standard metabolic function. So alongside finding oxygen, finding a way to trigger a strike while not causing excessive use of energy is key to your success.

We began searching deeper water with known structures because the fish moved to find more oxygen, cooler water temps, and following their food source. We started marking suspended fish in 12 to 15 feet of water, but we had to change our tactic when we still weren't catching fish. We had fallen victim to the mindset that it almost felt "too easy" or "too old-fashion" to fish with bobbers, but the jig heads we were using fell too fast, right past the strike zone and moved too quickly, meaning the fish would exert too much energy to chase down the bait to eat. The angler needs to either trigger a reaction strike or have the best food option to entice the fish to bite. One of us decided to tie on a slip bobber, cast out, and watched the bobber go down almost immediately. We looked at each other and knew it was time to go back to bobber fishing.

Break down with Bobbers

Slip bobbers are a great tool for effectively working around various structures. Break down rock bars, main lake reefs,

weed edges, and downed timber by suspending the bait in or above the fishes' strike zone longer.

Knowing where to set the depth of your bait is also extremely important. Use your electronics and pay attention to how far fish are suspended off the bottom. Remember always to place your bait above the fish, as fish, generally speaking, feed upward. But not too far up because the fish need to see your bait and have enough energy to go after it.

If you do not have electronics, fishing for suspended summer walleye in clear water, I will usually set my depth four to six feet off the bottom. If it is stained or low water clarity, I will set it two to four feet off the bottom.

Due to the relative size of the walleye we are targeting, I use a size three (3/4-inch oval) lite bite bobber with a size two hook and a leech. This smaller hook allows the leech to move more freely, creating more action and natural movement to help trigger a strike. With a solid forage base of leeches, this slow-moving yet abundant and accessible food source is the number one option for fish to eat during warm water periods.

Every year, during the dog days of summer, when the bite transitions from active, chasing fish to schooled up more lethargic fish, we consistently grab the slip bobber rod for the most effective way to continuously put walleye in the boat.

During summer, it is typical of walleye to school up in small pods, scattered throughout their preferred cover and depths. I locate a pod using my electronics, note the depth the fish are

suspended at, and set up at my farthest casting distance to try not to spook them.

Remember to be patient when the bobber goes down; I count to three while reeling in my slack and then make a gentle but powerful, upwards sweeping hookset. You are using small hooks, so a quick reaction hook set could pull it out of the fish's mouth. Once the bite slows on the school you are working, move onto the next one.

Time-tested

We have had many incredible days on the water slip bobber fishing for mid-summer walleye, and you can see an episode we did focusing on this topic on our YouTube Channel Sportsman's Journal TV.

There are many pieces to the slip bobber puzzle and so many different conditions when the slip bobber can out produce other techniques. So don't overlook a tried-and-true tactic because you think it's beneath you. When the sun is hot, the air humid, and us anglers aren't as aggressive in the boat, neither are the fish; so let your presentation do the work for you. Slip bobbers keep the bait in the strike zone longer, allowing the lethargic fish to move slowly and eat when they are ready. Lethargic fish don't want to chase, finicky fish need the bait in the strike zone longer, and spooky fish are difficult to get close enough to. The slip bobber can eliminate those challenges and entice the fish to bite, making you a more successful angler. ■

The advertisement is set against a background of a lush green field. On the left, a large white silhouette of a buck's head with impressive antlers is positioned above the text "CREEK BOTTOM LAND MANAGEMENT" in a bold, white, sans-serif font. Below this, the website "www.creekbottomlandmgmt.com" is written in a smaller white font. At the bottom left, the slogan "IF YOU PLAN IT... THEY WILL COME." is displayed in large, white, all-caps letters. On the right side, there is a vertical rectangular image. The top portion of this image shows a man in camouflage gear and a cap, kneeling in a field and holding a large buck with impressive antlers. Above him, the text "Schedule Your Consult Today!" is written in white on a blue background. The bottom portion of the image shows a topographic map with various colored areas (green, yellow, red, grey) and white markers, likely representing hunting or land management zones.



