

# Northwest Region Fishing Outlook for 2022

## Outlook by areas

### Baudette area

The Baudette fisheries area, located in the far northwestern portion of Minnesota, offers a variety of fishing opportunities for anglers for a variety of species and waterbody types. Generally, it is looking like we are going to have another excellent season of fishing. Lake of the Woods is the most popular fishing destination in the Baudette fisheries area (see Northwest Region Large Lake profiles later in this report).

Walleye are the most popular fish with anglers in the area and there are a number of good options for targeting them. Rainy River offers excellent walleye fishing. Each spring, walleye migrate from Lake of the Woods to the Rainy River to spawn. Many of those fish are still in the river when the walleye season opens in May. Besides great fishing, the Rainy River corridor can also offer some protection from the cold winds that often occur during the early part of the walleye season. This can lead to some great fishing opportunities for anglers. Although thousands of anglers flock to Lake of the Woods for the annual walleye opener, not many people fish on the Rainy River at that time of the year.

In the western portion of the Baudette fisheries area, Lake Bronson, Red Lake River Reservoir and the Red River all offer opportunities to fish for walleye. Based on recent monitoring conducted by area fisheries staff anglers can expect to find healthy walleye populations in both Lake Bronson and Red Lake River Reservoir. Opportunities also exist to target other fish in the Baudette fisheries area including species such as northern pike, lake sturgeon, channel catfish, bass and various panfish species. Northern pike can be targeted in nearly every public waterbody in the Baudette fisheries area. The Rainy River offers an excellent opportunity to target large northern pike though large pike have been caught in other waterbodies in the Baudette fisheries area. Lake sturgeon are most likely to be encountered by anglers fishing the Rainy River and fish exceeding 100 pounds have been observed in the river. The best options for anglers looking to target channel catfish in the Baudette fisheries area are the Red and Roseau rivers. Hayes Lake and Lake Bronson are good places to target largemouth bass while the Rainy River provides opportunity to target smallmouth bass. Hayes Lake and Lake Bronson are both good options for anglers wishing to target various panfish.

There is good public access to all the fishing locations referenced above. There are several public boat ramps located along the Rainy River, a public fishing pier located on Baudette Bay in the city of Baudette, and shore fishing opportunities near most public boat ramps and in Franz Jevne State Park. On the Roseau River there are multiple concrete boat ramps. There is a fishing pier at Roseau City Park and bank fishing opportunities at the Stoies bridge access and at Roseau City Park. There are also multiple boat accesses to the Red River in the Baudette fisheries area. Shore fishing opportunities on the Red River exist at the Frank Rose Aquatic Management Area. Access to Red Lake River Reservoir includes two public access points located on the reservoir in the city of Thief River Falls as well as fishing pier in located in the city park. Concrete boat ramps are located at both Lake Bronson and Hayes Lake and both have fishing piers. Only electric motors are allowed on Hayes Lake.

Hayes Lake and Lake Bronson are both located entirely within state parks and as such vehicle permits are required. As a reminder, the Rainy River and Red River both have special border waters regulations. Also, northern pike now are managed according to zones and all water bodies that do not have special regulations fall into the northwest zone regulations. For more information on regulations pick up a regulation booklet or check the [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/).

## **Bemidji area**

With late March snow, the arrival of spring seems to have slowed and staff at the Bemidji Area Fisheries office anticipate an average or slightly late ice-out time. This means egg take and hatchery operations should be in a more typical timeframe.

Anglers should have good luck targeting their favorite opener lakes. Shallower lakes such as Blackduck and Pike Bay are popular choices for area anglers around fishing opener because they are warmer and often have more active fish than deeper lakes. Deeper lakes such as Big Turtle, Turtle River, Plantagenet, Bemidji, Big Wolf, Big Lake and Lake Andrusia may start slow but are excellent choices with their healthy walleye populations. Gull Lake and Grace Lake also present good opportunities for opener walleyes.

The tradition of the walleye opener often overshadows quality springtime fishing for a number of other fish species found in the area. The early catch and release bass season starts on May 14 and runs through May 27. Many lakes in the area offer great fishing opportunities for largemouth bass, which are often pre-spawn during this timeframe. Some of the more popular largemouth bass lakes in the area include Balm, Big Bass and South Twin. Various lakes in the Turtle River chain of lakes present good opportunities for largemouth as well.

