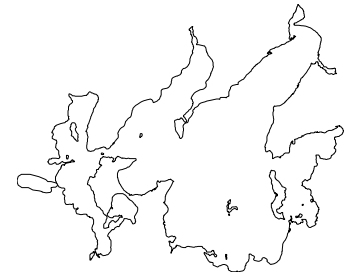




Leech Lake Update 5/20/2009
Walker Area Fisheries Office
07316 State Hwy. 371 NW
Walker, MN 56484
218-547-1683

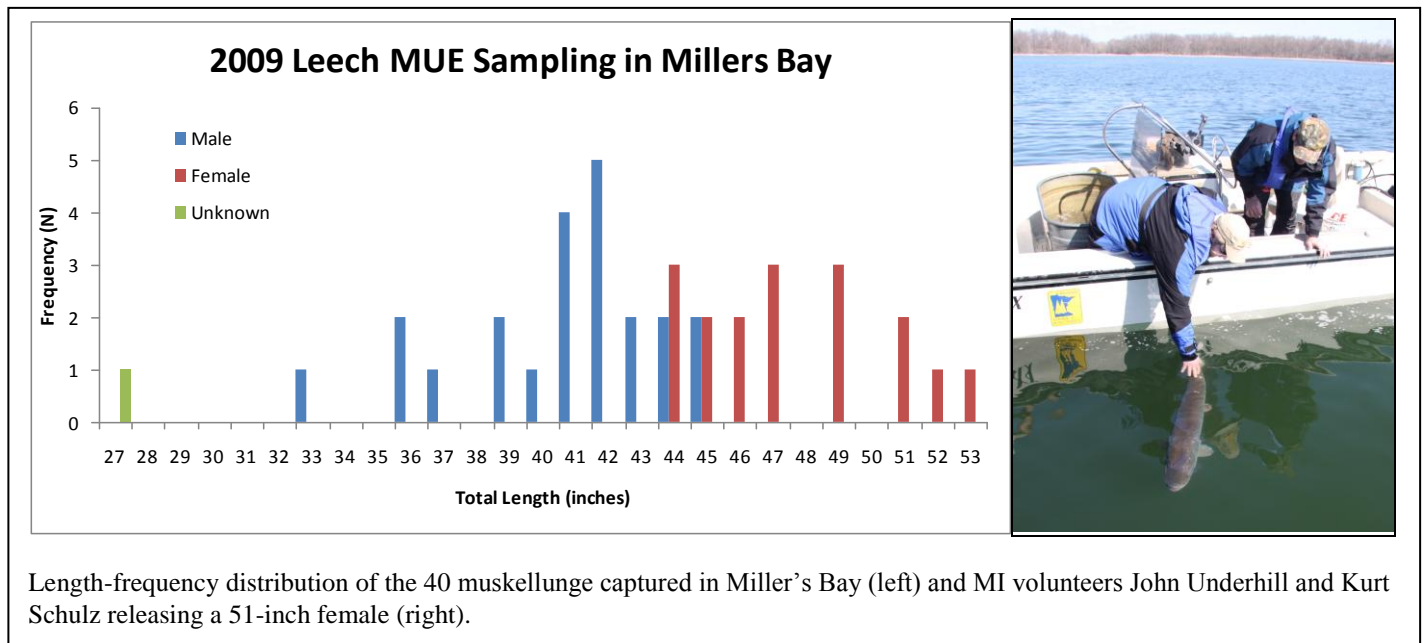


Greetings!

This update is part of a series of reports the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is sending to Leech Lake area resorts, businesses and others interested in DNR activities on Leech Lake. The goal of these messages is to keep you up to date with our findings and current activities on the lake. Earlier updates are available by visiting <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/walker/index.html>. Feel free to contact our office if you have any questions or comments, would like copies of previous updates not posted on the website, or if you would like to be added to the mailing list.

