

# FISHING THE **RED RIVER** OF THE NORTH



**m**  
DEPARTMENT OF  
NATURAL RESOURCES



The Red River boasts more than 70 species of fish. Channel catfish in the Red River can attain weights of more than 30 pounds, walleye as big as 13 pounds, and northern pike can grow as long as 45 inches.

Includes access maps, fishing tips, local tourism contacts and more.

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Cover photo: Bruce and Brad Nelson prepare to release a channel catfish caught on the Red River of the North near East Grand Forks. Photo taken by Tom Thulen.

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# YOUR GUIDE TO FISHING THE RED RIVER OF THE NORTH

## Introduction

The Red River of the North has a long, rich history. The “Red” was once a primary route for commerce but today it is increasingly popular for its recreational potential.

Although the Red is a “turbid” (muddy) river with low water clarity during much of the year, water quality is high. One example of its good water quality can be witnessed every August when millions of mayflies rise up from the surface in spectacular hatches that look like a summer snowstorm. Such a phenomenon, biologists say, wouldn’t happen without high water quality.

Also, the diverse habitat found in the Red River and its tributaries support excellent levels of natural reproduction for most fish species. In fact, nearly all fish species in the Red River are self-sustaining and do not require stocking to maintain populations. Still, there’s room for improvement. With increasing awareness and interest, the future of the Red River looks bright.

It’s your river to enjoy. Whether it’s an outing to one of the many parks along the banks, or a simple day of fishing, the Red is a wonderful place to be. We hope you enjoy the Red River and the excellent fishing opportunities it provides.

## Fishing Regulations

For the anglers’ benefit, the Minnesota DNR and North Dakota Game and Fish Department strive to maintain consistent regulations on the Red River. Because some regulations may differ from the statewide regulations for either state, anglers should consult the regulations booklets for either state.

## Minnesota Fisheries Offices

Baudette Area Office  
204 Main Street E.  
Baudette, MN 56623  
218-634-2522

Detroit Lakes Area Office  
14583 County Highway 19  
Detroit Lakes, MN 56501  
218-846-8290

Fergus Falls Area Office  
1509 1st Avenue N.  
Fergus Falls, MN 56537  
218-739-7576

## North Dakota Fisheries Offices

Devils Lake Regional Office  
7928 45th Street N.E.  
Devils Lake, ND 58301-8501  
701-662-3617

Jamestown Regional Office  
3320 E. Lakeside Road  
Jamestown, ND 58402-0309  
701-253-6480



## Trespass Laws

In Minnesota, always ask permission before entering private land. Unless an easement has been purchased from the landowner, you cannot shore-fish without permission.

In North Dakota, permission is required to access private land that is posted. Although non-posted land is accessible, obtaining owner permission first is always a good idea.

Trespassing is a misdemeanor in both Minnesota and North Dakota. If you are convicted of violating a trespass law, your fishing privileges may be revoked.

# FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

In the United States, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR) and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department cooperatively manage the Red River and its tributaries. The two agencies have a long history of working together on its management. Management focuses on promoting healthy fish populations and sustainable angling opportunities through active fish monitoring programs and habitat protection. Information on river fish populations, habitat, angling trends and harvest is collected every five to ten years through intensive sampling and creel surveys. Collectively, this information is essential to help make fisheries management decisions and develop future plans.

Another focus of fish management on the Red River and its tributaries is to restore fish passage by removing or modifying dams. Dams are barriers to fish migration and block fish access to breeding grounds. To restore fish passage, as well as addressing dam safety concerns, coordinated efforts between numerous partners resulted in the completion of many dam removal/modification projects throughout the Red River and its tributaries.

# RIVER STEWARDSHIP

The future of the Red River and its fishery is in your hands. Promoting good land use practices that improve the condition of the river and its tributaries keeps the river healthy.

The river and its tributaries form a complex ecosystem:

- the main stem of the river provides a permanent home for adult fish and a refuge for all species during winter and dry periods.
- the network of tributaries provides critical habitats for spawning and rearing young fish.
- the vegetation along the waters' edge stabilizes the banks and provides essential habitat for both game and nongame wildlife. Plant materials that fall in the river provide important food for aquatic insects and other creatures.
- large woody debris and snags offer current breaks and structure for fish to ambush prey.

**Adult zebra mussels  
found in the Red River.**

# PROTECT YOUR WATERS

Zebra mussels are an aquatic nuisance species, also known as aquatic invasive species, that have recently become established in the Red River. These small mussels can attach to hard structures and feed on tiny plants and animals, causing damage to equipment and ecosystems. Their microscopic larvae are not readily visible, and can be accidentally transported in water.