Many area lakes also have high quality populations of panfish such as bluegill and black crappie. Anglers should be aware of reduced bag limits for sunfish (five fish daily) on a number area lakes and their connected waters: Andrusia, Beltrami, Big, Big Bass, Big Rice, Buck, Campbell, Cass, Deer, Fox, Gull, Julia, Kitchi, Little Rice, Little Turtle, Medicine, Minerva, Movil, Pike Bay, Pimushe, Three Island, Turtle, Turtle River, Windigo and Wolf lakes.

## **Detroit Lakes area**

Ice-out dates for area lakes look to be in the normal range of mid- to late April. This will result in most species completing spawning activity within the normal chronology. That is, fishing locations and techniques should be predictable with better odds on small to medium sized lakes with darker water where water temperature may be higher. Walleye should remain shallow and be found around traditional Spottail Shiner runs. As such, most bait shops in northern Minnesota should be stocked with this popular bait. Traditional walleye lakes in the Detroit Lakes area continue to have strong walleye populations. Some of these lakes include: Sallie, Detroit, Melissa, White Earth and Island.

Northern pike are always active during the first month of the fishing season. Anglers are reminded of the statewide zone regulations for northern pike. In the North Central Zone, the bag limit is 10, all pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released, and no more than two pike over 26 inches long can be kept.

Black crappie and bluegill fishing is always good in the Detroit Lakes area. Popular lakes such as Sallie, Melissa and Detroit have black crappie populations with good numbers of harvestable fish. While less abundant, trophy black crappie can be found in Big Floyd, Tamarack, Shell and several other less popular small lakes within the White Earth Indian Reservation boundary. Anglers should note new sunfish regulations on Turtle (Becker County), Sarah (Polk County), and Island (Becker County) lakes where the sunfish daily limit is now 10. A new sunfish regulation on Sand Lake (Becker County) is also in effect where the daily sunfish limit is five.

The catch and release angling season for largemouth and smallmouth bass also begins on the May 14 opener, while the harvest season opens May 28. Largemouth bass are common across area lakes, while good smallmouth bass populations can be found in Big Cormorant, Island, White Earth and Strawberry lakes.

Muskellunge were introduced into Detroit and Many Point lakes. A trophy fishery has developed in Detroit Lake and has become very popular among muskie anglers. The Muskie population in Many Point Lake is excellent though not yet known as a destination for trophy sized fish as stocking was only initiated in 2006. The muskie angling season begins the first Saturday in June.

Rainbow trout can be found in two lakes in the Detroit Lakes area, the most prominent of which is Bad Medicine Lake. Catchable-sized fish are stocked both in spring and fall. The trout angling season on Bad Medicine Lake is

closed during winter, allowing fish stocked in the fall significant time to grow. This management strategy not only provides an abundance of harvestable-sized fish, but anglers also have a reasonable expectation of catching a fish of more memorable size. Rainbow trout can also be found in Hanson Lake, located just east of Cotton Lake within the Hubbel Pond Wildlife Management Area. Catchable-sized rainbow trout have been stocked into Hanson Lake in the spring the last three years, providing good angling opportunities in this small lake. The season for stream trout in lakes runs from May 14 to Oct. 31 and requires the purchase of a trout stamp.

## **Fergus Falls area**

Generally speaking, anglers should expect good walleye fishing on area lakes during the 2022 season as several strong natural year classes and supplemental stockings have established abundant walleye populations. Small, shallow lakes are usually popular for the opener because the water temperatures will be warmer and the fish more active. Some traditional favorites for the opener include Walker, Anna, South Ten Mile, Orwell and Fish lakes. Some larger, deeper lakes that presently have strong year classes of harvestable walleyes include Star, Dead, Pelican, Sybil, Eagle and the Pine Lakes. Anglers should be aware that there is an 18- to 26-inch protected slot size limit for walleye on Big and Little Pine lakes.

