

Lake of the Woods Stock Status Update, 2024

Walleye

- Walleye catch in the 2024 gill net sample averaged 17.5 per net, above the 2002 to 2023 average of 16.4 (Figure 1). The 3-year average for abundance exceeded the fisheries quality objective (14 per net).
- The 2011-, 2013-, 2014 and 2021-year classes were strong, while 2015-, 2016, 2018 and 2022-year classes are of average strength (Figure 2). The 2017-, 2019-, and 2020-year classes are below average to weak. Early observations of the 2023- and 2024-year classes are predicted to be average to weak (based on trawl catches).
- Small Walleye 9 to 11 inches long are abundant (2022 year-class; Figure 3). Walleye from 13 to 16 inches were above average in 2024. Walleye 16 to 25 inches were at the historic average.

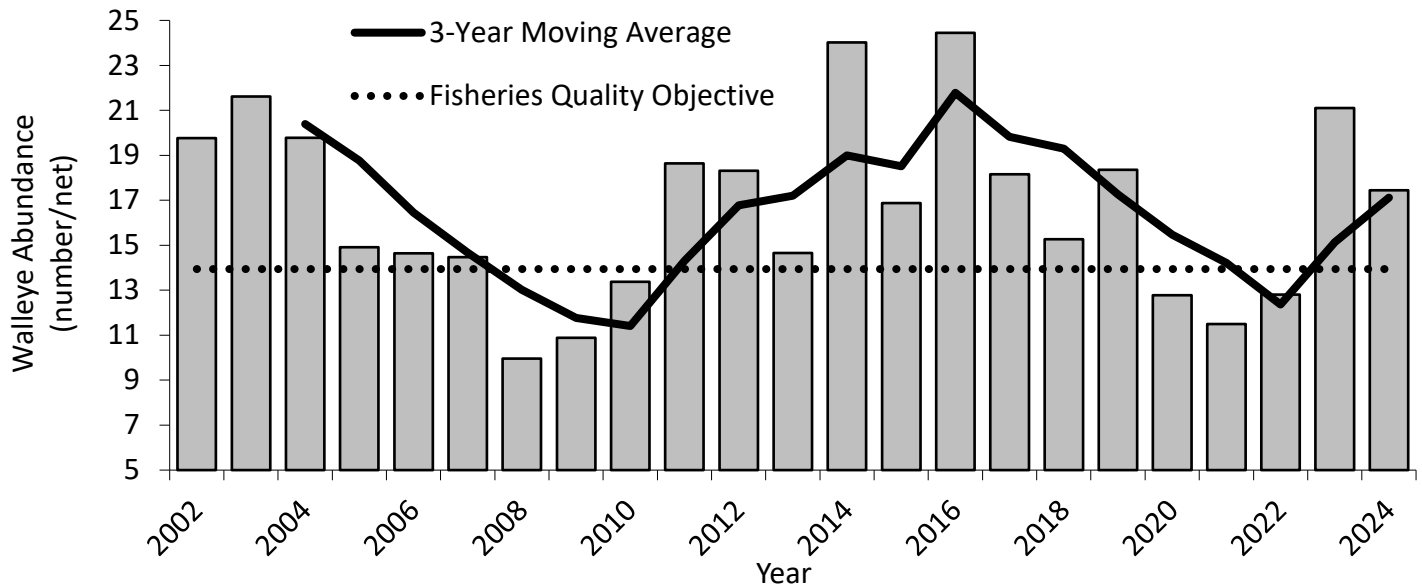


Figure 1. Average of near shore and offshore catch per unit effort of Walleye in September gill nets, 2002 through 2024.

