Central Region 2015 fishing outlook

Montrose:

Clearwater Lake
Clearwater Lake is a 3,158 acre lake in Wright and Stearns Counties north of Annandale, MN. It has two public access located in the west basin. Additionally, there is a private fee access on the east side of the lake. Clearwater Lake is made up of two basins each filled with enough fish habitat to keep any angler occupied for hours. Clearwater Lake also offers multiple angling opportunities, most notably, Black Crappie, Northern Pike, Largemouth Bass, and Walleye.

Black Crappies appear to be abundant and are reaching large sizes (>14 inches). The Northern Pike population is also abundant with a majority of the fish between 18 and 25 inches although fish up to 35 inches are present. Largemouth Bass are also a popular targeted species in Clearwater Lake, and rightfully so considering their relative abundance and size distribution (7-20 inches). Walleye fry are stocked during the even numbered years to provide a modest Walleye fishery. While numbers were lower than average, the population is still considered to be in good health when the range of sizes (7-28 inches) and average size (18 inches; 2.2 pounds) are taken in to account.

There are no special fishing regulations; however the lake is infested with Eurasian milfoil and care should be taken not to spread this invasive species. Practicing catch and release will continue to ensure healthy fish populations for future enjoyment. If anglers choose to harvest a meal of fish, it is suggested they harvest smaller Northern Pike (<24 inches) due to their high abundance.
Howard Lake
Howard Lake is a 717 acre lake located in the City of Howard Lake in Wright County. Close to half of the lake is less than 15 feet deep providing a concentrated target area for anglers. Notably, Howard Lake has a variety of access points providing multiple opportunities for getting out on the water.

Walleye are stocked every other year to provide anglers with additional fishing opportunities. The number of Walleye caught in 2014 was higher than expected, with fish as large as 26 inches, and averaging 21 inches and 3.5 pounds. Additionally, Northern Pike provide another excellent opportunity for anglers with fish reaching large sizes (>35 inches) and averaging 25.5 inches and 3.8 pounds. An abundance of small crappies were observed during this past spring, suggesting the potential for good fishing in the near future.

Howard Lake has an average number of Black, Brown, and Yellow Bullheads. These underutilized species are often overlooked, but can provide anglers with a unique fishing opportunity to catch large bullhead species (>14 inches). Simple fishing gear and patience is all that is needed to catch these fish.

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Cedar Lake
Cedar Lake is an 837 acre lake located near the Town of Annandale in Wright County. The lake has three public accesses and can be busy on the fishing opener. Cedar Lake offers fishing opportunities for multiple species; however the lake is primarily managed for Walleye and Northern Pike. Walleye fingerlings have been stocked every other year since 1970. The most recent lake survey conducted in 2014 found above average numbers of Walleye with a good average size. Walleye were caught up to 28 inches and averaged 19 inches and nearly 3 pounds. Northern Pike abundance remains high although the average size was respectable at 22 inches and almost 2 ½ pounds. While anglers will encounter numerous pike between 19 and 24 inches, they also have a chance to catch a large fish as pike up to 35 inches were caught during the survey.
Besides Walleye and Northern Pike, Cedar Lake also offers an excellent opportunity to catch Largemouth Bass. Bass numbers during the last survey were high with an average size of about 13 inches and 1 ½ pounds. Thirty percent of the catch was longer than 15 inches while the largest bass sampled was over 19 inches. Black Crappie and Bluegill are also popular species in Cedar Lake and at certain times can provide excellent fishing. Crappies up to 13 inches and Bluegill up to nine inches are found in the lake.

There are no special fishing regulations; however the lake is infested with Eurasian milfoil and care should be taken not to spread this invasive species. Practicing catch and release will continue to ensure healthy fish populations for future enjoyment. If anglers choose to harvest a meal of fish, it is suggested they harvest smaller Northern Pike (<24 inches) due to their high abundance.

Little Falls Area

Little Rock Lake: Often overlooked, or driven past, Little Rock Lake in Benton County has a naturally reproducing walleye population. In some of our most recent surveys there were a few significant year classes of walleye of a size that may be of interest to anglers. Early season can be a great opportunity to target walleye in the basin. There are ample opportunities for species such as Largemouth Bass and Black Crappie as well. Look for the sand flat drop offs and subtle bends in the channel for spots to target. Not to mention, any area with some significant current can also attract a fair amount of Walleye, Northern Pike, Smallmouth Bass and even Channel Catfish.

Fish Trap Lake: Recent surveys suggest the walleye, bass and northern pike numbers and size are looking good. It may be a little more challenging to find the active fish in Fish Trap Lake due to its complex shoreline, but, the reward may be worth it. The lake has a 24-36" protected slot limit for northern pike that appears to be protecting some of the larger fish in the system. Look for the humps and island breaks to find the walleye. Several decent year classes can be caught. Fish Trap Lake can offer some abundant crappie, and this year should be no exception. Look to the back bays around the opener for this panfish and potential bass action.

West Metro:

Upper “Minneapolis Chain of Lakes” (Cedar, Lake of the Isles, Calhoun), Hennepin County
These high-visibility, popular lakes span from the Bryn Mawr to Linden Hills neighborhoods of Minneapolis, with City of Minneapolis parkland or trails surrounding almost all of it. Despite urban surroundings, Cedar, Lake of the Isles, and Calhoun provide good, connected fishing opportunities, with the potential for catching multiple gamefish species. Fishing with typical boat setups is hampered because the lakes’ limited parking and electric-motors-only restriction, but should appeal to those wanting to avoid high-speed boat traffic. For access, use, restriction, and fee specifics, visit the City of Mpls Park and Recreation Board website (or contact them). DNR Fisheries lake surveys were completed in 2014.