Help prevent the spread of zebra mussels and other organisms from the Red River to new locations by following North Dakota and Minnesota regulations every time you recreate. Before leaving the water access site:

- **Clean** and remove all aquatic plants, zebra mussels and other invasive species from boats, trailers, fishing gear, and other equipment before leaving any water or shore access site.
- **Drain** all water from watercraft and equipment before leaving any water or shore access site. Pull all drain plugs (bilges, livewells, baitwells) and remove devices that hold water back before transport. Keep drain plugs out and water-draining devices open while transporting watercraft.
- **Dispose** of any unwanted bait, including minnows, leeches and worms in the trash. It is illegal to release bait into a waterbody or to dump bait on shore.

**While in North Dakota** it is illegal to transport water away from the Red River (including water used for transporting bait).

**While in Minnesota**, if you want to keep your live bait, you must drain all bait water and refill the bait container with bottled or tap water.

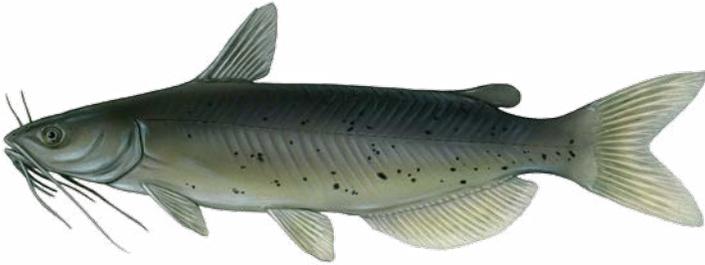
Although the Red River is jointly managed by North Dakota and Minnesota, be sure you know all laws that apply in the states where you are transporting equipment or recreating, as some laws may vary.



# FISH OF THE RED RIVER

The Red River boasts more than 70 species of fish including some of North America's finest game fish. The Red River offers excellent fishing opportunities for channel catfish, walleye, northern pike, and some lesser known fish.

With proper management and habitat protection, the following species will continue to thrive in the river and its tributaries.



## Channel Catfish

When it comes to channel “cats,” Doug Stange, editor of *In-Fisherman* magazine, and among the “who’s who” of catfish angling, refers to the Red as a “crown jewel” and a “national treasure.”

The Red River from Fargo–Moorhead north to Lake Winnipeg in Manitoba is prime catfish territory. Channel catfish in the Red grow slow, live long, (24-year-old fish have been found), and can attain weights of more than 30 pounds. Catfish eat a variety of foods ranging from bottom-dwelling insects and crustaceans to forage fish such as minnows and juvenile fish. Catfish spawn in early summer, preferably in root wads and beneath woody debris. As a general rule, the average size of Red River catfish increases as you move downstream.



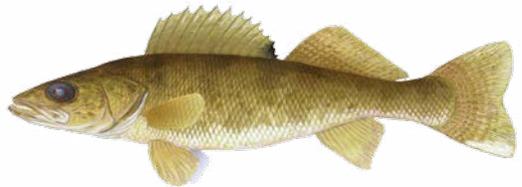
## Northern Pike

Northern pike as large as 45 inches call the Red River home. Netting surveys show a good northern pike population with a variety of sizes. Northern pike often live 10 to 12 years and can exceed 20 pounds. Pike are voracious eaters, feeding on a variety of fish species. They spawn at ice-out in seasonal wetland areas along the Red and its tributaries.



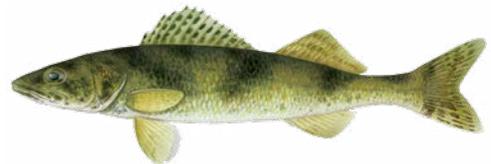
## Smallmouth Bass

Smallmouth bass over 4 pounds are present in the Red and its tributaries. In contrast to catfish, the best smallmouth fishing occurs from Breckenridge–Wahpeton to Grand Forks and throughout major tributaries. Smallmouth have expanded their range since they were introduced in the 1980s and 1990s. Today, they maintain themselves through natural reproduction in the quality spawning habitats of tributaries.



## Walleye

Each year, walleye as large as 13 pounds are caught in the Red River. A stable population of fast-growing walleyes can be caught in a variety of sizes. Walleye feed on fish, worms, insects, and crayfish. They spawn in late April to mid-May over clean gravel and rock, or over clam beds. The majority of walleye spawn in tributaries of the Red.



## Sauger

Sauger are often overlooked but they can provide fast and furious angling action. Sauger are particularly abundant downstream from Grand Forks. They grow to lengths of about 16 inches. They spawn in mid- to late-May over clean, gravel river bottoms. Populations are stable, with many year classes present. They feed on minnows, insects, and crayfish.

