

## 2010 Fishing Opener Prognosis

### Central Region

#### Hinckley

##### **PINE COUNTY**

Pokegama, Cross, Island, Oak and North and South Big Pine Lakes are typically the best lakes for targeting walleye in Pine County. They also have abundant crappie populations that can provide good fishing action. The Snake, St. Croix and Kettle Rivers can also provide decent walleye action.

##### **KANABEC COUNTY**

Knife, Ann, and Fish Lakes all have good populations of walleye, northern pike and crappie. They are good early season opener lakes because they are shallow and warm up early. The Snake River can also provide spring walleye action.

##### **CHISAGO COUNTY**

North Center, South Center, Chisago, South Lindstrom, North Lindstrom, Green and Rush Lake all have good walleye and panfish populations present. For river fishing, the St Croix River has a decent walleye population.

##### **ISANTI COUNTY**

Green, Spectacle, Fannie, and Skogman Lakes all have walleye present but they are better known for their panfish populations. The Rum River, it can provide some good walleye and northern pike action.

#### Little Falls

With impressive numbers of larger pike, Big Swan Lake in Todd County may be an option for anglers. Recent ice out trap nets results showed us the 24-36" protective slot limit appears to be helping the size structure in the Big Swan Lake. Fish approaching 40" are not uncommon. Look for new vegetation beds and upcoming bulrush for cover that should hold fish. Many anglers have success using artificial baits, but, the staple sucker minnow can often produce for anglers. Please try and release the fish in good shape. If using live bait, consider using circle hooks as they can help reduce hooking injuries. As a bonus the a year class of crappie approaching 10" may be up shallow and biting by the opener this year.

DNR Fisheries stocks walleye fry in Lake Alexander every other year on "odd years" this should have many walleye anglers catching fish. Fry stocking has proven to be very effective on Lake Alexander as our own electrofishing results have been favorable. Look for the 2005 and 2007 year classes to be ideal "keeper" fish. Keep in mind walleye may relate differently to vegetation and structure in Lake Alexander. Anglers have used a variety of baits and presentations effectively on the weed edges and on some of the deeper humps. If anglers are looking for recent results of a planned ice out assessment (2010) they can be found on the Little Falls Area Fisheries Website

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/littlefalls/index.html> Be sure to clean off your boats and trailers as Lake Alexander does have Eurasian milfoil.

Lake Shamineau pike and walleye an often untapped resource. With decent water clarity, Lake Shamineau offers anglers a picture into the depths below. Recent surveys suggest the

pike numbers are lower and the overall size structure has improved substantially. The walleye are there, but, anglers may need to use low light conditions of dawn or dusk to catch them effectively. Walleye up to 28" were caught in the 2009 ice out assessment. Look for abundant perch to offer some entertainment as well. Some keeper perch should be available to anglers in the spring.

A couple of under-rated spots in the Little Falls area could include the Mississippi River, Little Sauk, Guernsey and Jeurgens lakes along the Sauk River near Sauk Centre. Good luck!

### East Metro

**Clear Lake (Washington County)** - 424 acres. DNR-owned, 20-space public access on the west side of the lake. Walleye were sampled above the median level for abundance and mean weight in a recent lake survey. Average size of walleye sampled was 16.5 inches and 2.05 lbs! Northern Pike are also present in good numbers. Again, net catch information indicates average size of pike, 24.7 inches and 3.7 lbs. Clear Lake also provides an opportunity to capture hybrid muskellunge at or near legal size. **Opening date for Hybrid muskellunge is June 5.** Bluegill and Black crappie are found in high abundance; however, average size is below the preferred range.

