



Lake Winnibigoshish Fisheries Information Newsletter

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An annual fisheries newsletter for Lake Winnibigoshish

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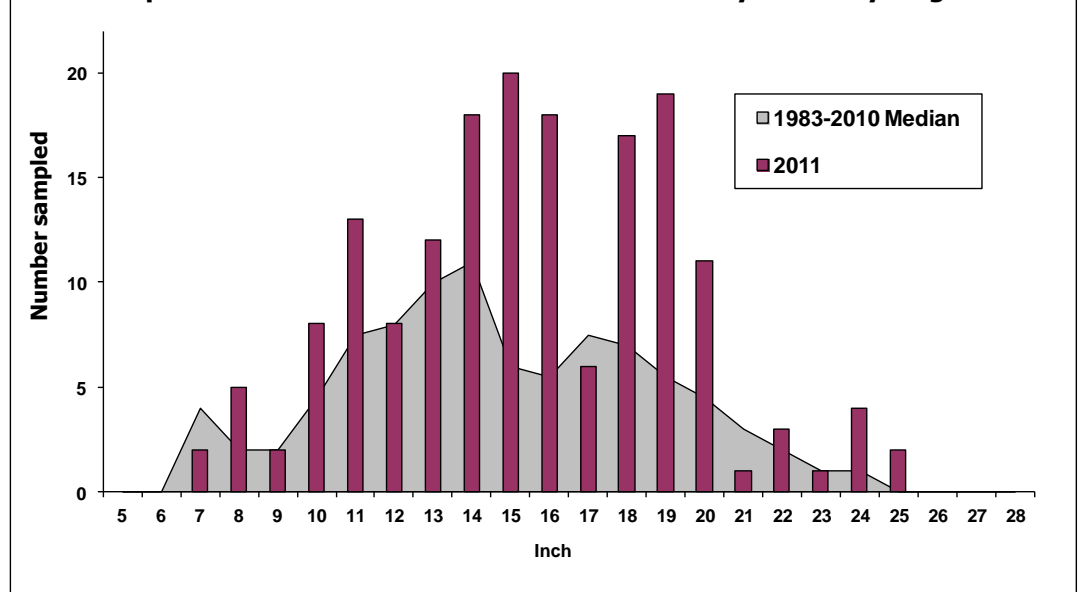
2011 Population Assessment



The walleye population in Winnie continues to be healthy, and consists of a wide range of sizes and age classes. Walleye catch rates of 7.0 per net were the third highest observed since 1983. Walleye sampled varied in length from 8 to 26 inches, with an average length of 16 inches. The walleye population in

Winnie is benefiting from strong year classes in 2001, 2005 and 2006. Most other year classes are average, with a weak 2008 year class. This results in a wide variety of walleye sizes available to anglers. Most individuals from the 2005 year class have entered the 17 to 26 inch protected slot but a large portion of the abundant 2006 and 2007 year classes will be of harvestable size during the summer of 2012. Walleye from the 2004 and earlier year classes will contribute to high catch rates and the potential for a trophy catch.

Comparison of 1983-2010 median and 2011 walleye catch by length



The catch of northern pike (pike) increased to a near average catch of 8.3 per net in 2011. Lower catch rates during the last two assessments indicate that the pike population has decreased. The decreased pike population combined with

increased cisco abundance resulted better growth and larger sized pike. Pike length varied from 12.7 to 35.4 inches with a average length of 21.7 inches. More pike longer than 30 inches were sampled than in any assessment since 2000. The average length of pike increased to 21.7 inches in 2011, and with the help of anglers this may continue to increase. Anglers can help increase the number of quality size pike in the population by releasing fish between 24 and 32 inches. This will allow pike the time to grow closer to their potential, and increase the chance of catching larger fish.



Yellow perch (perch) are an important species for both anglers and as a prey item for predatory species. The catch of perch in assessment nets reached an all-time low in 2005 largely because of poor year classes in 2000 and 2002. A strong 2003 year class moved through the system resulting in higher assessment catch rates in 2007. The 2004, 2005, and 2007 year classes were near average, and the 2006 and 2008 year classes were weak. The catch rate for perch was lower than average in 2011 at 44 per net but was higher than most lakes.

