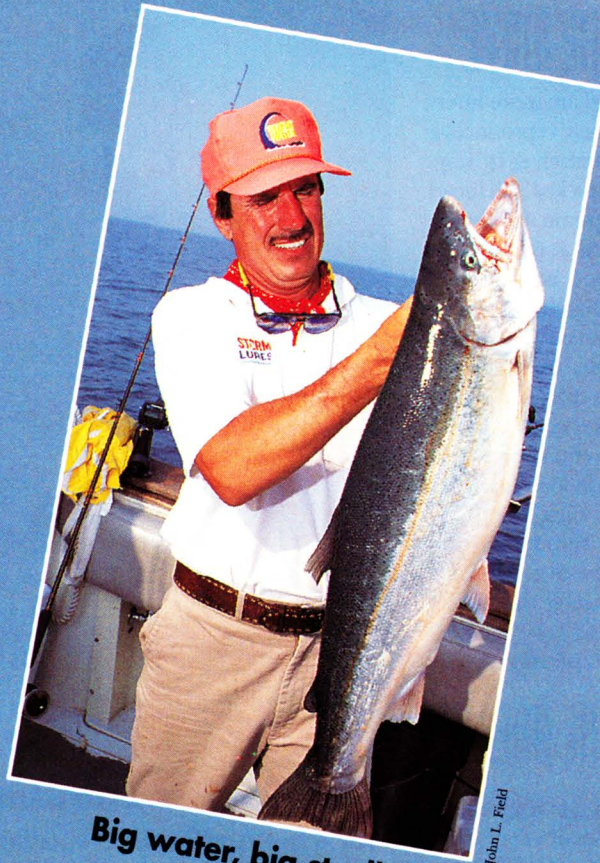


THE MISSING STEELIES OF SUMMER

Thermal Breaks





Big water, big steelhead!

John L. Field

Hold the Secret

By John Field

A yard long steelie grabs a slider spoon ten feet behind the ball and the clicker screams as the fish jumps four feet into the air! A second later it splashes into the water again and immediately changes direction. The line has long since snapped and the bucking rod is now lifeless, but the silver steelhead continues jumping to rid its jaw of the stinging spoon.

This is just one of a hundred scenarios that these speedsters can put you through. And, that's the challenge and the fun of fishing for steelhead on the Great Lakes! Right now out in Lake Ontario there are pods of big steelies in the sixteen to twenty pound class and also good numbers of smaller sizes. Don't write-off these steelies if they seem unavailable in late spring and summer when they wander the lake. The secret is to head offshore to a very special part of the lake: the edge where water warmed by the spring and early summer sun meets water that's still cold from winter's grip.

STEELES ON THE MOVE

Steelies are nomadic and are more interested in their diet and their reproductive cycles than in soaking themselves by staying in one spot. These stocked steelhead are closely related to stream rainbows. They still instinctively feed at or near the surface when choice food is available. That's probably the reason why steelhead love feeding on insects that are blown into the lake. You'll find ants, treehoppers, flies and other bugs in the stomachs of fish earlier in the season. If the weather at the end of May is normal, (no heavy east winds) steelies will gorge on insects in cold water. Then starting with the June warmth, and continuing throughout the summer, they'll consume alewives and smelt. And there's one thing that insect and baitfish concentrations have in common: temperature breaks and ridges.

SURFACE VERTICAL BREAKS

A surface or vertical temperature break is the meeting of two masses of water at the surface that have a temperature difference of 2-6 degrees Fahrenheit. There will be a water density difference between them and the currents passing through them will move differently too. These differences form a kind of "edge" on the surface which traps windsailing insects and other flotsam. The resulting debris lines themselves



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For giant steelies, give yourself a break - a thermal break that is.

then act as strainers to catch and hold still more insects. Some insects, such as treehoppers, will actually eat and reproduce in floating wood and leaves.