# FISH OF THE RED RIVER

## CONTINUED



### Lake Sturgeon

Until the early 1900s, lake sturgeon were common in the Red River and several of its tributaries. As the area was settled and developed, rivers were dammed and polluted, and sturgeon numbers declined. By 1995, it appeared that only a few remnant individual sturgeon were left in the entire Red River system.

In 1997, the MNDNR began a stocking program to re-establish sturgeon in the Red River. Since then, several thousand sturgeon have been stocked in the Red River Basin. Some of the stocked fish carry a numbered tag. Anyone who catches a tagged sturgeon is asked to write down the tag number and report the catch to any of the fisheries offices listed in this brochure. (Please do not remove the tag from the fish.)

In 2002, the MNDNR began a twenty-year program to annually stock lake sturgeon. By the time these sturgeon become sexually mature (15–20 years), dam removal and modification projects will have reconnected the Red River with its tributaries, allowing sturgeon access to their historical spawning grounds.

Anglers are reminded that harvest of lake sturgeon is not allowed, so any lake sturgeon must be released immediately.

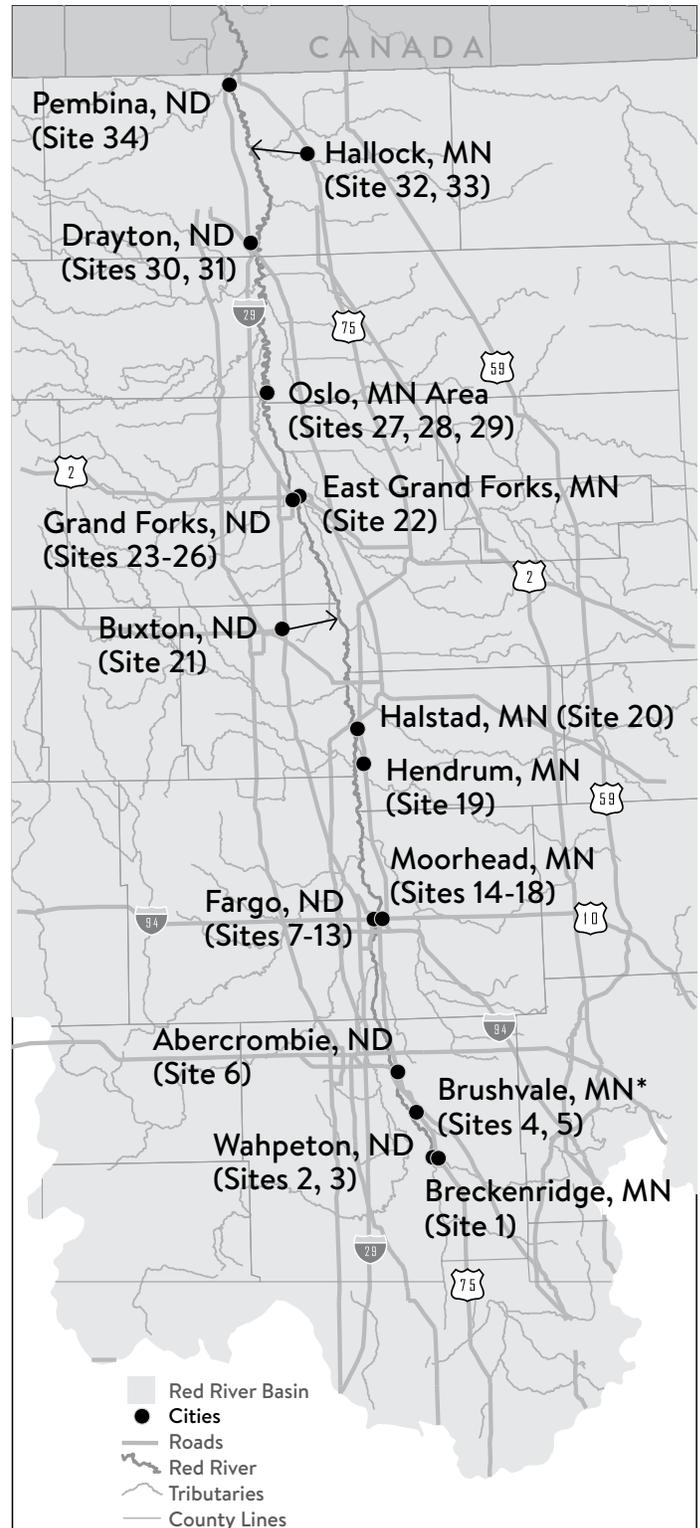
### Other Species

Muskellunge are periodically encountered in the Red River's downstream reaches, as fish introduced into Minnesota find their way into the river.

