

Central Region Fishing Outlook for 2025

Reminders for a great season

Welcome to the 2025 fishing season! These fishing outlooks contain a wide range of fisheries information compiled in April by local DNR Fisheries staff. You can find more information about the management, habitat and oversight work performed by area fisheries staff, and how to contact them, on the [DNR area fisheries pages](#). We hope you have a great fishing experience. And we'd also encourage you to take a kid fishing or [introduce someone new to fishing!](#)

Check the DNR fishing webpage

The DNR has a [fishing page](#) to help answer angler questions. The page links to [LakeFinder](#), which provides maps, special regulation information for individual lakes, other detailed information on lakes throughout the state, and the StreamFinder tool that provides a description, species list, regulations and access information for [trout streams throughout Minnesota](#). The fishing page includes the online versions of the Minnesota fishing regulations booklet in multiple languages. The regulations booklet is available in print anywhere [DNR licenses are sold](#).

Clean In Clean Out

Remember anglers and boaters, Clean In Clean Out when boating or fishing in Minnesota. Protect your waters by following state aquatic invasive species laws. Clean, drain, dispose and keep all plugs out while transporting boats. Find information on aquatic invasive species on the [DNR website](#).

Fish consumption guidance

Anglers can find fish consumption guidance on the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#). Anglers should check for site-specific advice that pertains to the water they're fishing. If eating fish from a variety of waters or a specific water isn't listed, anglers should follow the statewide guidelines. The MDH website has both site-specific and statewide guidance on eating fish.

Safety must be the priority around cold water

Cold water is dangerous and unexpected falls can quickly turn tragic. About 30% of fatal boating accidents each year happen during the cold-water period, and many involve victims who weren't wearing a life jacket. The most effective way to survive a fall into cold water is to wear a life jacket and make sure the jacket is buckled or zipped. For more information about staying safe on and around cold water, visit the [DNR cold water safety page](#).

Outlook by areas

Mille Lacs Lake

Mille Lacs Lake will provide excellent angling opportunities for multiple species during the 2025 fishing season. May and June typically offer the best time to fish for most species, especially for walleye. With high forage fish numbers currently in the lake, the bite may be a bit slower than a typical year. The walleye population is in good shape and anglers can harvest two walleye 17 inches or longer, only one of which may be larger than 20 inches walleye. The most abundant size range walleye anglers can expect to catch are 17 to 23 inches. Young walleye production was good in 2024, which bodes well for the future of the lake.

Smallmouth bass are also a popular species to fish for on Mille Lacs Lake. The smallmouth bass population is managed to provide high-quality sizes of fish and is regarded as one of the best bass fisheries in North America. Smallmouth bass over 20-inches in length are often caught by anglers. Regulations to manage this unique fishery

require that all bass longer than 17-inches must be released, though up to three bass less than 17-inches long may be harvested.

Northern pike have a quality size structure with trophy potential as well. The limit for northern pike is three and none longer than 30 inches may be kept. Northern pike over 40 inches are present in the lake.

Muskellunge offer a low-density population with a high potential for trophy size fish. The current state record was caught from Mille Lacs Lake. Muskellunge season begins on June 7, 2025.

Little Falls area

Big Birch Lake

This 2,106 acre lake located in southern Todd and Stearns counties is a local destination for walleye, pike, bass, bluegill and crappie. It offers complex habitat types to choose from and a variety of presentation options to catch walleye. Fish tend to use both the inside and outside edges of the vegetation beds when foraging. Due to the better than average water clarity, the bite can be better during evening hours for walleye. Good year classes in recent years (due to fingerling stocking) should allow anglers ample opportunities to catch "eater" walleye as well as the occasional trophy. Further details can be found at the [Lakefinder site](#).

Big Swan Lake

This 950-acre lake is a gem in Todd County, just outside the city of Swanville. With healthy pike, walleye, bass, crappie and bluegill populations, the lake has plenty to offer anglers who venture out this way. Extensive bulrush beds and excellent submerged vegetation make it an angler's paradise with ample structure. Recent walleye fingerling stocking has survived well and opportunities to catch some quality walleye are available. Special regulations are present for northern pike (24-36 inch protective slot, with only one over 36 inches and a six daily bag limit). Size structure of the pike has been impressive, with quite a few individuals over 30 inches present. Additional opportunities are available for quality bass, crappie and "eater" size bluegill as well. More information can be found on [DNR Lakefinder](#).