2009 Muskellunge Egg Take

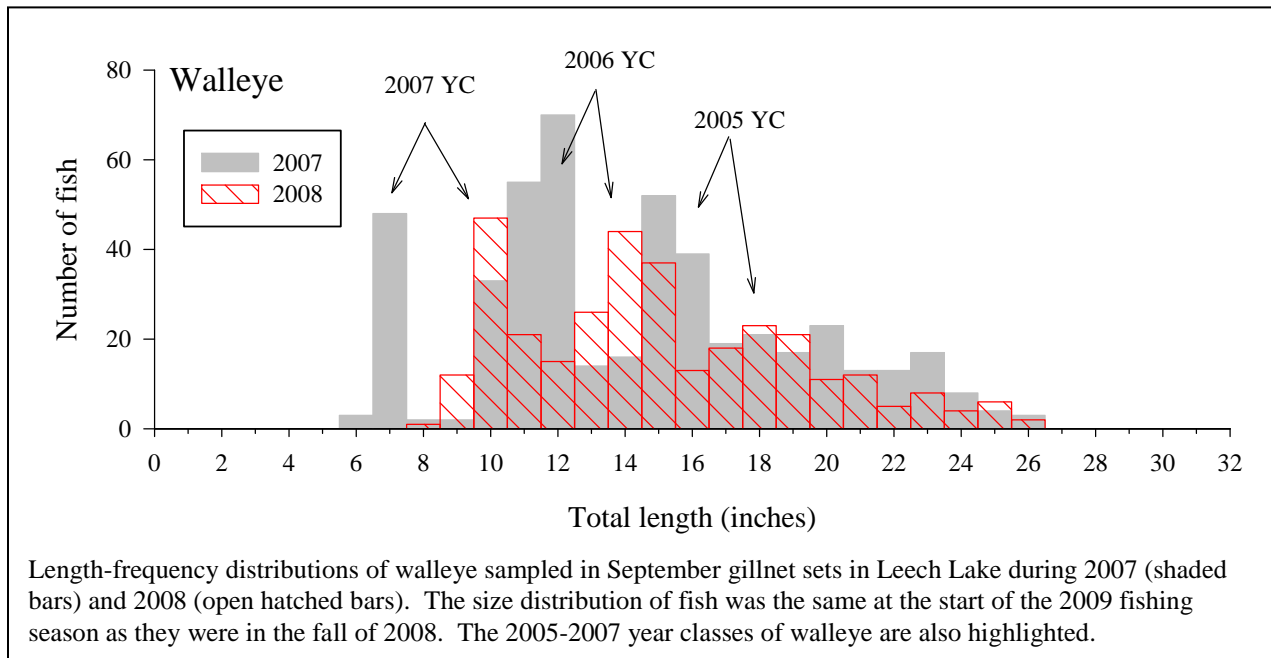
- Muskie egg take was concluded on Leech Lake this spring. This is done every 4 years to introduce new genetic material into brood-stock lakes from the original source to minimize inbreeding depression that could result from inadvertently pairing siblings during egg-take events on brood lakes where eggs are collected annually for the statewide muskie program.
- Similar to the walleye program, a percentage of collected eggs are returned to the source lake after hatching. Whereas walleye are returned as fry, muskies are returned as fall fingerlings.
- A total of 40 fish were captured ranging in length from 27 inches to 53 inches (below). Fish were caught in Miller's Bay every day from May 5 – May 13. Sampling was halted to accommodate walleye fry stocking in the Walker area.
- A big thank you goes out to guides, anglers, and Muskies Inc. members from around the state who assisted with this effort.



Length-frequency distribution of the 40 muskellunge captured in Miller's Bay (left) and MI volunteers John Underhill and Kurt Schulz releasing a 51-inch female (right).

2009 Fishing Opener

- The 2009 fishing season on Leech Lake began at a furious pace and has the potential to be one of the best on record.
- Preliminary creel statistics indicated that opening weekend anglers caught walleye at an average rate of 0.476 fish/hour and harvested walleye at a rate of 0.242 fish/hour; anglers specifically targeting walleye caught fish at a rate of 0.825 walleye/hour and harvested fish at a rate of 0.3884 fish/hour. Both of these metrics point towards one of the best openers ever observed.
- Total estimated fishing pressure (36,229 angler-hours) was the highest observed during an opener since 2004.