There are great opportunities to catch trophy carp and sheepshead (freshwater drum). Besides being hard fighters, these fish are surprisingly good tasting, especially in spring and early summer.

In addition, anglers can expect to catch goldeyes, suckers, or similar non-sport fish. Stonecats and madtoms (small cousins to the channel catfish) are also common. Anglers fishing with worms routinely encounter stonecats.

## PUBLIC ACCESS MAP



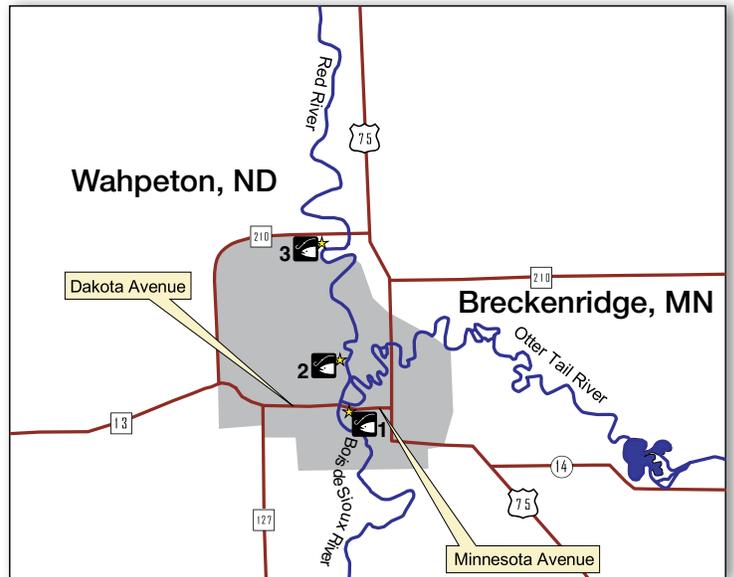
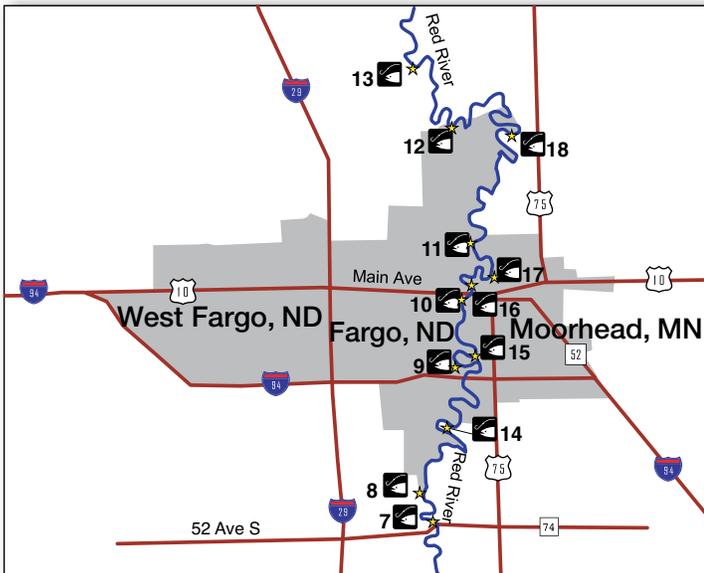
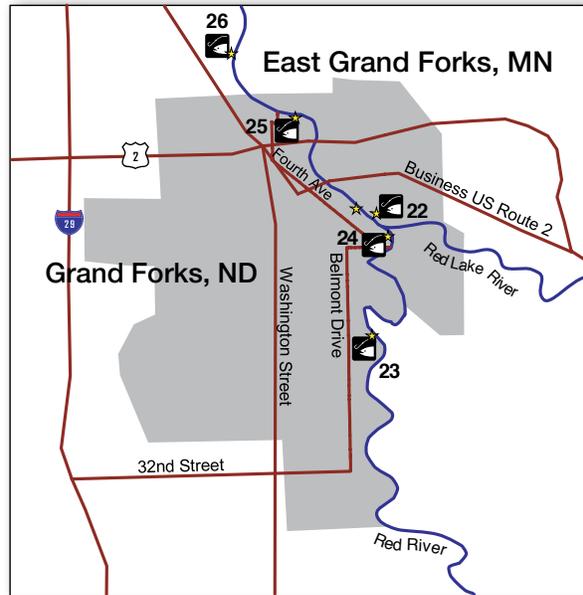
\* Brushvale fishing access is on the North Dakota side of the river.

For more detailed Area Maps and Local Tourism Contacts, see pages 8 and 12.

