Southern Region Outlook for 2015 Fishing Opener

April 16, 2015 – April 16, 2015 – Mild weather and little snow accumulation this past winter was a relief to many lakes in southern Minnesota, with little to no winter-kill observed on primary fishing lakes. This is a big change from a year ago, when about two dozen lakes were stressed with low oxygen levels coming off of a harsh winter. This resulted in a partial winter-kill that changed fish populations in some shallow lakes. In those situations, the DNR Fisheries crews were able to restock gamefish fry and brood stock to re-boot the fishery, enabling recovery back to naturally sustained populations. This strategy plays out on several shallow lakes in southern Minnesota and is something fish managers stay on top of, so boom and bust fisheries are addressed; making for some fabulous fishing opportunities.

This year’s ice-out dates were a little earlier than normal with the last two lakes to be ice-free, Green and Koronis lakes, near Spicer, occurring on April 8. This is a contrast to 2014, which was one of the latest ice-out dates on record. As a general rule, the advanced spring conditions will warm lakes much earlier, allowing fish species like walleye and northern pike to complete their spawning cycle well before the fishing opener. This makes for prime conditions and a hot fish bite on our shallow lake systems and we anticipate another good year for catching active fish in May.

Water levels on many lakes are still below normal following recent drought conditions this past winter and spring and drought periods the past few years. While a hand-full of boat ramps may be a challenge for larger boats, our Parks & Trails staff have done a great job readying DNR public accesses across the region for normal boat launching and accommodating opener traffic. If you have questions about lake conditions, contact our local Fisheries Office in that area [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/index.html)

Remember anglers and boaters, the aquatic invasive species (AIS) laws are extremely important to follow for preventing the spread of AIS. Clean, drain, dispose and keep all plugs out while transporting. Have a great fishing experience and take a kid fishing!

Some of the highlighted walleye lakes to consider for 2015 are: Collinwood (Meeker Co), Benton (Lincoln Co), Shetek (Murray Co), Mountain (Cottonwood Co), Big Kandiyohi (Kandiyohi Co), Koronis (Stearns Co), Big Stone & Traverse (Big Stone & Traverse Co), Cannon (Rice Co), and Minnesota River. Additional information on these lakes can be found in the following area highlights.

Overview of the DNR southern region by Fisheries area

Hutchinson Area Fisheries – covering Brown, McLeod, Meeker, Nicollet, Redwood, Renville and Sibley counties

General Outlook for Hutchinson Area: The 2014-2015 winter was long, but fairly mild. No significant winterkill had been identified on area lakes as of 4/7/15. Lake and river water levels were normal to low
this spring, following a winter of below normal snowfall. As usual, the shallower and more turbid lakes should warm up quicker, providing some of the best early season action.

Collinwood Lake (635 acres) on the Meeker/Wright County border was netted in 2014 and the Walleye population looked great. The gill net catch rate was 13.5/net, with fish averaging 17.2 inches. Strong Walleye year-classes were produced in both 2013 and 2014. Walleye fry were stocked in 2013 and 2014. Moderate numbers of Northern Pike were gill netted (5.8/net); averaging 22.2 inches in length with fish up to 32.5 inches being sampled. Moderate numbers of Channel Catfish were gill netted (5.4/net) with most of the fish ranging from 16.0 to 19.9 inches in length. Low numbers of Black Crappie were captured, but fish up to 11.7 inches in length were present. A county park is available for shore fishermen and camping is offered.

Minnie-Belle Lake (593 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2014 and the Northern Pike population looked great. The gill net catch rate was 12.6/net with fish averaging 23.98 inches in length. Three Northern Pike were over 35 inches in length. A special regulation, on Northern Pike, is present on Minnie-Belle and all fish between 24 and 36 inches must be released. A preliminary evaluation of the protected slot limit, which has been in place since 2003, indicated that the regulation had shifted the size structure to many more medium and large fish now being present. There were still many fish less than 24 inches in length, available for harvest. Moderate numbers of Walleye were gill netted (6.1/net), averaging 18.8 inches in length. The longest Walleye sampled during an ice-out trap netting assessment in 2014 was 28.6 inches, indicating that trophy sized fish were present. A fishing pier is present, on the north end of the lake, at the state owned aquatic management area. Minnie-Belle Lake has a maximum depth of 49 feet and the water is typically very clear compared to other lakes in Meeker County, but the bite is usually going by Memorial Day weekend.

Jennie Lake (1,064 acres) in Meeker County was surveyed in 2014 and the Northern Pike population looked great. The gill net catch rate was 7.4/net and the average length of Northern Pike was 22.9 inches, with a maximum length of 31.9 inches. Low numbers of Walleye were netted (2.3/net), despite intensive stocking. Walleye fry (approximately 1,000,000 each year) were stocked in 2007, 2008, 2010, 2012, and 2014. Walleye fingerlings were stocked in 2008 (15,616 fish) and 2014 (19,170 fish). Walleye yearlings (5,816 fish) were stocked in 2012. Moderate numbers of Largemouth Bass were sampled during spring night-time electrofishing with many fish being in the 13.0 to 18.9 inch range. A fishing pier is available at the southern public access. Curlyleaf pondweed is often abundant on this lake until early July and the maximum depth is around 15 feet.

Stella Lake (596 acres) in Meeker County was surveyed in 2014 and good numbers of Walleye were gill netted (8.4/net) with an average length of 14.1 inches. Walleye fry are stocked every other year at Stella. High numbers of Smallmouth Bass were gill netted (4.4/net) with most fish falling into the 14.0 to 18.9 inch range. Northern Pike were found in low numbers (4.4/net), but the average size was large (25.9 inches) and fish up to 32.6 inches were sampled.