2009 Operational Plans

- With the assistance of Leech Lake Fishing Task Force members and other volunteers, 22.67 million Boy River walleye fry were stocked into Leech Lake from May 19-21. As in previous years, fry were partitioned among major bays based on littoral acres and were marked with OTC.
- Under the supervision of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, double-crested cormorant control began the first week of May and will continue until the management goal of 500 active nests is met.
- Persons interested in assisting DNR staff with Large Lake sampling (seining – July; trawling – August; gillnetting – September; electrofishing – September) should contact Doug Schultz, Large Lake Specialist.

2009 Muskellunge Assessment

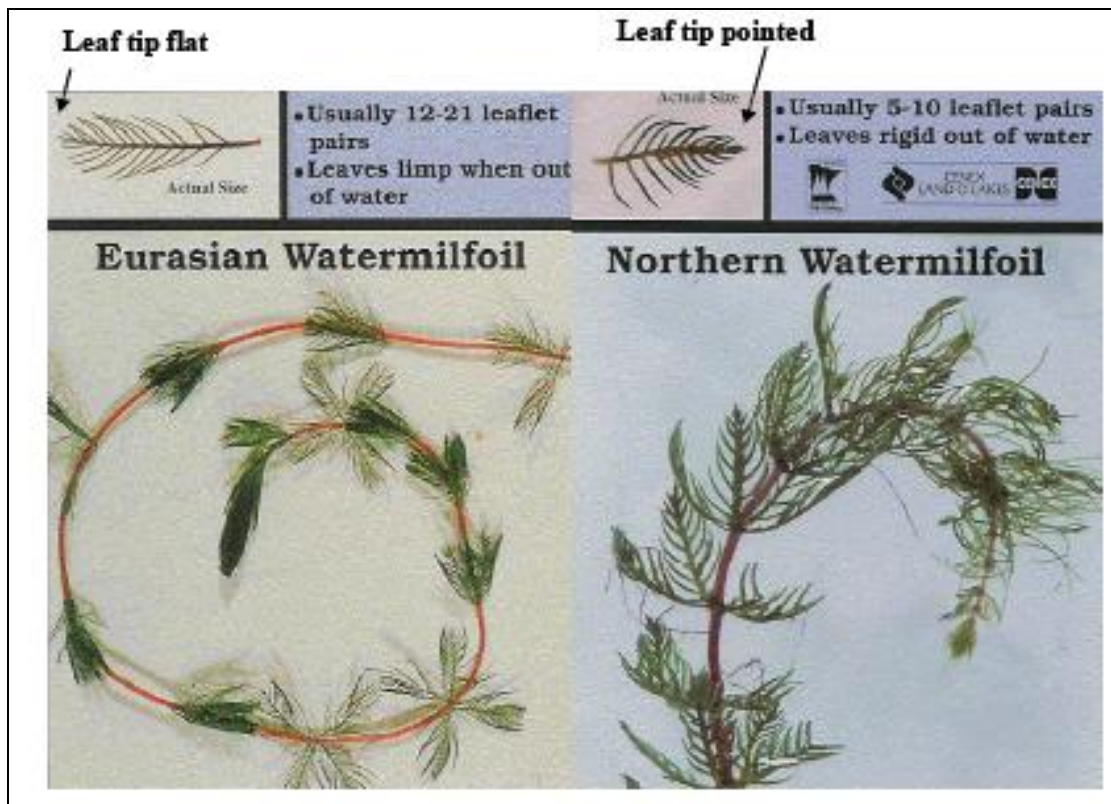
- Leech Lake is widely recognized as a premier destination for muskie anglers and is also the source for Minnesota's muskie management program. Little information has been collected on the Leech Lake population, in particular abundance, recruitment, growth rate, and mortality rate. This is because Leech Lake muskies are not very susceptible to standard muskie survey gears used to do population assessments on other Minnesota lakes, including large lakes such as Vermilion and Mille Lacs.
- The objective of this project is to estimate the size of the Leech Lake muskie population during 2009-2010 using genetic microsatellite markers. By all indications the Leech lake muskie population is very healthy. This effort is intended to be proactive, using recently developed genetic techniques to fill a necessary gap in our understanding of the population for future reference. Results from this initial study will serve as a benchmark for comparing future population estimates against. Doing so will facilitate recognition of changes to the population when they occur and identifying their causes so that informed management actions can be taken.
- We will be relying primarily on anglers to supply the necessary scale samples for genetically fingerprinting individual fish to use in the mark-recapture experimental design.
- Funding for this project has been provided by the Hugh C. Becker Trust Foundation and the Brainerd Lakes Chapter of Muskies Inc.