Relative health of the perch population can be described by the percent of perch longer than nine inches in the gill net catch. The catch of large perch declined to 6% in the early 1990's driven by high angler harvest. Changes in Winnie and other lakes prompted a statewide change in the perch bag limit to 20 daily and 40 in possession in 2001. Several strong year classes were produced during the same time period and the assessment catch of perch longer than nine inches increased to 30% in 2004. In 2005, the proportion of large perch sampled in near-shore gill nets declined for the first time since 1998. The proportion of perch longer than nine inches was about 17% in 2005 and 2006, then declined to 9.8% in 2007 as young perch were recruited to the fishery. Although many small fish remain in the population, the strong 2003 year class has grown large enough to affect the proportion of perch longer than 9 inches. Nearly 14 % of the perch sampled were longer than nine inches in 2011.

Creel Survey

The last creel survey was conducted during the summers of 2006 and 2007, and during the winters of 2006/07 and 2007/08. Creel surveys will be completed during the summers of 2012 and 2013, and during the winters of 2012/13 and 2013/14. A creel clerk may approach, ask a few questions about your fishing trip, and may ask to measure the fish you caught. The interview process only takes a few minutes and is a critical part of managing fish populations on Lake Winnibigoshish. Thanks for contributing information that helps keep Winnie a great fishing destination.

Walleye Experimental Regulation

The 17 to 26 inch protected slot limit for walleye was evaluated during the summer of 2010. Evaluation showed that the fishery has responded well to the regulation and that either the current 17 to 26 inch regulation, or a 18 to 26 inch protected slot with a bag limit of six fish would likely maintain the fishery at a healthy level.

Results of the evaluation were open to public review in the fall of 2010 and public meetings were held at three locations in October. Two hundred forty seven comments were received through the public review period and meetings. These comments came from anglers varying from Winona to Baudette in Minnesota and eight other states from Wisconsin to Texas and Arizona. More than 85% of the comments received favored either the 17 to 26 inch or 18 to 26 inch protected slots with a small advantage to the 17 to 26 inch slot. Of those favoring these two options, more than 1/3 would agree with either regulation. The final decision was to keep the 17 to 26 inch protected slot limit with a bag limit of six fish. This regulation was biologically suited to Lake Winnibigoshish and was viewed favorably by the majority of anglers.

Aquatic Invasive Species

Species that have been introduced through human activities to a location where they don't naturally occur are termed "invasive". Some invasive species are not necessarily harmful, but others cause ecological or economic problems.

Several invasive species have been introduced into Winnie. Three species of snail: banded mystery, Chinese mystery, and faucet have become established since 2000. Both species of mystery snail appear to have no negative effect at this time. The faucet snail carries a trematode parasite that can kill several species of ducks if ingested. Thousands of ducks were killed by these parasites during the fall of 2007 and 2008. Emerald shiners (often used as bait) are not native to Winnie, and were first sampled in 2005. Each of these invasive species were likely introduced through human activities.

The movement of any type of equipment (boats, boat trailers, boat lifts, docks, personal watercraft, bait containers, etc.) between lakes may transfer invasive species if precautions are not taken. To avoid being an accomplice to the spread of these unwanted species, people should make sure all equipment is thoroughly cleaned before moving it to a new body of water. For more information on invasive species, click the "Invasive Species" link at left.

New Fish Disease - VHS

A new fish disease is working its way towards Minnesota – Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS). VHS is a serious viral disease of freshwater and saltwater fish, and it is currently spreading throughout the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada. So far, it has been documented in all of the Great Lakes including Superior, and in inland waters in New York, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Fish from Lake Winnibigoshish are tested annually and VHS has not been detected in those fish. Because the disease is relatively new to North America, our fish populations have a low resistance to the virus, and new outbreaks can cause large-scale fish kills. Infected fish will display widespread hemorrhaging (bleeding) throughout the body surface (eyes, skin, and fins) and throughout internal organs during a VHS outbreak. Sick fish will appear listless and may be swimming in circles or struggling at the surface of the water. To minimize the chance of spreading VHS, do not move live fish or water between lakes. Drain all water from boats, motors, bilge areas, livewells, and bait containers before leaving the lake. Thoroughly clean and dry your boat and other equipment before entering another lake.