Sullivan Lake and attached Platte Lake

Located on the northeast corner of Morrison County, Sullivan (1,100-plus acres) and connected Platte Lake (1,600-plus acres) offer up a diversity of fish habitats and some excellent fishing opener options. With some natural reproduction and supplemental walleye fry stocking, several decent year classes are present in both Sullivan and Platte lakes. Sullivan and Platte offer a nice variety of angling options with excellent walleye, pike, bass and crappie. An experimental 10 fish daily bag limit is in place for sunfish for the lakes. Only 10 total can be kept daily from both Sullivan and Platte combined. Bulrush beds abound in both lakes and Sullivan offers some unique structure to challenge anglers as well. More information can be found on the DNR Lakefinder pages for [Sullivan Lake](#) and [Platte Lake](#).

Little Rock Lake/Mississippi River

Between both of these connected waters, about 3,000 acres of water are navigable with naturally reproducing walleye, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, channel catfish, northern pike, black crappie and bluegill available to anglers. Recent efforts to improve fish habitat and water quality, including a short-term drawdown on Little Rock Lake in 2019, is having some benefit from a fishery perspective. A recent survey (spring 2023) revealed a significant increase in bluegill, crappie and bass recruitment, with bluegill over 10 inches captured. Our 2020 survey of Little Rock Lake sampled 17.18 walleye per net, which is the highest ever recorded for the lake. Plenty of "keeper" size fish are available, with some approaching 30 inches. This, along with a strong population of channel catfish (13.73 pernet), black crappie (14.64 pernet) and reasonable population of northern pike, offers some distinct opportunities for anglers for the fishing opener and beyond. The Mississippi River offers some great opportunities above the Sartell Dam. Caution is advised if boating farther upstream (beyond the Rice bridge), as shallower water does prevent conventional boat traffic most of the time. Smallmouth bass, walleye, channel catfish and even muskellunge can be caught in this stretch of river. Mapping efforts associated with the drawdown were completed and available on the [C-Map Genesis website](#). Lake survey information on Little Rock Lake can be found on [DNR Lakefinder](#).

Big Sauk Lake

This 2094-acre impoundment in the Sauk River in Sauk Centre, had continued success with walleye fry stocking and puts Sauk Lake on the top of the list for better opener bets within the Little Falls management area. Excellent survival and fast growth have made a good number of keeper walleye available to anglers. Our sampling in 2023 yielded the second highest catch rates ever for walleye (12.7/net). You should expect good numbers of fish between 15 and 25 inches this spring with the occasional larger fish thrown in. This long body of water has the Sauk River running through it that can offer some ample opportunities to use current to your advantage. Big Sauk Lake can offer some great opportunities for largemouth bass, yellow perch and black crappie as well. Further details can be found on [DNR Lakefinder](#).

St. Cloud area

Buffalo Lake

This 1,552-acre lake is located within the city limits of Buffalo, in central Wright County. The lake is a popular destination for angling, and walleye fishing in Buffalo Lake has seen a significant surge in popularity. Walleye catch rates in the 2024 lake survey were the highest on record. Although the walleye caught in the lake were generally small, average length and weight of 14 inches and 1 pound, fish up to 28 inches in length were also present in the lake. Buffalo is also a great choice for quality-sized northern pike since 26% of pike exceed 26 inches and 10% exceed 30 inches. Both largemouth and smallmouth bass are present in respectable numbers, but populations generally consist of smaller sized individuals. Although down from a few years ago, the population of black crappie is still very good, although the average size was still a bit small at just under 8 inches. However, anglers targeting black crappie should still have a good chance at catching quality sized fish as 31% of the catch exceeded 10 inches in length and crappie up to 13 inches were sampled. Three public accesses are located around the lake one each on the north, east, and south sides of the lake, but anglers should arrive early since parking can be problem on opener.

Cokato Lake

This 545-acre lake is located in Wright County three miles north of the city of Cokato. Anglers can expect good fishing for walleye, northern pike, largemouth and smallmouth bass.