Invasive Species Watch

- Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) was discovered in Leech Lake in 2004 and has been expanding every year since. Extensive searches have not discovered rooted EWM outside of artificial harbors to date, however, this invasive species continues to be discovered in new locations. Follow-up inspections found EWM in 22 harbors throughout Leech Lake in 2008. Inspection and treatments will again continue in 2009 through volunteer reports and DNR staff in a continued effort to keep EWM from further spreading.
- Eurasian watermilfoil, curly-leaf pondweed, rusty crayfish, and banded mystery snails are all present in Leech Lake. Other harmful invasive species, such as the spiny water flea, have been found in waters along the Canadian border water area. Zebra Mussels, which have not been found in Leech Lake to date, are greatly increasing in abundance in Mille Lacs Lake. Efforts are being focused in that region to keep them there and prevent the spread elsewhere in the state.
- Introductions of other aquatic invasive species are a concern for Leech and other area lakes and caution and care should always be taken when moving from any body of water to another.

- Watercraft Inspections are scheduled for local boat accesses around Leech Lake in 2009. Watercraft inspectors are there to educate and inform boaters coming in and off the lake. In only a few minutes inspectors will show you what precautions you can take to prevent any new introductions to Leech Lake and how to prevent transporting any invasive species out of Leech Lake.
- Boaters can help prevent further spread invasive species by taking a few simple extra precautions:
 - inspect and remove all visible aquatic plants, animals and mud from boats, trailers and equipment such as anchors before leaving a water access;
 - inspect and remove all visible aquatic plants, animals or mud from docks, boat lifts and swim rafts before transporting to another water;
 - drain all water from boats - including live wells, bilges and bait buckets - before leaving a water access;
 - spray or rinse boats with high pressure and/or hot water, or let them dry thoroughly for five days before transporting to another water.
- Precautions for anglers and boaters can be found at: www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/preventsread.html
- Further details on aquatic invasive species and the DNR Invasive Species Program can be found at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/invasives/index.html>



New Face in Town

Hello all. My name is Darrin Hoverson and I am the new invasive species specialist for Northwest Minnesota. I came to the DNR in January of 2009 where I worked as the shoreland stewardship specialist. I earned my bachelor's degree in aquatic biology from St. Cloud State University and my master's degree in water resources from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where I was also a graduate researcher for the Center for Watershed Science and Education. I am a native to Park Rapids, MN where I spent many years and great opportunities being enriched by the outdoors around me which lead me to where I am today.

I assumed my new role last August and work out of Itasca State Park. I am responsible for 15 northwestern counties where I provide technical assistance to local groups, develop lake vegetation management plans, conduct surveys and assessments of invasive species, carry out control of invasive species, and educate and inform the public about invasive species.



It is very encouraging to see the local commitment by citizens and lake and river groups that are actively working to prevent the further spread of invasive species in this region and in and around Leech Lake. I believe we all need to continue this work cooperatively in order to effectively manage and protect our lakes and rivers.

I look forward to meeting and working with many of you in the future. Feel free to contact me anytime.

Darrin Hoverson

Darrin Hoverson, Aquatic Biologist – Invasive Species Specialist
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If you have questions, comments, or requests please contact:

Doug Schultz (doug.schultz@dnr.state.mn.us)
or
Harlan Fierstine (harlan.fierstine@dnr.state.mn.us)