Other Lakes: Angling last winter on Clear Lake (497 acres) near Watkins was good for Black Crappie and Bluegill with some nice Yellow Perch mixed in as well. Washington Lake (2,639 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2014 and the Walleye catch rate was good (8.3/net) with fish averaging 16.3 inches in length. Walleye fry are stocked every other year at Washington. Good numbers of Smallmouth Bass were also captured (2.7/net) with many fish in the 15.0 to 17.9 inch range. Walleye fry were stocked every other year at Washington. Good numbers of Smallmouth Bass were also captured (2.7/net) with many fish in the 15.0 to 17.9 inch range. Washington Lake (2,639 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2014 and the Walleye catch rate was good (8.3/net) with fish averaging 16.3 inches in length. Walleye fry are stocked every other year at Washington. Good numbers of Smallmouth Bass were also captured (2.7/net) with many fish in the 15.0 to 17.9 inch range. Manuella Lake (289 acres) was netted in 2014 with fair to good numbers of Walleye (3.7/net) and Northern Pike (6.2/net) being sampled. High numbers of Smallmouth Bass were also netted (6.2/net) with many in the 12.0 to 16.9 inch length range. Allie Lake (451 acres) in Renville County often warms up quick and sometimes provides a good early season Walleye bite.

Windom Area Fisheries – covering Cottonwood, Jackson, part of Lincoln, part of Lyon, Martin, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Rock and Watonwan counties

General Outlook: The Windom fisheries management area is located within the prairie pothole region, which is characterized by very productive and shallow lakes. Many of the lakes and wetlands located in
this region are susceptible to winterkill, especially when water levels are low due to lack of fall precipitation and ice is snow covered.

After the harsh winter of 2013-14, one during which many of the area lakes experienced some degree of winterkill, the winter of 2014-15 was extremely mild with below average snowfall, resulting in high dissolved oxygen levels in the lakes throughout the winter. Dissolved oxygen readings for area lakes can be viewed at [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/lakes/aeration.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/lakes/aeration.html).

Recovery from the winterkills experienced during the winter of 2013-14 is well underway as many area lakes were stocked in 2014 with pre-spawn adult yellow perch, walleye (fry, fingerlings, and adults), pre-spawn adult crappies, northern pike (fry, fingerlings and adults), and/or pre-spawn bluegills. A list of lakes and species stocked in 2014 can be viewed at [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/stocking.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/stocking.html).

Based on angler reports from this last winter, it appears that many of the walleye stockings were successful, as small (<10 inches) walleyes were common in angler catches. Barring any setbacks, walleye fishing in southwest Minnesota should be good within 2 or 3 years, when walleyes attain a size acceptable for anglers to harvest. In the meantime, there are a number of lakes throughout the area that can provide good fishing opportunities this spring. For additional information regarding stocking, fish surveys, oxygen monitoring, contour maps, and other fish management activities, please visit the Windom area fisheries webpage at [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/index.html).

**Walleye**

**Lake Sarah (1,176 acres) Murray County:** Lake Sarah is a perennial walleye hotspot, being one of two lakes in the Windom area that has a self-sustaining walleye population. Lake Sarah was last stocked with walleye fry over two decades ago in 1991. Although the 2014 walleye catch rate of 10.3 per gill net was much lower than catch rates in two previous surveys (60.5 and 45.5 per gill net in 2006 and 2010, respectively), Lake Sarah still boasts one of the best walleye populations in the area. During fall electrofishing, many adult walleye likely from several different year classes were observed, suggesting that our nets did not effectively sample walleyes in June, which could explain the below average catch rate. Natural reproduction checks have indicated that the population will continue to be strong, as the electrofishing catch rate of young-of-year walleyes has exceeded 149.5/hour annually since 2010, and was 232.7/hour in 2014. Angling was very slow on Lake Sarah last spring and summer and has continued to be slow through the winter, which is likely a result of the high abundance of prey (black bullheads and yellow perch) available in the lake. Expect the best walleye fishing to be from mid-May to mid-June, and then again in the fall. Make sure to plan ahead, as this walleye “factory” will likely be busy on the opener.

**Lake Benton (2,857 acres) Lincoln County:** One of the bigger waters in the Windom fisheries management area, Lake Benton is poised to provide quality walleye fishing this season. The 2013 population assessment indicated an abundant walleye population at 34.0/gill net, down slightly from the 2011 catch rate of 45.3/gill net, but still well above average for this lake type. A wide range of sizes were present, as lengths ranged from 8 to 22 inches, with the majority of the fish being between 12 and 15 inches. With another growing season under the belt, this strong year class should be pushing 16 to 18 inches, the perfect size to keep. Walleye over 20 inches are likely present, with the opportunity for a trophy not out of the question. It is likely that many of the locals won’t have to travel far to find good walleye fishing with Lake Benton in their backyard. A slip bobber with a leech off rocky points and shorelines early in the season should put a few walleyes on the stringer. Expect accesses to be busy, but the size of the lake should give anglers plenty of room to pursue the wily walleye. Curly-leaf pondweed, an invasive species, is present in Lake Benton. Anglers can help stop the spread of invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the access.

**Lake Shaokotan (996 acres) Lincoln County:** There is no shortage of nice sized walleyes in Lake Shaokotan, likely making it a popular destination when the Minnesota fishing opener rolls around. If you’re looking to tie into an above average sized walleye, Shaokotan is the place to do it. According to
the 2014 population assessment, abundance of walleye is down a bit (10.7 per gill net) but size is up. Walleyes sampled in 2014 ranged in length from 10-25 inches and averaged a whopping 20.5 inches. Seventy-five percent of the walleyes sampled were 19 inches or bigger. If walleyes aren’t cooperating, you might want to try your luck at catching some of Shaokotan’s yellow perch (43.3 per gill net).