Northern pike should be feeding actively as they spawn earlier than walleyes. Most of the large lakes in the area consistently produce above-average sized pike. Some smaller lakes that anglers may want to check-out for nice northern pike include Marion, Wall, Anna, Johnson and Jolly Ann lakes. Anglers are reminded of the northern pike slot length limit. The bag limit is 10 with not more than two over 26 inches. All pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released. Anglers looking to take advantage of the 10-fish bag can look to lakes like Swan, Dead, East Battle, South Lida, Heilberger and Loon. These lakes have an abundance of small pike less than 22 inches in length.

Panfish opportunities may be a viable option if the walleye and northern pike are not cooperating. Many area lakes presently support abundant populations of sunfish and black crappie with good size structures. Several of these lakes include Big McDonald, Little Pelican, Adley, McDonald, Schwartz, Dead, Blanche and the Leaf lakes. Anglers targeting sunfish need to be aware of 19 lakes in the area with reduced daily bag limits. The intent of the reduced bag limits is to maintain or improve the size structures of sunfish in lakes that have historically produced quality populations. Lakes with a five-sunfish daily bag limit include West Silent, Franklin, Bass, Middle, Fish by Weetown, and Fish by Parkers Prairie. Lakes with a 10-sunfish daily bag limit include East Lost, West Lost, Crystal, Deer, Wall, Red River, Prairie, Stuart, Star, Big Pine, South Lida, North Lida and Long by Vergas. The statewide possession limit for sunfish still applies for these lakes.

The largemouth and smallmouth bass angling seasons will also begin on the May 14 opener; however, it is catch and release only until May 28. Most area lakes consistently produce abundant largemouth bass populations. Anglers interested in smallmouth bass should look to Pickerel, South Ten Mile, North Lida and Lizzie lakes. Anglers interested in a float fishing trip should consider the Otter Tail River, as it has a renowned catch-and-release only smallmouth bass fishery.

For anglers wanting to try something unique in the area for the opener, Bass Lake in Maplewood State Park is an option for trout fishing. Bass Lake is stocked annually with rainbow trout. Anglers are reminded that a state park permit and a trout stamp are required to fish Bass Lake. The use of live minnows for bait is prohibited and the bag limit is five with not more than three over 16 inches in length.

## **Glenwood area**

By the end of March, there is still a lot of ice on most of the lakes in the Glenwood area and anglers are still ice fishing local lakes. After an early ice out last year, it looks like timing of ice out this year will be average or later than average. Anglers may want to focus on shallower lakes for this year's opener. Typically, our shallow, turbid lakes are your best bet early in the season because they warm faster and fish become more active. These productive lakes also tend to have greater walleye numbers. Many of our larger lakes produced stronger than average year classes of walleye from fry or natural reproduction during the 2018 or 2019 seasons that should lead

to great walleye fishing during 2022. Strong walleye numbers are present in the lakes along the Pomme de Terre River system and would be good options for fishing opener. Lakes Emily and Stowe are also shallow, turbid systems that typically fish well during the earlier part of the season. Other large, relatively shallow lakes that support excellent walleye populations include lakes Mary, Minnewaska, Osakis, Pelican (Grant County) and Reno. As water temperatures warm, look to our deeper lakes that support abundant walleye populations such as Amelia, Andrew, and Big Chippewa.

Northern pike are abundant in the Glenwood Area, and many lakes contain an over-abundance of small pike. All lakes in the Glenwood area are within the North Central Zone for northern pike regulations that were implemented in 2018. Anglers can keep 10 northern pike, but not more than two pike longer than 26 inches. All pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released. Anglers are encouraged to take advantage of the liberal limits on small pike less than 22 inches. One exception to the statewide regulation is a special regulation on Lake Rachel, where all pike from 24 to 36 inches must be immediately released (possession limit is three and only one over 36 inches). With help from this special regulation, Lake Rachel now supports a high-quality pike fishery, with multiple reports of 40-inch fish in recent years. Several other lakes recently sampled that also contain modest numbers of larger pike include Latoka, Mary, Chippewa, Devils and Pelican.