# PUBLIC ACCESS CHART

Site No.	Site Name	Shore Access	Boat Access	Fish Cleaning	Restroom	Camping	Location
1	<b>Breckenridge, MN</b> Welles Park/Headwaters Park	x	x		x	x	2nd St N and Minnesota Ave
2	<b>Wahpeton, ND</b> Chahinkapa Campground	x				x	RJ Hughes Dr
3	Kidder Recreation Area	x	x	x	x	x	4th St N and Dabill Dr
4	<b>Brushvale, MN</b> Brushvale Access	x	x			x	72nd St SE and 180th Ave SE
5	Lloyds Park	x					County Rd 18
6	<b>Abercrombie, ND</b> Fort Abercrombie/Loff Landing	x	x			x	County Rd 4
7	<b>Fargo, ND</b> Iwen Park/Convent Landing	x	x				1209 52nd Ave S
8	Lions Conservancy Park	x					1221 El Cano Dr S
9	Lindenwood Park	x			x	x	1905 Roger Maris Dr
10	Dike East Park (Midtown dam)	x	x				100 2nd St S
11	Oak Grove/Mickleson/Trefoil Parks	x					901 Oak St N
12	Trollwood Park	x					35th Ave N
13	Riverwood Park	x					Cass County Rd 31 and 17th St N
14	<b>Moorhead, MN</b> River Oaks Park	x					100 River Oaks Point
15	Gooseberry Mound Park	x			x		100 22nd Ave S
16	Tour Boat Landing	x			x		1st Ave N next to Hjemkomst Center
17	Memorial/Riverfront Park	x			x		210 8th St N
18	MB Johnson Park	x	x		x		3601 N 11th St
19	<b>Hendrum, MN</b> Norman County Rd #25	x	x				1 mile west of Hendrum on Norman County Rd #25
20	<b>Halstad, MN</b> Riverside Park	x	x			x	1 mile west of Halstad on State Hwy 200
21	<b>Buxton, ND</b> Belmont Park/Frog Point	x	x		x	x	10 miles east and 1.5 miles north of Buxton
22	<b>East Grand Forks, MN</b> LaFave Park	x	x		x	x	Hill St and Central Ave; Camping at Red River Recreation Area
23	<b>Grand Forks, ND</b> Lincoln Park	x	x				Belmont Rd and Lincoln Dr
24	Central Park	x					4th Ave S and 30th St
25	Riverside Park	x			x		Park Ave and Lewis Ave
26	Whopper John Little Ramp	x	x		x		Red Dot Place and N 7th St (North Forks Landing)
27	<b>Oslo, MN Area</b> Oslo Access Area, MN	x	x				State Hwy 1, near Oslo city water tower
28	Kulwicki WMA, ND	x					2 miles east and 2.25 miles north of I29, Exit 168
29	Rose AMA, MN	x					350th St NW, 19 miles north of Oslo
30	<b>Drayton, ND</b> Hastings Landing	x	x	x			East of city water tower in downtown Drayton
31	Drayton Dam Recreation Area	x	x				2 miles north of Drayton and 1 mile east
32	<b>Hallock, MN</b> Golden Grain Bridge Access	x					13 miles west of Hallock on State Hwy 175
33	Hilltop Access	x	x		x		13 miles northwest of Hallock
34	<b>Pembina, ND</b> Fort Daer Recreation Area	x	x	x	x	x	East side of the City of Pembina

# AREA MAPS



# FISHING THE RED

Ask anyone who fishes the Red and you'll hear of the mystique and thrill of never knowing what you might catch. Got a light bite? Could be a small stonecat, a goldeye, or mooneye. Heavy hitter? Could be a 20-plus pound catfish, a 15-pound northern, or a 10-pound walleye.

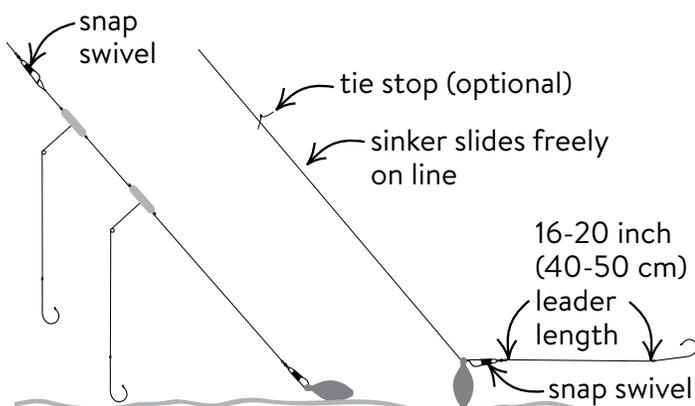
To fish the Red—or one of its many tributaries—you don't need expensive equipment. An inexpensive rod and quality reel are good enough to land any fish from these rivers—skill and patience are usually required to land “the big one.”