A lake survey conducted in 2024 found above average walleye numbers, averaging 17 inches, with a number of fish over 20 inches and the largest over 28 inches. The majority of walleye sampled were 1-3 years old and show higher than average growth rates, reaching 14 inches at age one.

Northern pike numbers were decent with a good average size coming in at 22 inches and 3 pounds. Ten percent of pike were longer than 26 inches with 8% measuring over 30 inches. Anglers can expect to find some quality sized pike fishing Cokato Lake. Largemouth bass and smallmouth bass numbers were higher than previous surveys, but what was truly impressive was the average size of the fish captured. Smallmouth bass had an average length of 17 inches and 85% of fish sampled measured over 14 inches. Two fish were measured over 20 inches, with the largest measuring just over 21 inches. Largemouth bass had an average length of 16 inches and 91% of fish sampled measured over 14 inches. The largest largemouth bass sampled measured in at just under 19 inches. Anglers may find memorable bass fishing in Cokato Lake!

Sauk River Chain of Lakes

The Sauk River Chain of Lakes located in south-central Stearns County near the cities of Richmond and Cold Spring. The chain consists of over 3,000 acres and is made up of nine different lakes, several of which are located directly on the Sauk River, while others are off channel but still influenced by the river. The Sauk River chain is a great all-around fishery with an excellent variety of species for the area. Anglers can catch quality-sized sunfish, black crappie, largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleye, muskie, northern pike, and channel catfish. A fisheries survey conducted in 2024 found fewer numbers of walleye compared to the previous survey; however, the average size of 16 inches and 1 1/2 pounds was unchanged. The lakes support a good number of sunfish over 8 inches and black crappie over 10 inches. Moderate numbers of northern pike were observed with an average length of 22 inches and 3 pounds with the largest being 34 inches. Anglers have also reported catching muskie exceeding 45 inches. Bass can

provide some excellent action with largemouth up to 20 inches and smallmouth up to 19 inches. Good numbers of large channel catfish are also available with fish averaging 22 inches and a few exceeding 30 inches. The chain has a bag limit of 10 on sunfish while the catfish regulation has returned to the statewide limit of five, so be aware of these if you are planning on harvesting these species. There are three public accesses located on the chain, one located on the Sauk River off State Hwy 22 just east of Becker Lake, the second is off County Road 71 east of Cedar Island Lake, and the third is located in the city of Cold Spring near Minnesota Highway 23. The lakes are infested with zebra mussels and so anglers should be mindful of this and remember to clean, drain and dry their boat.

Briggs Chain of Lakes

Briggs, Julia and Rush Lakes are located 5 miles north of the city of Clear Lake in northern Sherburne County. The lakes are connected by a navigable channel and together make up the Briggs Chain of Lakes. Anglers can expect good fishing for walleye, northern pike and black crappie.

A lake survey conducted in 2024 found decent walleye numbers, averaging 16 1/2 inches long, with a number of fish over 20 inches. A variety of ages were sampled, indicating that fry stocking continues to be successful. Northern pike numbers were decent with an average size of inches. Sixteen percent of pike were longer than 26 inches with 1% measuring over 30 inches. Northern pike catches have been highest in Julia Lake, but anglers can expect good northern pike fishing throughout the Briggs Chain.

Black crappie numbers were double the long-term average when sampled in 2024. Most of the black crappie caught were 4-5 inches long, representing a large year class of crappie that anglers should be seeing in coming years as they fish on the Briggs Chain of Lakes. There are also harvestable size black crappie present, with individuals measuring just under 14 inches long.

West metro area

Lake Waconia

This 3,080-acre lake is located north of the city of Waconia in central Carver County. Waconia is primarily managed for walleye (special regulation: 16-inch minimum length) and muskellunge (though muskie angling does not open until June 7). In addition, Lake Waconia supports catchable populations of largemouth bass, northern pike, bluegill, pumpkinseed and black crappie. A winter creel survey was conducted in 2025 and showed moderate numbers of 9-10 inch crappies were harvested throughout the ice fishing season. Walleye harvest was better during early ice months and slowed throughout January and February. Anglers caught a wide range of sizes of walleye throughout the season with the biggest being 27 inches. Anglers reported releasing a fair amount of walleye just below the 16-inch minimum size limit and that year class should be available for harvest this open water season. An open water creel survey will be conducted on Lake Waconia from April-November so a creel clerk may talk to you about your fishing trip. This is a quick survey and provides valuable information about catch rates, harvest rates and angler opinions about the fishery.