**Lake St. Croix (Washington County)** The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources defines Lake St. Croix to be from river mile 23.3 at the lift bridge in Stillwater down to mile 0.0 where it enters Pool 3 of the Mississippi River at Prescott, Wisconsin. The 7,800 "wide spot" in the St. Croix River is one of the most popular fishing and recreational destinations in the Metro Area and is part of the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

According to a creel survey conducted during the open water season of 1997, walleye was the most commonly fish caught and provided the highest catch rates (~0.2 fish/hour) of game fish. However, catch rate for walleye during May was three times higher than the season average; 0.65 fish/hour. Based on back calculated length-at-age, the average walleye reaches the minimal harvest size of 15" by age 3. Sauger was also a game fish that was commonly sought and captured. Of the fish captured during the creel survey, sauger was the fourth most commonly captured species.

**Opening day for walleye and sauger on Lake St. Croix is May 1.** Be aware that there is a **15" minimum size regulation for walleye** on this body of water.

Lake St. Croix has been stocked with muskellunge consistently since 1989. This management has proved successful as a National Muskellunge Tournament held in 2009 produced a catch of 33 muskellunge, two of which measured 50" long! Tournament promoters boasted this as their most successful (of the nation-wide) events! **Opening day for Muskellunge on Lake St. Croix is May 29.**

This water body is known as an excellent destination for catfish. Flathead and channel catfish are abundant and in large sizes. The species can be fished continuously. Smallmouth and White bass are also popular targets on Lake St. Croix. Data shows that these two fish species make up the second and third most commonly

captured fish In addition to abundance, size structure of both species is impressive. Smallmouth opener is May 29, there is no closed season for white bass.

**Centerville Lake (Anoka County)** - 455 acres. Access can be gained through the 5,500-acre Rice Creek Chain of Lakes Regional Park Reserve. It is one of the largest in the seven-county metropolitan area and contains some of the most significant native wildlife habitat and water resources in the regional area. Both walleye and northern pike were sampled above the median levels for abundance in our netting data. Average size for walleye is 20.9 inches and 3.1 lbs, likely the largest average size for walleye in the East Metro Management Area. Anglers indicate these fish can be captured early in the season but success decreases with warming water temperatures. The average size of northern pike sampled was impressive as well, 24.85 inches and almost 4 lbs. Bluegill and black crappie are found in good numbers and desirable sizes.

#### West Metro

Cedar Lake (27-0039) is a 169 acre lake in the northern most of the Minneapolis Chain of Lakes. Walleye gill net catch increased to 3.8/net in 2009. This is the highest measure of abundance ever recorded for Cedar Lake. Stocking began in 2005 and is increasing gill net catches. Tiger muskie are also present. Shore fishing is popular in the park along the northwest shore of Cedar Lake. A carry-in access is located in the same park.

Lake Harriet (27-0016) is a 335-acre lake located in south Minneapolis that's primarily managed as a muskellunge and walleye fishery. A boat launch operated by the Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board is located on the northwest corner of the lake. There are two fishing piers and ample shore fishing opportunities as the lake is encircled by a bike path. Lake Harriet is stocked with walleye fingerlings, yearlings, adults or a combination every year. In 2009, walleye abundance was moderate compared with other metro lakes and the size structure shows 52% were 15 inches or longer, 18% were 20 inches or longer and 7% were 25 inches or longer. In a spring assessment of muskellunge, 20 were netted averaging 40.4 inches and 15.4 lbs. Seventy percent were 38 inches or longer and 35% were 42 inches or longer. The largest measured 48.4 inches and 27.6 pounds. The adult muskellunge population was estimated at 0.33 fish/acre (110 total fish). Northern pike relative abundance is low (1.4/gill net) and this has previously been the case in Lake Harriet, however, mean size of northern pike was relatively high at 28 inches and 5.9 pounds.

#### Montrose

Briggs, Rush and Julia Lakes in western Sherburne County are recreational development lakes connected by navigable channels and together make up the Briggs Chain of Lakes. Rush and Julia are similar in size (142 acres) and maximum depth (11 and 15 feet, respectively). Briggs Lake is the largest and deepest of the lakes (377 acres, 25 feet maximum) and tends to have the best water quality, with a mid-summer clarity reading of three feet or so.