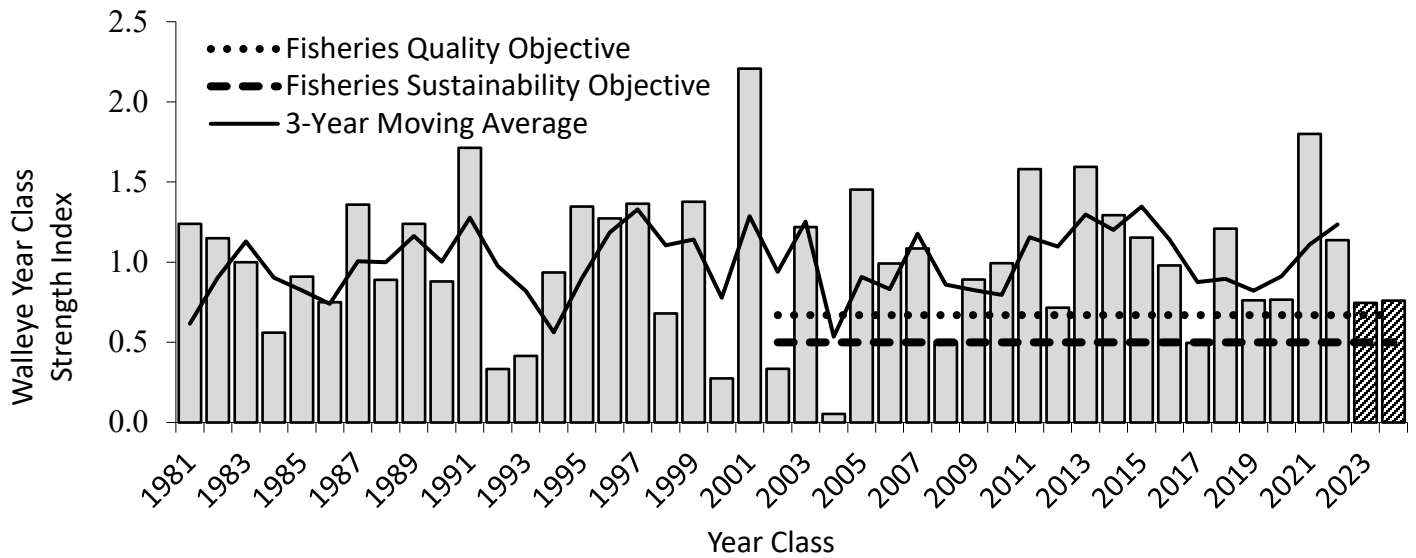


Figure 2. Year class strength of Walleye in Lake of the Woods from 1981-2024. Fishes hatched in 2023 and 2024 are not considered fully vulnerable to gill nets; therefore, strength values are predicted.

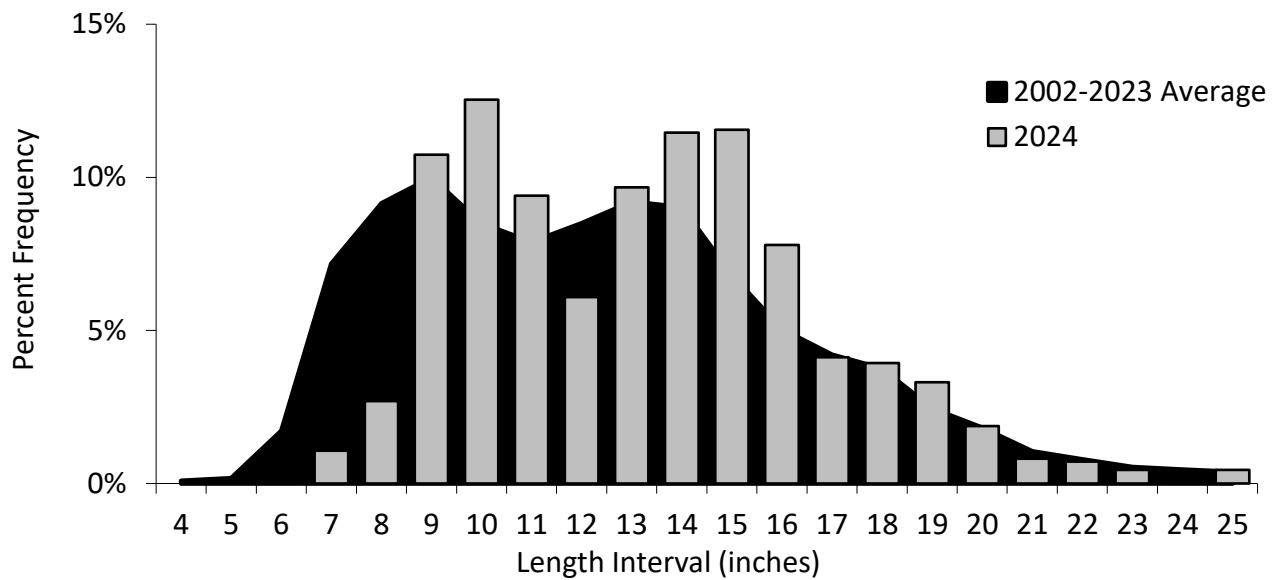


Figure 3. Walleye size distribution from 2024 fall gill net survey (gray bars). Shaded area denotes the average length frequency from 2002-2023.