**Big Twin Lake (444 acres) Martin County:** Big Twin Lake may be worth checking out on the fishing opener if you’re looking to hook into every Minnesotan’s favorite fish, the walleye. The walleye population is primarily sustained by annual stocking of walleye fingerlings. In the 2012 population assessment walleyes were abundant at 16.0/gill net. Walleyes ranged in length from 8 to 20 inches and averaged a good eating size of 16 inches. Seventy-three percent of the walleyes sampled were 16 inches or larger. With a couple of growing seasons past since the 2012 survey, the walleyes should be dandies as they have likely grown a couple of inches since then. If the walleye bite is slow, Big Twin also offers an abundant black crappie population (61.2/trap net) that may provide some good action. Although the size of crappies was not extremely large in 2012, there were good numbers of crappies that exceed 9 inches in length (25%). Crappies should be a decent size, as a couple of years have passed since the 2012 survey. Big Twin also offers an abundant channel catfish and yellow perch populations.

**Lake Shetek (3,462 acres) Murray County:** Lake Shetek is one of the largest water bodies in the Windom area, consistently producing quality walleye fishing. Lake Shetek was busy this past winter as anglers reported excellent walleye fishing throughout much of the winter. The trend should continue into the spring as Shetek has a decent walleye population as indicted by a catch rate of 5.8/gill net in 2014. Expect the majority of walleyes to be nice fish as 63% were larger than 15 inches long, with fish up to 23.5 inches sampled. Larger fish are present in the lake, as anglers have reported catching a lot of 25 inch plus fish, with the largest reported being 31 inches in length. Prey fish abundance (yellow perch and bullhead) is relatively low in Lake Shetek, so walleyes should be actively searching for their next meal. If walleye action is slow, anglers can try their luck in catching northern pike. The size of northern pike may not be large, but reports suggest that the northern pike population is on the upswing in Lake Shetek, likely the result of stocking and recent efforts to reestablish historic spawning runs. Black and white crappies are also present in Lake Shetek, albeit in average abundance, but action could be fast if you locate a downed tree that they are hanging around. Crappies up to 13 inches were sampled in the 2014 survey. Although fishing pressure may be high on the opener, Shetek’s vast surface area should provide plenty of options.

**Lake Okabena (785 acres) Nobles County:** Located in Worthington city limits, Lake Okabena provides ample recreational opportunity for area residents. Lake Okabena could provide good walleye fishing this spring as the gill net catch rate was 12.3 and the trap net catch rate was 3.6 during the 2014 survey. A lot of the walleye sampled were small (less than 10 inches), but good numbers of walleye over 17 inches were sampled (21 percent). The possibility for a trophy exists with the largest walleye sampled being 28.4 inches. The black crappie population is also abundant (36.7 per trap net) if walleye fishing is slow, but crappies were small (6-8 inches). With all of the small game fish in this lake, fishing should be excellent after 2 or 3 years of growth.

**Kansas Lake (395 acres) Watonwan County:** Although gill net catch rates of walleye have not been as high as those observed in the 1990s, the 2013 population assessment on Kansas Lake indicated a decent walleye population at 10.3/gill net. A good number of the walleyes captured were “keepers”, and would provide some excellent table fare. You may be able to hook into a northern pike here as well, as anglers and spearers had good luck pike fishing this last winter.

**Cottonwood Lake (155 acres) Cottonwood County:** In the 2012 population assessment, walleyes were captured at a rate of 10.7/gill net, which is well above the historical average for this lake. The chance to catch a trophy also exists as walleyes up to 30 inches were sampled. Eighty-one percent of the walleyes sampled were 17 inches or larger. Ice angling activity was steady all winter on Cottonwood Lake, and anglers reported catching some walleyes. The action was never fast and furious, but they consistently would have 1 to 3 fish nights, with fish over 24 inches common.
Clear Lake (415 acres) Jackson County: Throughout the years, Clear Lake has been local walleye angler’s go to lake. Walleyes were captured at a rate of 15/gill net in 2011, but heavy angling pressure during the spring of 2012 may have taken toll on the numbers. However, given Clear Lake’s record of producing a quality walleye fishery coupled with recent stockings, it is likely that some fish will be caught when the season opens. It might not hurt to try chasing northern pike on Clear Lake, as adult pike that averaged a pound apiece were stocked during the winter of 2013 - 2014. With slightly over one growing season complete, these pike should be approaching a harvestable size.

Clear Lake (68 acres) Lyon County: Although an extremely small lake, Clear Lake has an abundant walleye population (27/gill net in 2012) that should provide good angling this spring. In 2012 walleyes ranged from 8 to 15 inches in length and averaged 10.5 inches. More of the walleyes should be approaching “keeper” size after the 2013 and 2014 summer growth. In addition, 387 adult walleye were stocked there in the fall of 2013. The trick may be getting the walleyes to bite, as evidence suggests that the lake has an extremely abundant fathead minnow population, which is likely keeping the walleyes appetite satisfied.

Mountain Lake (241 acres) Cottonwood County: More so known as a bluegill/bass lake, Mountain Lake had a sneaky good walleye catch rate during the 2014 population assessment (21.0 per gill net). You’re likely not going to catch a trophy out there, but getting walleye for the frying pan isn’t out of the question, as most of the walleyes sampled were 13 to 16 inches long. One 24.7 inch walleye was sampled so the possibility for a larger fish does exist. If the walleyes aren’t cooperating, Mountain Lake has good bluegill and largemouth bass (catch and release from May 9 to May 22) populations that could provide some steady action.

Yankton Lake (387 acres) Lyon County: The walleye population in Yankton Lake is doing well, as they were captured at a rate of 8.3 per gill net in 2014. Even more impressive was the size of walleyes which ranged from 7.8 to 27.5 inches and averaged 18.6 inches. Nearly 70% of the walleyes sampled were larger than 15 inches. Although Yankton Lake is typically renowned for its walleyes and crappies, there are decent numbers of northern pike available too. In the 2014 survey northern pike were captured at a rate of 4.3 per gill net, with lengths ranging from 16 to 31 inches. The pike could provide an alternative angling option if the walleyes aren’t cooperating.