The warmer water mass on one side of these vertical breaks also has food in it for

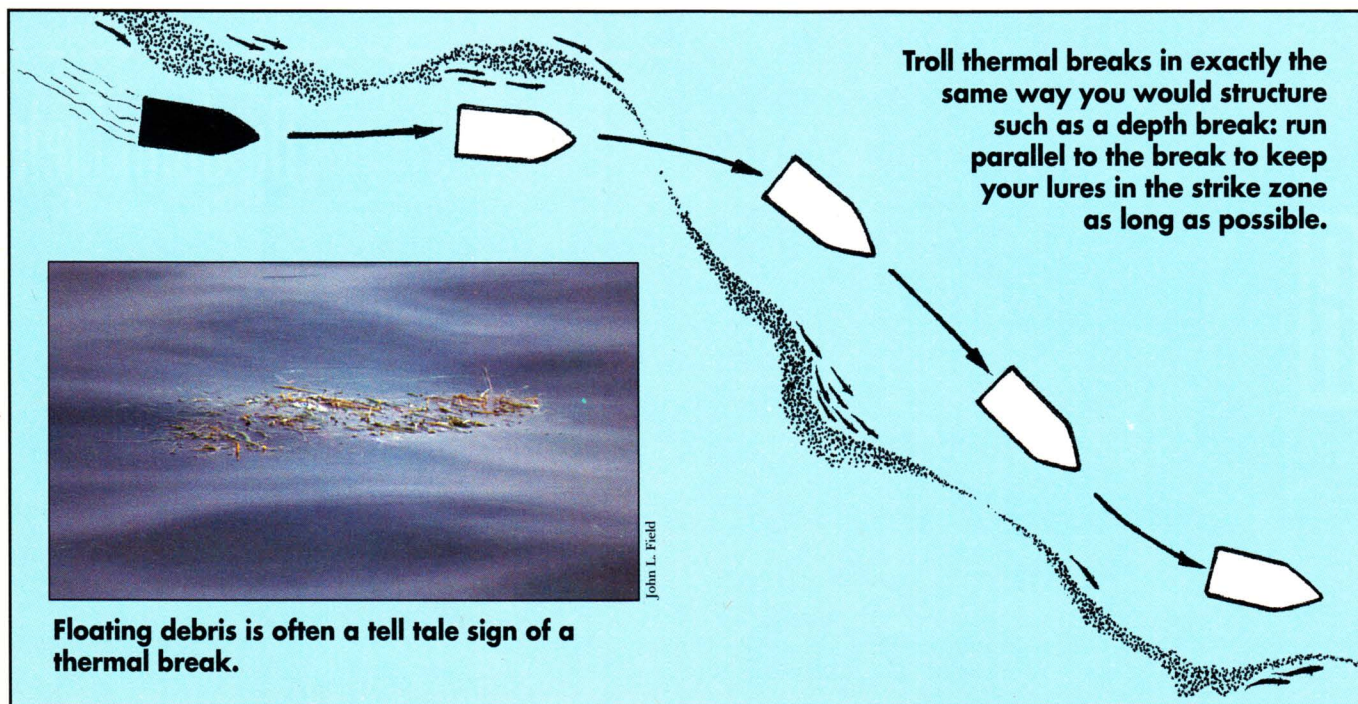
the alewives: it supports their main staple of plankton, making them stack on such breaks. Find these breaks and you should find the steelies too.

The easiest way to find a surface break is to look for the physical signs. There should be a difference in water clarity and texture between the cold sterile water and the warm fertile water. In a break that doesn't have a clearly noticeable contrast in clarity, fish holding will be minimal. What you need for good numbers of fish is a distinctly visible break. A distinct break will have dirty water appearing like a calm oil slick with cleaner water riffling against it. Classic indications to look for up close are wood, weeds, debris, insects and rising fish anglers call "sippers."

The wind driven surface currents and deeper submarine currents mobilize these immense masses of water making them collide, deepen, rise and shift all over the place. Ultimately they form different types of breaks that anglers need to understand and locate.

TYPES OF SUMMER BREAKS

In a "normal" summer thermoclines develop with different temperature affected layers of water. The warm surface layer, however, can quickly be disrupted by wind driven currents. A partial upwelling occurs when warm surface waters get pushed out from shore by offshore breezes and are then themselves replaced by the