Many lakes in the area offer excellent largemouth bass fishing. Good numbers, as well as bass over 18 inches, have been sampled recently in Elk and Thompson lakes. Smallmouth bass are found in several lakes in our area and their populations appear to be expanding. Lakes Grants, Ida, Miltona, Minnewaska and Osakis offer fishable populations of smallmouth bass.

Those wishing to target panfish have many excellent options as well. Most lakes in the area support good populations of black crappie and bluegill. A few lakes sampled recently that showed strong black crappie populations are Lobster, Turtle, Crooked, Mary and Pelican. Good options for numbers, as well as quality-size Bluegill include Elk, Turtle, Lobster and Mary. An exceptionally strong year class of bluegill from 2015 has been observed in a lot of area lakes and many of these bluegill are now reaching quality sizes. This strong year class, in addition to the new reduced sunfish limits, should increase high quality fishing opportunities. Anglers should be aware of special sunfish regulations that include 10-fish bag limits on lakes Amelia, Andrew, Blackwell, Gilchrist, Grove, Irene, Leven, Mill, Minnewaska, Osakis, Little Osakis, Red Rock, Reno, Vermont and Villard, and five-fish bag limits on Moon, Round and Whiskey.

For a unique opportunity in the Glenwood area, head to Lake Emily for channel catfish. First sampled in 1995, catfish are now fairly abundant in the lake. During the last survey catfish averaged 22 inches, with the largest being 28 inches. White bass, another species unique to the area, are also present in Lake Emily.

A recent addition to the Glenwood area is the opportunity to fish for trout in Spruce Creek, northeast of Alexandria. Since 2019, catchable-size brown and rainbow trout have been stocked annually into Spruce Creek by the Viking Sportsmen and DNR. Shore fishing is available in Spruce Hill County Park. Last fall, 150 brown trout averaging 2-3 pounds were stocked at the park. Trout opener was April 16.

### **Park Rapids area**

Northern pike and walleye spawning will be occurring in April and should be completed fishing opener. Northern pike and walleye should be in post spawn patterns by the May 14 fishing opener. As for other fish species, the timing of water warmup and photoperiod lengths will dictate where that particular species is actively spawning.

Walleye fishing should provide anglers with a chance to hook into some excellent fish. Adult male walleye should be in the post spawn mode, ready to feed. Some of the better early season lakes in the Park Rapids area to target walleye would be Eagle, Fish Hook, Island and Potato chain. As the season progresses, other lakes such as Big Sand, Eleventh Crow Wing, Kabekona, Long, and Upper and Lower Bottle are the go-to lakes for local anglers.

Northern pike are abundant in the Park Rapids Fisheries Management Area. Lakes that have a better overall size structure are lakes that have the special regulation of 24- to 36-inch protected slot such as Big Mantrap, George,

and Fifth and Sixth Crow Wing. In regard to the zone regulation, lakes such as Garfield, Portage, Potato and Straight have high abundance but smaller sizes. In turn, anglers at these zone-regulated lakes can take advantage of the increased possession limit of 10, of which no more than two can be above 26 inches, and all fish between 22 to 26 inches have to be released.

Like most years, black crappie and sunfish action should start getting good around Memorial Day weekend. Lakes that will provide ample angling opportunities in the Park Rapids area are Big Mantrap, Belle Taine and any of the lakes in the Crow Wing chain. Some of the better lakes in the area for largemouth bass are Belle Taine, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Crow Wing, and Little Mantrap. Duck Lake and Lake George also have abundant bass populations but not many large bass. Smallmouth bass fishing should be getting good as the season progresses and some of the better lakes in the Park Rapids area are Belle Taine, Big Sand, Boulder, East Crooked and Potato.

Anglers are reminded that the second round of lakes in the Quality Sunfish Initiative were implemented on March 1. Park Rapids area lakes in this round include First Crow Wing and Garfield lakes. The special regulation is a daily bag limit of five. Lakes from the first round of QSI were Second, Third and Fourth Crow Wing lakes.

