

Get personal with Lake Erie and walleye on a kayak



Search

By **James Proffitt, Great Lakes Now**

August 5, 2022

2

Shares

Chuck Earls knows a couple things: kayaks and walleye. And that's the perfect combination for Cleveland-based [Lake Erie Kayak Fishing Guided Adventures](#) — not just a charter service and not just a kayak rental company. It's kind of something in the middle.

Earls is the first Lake Erie kayak guide licensed by the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. He takes folks onto the lake to learn about kayaking and angling. Sometimes they arrive with their own kayak and sometimes they use one of his if either they don't own one or don't own one suitable for big water.

"I take out all kinds of people," he said. "Some are thinking about getting into kayak fishing so they'll use one of my units on days with calm, perfect weather. Others want to come out in one-to-two footers and get the experience in rougher stuff, so I always try to adapt it to each person's needs and what they're looking for."

While he guides both one-on-ones and groups, Earls said he never mixes strangers because it takes away from the overall learning experience. But some groups do show up together, like a recent high school reunion crowd that hadn't been together in decades.

"They all got together and wanted to have an experience for a few days and they all needed kayaks so they used mine," he said. "It was great. They all fished together and had a great time on the water."

Earls charges \$250 per person per day, \$375 if you use his kayaks. And they come with all safety gear, all fishing gear, and an expert guide ready to share big water walleye knowledge and kayaking experience.

Recently a client traveled from New Jersey to spend three days on Lake Erie with Earls. He was a novice kayak angler interested in saltwater fishing and wanted to learn about weather, waves, currents and re-entry. He'd come across Earls' videos where everyone comes across everything: the Internet.

Safety Lessons as Important as Fishing

Re-entry means getting back into your kayak if you go overboard, and in videos, Earls covers that. As well as a variety of other safety topics in [online videos](#). While fishing is a big part of Earls' public platform, so is safety. And when it comes to kayak fishing on Lake Erie, or any large body of water, there is plenty to think about.

"You have to always remember that you are the smallest fish out there," he said. "And you have to be able to react to anything and everything."

Mostly that includes other boats, since kayaks are tiny and not highly visible. And while paddle vessels have the right-of-way over power vessels on the water, it doesn't mean much if you get hit or swamped, he said.

"It's our job to stay out of the way, so you really have to identify boats, spot them and take note of what direction they're going," Earls said. "Especially at night it's a little more challenging. You want to have the same thing as big boats have: a bright 360-degree light and red and green navigation lights. Also a pocket airhorn if someone is coming toward you and you need to alert them, signal your location."

He said sometimes people in other vessels just don't see kayakers, and other times people think it's cute to try to swamp someone on a kayak.

"Every once in a while, you're going to have an incident," he said. "It happens. But this one guy shifts twice despite my adjusting course, obviously trying to swamp me, which isn't a problem for me but what if it's someone who's not prepared? What if you did that to the wrong person and they never came back?"

Earls said in cold weather fishing a dry suit is a must. He wears a [Kokatat](#), though says [Mustang](#) brand or other quality suits will keep you warm, dry and possibly save your life. He cautioned against cheaper versions of dry suits that can be found online.

"You're probably going to spend at least \$600 on a reputable brand," he said. "You could get one a lot cheaper on Amazon or from some offshore company but you want one that's reputable, because if the thing doesn't do what it's supposed to do, it could be your life."

While keeping safe on the water is a full-time endeavor, so is catching fish and earning a living. And Earls, tournament angler, has pushed walleye kayak angling to a new level on Lake Erie.

Two big tournaments: Welcome kayakers

Jason Fischer operates the [Lake Erie Walleye Trail](#) (LEWT) series and the Fall Brawl, two of Lake Erie's top walleye events. [The Fall Brawl](#) regularly attracts 10,000-plus entrants from Ohio and dozens of other states.

"This is the first year kayakers have ever participated in the LEWT and the first year there's ever been a kayak category in the Fall Brawl," he said. "And basically this all stems from Chuck Earls. We talked about it and we really wanted to increase interest in competitive angling on Lake Erie."

According to Fischer, while kayak anglers do troll for walleye, many are exploring new ways to land fish. Or actually, old ways — including casting, among other things, the world famous [Erie Dearies](#). The weight-forward bait was super-hot in the 70s and 80s and remains an angler favorite.