Cedar, one of the few lakes in the chain lacking trails around its entire shore, has the benefit of less recreational use. It has a fishing pier and multiple locations to shore fish and put in carry-in craft, and can also be accessed from a channel connecting it to Lake of the Isles. Native top-predator species northern pike and largemouth bass offer the best gamefish opportunities, based on recent survey results and angler reports.

Northern pike numbers have recently increased to middle-of-the-pack levels for lake type, with a favorable size structure featuring 30% of fish 28 inches or larger. Bluegill and black crappie abundances are, respectively, moderate and low; overall sizes tended toward small fish. Walleyes, stocked in odd-numbered years, are present in low numbers. Muskellunge have been stocked in the lake since 2009; from 1982-2007, hybrid (tiger) muskies were stocked. Note the muskie season starts June 6 this year, and muskies in Cedar, Lake of the Isles, and Calhoun have a 40-inch minimum size for harvest and a bag limit of one.

Lake of the Isles: It is the smallest and shallowest of these connected lakes; the aquatic weed growth can often make fishing difficult. As with Cedar Lake, largemouth bass are a good option, northern pike are moderately abundant with a reasonably favorable size structure, and panfish sizes tend to be small. However, bluegill and crappie are more abundant here than in Cedar. While Lake of the Isles is not stocked with walleye, fish have apparently migrated in from Calhoun and/or Cedar; 2014 walleye abundance was, for the first time recorded, better than average for the lake type. Similarly, anglers might catch pure-strain muskellunge stocked into the other lakes, as well as remnants of hybrid (tiger) muskies, last stocked in the system in 2009.

Calhoun is largest and most well-known of these lakes. Though there is a boat ramp, parking is limited to nearby street curbs, which are also used by neighborhood residents and others visiting Lake Calhoun. There is a fishing pier and multiple points to launch small craft or shore fish. Native predators northern pike and largemouth bass are present. The 2014 survey results indicated an increase in northern pike to
levels just above average. About one-eighth of northern pike were 28 inches or longer. Bluegills are moderately abundant, but small-sized, and black crappies tend to be sparse and small.

Lake Calhoun is also stocked with walleye and pure-strain muskellunge; these fishes are present in low levels. A few leftover stocked hybrid (tiger) muskies might still be present—the last stocking was in 2009. Be sure to keep in mind muskie season starts June 6 and these connected lakes have a 40-inch harvest minimum and limit of one.

Lake Susan, Carver County

Lake Susan, in Chanhassen, offers opportunities for the typical regional sportfish mix in a suburban park setting. A boat ramp, fishing pier, shore fishing, and other park amenities are located in the City of Chanhassen’s Lake Susan Park.

This is an 88-acre, shallow body of water (maximum depth of 17 feet). Its high fertility results in low summer oxygen below mid-level depths. Watershed-based projects have been done over the last 8 years to improve water quality. They included reducing carp and Eurasian watermilfoil, planting native aquatic vegetation, and restoring wetland buffers adjoining Lake Susan and upstream portions of Riley Creek.

Northern pike, with abundances increasing steadily over the past 25 years, are the primary attraction for anglers. From 2014 survey results, 14% of the pike were 30 inches or larger. Bluegill appear of normal abundance, but somewhat smallish—30% were 6 inches or larger. Black crappie are below-average in abundance, though size structure was not bad for metro crappies—56% were 8 inches or larger.

Largemouth bass are present, and anglers might have a chance to catch a large walleye; though stocking did not fare well and was discontinued after 2004, a few old, large (over 22-inch) fish might still be present, as walleyes

East Metro 2015 Opener outlook

Bald Eagle Lake (1,046 acres): Located within the City of White Bear Lake and right off of US Highway 61, Bald Eagle Lake provides a solid fishery for both northern pike and walleye, where they were captured at a rate of approximately 3.0 per gill net during the 2014 assessment. Walleye fingerlings (1500 lb) are stocked every other year, thus producing a walleye population that averaged 17 inches and 2.0 lb in 2014. Averaging just over 25 inches, northern pike numbers were consistent with previous surveys and should provide some good action this year. The largest pike sampled was over 27 inches. Bald Eagle also provides very respectable largemouth bass and muskellunge fisheries. Don’t forget the bass catch and release season starts this year and runs from May 9th through May 22nd. The largest muskie
sampled this summer measured over 47 inches. One public access operated by Ramsey County is located just off of Highway 61 on the east side of the lake.

Big Marine Lake (1799 acres): If you like catching panfish, largemouth bass, northern pike and an occasional walleye in clear water, Big Marine is definitely worth a try. Located in Washington County, Big Marine provides anglers a diverse fishing experience throughout the year. Walleye are the only fish stocked at Big Marine (1152 lb every other year) and can provide some decent action. Walleye were sampled in good numbers (3.5 fish per gillnet) and size (average length = 20.2 inches; average weight = 3.2 lb). Be aware, you may have to fish at night for walleye due to the relatively clear water. Pike are numerous but small in size. Two DNR accesses and one county access (fee/permit needed) provide options to the angler venturing out on Big Marine.

**Lake City**

The “Opener” has less meaning here, because the Mississippi River has an open season year-round. But Lake Pepin is still an amazing fishery. Not only for walleye, but there is a great year class of sauger and black crappie moving in. One might not think of here, but the northern pike fishing can be among the best in the state. Jumbo perch? This is the place. An unusual smorgsbord in a place you might not expect.