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A collaboration of Tyler and Sara Trampe's knowledge, experiences, opinions, and insight on various topics in the fishing industry. Tyler and Sara host *Sportsman's Journal*, a syndicated fishing show on Bally Sports North and Pursuit Channel. Here we provide an in-depth breakdown of something from the corresponding article to better educate you on a specific topic.

Finding the right rod pairing

In this edition, Sara talks with Erik Kraemer, from Kraemer Custom Rods, about how to choose which rod to grab for slip bobbers.

Size

Let's talk rods. Everyone has an opinion on rods. Whether it's sentimental value, experience, or a combination of both, anglers have their favorites; from the high dollar, top of the line to easy to purchase off the rack combos. Some anglers say rods don't matter, and others swear by them.

I remember for my 12th or 13th birthday; we headed off to Fleet Farm so that I could pick out a new fishing rod for our family vacation to the cottage. I used color to solely base which rod I wanted – it was teal and black with a combo reel – and I still have that rod, but I no longer use it. Though it has sentimental value, it's not an effective fishing rod.

When I began fishing more frequently and gained some actual knowledge, I started adding rods to my arsenal. I'm to the point where I have rods for specific techniques because I have a better understanding of what rod power and action are and what each can mean for differing techniques. And I can say with 100% honesty that I have caught more fish on my Kraemer Custom Rods than on anything I've used previously. The craftsmanship, weight, and components are superior for better castability, sensitivity to feel bites, and ultimately catch more fish.

When I decided I wanted to break down the components of what rod to use for slip bobbers, I knew I had to call and get Erik's opinion.

Most anglers will agree that length is important for slip bobber rods. Length allows for further casts and to

pick up the slack faster in your line. When slip bobber fishing, you are allowing the bobber to float freely, creating little tension between the bait and your rod. So, when it's time to set the hook, there may be line that needs to be reeled in before you have direct contact with the hook. A longer rod helps eliminate that excess line faster. And further casts are important to stay away from spooky, finicky fish.

I asked Erik what the perfect rod length is for slip bobber fishing and what length is a good alternative if you are purchasing a rod for multiple techniques.

"Ideally, a rod longer than seven feet, two inches is needed for slip bobber rigs," he started.

"I think seven feet nine inches is a great rod length because most rod storage compartments in boats today are eight feet. A seven-foot, nine-inch rod gives me room to add the handle and still fit it inside the rod storage while also providing the length for casting and picking up the slack that's needed for slip bobbers. But if you want a multi-purpose rod for lindy rigging, slip bobbers, and jigging, then a seven-foot, two-inch medium light is ideal."

Muscle

Next, we discussed power and action. Power is the stiffness of the rod or the ability of the rod to hold weight. From ultralights to heavy, rod power determines what weight of baits you should be flinging and the thickness of line to use.

Action is where the rod bends when pressure is applied or when you feel the bite. Extra fast tips feel the bite quickly, but remember, so does the fish. When the rod bends and gives pressure, the fish feels the pressure too. The slower the action, the farther

the rod bends from the tip. This also means you have longer to feel the hook and for the fish to feel the tension.

Erik recommends a medium-light fast action rod for walleye slip bobber fishing. "You want the rod to load up [where the rod bends] and stay loaded to keep the fish pinned [keep the fish hooked]. It's better to have a moderate action than an extra fast tip when using a slip bobber due to small hook size."

The slower the action, the more bend in the rod and this will help with hooksets and keep the fish pinned all the way into the net. The faster the tip, the more likely the fish can create slack in your line on headshakes and shake the hook loose.

Lastly, we briefly talked about components, specifically, the eyelets and handles of the rod. I have heard many anglers state you don't need a sensitive rod for slip bobber fishing because the bobber indicates the bite.

So, do components make a difference?

"Components play into many aspects of the rod, not just sensitivity. For example, using high-quality guides makes a huge difference in castability; cheaper bare-metal eyelets will catch the bobber stop, making for a jerky, shorter cast. But rounded eyelets with a ceramic insert will allow for a smoother cast, getting your bait further away from the boat. Grips or handles aren't as important for sensitivity in slip bobber rods; that's more about angler comfort or preference."

While specific rods are preferred, having the correct length, power, and action will increase the number of fish you catch. Don't let the incorrect rod be the reason you aren't catching your limits!