Northern pike anglers are reminded that there is a difference between the northern pike central zone regulation and the special regulation for northern pike. In Park Rapids, we have eight lakes with special northern pike regulations and several others for bass, crappie or walleye. These lakes include:

- Northern Pike – Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Crow Wing; George; Big Mantrap and Blueberry
- Bass – Little Mantrap and George
- Crappie – Big Mantrap and Spider
- Sunfish – First, Second, Third, and Fourth Crow Wing and Garfield
- Walleye – Big Sand and Kabekona
- All Species – Lester and LaSalle

If you have no particular fish species of interest and are willing to try different techniques, consider trying Fish Hook or Potato lakes, with a goal of catching multiple species of fish. These two lakes are some of the better all-around lakes because you can find walleye, northern pike, largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill and crappie.

Angles can help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. Lake users are required to remove all aquatic plants or animals from their watercraft and drain all water from their boat before leaving the access. Park Rapids Area Fisheries has been extremely fortunate to not have many lakes with AIS in them. So far, we have three lakes with zebra mussels (Benedict, Garfield and Long lakes) and two lakes with Eurasian water milfoil (Bad Axe and Big Mantrap).

## **Walker area**

The Walker area lakes provide diverse angling opportunities for many species. Boy, Crooked, Pine Mountain, Pleasant and Woman lakes have excellent walleye populations. Surveys completed in 2021 show strong walleye year-classes produced in recent years on Boy Lake and Little Boy Lake that will be harvestable sizes this summer.

Quality smallmouth bass angling opportunities exist on Little Boy, Pleasant, Portage, Ten Mile, Wabedo and Woman lakes. In addition to Leech Lake, Muskellunge can be targeted on Baby, Boy, Man, Little Boy, Wabedo, Inguadona and Woman lakes and their connecting waters. Recent surveys show fish exceeding 50 inches are present in many of these lakes.

Northern pike are abundant in the Walker Management Area. Anglers are reminded of the statewide zone regulations for northern pike. In the North Central Zone, the bag limit is 10, all pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released and no more than two pike over 26 inches long can be harvested. Surveys completed in 2021 show abundant northern pike populations in Boy, Steamboat, Stony and Webb lakes.

For anglers looking for unique opportunities the Walker area manages five rainbow trout lakes. Lakes which provide trout in remote settings include Perch, Hazel, Teepee and Diamond lakes. Long Lake near Longville has a more developed public water access. Black crappie and sunfish can be caught throughout the area with many lakes producing quality sized fish.

Anglers targeting panfish should be aware of newly implemented special regulations in the form of reduced bag limits. New lakes with special regulations which became effective March 1, 2022, include Beuber, Crooked, Welsh, Island, Lower Trelipe, Ox Yoke, Sanborn, Sugar, Upper Trelipe and Vermillion (five sunfish daily; statewide possession limits) and Boy/Swift lakes (10 sunfish, five crappie daily; statewide possession limits).

## Northwest region large lake outlook for 2022

### Lake of the Woods

Walleye and sauger are the most important sport fish in Lake of the Woods, and as such those populations are monitored annually. Annual assessments have been conducted in early September since 1981.

Walleye 14 to 19 inches long were either at or below the historic average last September during the annual fall survey. Catch rates of 14- to 19-inch walleye were lower than observed in recent years; although the strong 2018 year class will begin contributing to the desired harvest range during the summer of 2022. In addition to these keeper-size walleye, anglers should also notice good numbers of small walleye in the 10 to 14-inch range. These walleye showed up in good numbers in our annual fall survey.

Lake of the Woods is well known for the trophy-size walleye. Fish up to 30 inches are sampled every year during DNR sampling. The abundance of walleye greater than 25 inches remains high and should provide anglers plenty of opportunity to catch large fish. Consider that these fish can be quite old, and that it takes a long time for them to get to be of trophy size. Carefully consider what you will do with one of these fish before you harvest it, as it may have more value to the population than as table fare. Generally, a 25-inch long walleye is about 10 to 15 years old, and a 30-inch walleye is over 20 years old.

Sauger abundance has remained high since 2016 due to multiple strong year-classes in 2011 and from 2014 to 2017. Sauger 11 inches and above were abundant during fall gill netting and last winter's creel survey.