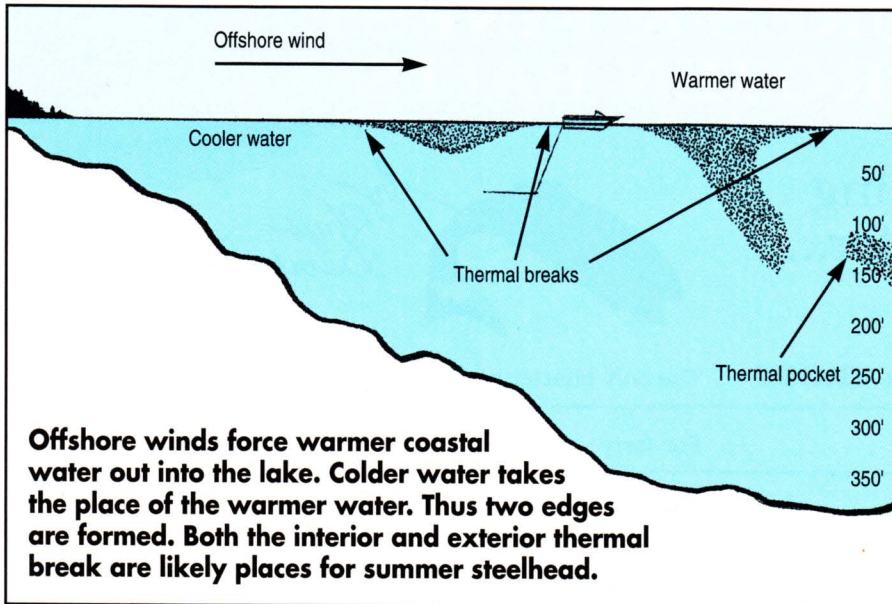


Troll thermal breaks in exactly the same way you would structure such as a depth break: run parallel to the break to keep your lures in the strike zone as long as possible.

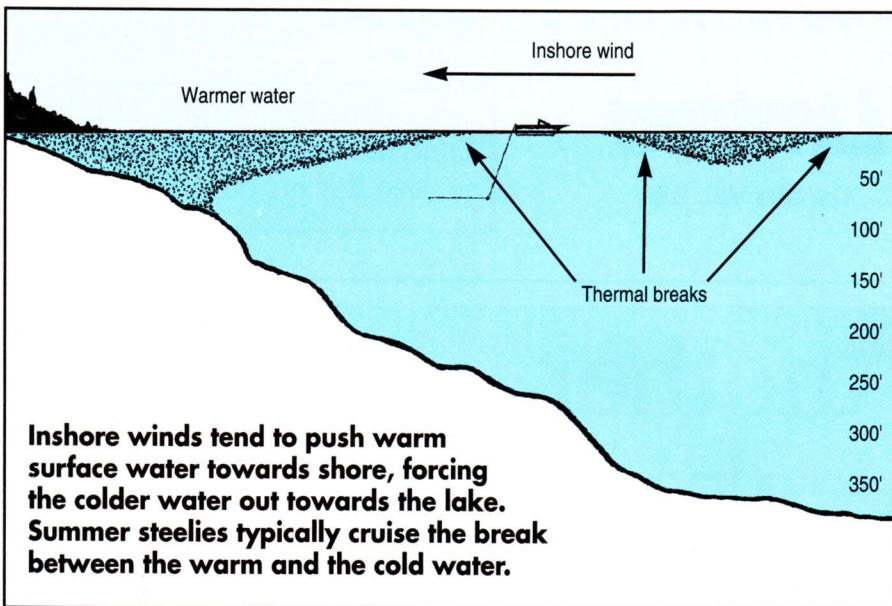
Floating debris is often a tell tale sign of a thermal break.

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underlying cold water. A temperature break occurs where the warm water “front” from inshore meets the colder water that now lies inshore and (further) offshore.

Conversely, an inshore wind “piles” the warm surface water into the shore eventually pushing the colder water from the bottom further offshore, creating a distinct edge where they meet. Steelies will move along these “edges” of contrasting temperature in much the same way as they might follow current “edges” in a river.

In mid-summer, breaks also develop that lie more horizontally than the early vertical ones. Generally these shallow breaks call for a shallow presentation while the deep breaks call for a deeper presentation.

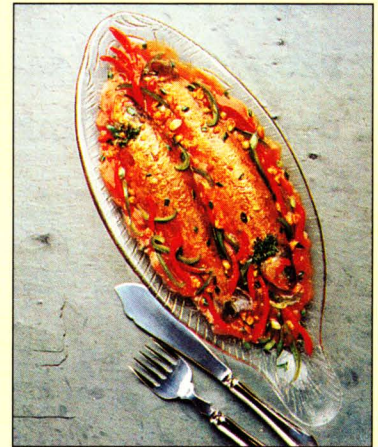
SUMMER STRATEGY

Temperature “walls” or breaks develop a few miles out early in the season and as far out as mid-lake during the summer doldrums. Locating shallow breaks is a matter of scouting for the typical visual surface signs. The steelies themselves don’t have to show as marks on the sonar screen; don’t worry, they’ll turn up on your lures if you find the breaks. Fish parallel to these breaks whenever possible. When these spooky fish are shallow, planer boards are the best method to present lures to them.