Bean Lake (162 acres) Cottonwood County: 7.5 walleye per gill net in 2014; average length of 17 inches in 2014. Rock Lake (379 acres) Lyon County: 6.0 walleye per gill net; average length of 16 inches in 2014. West Graham Lake (519 acres) Nobles County: 8.3 walleye per gill net; average length of 16 inches in 2014. Wilmert Lake (362 acres) Martin County: 28.5 walleye per trap net; average length of 12.7 inches in 2014. Currant Lake (405 acres) Murray County: Anglers have reported good walleye fishing the last two winters. Round Lake (929 acres) Jackson County: 7.8 walleye per gill net; average length of 18.3 inches in 2013. Anglers reported catching walleye periodically this last winter.

Northern Pike

St. James Lake (252 acres) Watonwan County: There is no shortage of pike in St. James Lake (26/gill net in 2013), making it an ideal destination if you are looking for steady pike action. A strong naturally reproduced year class in 2010 appears to be well established in St. James Lake. While the majority of the pike were in the 18 to 20 inch range, pike up to 32 inches were sampled. The pike should be a little bit larger with another growing season complete. Pike fishing in St. James Lake has the potential to be fast and furious when the Minnesota opener rolls around.

Lime Lake (316 acres) Murray County: Lime Lake is one of the more consistent northern pike fisheries in the Windom fisheries management area. Although not sampled well in the 2013 population assessment (0.9/trap net), it is believed that a quality northern pike population exists in Lime Lake. Lime Lake is used as a source for northern pike brood stock which are used for rearing fingerlings in the Windom area. Each spring, 150 to 200 adult northern pike are collected from Lime Lake and stocked into rearing ponds. Lime Lake could provide some good pike action early in the season before water temperatures rise because of summer heat.
Island Lake (163 acres) Lincoln County: Northern pike are on the prowl in Island Lake! In 2011, northern pike were captured at a rate of 27/gill net, which is over 3 times greater than what we would expect for this type of lake. In 2011, the majority of the pike sampled were between 18 and 22 inches, with pike up to 31 inches observed. After three summers of growth, it is safe to assume that there are some dandies swimming around in this body of water. Island Lake also boasts an abundant population (444/gill net in 2011) of nice-sized yellow perch.

Temperance Lake (166 acres) Martin County: Temperance Lake could be hidden gem if you are looking to put some northern pike on a stringer. A population assessment done in 2013 indicated a decent northern pike population as they were captured at rates of 5/gill net and 5.2/trap net. Although northern pike weren’t huge (largest was 25 inches), most of the pike were between 20 to 25 inches in length and would put up a good fight if you hook into one.

East Stay Lake (220 acres) Lincoln County: 7 pike per gill net in 2012; average length was 25 inches. First Fulda Lake (122 acres) Murray County: Anglers and spearers had success chasing pike this last winter. Summit Lake at Hadley (77 acres) Murray County: 6 pike per gill net in 2012; average length was 27 inches.

Spicer Area Fisheries – covering Kandiyohi County and portions of Stearns, Lyon, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine.

General outlook for Spicer Area: The 2014-15 winter started early with decent fishing success, but was met with little snowfall/precipitation and little-to-no winterkill. Currently, water levels are lower than normal so watch out for those shallow points and boulders. The early winter bite was okay, but with some exceptions, winter fishing got challenging after that. Hopefully this year’s opener will bring anglers glorious weather and consistent action. It will be interesting if submersed vegetation levels will be on the rise this year, which can happen after winters that have low snow cover.

Currently, Spicer area lakes that have known infestations of Eurasian Watermilfoil are Green, Calhoun, Norway, Games and Florida. Zebra Mussels were discovered in Green Lake in 2014.

Big Kandiyohi Lake (2,692 acres): Big Kandiyohi Lake, located south of Willmar in Kandiyohi County, is once again one of the ‘best bets’ for walleye in 2015. The lake is large and shallow (15 feet maximum depth). The walleye population has seen a steady increase due to multiple successful fry stockings in 2008, 2009, 2011 and 2013. The 2011 survey indicated a near historical lake record walleye population as nearly 33 walleye were captured per gillnet. Expect a lot of walleye in that “eater” range. As a bonus, ‘jumbo’ yellow perch (10-12 + inch size range) have been biting and even some larger bluegill (8-10+ inch) have been caught if you know the spots. Big Kandiyohi also offers the opportunity to catch channel catfish and smallmouth bass. Periodic stockings of adult northern pike, yellow perch, black crappie and bluegill also occur in this popular southern Kandiyohi County lake. There are 2 county parks, each with boat accesses located on the southwest (Kandiyohi County Park #1) and northeast (Kandiyohi County Park #2) shores of the lake.

Lake Koronis (3,014 acres): Located near Paynesville in Stearns County, Koronis has been an excellent choice for walleye for some time now with the most recent survey (2014) at nearly 20 per gillnet with the majority of fish in that 1-2 pound range. Koronis also offers nice sized northern pike, black crappie, bass (both largemouth and smallmouth) and bluegill. Lake Koronis offers a variety of structure, habitat and depths to explore with your offerings. Koronis is a true gem of a lake in west central Minnesota.

Eagle Lake (824 acres): Located north of Willmar in Kandiyohi County, Eagle Lake walleye has come on in recent years with a 2014 survey gillnet catch of 21.3 per gillnet with most fish in that 1-2 pound range. Eagle is stocked every other year with walleye fingerlings or yearlings and periodically with fry. The 2011 year-class has proven to be a very good one. Eagle Lake also has the reputation of producing large walleye as well in addition to recent black crappie and sunfish angling success. The
2014 survey showed a moderate northern pike population, but excellent average size. The public access is located along the southeast corner of the lake.