Anglers should be aware of special fishing regulations on Lake of the Woods. These regulations are designed to maintain a quality fishery and fishing experiences. The combined walleye-sauger limit is six, but no more than four of those fish may be walleye. All walleye between 19.5 and 28 inches in length must be immediately released, and only one walleye longer than 28 inches may be possessed.

Northern pike are frequently overlooked by many anglers on Lake of the Woods. Both Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River support populations of trophy pike, with individuals over 40 inches long. Northern pike season is open continuously on Lake of the Woods and Rainy River. The period immediately after ice-out is an excellent time to participate in this fishery. Anglers who would like to target northern pike should focus their efforts near spawning sites. Major spawning sites are Bostic Creek, Zippel Bay and the Warroad River, in addition to the Rainy River proper. Northern pike are also managed by special regulation. The possession limit is three. All northern pike from 30 to 40 inches long must be released immediately. An angler may possess one northern pike over 40 inches long.

Lake sturgeon are another species that anglers may encounter, particularly if fishing the lower reaches of the Rainy River or Fourmile Bay. Sturgeon are highly vulnerable to over-harvest, so regulations governing the harvest of these fish are fairly restrictive. Anglers that have purchased a lake sturgeon harvest tag may harvest one lake sturgeon per calendar year. The harvest season runs from April 24 to May 7, and from July 1 to September 30. Anglers may catch and release fish for sturgeon from May 8 to May 15, and from October 1 through the following April 23. The lake sturgeon season is closed from May 16 to June 30, so anglers **cannot fish** for sturgeon during this period. Only lake sturgeon from 45 to 50 inches long, or over 75 inches long, may be harvested.

Anglers should also be aware that lake sturgeon regulations are much more restrictive in Ontario. Sturgeon are

classified as **Threatened** and the fishing season is closed. You may not harvest, or fish for, lake sturgeon on the Ontario portions of Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River. If you are fishing for lake sturgeon, it is very important to know which side of the border you are fishing.

Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River have been designated as infested waters due to the presence of spiny water flea, and most recently zebra mussel within Lake of the Woods. With this designation, anglers have an obligation to prevent the spread of these invasive species to other water bodies. Anglers must make sure they do not transport any lake water in their boats. Bilges, live wells and bait wells must all be drained at boat landings, and boat has to be trailered with all of the plugs out. Check the [DNR website](#) for more specific information of how to prevent the spread of spiny water flea and zebra mussels.

## **Cass Lake**

Cass Lake and its connected waters are typically a good choice for early season walleye fishing with the inlets and outlets of the connected waters being popular early season spots. The walleye population is healthy and comprised of good numbers of fish distributed among many different size and age classes. Angler catch rates should be good, with an abundance of fish from the strong 2018 year class. These fish were an average of 14 inches last fall, making them excellent keeper size for the 2022 season. There are also a number of fish in the low to mid-20 inch range that will provide some quality-sized fish. Although night fishing has been popular on Cass Lake for a number of years, the water has gotten even clearer from the recent zebra mussel invasion making night a prime time to fish walleye. Day fishing seems to be most productive when there is a chop on the water or during low light periods.

The northern pike population is at average levels of abundance with good numbers of fish between 22 and 30 inches. Cass Lake generally produces a few trophy northern pike each year as well. Cass is also well known as a premier native muskellunge lake and anglers catch a wide size range of fish, with some topping 50 inches. Anglers are reminded that the statewide muskellunge season opens on June 5 and the statewide minimum length limit is 54 inches.

Yellow perch numbers in Cass Lake are a slightly below the long-term average, though size and abundance have improved over recent years. Fish are growing rapidly and there are good numbers of fish from 9 to 11 inches.

Zebra mussels and starry stonewort are present in the lake. Remember to inspect your boat hull and anchor for unwanted hitchhikers and drain all of your water and keep your boat plugs out before leaving the landing area.

## **Upper Red**

The fishing outlook for Upper Red Lake is excellent. On waters under the jurisdiction of the State of Minnesota (the eastern 48,000 acres of Upper Red Lake), licensed anglers will be allowed a daily and possession limit of four walleye, with one fish larger than 20 inches allowed in possession for the open water season. This regulation is more relaxed than last winter and will balance harvest across fish of all sizes.