"It's almost bringing back a side of fishing that anglers aren't doing much anymore," he said. "So they're thinking outside the box, which is really just deep inside the box, how they were caught a long time ago."

In the Fall Brawl, which sees more than \$300,000 in prizes awarded, kayak anglers will compete for kayak-specific prizes and well as the open prizes, including two Ranger boats worth more than \$100,000 each and cash prizes of more than \$160,000, all for the top five biggest walleye.

It's not your grandfather's kayak. Or even your father's

At a glance, kayaks on the water looks pretty simple: tiny plastic boat. But in reality, today's kayaks are anything but.

"We've been building fishing-specific kayaks for over 10 years now and in the past two years we've really pushed the boundaries of what a fishing kayak is and that innovation is really the core of who [Old Town](#) is," said Alex Sherbinow, marketing manager at Old Town.

The company, based in Old Town, Maine, has been boatbuilding (mostly canoes) since 1898. And in the last few years, he said, fishing kayaks have come a long way.

At the low price point, a paddle kayak for anglers costs about \$1,000, while a pedal kayak costs about \$2,200. Go to the top, and an electric motor kayak will set you back about \$4,000 for a top-of-the-line unit with autopilot and associated electronics that can hold an angler in position in wind, waves and current.

"These aren't even the kayaks of 10 years ago," Sherbinow said. "These are purpose-built and they are fishing machines and they're built to keep people on the water and on the fish."

Earls said he started kayak fishing with a used \$450 paddle kayak before upgrading to a pedal kayak then a motorized kayak.

"It was a lot of work, I had to paddle all around the lake and it was hard," he said. "It really sucked. But do you know what didn't suck? Fishing and catching walleye."

With his current Old Town model, outfitted with a [Torqeedo](#) electric motor, Earls can pedal or relax and concentrate on fishing. And if needed, lend a helping hand.

"About two miles offshore is about the limit to how far I'll take clients out," he said. "That's about an hour to get back pedaling. But with the Torqeedo the cool thing is if we have to get back say in 15 minutes in an emergency I just grab the ropes I have tied to my kayaks and tow them in real quick. If I'm by myself I'll push the limits and fish up to six or so miles out."

Fishing kayaks have come so far, he said, that some anglers are buying kayaks to either replace or augment their traditional fishing boat for ease of launching and low cost of operation. And in tournaments, like the Fall Brawl which spans six weeks, kayaks are perfect.

"It's just like anything else, there's give and take. You got to work for it but it's a more rewarding experience and definitely less impactful on your pocketbook trying to go out fishing every night for a month and a half," he said.

Catch more news at Great Lakes Now:

- [State outdoors operations emerge stronger after the pandemic](#)
- [Study suggests phosphorous reduction alone could lead to more toxic algae](#)



Featured image: Angling from a kayak can provide breathtaking views. (Photo courtesy of Old Town)

[KAYAKING](#) [LAKE ERIE](#) [OUTDOOR RECREATION](#)

0 Comments 2 Likes

Shares Twitter Shares Facebook Shares Email Shares

About James Proffitt, Great Lakes Now

More by [James Proffitt, Great Lakes Now](#)