Other lakes to consider: Diamond (1,565 acres), northeast of Atwater, is a good lake for walleye and northern pike of all sizes in addition to black crappie and bluegill. Nest and Florida lakes are also good choices for moderate sized northern pike, bluegill and walleye. Norway Lake is worth considering for walleye and black crappie. Excellent shore fishing opportunities for variety of gamefish are found on many area lakes some of which include Willmar and Foot Lakes in Willmar; the east shore of Ringo Lake accessible from Highway 71; Highway 55 bridge adjacent to the Lake Koronis access near Paynesville; below the outlet dam/public access area at Lake Calhoun near Spicer; Lake Florida outlet shorefishing area, etc.

Ortonville Area Fisheries – covering Big Stone, northern Chippewa, Kandiyohi, western Lac qui Parle, northern Lincoln, western Swift, Traverse and Yellow Medicine counties

The Ortonville Fisheries Management Area includes inland lakes and Minnesota-South Dakota border lakes. Anglers are reminded to review the fishing regulations booklet since different regulations apply to border lakes. The border lakes, including Big Stone, Hendricks, and Traverse, are co-managed with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. Anglers can fish the border lakes in their entireties, including from both shorelines, with a single license. If you are a resident of Minnesota or South Dakota you need a fishing license from your state. Anglers from all other states can fish the lakes with a license from either Minnesota or South Dakota. The walleye and northern pike angling season on the border waters began on April 18, 2015.

Many lakes in the Ortonville area provide good fishing for freshwater drum and white bass. These species are very good to eat when prepared properly. Their flavor can be further improved by bleeding them prior to cleaning (cut through their gills when on a stringer or in the live-well), being careful not to get slime on the meat during filleting, and by trimming away the reddish “mud-line” flesh from the outer edge of the fillets. Anglers are encouraged to harvest and consume them. Excellent recipes for preparing drum can be located on the internet by searching "drum recipes". Of course, the recipes can be used for any species of fish.

Big Stone Lake is located in western Minnesota adjacent to Ortonville. It is a narrow lake that measures 27 miles long and up to one mile wide. Big Stone has a surface area of 12,600 acres and a maximum depth of 16 feet. Anglers can expect to find walleye moderately abundant during 2015 with fish present from a wide range of sizes. Early season walleye fishing has typically been very good, with many fish being caught by casting jigs along the shoreline. Exceptional yellow perch fishing has occurred in recent years and is expected to continue. Perch generally bite best during mid to late summer and winter. Good fishing for large bluegills has been common in recent years in the southern portion of the lake around rock reefs. White bass and freshwater drum bite best during late spring and summer and can be found throughout the lake.

Hendricks Lake is located in southwest Minnesota adjacent to Hendricks. It is a highly productive, 1,600 acre lake that has a maximum depth of 12 feet. Anglers can expect to find moderate numbers of walleye present with the majority of them 14-20 inches. Good fishing for yellow perch can be expected as numerous 5–11 inch perch are present. Anglers seeking bullheads will find high numbers, however smaller sizes. The bullheads will attain more acceptable sizes by later summer. Hendricks continues to offer decent fishing for white bass with most fish over 12 inches.

Traverse Lake is located in western Minnesota just north of Browns Valley. It is a narrow lake that is 16 miles long and up to two miles wide. Traverse has a surface area of 11,500 acres and a maximum depth of 12 feet. Anglers should carefully study the lake's contour map before boating as shallow reef areas exist, especially near the islands and in the northwest portion of the lake.

During 2015, anglers will find high numbers of walleye from a wide range of sizes. Trophy walleye opportunities exist and numerous walleye in excess of 10 pounds have been caught in recent years.
Anglers will also find an exceptional white bass fishery with high numbers of 15 inch fish present. The daily and possession limit of white bass on Minnesota-South Dakota boundary waters is unlimited! If you’re looking to catch a trophy channel catfish, look no further.

Channel catfish numbers are high and trophy sized fish are present in good numbers, and you’ll find little competition from other anglers.

Bluegill fishing is expected to be decent with most catches coming from near the shoreline in the spring and the mid-lake reefs during summer. Although bluegill can be difficult to find, it can be worth the search as many of them will be large. Anglers can also expect moderate fishing for northern pike with some fish larger than 35 inches present.

**Lac qui Parle Lake** is located in western Minnesota a couple miles south of Appleton. It is 12 miles long, approximately ½ mile wide and 5,600 acres. It is an impoundment of the Minnesota River and is highly affected by flood water management.

Anglers have experienced tremendous crappie fishing during recent years, especially during winter. This trend is expected to continue, however crappies are more difficult to find during the open water season. Channel catfish are abundant from a wide range of sizes. Anglers are encouraged to pursue them. Good catches can come by fishing the rock reef areas. Freshwater drum have been abundant in recent years, and anglers continue to report catching a lot of them. Drum continue to become more sought after by anglers for sport fishing and eating. Northern pike are abundant, including fish in excess of 35 inches. Spear fishermen reported good success for them during the 2014-15 winter.

Open water anglers frequently have good success for pike around the Highway 40 bridge, particularly near Emily Creek. Despite frequent supplemental stockings, walleye numbers have been lower in recent years. Walleye fishing during 2014 was slow, however assessment netting revealed moderate numbers of walleye were present from 10-20 inches.

**Artichoke Lake** is located approximately 15 miles northeast of Ortonville in Big Stone County. It is 6 miles long, approximately ½ mile wide and 1,900 acres. During 2015, anglers can expect to find good numbers of black crappie and freshwater drum, and moderate numbers of walleye. Several “hot” bites for large crappies have occurred in recent years, especially during fall from the fishing pier located along the southeast shoreline. Drum fishing has been very good, with numerous fish around 15 inches biting during the majority of the summer. Artichoke is a highly recommended destination for anglers with kids who are looking for action. Using night crawlers on jigs or spinners is a good way to catch drum. Walleye angling is expected to be spotty. Walleye are moderately abundant from all size ranges, however high forage levels in recent years have definitely made them difficult to catch. Northern pike numbers are presently low, and anglers shouldn’t expect much success during 2015.