Local tackle shops along the river can give you suggestions on the type of equipment and bait that suits your needs. (They can also tell you where and what kind of fish have been biting lately.)

Most fishing is done with natural baits such as worms, minnows, leeches, or prepared baits—all fished on or near the bottom. Figure 1 shows the two most common bottom-fishing techniques—the “dropper” rig and the sliding sinker rig. (Anglers should consult the regulations booklets of either state to determine which rigs are legal.)

Remember to keep the bait just above the bottom. The sliding sinker rig, which keeps the bait closer to the bottom, works especially well for channel catfish, carp, and freshwater drum. Remember, you will need a heavy weight to hold the bait in the current.

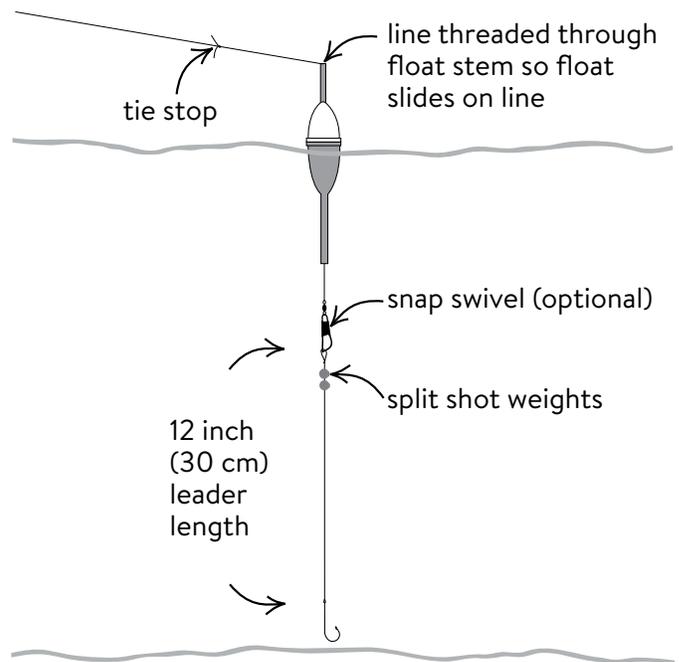
**Figure 1: Dropper Rig and Sliding Sinker Rig**



## Fishing in Slack Water

To catch fish that inhabit surface or mid-water areas of the river, you can use a float or bobber. The sliding float rig, shown in Figure 2, allows you to set the depth of your bait and change it easily. This rig is good for mooneye and goldeye, as well as walleye and channel catfish when they are feeding near the surface.

**Figure 2: Sliding Float Rig**



## TIP AND RAP

Don't let poachers steal your fish and wildlife. If you see someone violate a hunting or angling law or hear about a violation, call one of the toll-free numbers below. Cash rewards are given for tips leading to arrests. You may remain anonymous.

**In Minnesota call TIP**  
(Turn in Poachers), Inc. at 800-652-9093.

**In North Dakota call RAP**  
(Report all Poaching) at 800-472-2121.

**PLEASE REPORT TAGGED FISH:**  
[www.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries/tagged\\_fish\\_reporting/step1.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fisheries/tagged_fish_reporting/step1.html)