Sauger

- Strong year classes were produced from 2014 to 2017, 2019 and 2022 drove above average catches in recent years (Figures 4 & 5). Sauger exceeding 13 inches (Figure 6) are above average in abundance. Sauger, 8 to 12 inches, were below average because of recent average to weak year-classes produced in 2020/2021 and 2023.

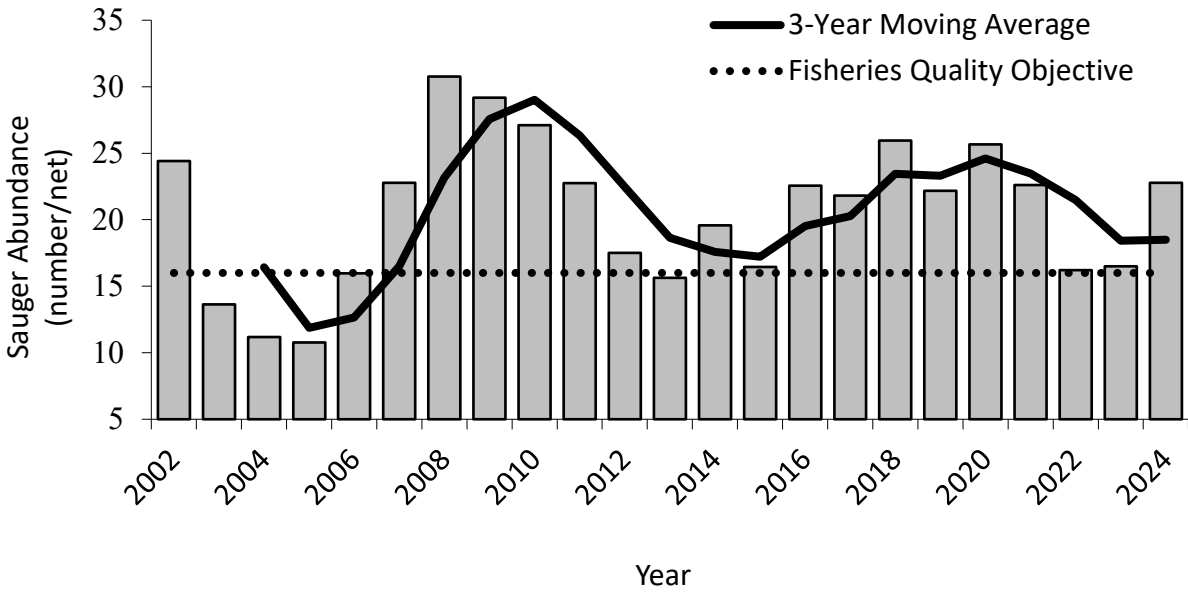


Figure 4. Average of near shore and offshore catch per unit effort of Sauger in September gill nets, 2002 through 2024.