Walleye fry stocking has been successful in providing a walleye fishery in the Briggs Chain of Lakes. Results of 2009 test netting showed that walleye catches increased significantly for Briggs and Rush Lakes and nearly so, for Julia. At the same time northern pike populations declined.

Walleye gill net catches for the Briggs Chain of Lakes ranged from 8-11/gill net. These numbers represent the historic high catch for each lake. Small fish less than 12 inches comprised a substantial portion of the gill net catch for the three lakes. Continued opportunities for walleye angling will be present as these fish mature.

Northern pike declined significantly in Briggs and Julia Lakes, but not Rush Lake. Historically, gill net catches have been highest in Julia Lake. Briggs Lake, which had the lowest gill net catch, had the highest percentage of northern pike greater than 24 inches, 43%. Rush Lake, with the highest gill net catch, had the lowest percentage of northern pike greater than 24 inches, 4%.

Catches of panfish were common especially for largemouth bass and black crappie. A sample of 50 largemouth collected by electrofishing showed that 12 inch fish were common. The average size of black crappie was small in each lake ranging from 6-8 inches. Catches of bluegill were relatively low on Briggs and Rush Lakes, though still within the range of expected values. Bluegill were above the normal range on Julia, but of the lowest average size, four inches.

The Briggs Chain is overflowed by the Elk River during periods of high water. Catches of riverine species such as smallmouth bass, white sucker, golden, shorthead and silver redhorse reflect the overflow connection. Carp are known to be common as well.

Maple Lake is a 777-acre recreational development lake located partly within the City of Maple Lake in Wright County. The lake is popular for all types of recreational use. The DNR conducted a fisheries survey in 2009 to determine the current status of the fish populations. Largemouth bass, northern pike and bluegill sunfish were abundant while black crappie and walleye were less so.

Maple Lake has a reputation as a good lake for largemouth bass. Electrofishing bore that out. Largemouth bass were sampled by electrofishing on May 21, 2009. The catch was twice the average catch rate for Wright County Area lakes and greater than that reported previously for Maple Lake. Largemouth bass ranged in length from five to 19 inches with an average length of 12 inches. About half the sample consisted of fish larger than 12 inches.

The catch of northern pike was above the expected rate for lakes similar to Maple Lake. The catch represents the historic high and a statistically significant increase since the previous survey. Fish ranged in length from 12 to 30 inches with an average of 20 inches. The percent of northern pike greater than 24 inches was 12%. Anglers have an opportunity to catch many small northern pike.

Bluegill catches were similar to previous surveys and within the range of expected values for similar lakes. Overall, bluegill ranged in length from 3 to 7.8 inches with an average length of 6.5 inches. Historically, bluegill have been abundant and small.

The catch of walleye was less than hoped for despite both the DNR and lake association who have been stocking Maple Lake for several years. Maple Lake exhibits a typical pattern for many area lakes of high northern pike abundance: low yellow perch and walleye numbers. Still, walleye ranged in length from 12 to 26 inches with an average of 18 inches.

The catch of black crappie was below the normal range for lakes like Maple Lake. Black crappie have always been low in trap net catches. Crappies were a surprisingly large part of the creel during winter 2009-2010. Black crappie ranged in length from 6.6 to 8.3 inches with an average length of 7.6 inches.

Anglers are reminded to carefully remove any aquatic vegetation from boats since Eurasian water milfoil was noted in 2007 in Maple Lake.

### Lake City

Anglers venturing out for the inland season fishing opener in the Lake City Area will find good populations of walleye in Lakes Winona and Byllesby, while anglers seeking northern pike will do best to cast the shallow bays in Lake Zumbro or the shallow lakes in the lower Vermillion River. For a really diverse fishing opportunity, float the Cannon or Zumbro River for both northern pike and walleye with the potential to also catch sauger, white bass and muskies. On the MN/WI border waters of the Mississippi river, which is open to angling year-round, expect excellent fishing in 2010 for walleye, sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, white bass and most species of panfish.