# FISHING THE RED CONTINUED

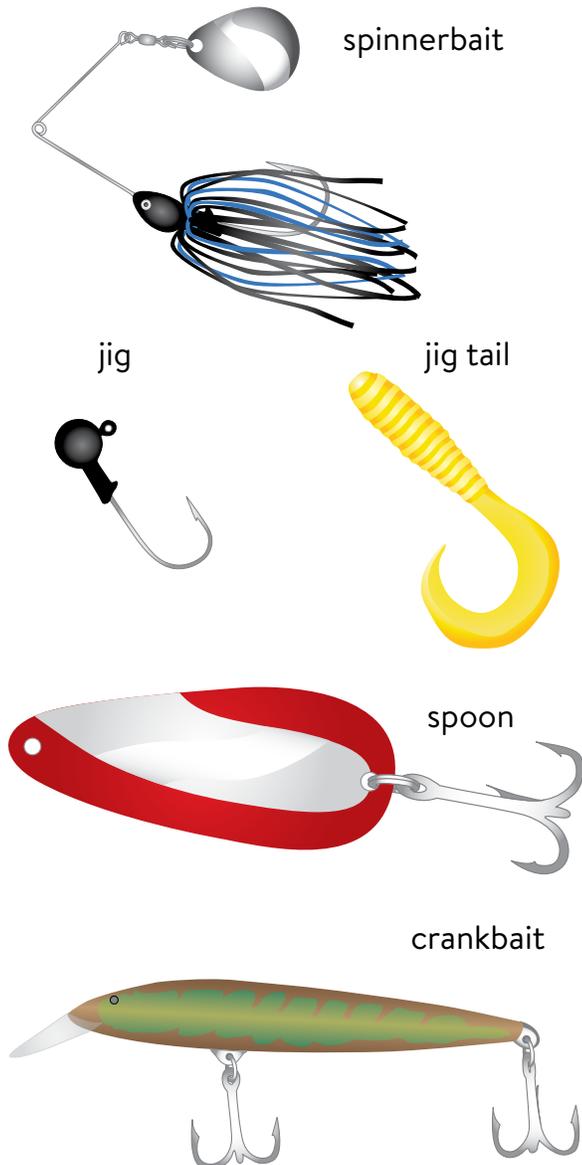
## Artificial Lures

There are many types of artificial lures or combinations of lures and natural bait that work well. (Figure 3.) A spinnerbait can be used as is, with a plastic jig tail, or baited with a dead minnow or worm. These are effective for walleye, sauger, and pike. Use smaller spinner baits for goldeye and mooneye, which have small mouths.

Jigs can be used with minnows, worms, or leeches, or with any color or pattern of plastic tail, and are especially effective for walleye and sauger. Cast and retrieve these jigs, or bounce them near the bottom.

Spoons and crankbaits are also effective lures for northern pike, walleye, and sauger.

**Figure 3: Artificial Lures**



## Weigh Your Fish with a Ruler

It's possible to determine the weight of your prize catch with a ruler. This table offers length-weight breakdowns for channel catfish, walleye, northern pike, and smallmouth bass on the Red River. Individual fish weights may vary from these estimates.

Length in Inches	Channel Catfish	Walleye	Northern Pike	Smallmouth Bass
10		0.3		0.5
11		0.4		0.6
12	0.5	0.5		0.8
13	0.6	0.7		1.1
14	0.8	0.9		1.4
15	1.0	1.1		1.7
16	1.2	1.3	1.1	2.1
17	1.5	1.6	1.3	2.5
18	1.9	1.9	1.6	3.0
19	2.2	2.3	1.9	3.6
20	2.7	2.7	2.2	4.3
21	3.1	3.1	2.6	5.0
22	3.7	3.6	3.0	5.8
23	4.3	4.1	3.4	6.6
24	4.9	4.7	3.9	
25	5.7	5.3	4.4	
26	6.5	6.0	5.0	
27	7.4	6.8	5.6	
28	8.3	7.6	6.3	
29	9.4	8.5	7.0	
30	10.5	9.4	7.8	
31	11.8	10.2	8.6	
32	13.1	11.5	9.5	
33	14.6	12.6	10.5	
34	16.1	13.9	11.5	
35	17.8		12.6	
36	19.6		13.7	
37	21.5		14.9	
38	23.5		16.2	
39	25.7		17.6	
40	28.0		19.0	
41	30.6		20.5	
42	33.2		22.1	
43	36.0		23.8	
44	38.9		25.6	
45	42.0		27.4	

# EATING FISH FROM THE RED RIVER

Fish from the Red River and its tributaries are safe and nutritious if properly handled. The river flows over deep, rich, prairie soils, picking up loose soil material which gives it a turbid (“muddy”) appearance. This is natural and is not harmful to people or fish.

The Minnesota and North Dakota departments of health have developed guidelines for how often fish can be safely eaten. Recommendations for individual waters are available in each state.

In Minnesota, anglers should refer to the latest “Minnesota Fish Consumption Advisory,” available at local DNR offices or from the Department of Health at 800-657-3908. Information is also available on the internet at [mndnr.gov](http://mndnr.gov). Information is available in five languages and Braille.

In North Dakota, contact the Department of Health and Consolidation Laboratories at 701-328-5210 or on the internet at [www.health.state.nd.us](http://www.health.state.nd.us).

## CATCH-AND-RELEASE

Anglers can make a difference in the abundance of fish. Take home a meal or two, but share the resource by releasing other fish you catch. This “selective harvest” helps ensure that others will have the fun of catching fish.

Play the fish quickly and remove the hook carefully. If a fish is deeply hooked, just cut the line. A few other tips:

1. Use barbless hooks or pinch the barbs down with a pliers.
2. Set the hook on the initial strike instead of “feeding” line, which increases the potential for gut-hooking the fish.
3. Hold the fish firmly, without excessive squeezing, while removing the hook.
4. Use needle-nose pliers to remove the hook.
5. Gently put the fish back in the river.
6. Don't put fish on a stringer or livewell before releasing them.