The mouth of the Tamarac River is a very popular early season fishing location. However, early in the season there is good fishing around the entire shoreline break so consider spreading out to get away from the crowds. As usual, there are good numbers of fish from 14 to 18 inches in the population, with many also around 12 inches indicating a strong year class coming into the size that anglers like. Be prepared to accurately measure your catch by having the proper tools in your boat as you will want to keep to just one walleye over 20 inches.

Anglers interested in catching large northern pike are probably already familiar with Upper Red Lake. Northern pike size structure is impressive, and although angler catch rates may be low at times, the incentive is the potential to catch a trophy. Anglers should be aware of the special regulation for northern pike: all fish from 30 to 40 inches must be immediately released, and only one fish greater than 40 inches is allowed in possession. Be sure to examine all northern pike caught for a small tag on the left side of their top (dorsal) fin. These yellow tags have unique numbers and can be reported to the creel clerk, on the [DNR website](#), or by contacting the Bemidji Area Fisheries Office. Tagged fish of the appropriate size may be harvested if you choose; however, if you release a

tagged fish, please do not remove the tag from the fish.

Black crappie numbers remain similar to post “crappie boom” levels that have persisted since the mid-2000s. Catching a few bonus black crappie is a real possibility for anglers who know where to look. Late May and early June will be best, as fish will scatter after spawning and be more difficult to find. There are still some fish out there in the 12-to 14-inch range but a younger year class is also showing up. These younger fish should be around 10 inches and growing.

Anglers should be prepared to encounter a variety of natural resources staff while fishing or accessing Upper Red Lake. In addition to requests by DNR creel survey clerks and conservation officers, staff from the various DNR and Beltrami County invasive species programs may be doing inspections and providing educational information. Red Lake is designated as an infested water with both zebra mussels and starry stonewort present. Spiny water fleas are established in Rainy Lake. That puts other nearby waters at risk for direct transfer of this aquatic nuisance species by boaters, including the Rainy River and Lake of the Woods, Upper Red Lake, and other nearby waters. Anglers leaving any lake should remember that they are required by law to drain all water from boats, live wells, and bait wells and ensure the effective removal of all aquatic plants and/or other invasive species from their boat, trailer and other equipment.

## **Leech Lake**

The 2022 fishing outlook on Leech Lake should be good. Current walleye numbers were within or above various management objectives with considerable young walleye that should be available for harvest for the opener and were being caught this past winter. Walleye in the sample ranged in length from 6 to 31 inches. The walleye regulation of four fish with only 1 over 20 inches allowed in possession was implemented in 2019 and will continue for another season.

New as of March 1, 2021, was the implementation of sunfish and black crappie reduced daily limits on Leech Lake. Specifically, anglers can harvest five sunfish and five crappie daily; statewide possession limits of 20 sunfish and 10 crappie remain unchanged. The purpose of the reduced bag limits is to ensure the high size quality of panfish in Leech Lake is maintained.

Northern pike numbers are consistent and within management objectives with 4.1 fish/net sampled. Catch rates have historically ranged from four to six fish per net and the lower management goal is at least 4.1 fish/net. Northern pike zone regulations were put in place in 2018 and should benefit the northern pike population on Leech Lake.

Yellow perch numbers are below management objectives but larger fish remain present. Perch sampled ranged from 5 to 12 inches with more than 30 percent of fish longer than 8 inches.

A continued focus on Leech Lake are the impacts zebra mussels will have in the future. Immature zebra mussel larvae, called veligers, were found in 2016 and adults were reported lakewide by fall 2021. There are currently no known methods to control or reduce numbers of zebra mussels once they are found in natural systems. Starry stonewort, which is an invasive algae, was found in Steamboat Bay during 2021. Aquatic invasive species like zebra mussels and starry stonewort are moved from infested to non-infested waters by anglers, boaters and lake shore owners and can adversely impact lakes and fish populations. To avoid spreading AIS, lake users are required to remove all aquatic plants or animals from their watercraft and drain all water from their boat before leaving the access. Additional information on all of these topics can be found on the [DNR website](#) or by contacting the Walker Area Fisheries office.