If you’re in a small boat without a planer board mast, use in-line boards such as the

TROUT IN SPICY PEANUT-GINGER SAUCE

What could be better for a really good meal than trout? It’s a doubly good choice because it’s simply delicious *and* it’s good for you too! All you have to do is catch ‘em, follow these complete directions and you’ll serve a meal of trout for two that’ll charm your taste buds.



INGREDIENTS:

- 2 whole dressed 12 oz. trout
- 1/4 cup cornstarch
- 1/4 cup vegetable oil

SAUCE:

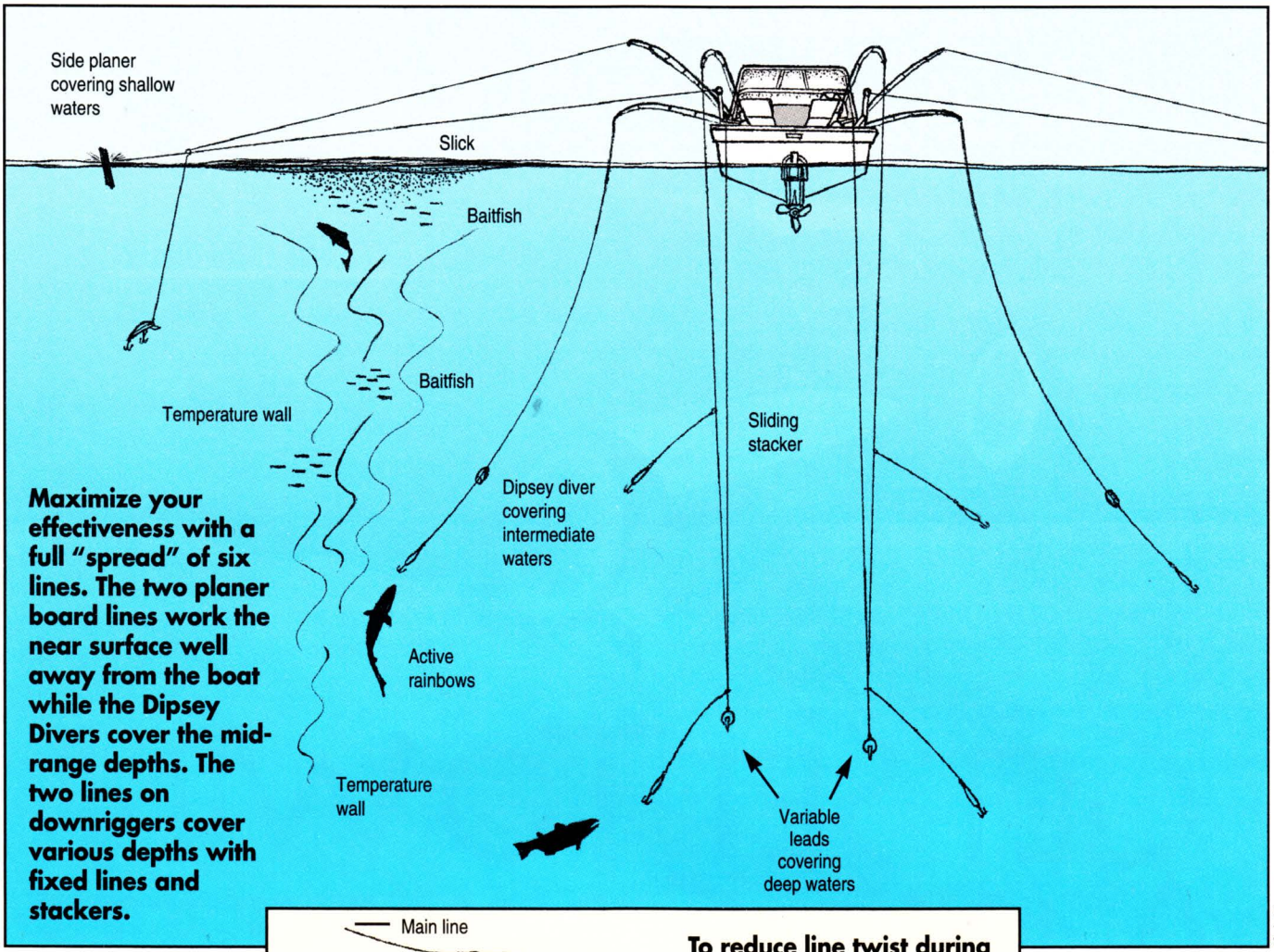
- 1 tbsp cornstarch *
- 2 tsp brown sugar *
- 1 cup chicken stock *
- 1/4 cup chili sauce or ketchup *
- 2 tbsp dry sherry *
- 1 tbsp soy sauce *
- 2 tsp ground ginger *
- 3 green onions, sliced diagonally 1/4 inch
- 1 small red pepper, cut in strips
- 1 small green pepper, cut in strips
- 1 tsp crushed dried red chilies
- 1/4 cup peanuts coarsely chopped