**Oliver Lake** is located ten miles north of Appleton in Swift County. It is three miles long and roughly ½ mile wide. Oliver is split by a county highway into east and west basins. Both basins have maximum depths near 30 feet. A culvert connects the basins, but fish migration between the basins is limited and differences do exist between the fish populations. During 2015 anglers can expect good fishing for smallmouth bass on the east basin. Smallmouths appeared in recent years from an unknown source and a substantial population has developed. Anglers can also expect to find good numbers of walleye, however angling for them during 2014 was slow. Moderate numbers of black crappie and yellow perch are also present. Oliver’s west basin has decent numbers of bullheads, bluegill, black crappie, walleye and yellow perch. These species are present in desirable sizes.

**Steep Bank Lake** is located in Lincoln County 5 miles northeast of Hendricks. It measures 208 acres and has a maximum depth of seven feet. It is a highly productive lake that frequently has dense algal blooms and is prone to winterkill. Steep Bank Lake is managed as a boom or bust walleye and yellow perch fishery. Winterkill hasn’t occurred for a couple of years and presently Steep Bank is in the “boom” stage. In other words, walleye are abundant with many fish present up to 20 inches. High numbers of yellow perch are also present, but on the smaller size measuring mostly 5-7 inches. Perch grow fast in Steep Bank and should exceed nine inches by fall. Fathead minnows can also be
abundant, and at times dramatically affect the bite. Sometimes anglers have to wait until the walleye and perch crop the minnows down before the bite turns on.

**Waterville Area Fisheries – covering Blue Earth, Dodge, Faribault, Freeborn, Le Sueur, Mower, Rice, Steele and Waseca counties**

**General outlook:** An early spring following a pleasantly warm and dry winter 2014-15 comes as quite a contrast to the historically harsh winter of 2013-14. Stable lake habitats, identifiable to anglers as lakes that don’t experience winterkill because of their size and depth, or lack of aeration, should produce good fishing. Unstable lakes, many of which experienced strong full or partial winterkills after last winter, will likely need more time to recover and produce fish of a size that is acceptable to anglers. Winterkill can diminish angling prospects for a year or two, but many times a winterkill comes as a blessing in disguise when a fish community loaded with undesirable fish like common carp or black bullheads kills. The resulting vacancy gives fisheries managers a chance to restock lakes with game fish species and build a strong foundation for a lake’s immediate future. The following list of lakes represents some of the better fishing prospects for open water angling for walleye and northern pike.

For additional information about Waterville area lakes, please use the DNR LakeFinder ([http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html)) or visit the Waterville Area Fisheries webpage at [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/waterville/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/waterville/index.html). 2014 fish stocking reports for Waterville area lakes and streams are also available at the Waterville Area Fisheries webpage.

**Cannon Lake (1591 acres):** Located in Rice County, this lake remains popular on the fishing opener and for good reason. The 2014 lake resurvey found nearly 12 walleyes per gill net lift, with 36 percent of walleye caught larger than 17 inches. With any wind, the long, narrow, shallow, and Cannon River-connected lake builds a strong “walleye chop” and anglers can cover lots of ground while drifting with live bait or trolling artificial lures. A public water access is located on the southeast end of the lake in Shager Park.

**Mazaska Lake (681 acres):** Popular with anglers from the Interstate 35 corridor and metropolitan area, Mazaska Lake offers a variety of species with good numbers of walleye being present (about 8/gill net in 2012). The walleyes in Mazaska Lake are relatively large, as the majority of them fell between 17-21 inches long, with an average length of nearly 19 inches. Larger walleyes were present, with the largest one sampled being 26 inches long. Although 2012 northern pike catch rate (3/gill net) was down from the 2007 survey (11/gill net), it still might be worth a try if you are looking for large pike. Large pike exist in Mazaska Lake, as gators up to 38 inches in length were sampled in both gill nets and trap nets. If the walleyes have lock-jaw on the opener, Mazaska Lake also supports a quality bluegill population, which could provide some steady action if the bite is on. Public accesses are located on the southeast and southwest ends of the lake. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in this waterbody. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

**Fountain Lake (521 acres):** Located in Freeborn County in the Town of Albert Lea, Fountain Lake is worth checking out on the opener. 2011 test netting showed an abundant northern pike population with 14 pike being captured per gill net. Northern pike weren’t huge but did average a little over 2 pounds and ranged from 19 to 26 inches. A healthy walleye population is also present in Fountain Lake as they were sampled at a rate of 6/gill net in the 2011 survey. Walleyes were nice-sized as the average length was almost 21 inches, and all of the walleyes were greater than 15 inches. The opportunity to hook into a trophy walleye is also present, with the largest sampled walleye measuring just over 27 inches. If the popular walleye and northern pike aren’t biting, you might want to try your luck in catching some channel catfish. Channel catfish were sampled in high numbers (about 14/trap net) during the 2011 survey and the cats were nice, averaging nearly 21 inches with the largest being almost 31 inches. Respectable populations of bluegill and black crappies were also present. Public accesses are located on the northern side of the lake in Edgewater Park, and on the east side of the lake in the narrows connecting the northern basin to the southern basin.
**Lura Lake (1359 acres):** Lura Lake in Blue Earth County is entering a cycle of fishing renaissance. After seeing declines in nearly all gamefish species over a 10-15 year period, the lake is showing great promise following test netting in 2013. Walleye have rebounded to 5.8 fish per gill net lift. Average walleye size was just over twenty inches. Walleye fry stocking occurs 3 out of 4 years. Northern pike abundance has jumped to 10.5 fish per gillnet with an average size of 2.7 pounds. The future for these predators appears strong as yellow perch are doing exceptionally well. 147 yellow perch per gillnet were captured. Average size was around 8”, a size anglers find acceptable. The perch should provide angling and forage for larger predators, although anglers may have a hard time catching those larger predators that are now well-fed. Public accesses can be found at Daly Park on the north end, the Sportsmens Access on the northwest end, and the county access on the southwest end.