Lake Minnetonka

This lake is a perennial favorite for metro anglers. Lake Minnetonka is a multi-species lake with moderate numbers of walleye of a large average size, abundant northern pike in a range of sizes, top notch bass fishing, abundant sunfish and crappie at decent sizes, and opportunity to fish for muskie after June 7. If you choose to fish Minnetonka, plan to arrive early as the public accesses fill up quickly, especially on weekends.

Spring Lake

This 591-acre lake is located southwest of the city of Prior Lake. Spring Lake is managed for walleye and largemouth bass, but also supports stable populations of northern pike, black crappie, bluegill and yellow perch. In 2024, walleye averaged 16.5 inches and were sampled at the highest catches ever recorded for this lake (12.3 per gill net). While there were plenty of harvest-sized fish present, there was also a good number of smaller fish in the survey which shows the success of recent stocking events and bodes well for the future of this fishery. Similarly, northern pike were sampled at the highest catches ever recorded for this lake (8.0 per gill net) in 2024. Northern pike averaged

24.3 inches and the largest fish sampled was 37.9 inches. Sunfish and largemouth bass are plentiful, but populations generally consist of smaller sized individuals. Public access is provided by a DNR-owned boat ramp on the southwest side of the lake.

East metro area

Lake options

Bald Eagle, Big Marine and White Bear lakes are all good multi-species options for the opener. In addition, Bone (221 acres in Washington County) and Owasso (375 acres in Ramsey County) offer good walleye and pike fishing in a smaller lake setting. Bone Lake's 2024 fish survey revealed a walleye population at its highest level (4.8 per gill net) since 2006 and a pike population that averaged a respectable 25 inches. Lake Owasso offers decent populations of walleye (2.6 per gill net) and northern pike (6.6 per gill net with a 23.5 average length). Both lakes have one public access and can be good bass and panfish lakes too.

If fishing east metro's larger lakes is not your thing, give one of our smaller Fishing in the Neighborhood lakes a try for walleye in 2025. Carver (Woodbury), Cobblestone (Apple Valley), Como (St. Paul) and Ravine (Cottage Grove) lakes are stocked every year with yearling and adult walleye to provide quick action from shore or canoe.

Don't forget about East Metro's rivers

The St. Croix River from Taylors Falls to the confluence with Pool 3 of the Mississippi River offers solid fishing for lake sturgeon, flathead and channel catfish, walleye, sauger, muskellunge, white bass and smallmouth bass. Refer to the Wisconsin-Minnesota Border Waters page in the 2025 Minnesota Fishing Regulation Booklet for the current regulations for the St. Croix River. In addition, Pool 2 of the Mississippi River (Ford Dam to Hastings Dam) is a great place to catch a variety of fish species where the fishing season is open year-round and catch and release for walleye, sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass. Pool 2 also offers good fishing for white bass, channel catfish and flathead catfish and is comprised of all backwaters and connected lakes except for Crosby, Pickerel, Upper, Little Pigs Eye and North Star Steel lakes.

Hinckley Area

Chisago County

The Chisago chain of lakes (South Center, North Center, South Lindstrom and Chisago) have had good numbers of walleyes in recent surveys. Northern pike grow well in these lakes; there is a 24-36" protected slot for pike in North and South Center. Largemouth bass fishing action should be good for the catch and release season which opens on the fishing opener. East and West Rush lakes are a good bet for walleye and northern pike, as well as good numbers and sizes of crappies and sunfish. Northern pike also grow well in these lakes; there is a 24-40 inch protected slot for pike in East and West Rush. Muskie are stocked in East and West Rush and the season begins June 7.

Isanti County

Green Lake west of Cambridge is a good all-around lake for walleye, northern pike, largemouth bass, crappies and sunfish. The Rum River, with several access points in the county, also offers fishing for smallmouth bass and walleye.