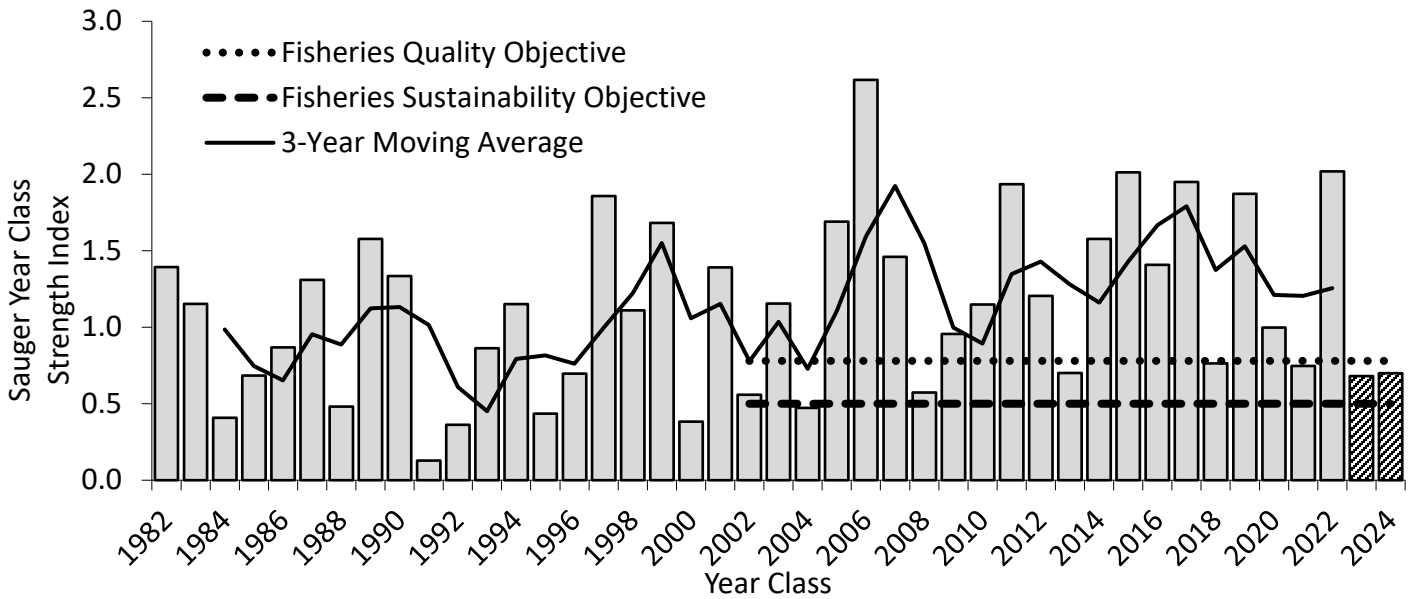


Figure 5. Year class strength of Sauger in Lake of the Woods from 1982-2024. Fishes hatched in 2023 and 2024 are not considered fully vulnerable to gill nets; therefore, strength values are predicted.

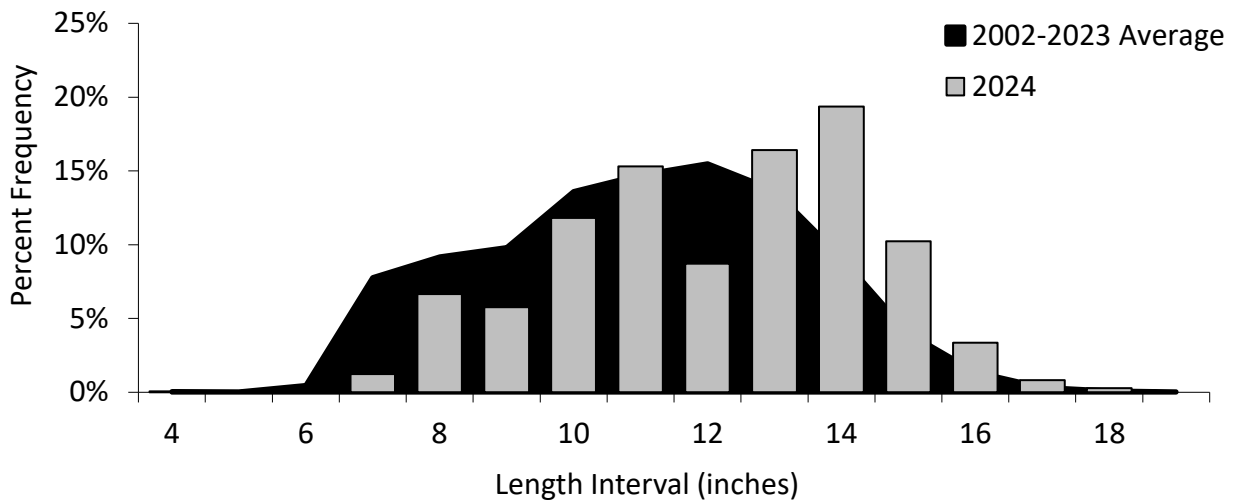


Figure 6. Sauger size distribution from 2024 fall gill net survey (gray bars). Shaded area denotes the average length frequency from 2002-2023.

Creel Survey Highlights

- Winter 2023 - 2024: Winter fishing pressure was estimated at 1 million angler-hours, well below the six-year average.
- Current six-year average winter harvest is just under 200,000 pounds for Walleye and 300,000 pounds for Sauger. Winter harvest in 2023-24 was 75,000 pounds for Walleye, and 100,000 pounds for Sauger (lowest Walleye and Sauger harvest observed since 2000).
- Summer 2023: Summer fishing pressure was at 600,000 angler-hours and is the lowest observed since the mid-2000s. Summer harvest in 2023 was 175,000 pounds for Walleye, and 45,000 pounds for Sauger (both also below the current six-year average).