0 Comments

Leave a reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

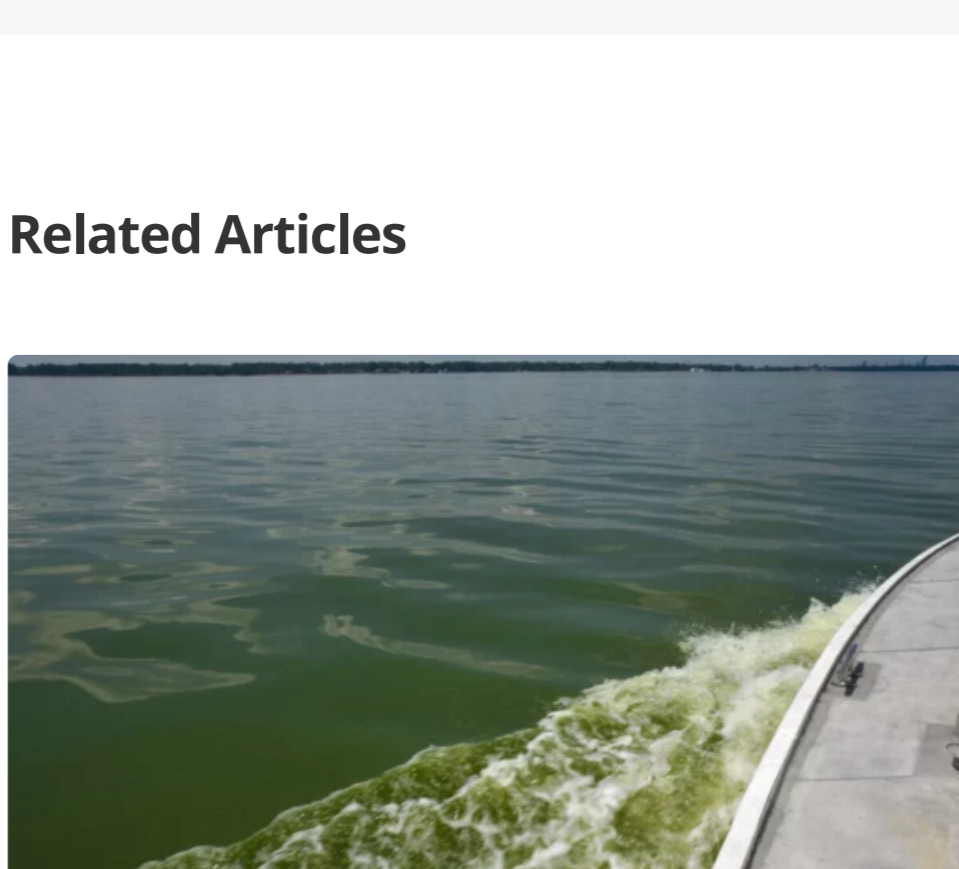
Comment

Author * Email *

Website

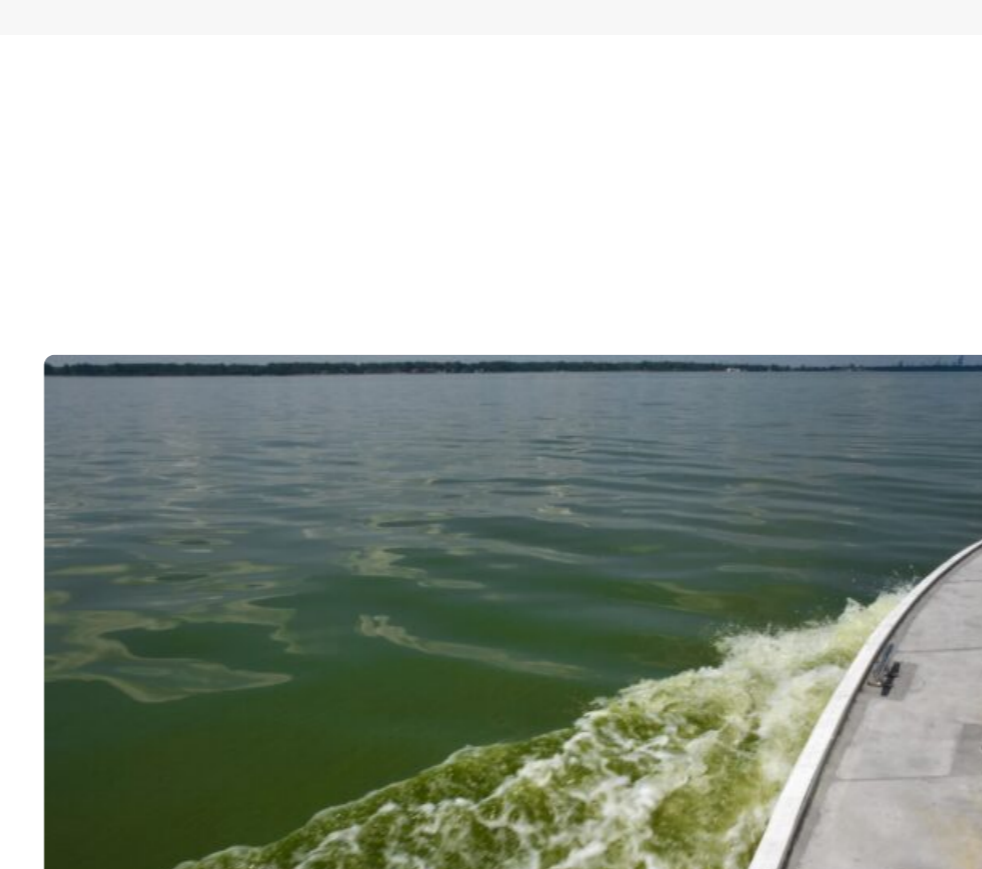
Post comment

Related Articles



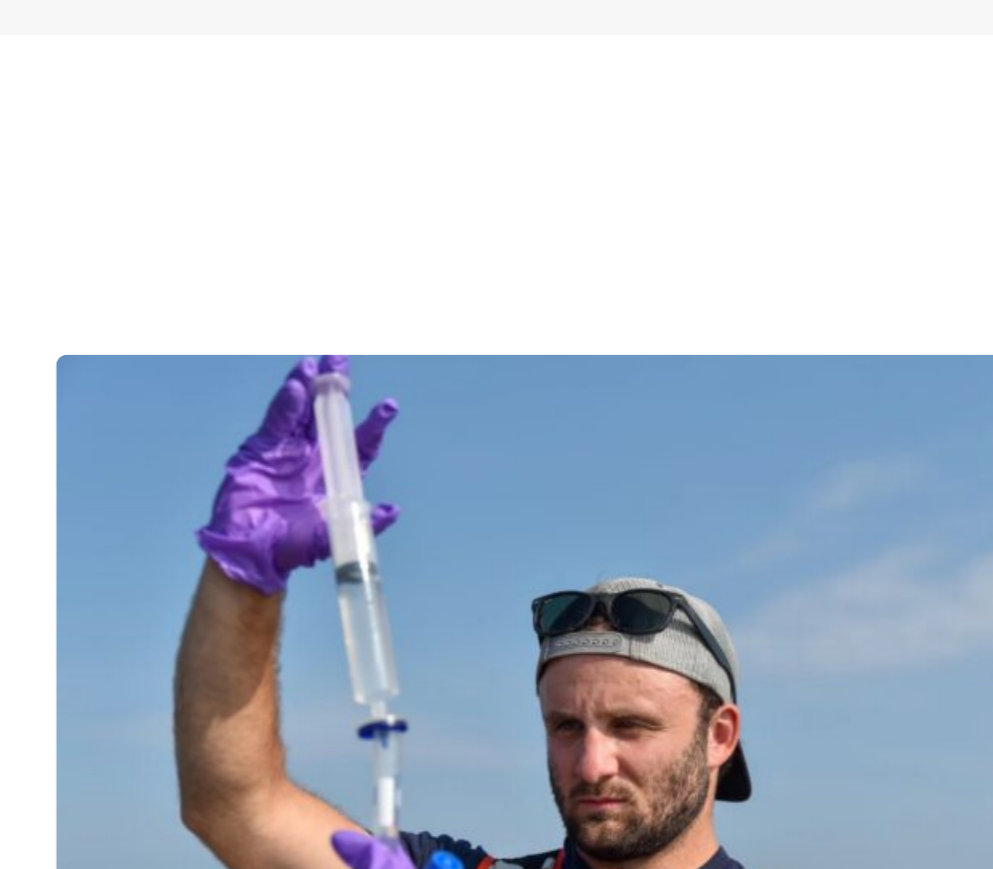
Can Michigan reduce phosphorus pollution getting into Lake Erie by 40 percent?

December 19, 2023 - by Michigan Public



Toxins from cyanobacterial blooms can be airborne, but the threat to public health is unclear

August 23, 2023 - by Michigan Public



Scientists are learning just how complicated it will be to reduce toxic blooms in Lake Erie

August 22, 2023 - by Michigan Public

Great Lakes Now is brought to you by: Great Lakes Now Connect

Support Provided By:

Errol A. and Barbara M. Erb Family Foundation

Richard C. Devereaux Foundation for Energy & Environmental Programs at Detroit PBS

Polk Family Fund

DTE Foundation

Viewers Like You Thank You

About Us
Contact
Privacy Policy
Terms of Use

Facebook Twitter RSS