PREPARATION:

Thaw trout if frozen. Wipe outside of fish and inside cavity with paper towels. If desired, trim tail and fins with kitchen scissors. Dip trout in cornstarch, shaking off excess. Heat oil over medium-high heat in a large, heavy skillet; fry trout in hot oil 2 to 3 minutes each side. Remove and drain on paper towels. Place trout on serving platter and keep warm.

Reserve 2 tbsp of oil in the skillet. In a medium size bowl, combine first 7 sauce ingredients (*); stir-fry vegetables and chilies for 1 to 2 minutes. Add chopped peanuts and continue to stir-fry 1 minute. Stir chicken stock mixture well and pour over vegetables. Bring to a boil. Cook, stirring for 1 to 2 minutes. Spoon sauce over trout and garnish with green onion curls. Makes two servings.

- Recipe and photo courtesy of Foodland Ontario.



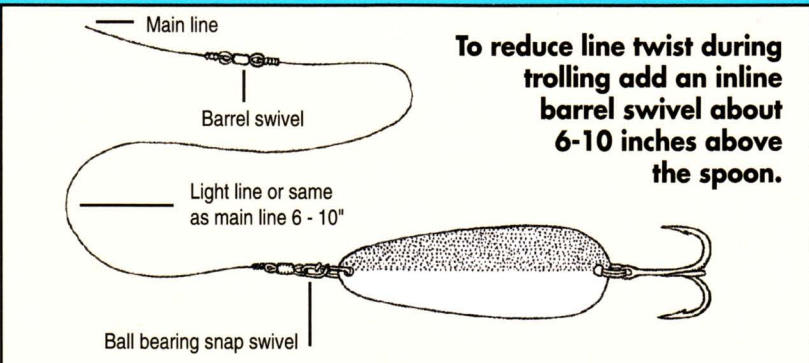
Maximize your effectiveness with a full "spread" of six lines. The two planer board lines work the near surface well away from the boat while the Dipsey Divers cover the mid-range depths. The two lines on downriggers cover various depths with fixed lines and stackers.

Yellow Bird. Using one on each side and a pair of weighted flat lines represents a full spread. If you do have a mast, run two to three planers per side and omit the flat lines.

Troll thin profile stickbaits like straight Floating Rapalas in #11 or #13, and Jointed J11 or J13's in fluorescent chartreuse/silver and fluorescent orange/gold. The Bomber Long "A" in silver-orange/belly or fluorescent yellow are also very good choices. In fat profile crankbaits use Storm's Stealie Wart or Wiggle Wart in hot pink or orange.

TELL-TALE SIGNS

To find summer breaks you'll need to read the clues. Look for temperature breaks at the surface, but always examine what is going on below these surface signs as well. If you have



To reduce line twist during trolling add an inline barrel swivel about 6-10 inches above the spoon.

a temperature probe, look for areas with promising temperature profiles where warm water lies over cold water or where the temperature break is more vertical. Then look for fish, bait and plankton on your sonar. The most promising situation occurs when you find these signs in combination. Note the correct depth and fish it. Try to picture the gradient of the break and make trolling passes that keep your lures near it.

Deeper breaks can be successfully fished with downriggers, diving planers, sliders and dipsey divers. When steelies are suspected at 20 to 50 feet, use small spoons like the 3F Evil Pirate 44 and NK-C5. When they are

deeper still, use the NK 28, Pirate 66 and 5F Evil Eye in colours like black/silver and black/raspberry. Incidentally, you can bet on lakers and kings preying on these lures too.

Using sliders increases the odds of catching

more fish. A slider on a downrigger cable usually positions the bait at half the depth to the ball. On high sliders that are 20 to 40 feet down, use small spoons like the Evil Eye 3F in silver-orange, silver/gold, and hot pink.

When a steelie takes a slider, its first reaction is to jump. Sometimes they're so fast that one fish appears to be two fish jumping simultaneously on both sides of the boat. If you want action like this, find yourself some of those Great Lakes steelies hiding in the thermal breaks of summer.