Kanabec County

Walleye in Knife Lake spawned in mid-April and should be well dispersed throughout the lake by the fishing opener. Knife has an 18- to 24-inch protected slot for walleye. Good numbers under 18 inches were sampled during spawning. Crappie action is also good on Knife. Fish Lake, Ann Lake, and the Snake River are other options for walleye, northern pike, bass, crappies and sunfish.

Pine County

Cross and Pokegama lakes, connected to the Snake River system, have a wide variety of fish species. In addition to walleye and northern pike, these lakes have some large crappies and sunfish, as well as channel catfish, and white bass. Muskie are stocked in Cross Lake; the season begins June 7. Lake sturgeon are present in the Snake River system; the catch and release season begins on June 16. Island and Sturgeon lakes, just off I-35, both had recent lake surveys. Results suggest Island might be the better choice for walleye, 20-plus inch northern pike, and keeper size

yellow perch, while Sturgeon Lake has better numbers and sizes of crappies and sunfish and an abundant largemouth bass population. If size isn't an issue, Sturgeon Lake also has numerous northern pike under 20 inches. The season for trout in inland lakes begins on May 10. Grindstone Lake is the only trout lake in the Hinckley Fisheries Area and is stocked annually prior to the fishing opener with rainbow trout and brown trout. Other trout species present include splake, lake trout and brook trout. While Grindstone is not a designated trout lake, a trout stamp is required to keep trout. Grindstone also has fishing for crappies, bass and northern pike.

Southeast Minnesota

Pepin/Pool 4

The 2025 outlook for walleye and sauger anglers is good. Remnants of four strong year classes should provide larger fish for anglers, though those species are down slightly in numbers from recent peaks. During the 2025 angling season individuals from the large 2020 sauger year class should provide opportunities for fish over 20-inches. Smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, yellow perch, black crappie and bluegill should continue to provide excellent angling opportunities during 2025. The consistent bluegill and yellow perch reproduction observed for the last several decades should continue to provide good angling opportunities with quality sized fish. The strong 2018 year class of black crappie will contribute larger individuals to the population for the next several years. These fish are available in large numbers from 10-13 inches in length, so anglers should find plenty of harvestable fish. Northern pike benefited from recent warm winters and the associated survival of gizzard shad. These large shad provide exceptional energy for growing large pike in the system and anglers should have ample opportunities to target quality and even trophy size pike in 2025.

Mississippi River pools

The Mississippi offers a multi-species on all of the different pools. Catfish populations are in great shape in all the pools and will provide great angling opportunities throughout the summer and fall. Early indications are that yellow perch, black crappie and bluegill numbers remain strong in many of the pools. One bright spot in summer sampling in 2024 was an abundance of white bass that should also provide opportunities for anglers.

Rochester reservoirs

Several of the Rochester area lakes experienced supersaturation of oxygen during the winter when clear ice and no snow allowed vegetation to continue to grow through much of the winter. One side effect of this excess oxygen is bubbles developing in the fins of fish causing tissue damage and leading to secondary infections visible as eroded or missing fins. Kalmar Reservoir in particular experience this last winter and a small fish kill was documented this spring. The good news is that spring electrofishing this year has documented good populations of panfish (particularly bluegill) remaining for anglers in 2025.

Southeast Minnesota trout streams

Many streams in the Lanesboro and Lake City areas are at normal to low flow conditions. With another mild winter behind us and lack of rain this spring, anglers can expect to see more instream sedimentation this year and potential growth of filamentous algae and aquatic vegetation. Ideally, spring and summer rainfall will flush the sediment through these systems and improve stream conditions for anglers. Despite these conditions, both adult brook and brown trout populations are in good shape in many streams. Reproduction during these mild years is often high and spring surveys have already shown the year class from last year is strong. Many streams have higher numbers of fish greater than 10 inches due to successful reproduction in previous years as well. Catchable size rainbow trout have already been stocked in many area streams prior to the April trout opener. They are mostly stocked within towns and popular fishing areas to increase angling opportunities for all ages and abilities. Lastly the medium size rivers in the southeast are holding diverse populations of smallmouth bass, shovelnose sturgeon, walleye and redhorse. Fishing these systems can be fun as what you might land is always a bit of a surprise.