**Minnesota River (Courtland to Henderson):** The Minnesota River, managed amongst a handful of Minnesota DNR Area Fisheries offices, offers some of the best and most underutilized walleye fishing in the state. The stretch of river from Courtland to Henderson is co-managed by the Waterville Fisheries Area and offers a variety of river habitat types unique to the middle Minnesota River. Sauger, white bass, northern pike, channel catfish, and flathead catfish provide additional sport fishing opportunities and numerous other species (gar, suckers, buffalo, sturgeon, mooneye, carp) make for fun fishing. For a list of accesses, consult an atlas or check out these maps: [http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/canoe_routes/minnesota3.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/canoe_routes/minnesota3.pdf), [http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/canoe_routes/minnesota4.pdf](http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/canoe_routes/minnesota4.pdf). Walleye opener is usually a time of high stage and moderate flows on the river with less chance of collision hazards like snags, boulders, or exposed sandbars. Always travel the river with caution and observe USGS gaging station online reports before your trip for stage and flow predictions. Anglers looking for walleye and sauger should try fishing tributary mouths, boulder or rip-rapped banks, gravel bars, rapids, and the front, middle, and back ends of deep pools.

**Tetonka Lake (1,358 acres):** Although 2014 gill net catches indicated a sparse walleye population, anglers typically report a good walleye bite for a few weeks after the opener. A creel survey was conducted on Tetonka Lake in 2012. From the fishing opener through the end of the month of May, walleye fishing was some of the best of the year. During the month of May, walleye were caught at a rate of one fish every 51 minutes amongst anglers targeting walleye. Winter fishing reports and electrofishing during the Cannon River survey showed an abundance of 2013 and 2014 walleye year classes. Public accesses are located on the Cannon River between Tetonka Lake and Upper Sakatah Lake in the Town of Waterville, and on the south shore of the lake near the Waterville Fisheries Office.

**Fox Lake (312 acres):** Located north of Faribault approximately 8 miles in Rice County, Fox Lake boasts good numbers of northern pike and walleye. Northern pike and walleye were captured at a rate of 8.4 and 8.6 per gill net, respectively, during a 2011 test netting of the lake. The majority of the walleyes would make some good “eaters”, ranging from 13 to 20 inches in length in 2011 and adding on three years growth since. Northern pike tended to be small in 2011 and ranged in length from 17 to 23 inches, but should be larger now with some extra growing seasons under their belts. A public access is located on the south shore of the lake. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in this waterbody. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

**Jefferson Chain of Lakes, German Lake:** (2,540 acres): The Jefferson chain of lakes (East, Middle, Swede’s Bay, and West Jefferson lakes; located northeast of Mankato in Le Sueur County) and connected German Lake should provide good pike angling as a couple of strong year classes are present as a result of pike fry stockings. Angler reports from last summer and winter have been favorable, as anglers have reported catching good numbers of eater sized pike. 2013 test netting showed northern pike abundance anywhere from 5.5 pike per gillnet on Middle Jefferson all the way to 9.9 pike per gillnet on German Lake. Boat accesses are located on the east side of East Jefferson and the east side of West Jefferson. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in these waterbodies. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.
Cedar Lake (885 acres): Northern pike are on the prowl in Cedar Lake! Cedar Lake is located approximately 6 miles to the west of the Town of Faribault, in Rice County. In 2012, northern pike were very abundant and were captured at a rate of 11.2/gill net. Northern pike were a little on the small side, ranging in length from 16 to 29 inches and averaging 21 inches, but should be a bit larger after three years of growth. A public access is located on the north side of the lake. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in this waterbody. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning vegetation off of boats and trailers before leaving the access.

Duck Lake (290 acres): Duck Lake is located in Blue Earth County north of the Town of Madison Lake. While walleye are a rarity in Duck Lake, northern pike seem to be doing pretty well. The 2011 test netting returned an average of nearly 7 pike per gill net, with roughly 70% of the pike being greater than 21 inches long. Duck Lake has been a northern pike brood stock lake for Waterville Area Fisheries stocking efforts because of the quality sized pike available. A public access is located in Duck Lake County Park on the south shore of the lake.

Washington Lake (1519 acres): Located northeast of Mankato in Le Sueur County, Washington Lake has supported a strong population of walleye in recent years, which results from fry stocking 3 of every 4 years. The 2013 catch rate was over five walleye per gill net lift. The average length of walleye sampled was over 16 inches, while the largest fish measured was 26 inches. While Washington doesn’t have many northern pike, the fish that are present are large. Washington is best known for its abundant and large bluegills and crappies; if fishing for walleye or pike is slow consider downsizing and targeting panfish. Public accesses are found on the west side near Westwood Bar and Grill or the Northeast corner of the lake.

Madison Lake (1,439 acres): Located by the Town of Madison Lake in Blue Earth County, Madison Lake has been a perennial walleye hotspot. Fry stocking has been the ticket to maintaining an abundant walleye population. The 2014 survey showed walleye abundance has fallen off over the past four years, from 11 walleye per gillnet in 2011 to 4.6 walleye per gillnet in 2014. The historical average for Madison (1955-present) has been over 7 walleye per net. Expect nice sized walleyes as gill netted fish averaged 19.5 inches and 2.9 pounds. Respectable black crappie and bluegill populations may provide additional angling opportunities. Madison will likely be busy on the opener so plan ahead. Boat accesses are located in the Town of Madison Lake, in Bray County Park, and north of Bray County Park. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in this waterbody. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

Roberds Lake (625 acres): Just west of Faribault is where you can find Roberds Lake, complete with a public access on the west end and two family resorts to offer lodging. This Rice County lake has an abundant northern pike population. The 2013 survey found over seven northern pike per gill net. Besides the fast northern pike action, a great diversity of other options are available at Roberds lake including white bass, walleye, black and white crappie, bluegill, largemouth bass, and channel catfish.