## FISH RECIPES

Fish is nutritious and can be prepared in a variety of ways. Here are suggestions for preparing channel catfish. Other species can also be substituted.

### **Pan-fried or Deep-fried Catfish**

For pan frying, use fillets or pieces that are no more than 1-inch thick. For deep frying, use pieces no more than ¾-inch thick.

In a large bowl, combine:

3 cups of milk

4 tsp honey

1 egg

Make a flour dredge by combining in a shallow dish or paper sack:

2 cups of Bisquick®

4 tsp lemon pepper

¾ cup flour

salt and pepper to taste

½ cup corn meal

Dash of cayenne or red pepper

Place the fish in the milk mixture and turn until coated on both sides. Soak for 5 to 10 minutes in the bowl. Remove the fish and allow excess milk mixture to drain off. Put the fish into the flour dredge and coat evenly. Remove and let the fish pieces stand for about 5 minutes, allowing the coating to set up before cooking.

Pan fry over moderate heat and turn often until done. Deep fry using 350° F oil and cook until done.

### **Jamaican Style Catfish**

Here's another tasty recipe that's guaranteed to put a little “zip” into your diet.

Place fillets or pieces of catfish in a snug aluminum foil “boat.” Add orange juice to cover the fish, 4 tbsp. of rice wine vinegar, a dash of nutmeg, a dash of allspice, one finely-chopped green onion and crushed red pepper to taste. Refrigerate 4 to 6 hours.

Cook the fish in the foil boat on a grill or in a 350° F oven. When the fish is flaky and the orange juice has evaporated the fish is done.

Serve with a sprinkling of brown sugar over the fish.

# LOCAL TOURISM CONTACTS

For information on accommodations, local events, river conditions, camping sites, local contacts, maps or guides, the following organizations would like to serve you:

## Wahpeton/Breckenridge Area Chamber of Commerce

118 North 6th Street  
Wahpeton, ND 58075  
(701) 642-8744  
[www.wahpetonbreckenridgechamber.com](http://www.wahpetonbreckenridgechamber.com)

## Wahpeton Parks & Recreation

304 South 5th Street  
Wahpeton, ND 58075  
(701) 642-2811  
[www.wahpetonpark.com](http://www.wahpetonpark.com)

## Fargo/Moorhead CVB

2001 44th Street South  
Fargo, ND 58103  
(701) 282-3653 or 1-800-235-7654  
[www.fargomoorhead.org](http://www.fargomoorhead.org)

## River Keepers of Fargo/Moorhead

[www.riverkeepers.org](http://www.riverkeepers.org)

## Greater Grand Forks CVB

4251 Gateway Drive  
Grand Forks, ND 58203  
(701) 746-0444 or 1-800-866-4566  
[www.visitgrandforks.com](http://www.visitgrandforks.com)

## Grafton Chamber Office

432 Hill Avenue  
Grafton, ND 58237  
(701) 352-0781  
[www.graftonevents.com](http://www.graftonevents.com)

## Drayton Community Chamber of Commerce

604 North Main  
Drayton, ND 58225  
(701) 454-3474  
[www.draytonnd.com](http://www.draytonnd.com)

## Hallock City Clerk Office

163 Third Street SE  
Hallock, MN 56728  
(218) 843-2737  
[www.hallockmn.org](http://www.hallockmn.org)

## Rendezvous Region

P.O. Box 318  
Walhalla, ND 58282  
(701) 549-2707  
[www.walhalland.org](http://www.walhalland.org)

## City of Pembina

152 Rolette Street  
Pembina, ND 58721  
(701) 825-6819  
[www.pembina.govoffice.com](http://www.pembina.govoffice.com)

## BE AWARE OF THE DANGERS OF DAMS

**Widely viewed as “drowning machines,”** low-head dams are dangerous and people should keep a safe distance away. Whether fishing from a boat or shore, NEVER enter the restrictive zones associated with low-head dams FOR ANY REASON.

Through cooperative efforts between federal, state, and local groups, seven of the eight low-head dams along the main stem of the Red River have been modified to a series of rock rapids. In addition to improving safety at the dam sites, these modification efforts allow fish passage, have improved habitat conditions, and provide recreational hubs along the Red River.

The last remaining low-head dam on the main stem of the Red River, within the United States, is located at Drayton. Currently, efforts are underway to modify the Drayton dam site as well as other low-head dam sites on tributaries entering the Red.