Other waters: The Cannon River chain of lakes (Gorman, Sabre, Upper and Lower Sakatah, Tetonka, Cannon and Wells) support good numbers of walleyes including strong 2013 and 2014 yearclasses that should carry the fishery forward. There are numerous shore fishing opportunities including a fishing pier at the Waterville Area Fisheries Headquarters on Lake Tetonka; the bridge between Upper and Lower Sakatah; a park area in the City of Morristown; and the bridge between Cannon and Wells lakes. Also, approximately 4 miles of the Cannon River between Morristown and Warsaw flow through the Cannon River AMA and WMA. The Blue Earth River could be worth a try when flows are moderate. For other shore fishing opportunities, search for the aforementioned lakes and rivers on the Fishing piers & shore fishing sites page.

Minnesota River Fishing Outlook
Overview: The Minnesota River is a tremendous recreational resource stretching over 320 miles across Southern Minnesota and provides excellent angling opportunities for Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish, Sauger, Walleye, and White Bass with occasional opportunities to catch Crappie, Northern Pike, and Smallmouth Bass. Catching a 50lb Flathead Catfish, 20lb Channel Catfish, or 10lb Walleye from the Minnesota River is always a possibility. The Minnesota River is also one of the best locations for catching less targeted species such as Buffalo, Common Carp, Freshwater Drum (sheepshead), Gar, and Redhorse. Starting this year, it is also legal to catch and release Shovelnose Sturgeon from the Minnesota River. Given the limited snow and early ice-out for the Minnesota River, anglers can expect excellent river conditions for early spring fishing and the 2015 fishing opener. Please review the 2015 fishing regulation handbook for specific rules and seasons.

Access: Shore fishing access can be found at numerous State Parks (Fort Snelling, Minneopa, Upper Souix Agency), County Parks, City Parks, National Wildlife Refuges (Minnesota Valley, Big Stone), Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, and boat ramps situated along the banks of the Minnesota River. Boats and canoes can access the Minnesota River at over 50 state, county, and city owned boat ramps. Always use extreme caution when boating on the Minnesota River. Consult the DNR’s Recreation Compass to learn more about shore fishing and boat access locations on the Minnesota River [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/compass.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/compass.html).

General Fishing Tips: One of the most effective methods for catching a variety of fish species from the Minnesota River is using a simple 1/8th - 5/8th oz. jighead baited with a minnow, piece of nightcrawler, or plastic grub. This presentation will catch everything from Channel Catfish and Walleye to Common Carp and Shovelnose Sturgeon. When targeting Walleye in the Minnesota River focus fishing effort near tributary mouths, rip-rap banks, rocky bottoms, gravel bars, areas around deep pools, and near current breaks. When targeting trophy Flathead Catfish it is best to use large live bait such as Black Bullheads, Creek Chubs, or White Suckers. These live baits should be fished near the bottom and held in place by a 2-6oz sinker depending on the current. During the day it is best to target Flathead Catfish near deep holes and structure such as large log jams. Flathead Catfish can be found in the same locations at night, but are also often caught roaming shallower habitats in search of an evening meal. When fishing the Minnesota River it is recommended that you use heavier line and tackle so you can effectively fight fish against the current and keep fish away from log jams and sharp rocks that could cut your line.

Upstream of Granite Falls Dam: The Minnesota River from Granite Falls Dam upstream to Ortonville provides good Channel Catfish, Freshwater Drum, and Walleye fishing. The most popular shore fishing locations are below Lac qui Parle Dam, Marsh Lake Dam, Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge Dam, and Ortonville Dam. However, numerous other public shore fishing locations are present. Also, several boat ramps are found along this stretch of river but boating can be limited by shallow depths. White Bass fishing has been poor in recent years due to a winter die-off that occurred during 2011 in Lac qui Parle Lake.

Granite Falls Dam to Mankato: This stretch of the Minnesota River provides outstanding fishing for Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish, and Walleye. Walleye fishing in this portion of the Minnesota River is typically best during spring and fall. Many anglers fish tributary mouths and rocky habitats during the spring and areas around deep holes during late fall. The New Ulm area is well known for several deep holes where anglers may find hungry walleyes. Also, the 4 miles of river immediately below Granite Falls Dam can provide outstanding fishing during the spring. The portion of river between Granite Falls and Mankato is very complex with lots of log jams, bends, and deep holes for monster catfish to hide in. You’ll likely be rewarded by a trophy catfish if you spend time fishing these areas during July and August. If you’re feeling competitive, you may want to check out the Franklin Catfish Derby Days in July. Some great shore fishing can be found at Memorial Park near Granite Falls, Minnecon Park in New Ulm, and Sibley Park in Mankato.

Mankato to the Mississippi: This stretch of the Minnesota River provides some of the best opportunities for catching Sauger and White Bass along with the usual trophy size Minnesota River Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish, and Walleye. You can launch a boat at most towns situated along
the river between Mankato and St. Paul (St. Peter, Le Sueur, Belle Plaine, Jordan, Shakopee) and you won’t have to motor far to find big fish. With the help of catch and release angling, Flathead Catfish live a long time in the Minnesota River allowing some to exceed 50lbs in weight. The lower 17 miles of the Minnesota River downstream of the Hwy 169 bridge are the most navigable by larger boats, but watch out for barge traffic. Toss a night crawler or minnow into the Minnesota River and you might be surprised by what you catch.

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