

Commissioner's Order #3 ML 2025: Mille Lacs Lake Winter Fishing Regulations

Effective Date: December 1, 2025

Statutory authority: *Minnesota Statutes*, section 97C.005, subdivision 3

Amends: Commissioner's Order #2 ML 2025: Amend Walleye Regulations for Open Water Angling on Lake Mille Lacs, as published on August 18, 2025 (50 SR 177); and those portions of Expedited Emergency Rule Minn. R. 6264.0400 relating to season and possession limits for walleye, yellow perch, and northern pike, as published on April 28, 2025 (49 SR 1193).

BACKGROUND

Each year harvestable surpluses are set for walleye, yellow perch, and northern pike in Lake Mille Lacs by a joint management process between the state and the eight Ojibwe Bands signatory to the Treaty of 1837. The harvestable surplus is the pounds of each species that can be taken safely from Lake Mille Lacs while ensuring sufficient numbers remain in the lake for a healthy population. The harvestable surplus is then divided between the State of Minnesota and the eight Ojibwe Bands. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) sets fishing regulations to keep within the state's share of the harvest. The harvestable surpluses for 2026 will not be determined until January 2026, but regulations must be in place for the winter prior to that date. Based on 2025 fall fisheries surveys, DNR anticipates that the 2026 harvestable surplus will allow for harvest of walleye, yellow perch, and northern pike by state-licensed anglers during the winter 2025-2026 fishing season while not exceeding the state's share of the harvest. DNR will continue to monitor walleye, yellow perch, and northern pike populations and modify regulations to ensure the state's harvest remains within its share of the

harvestable surplus and may adjust regulations as needed, including in advance of the open water season that will begin on May 9, 2026.

The winter 2025-2026 fishing season for walleye, yellow perch, and northern pike will commence December 1, 2025. For walleye, the winter season will extend through February 22, 2026. For yellow perch, the winter season will extend through May 8, 2026. For northern pike, the winter season will extend through March 31, 2026. Additional restrictions for these three species are outlined in the order below.

For all other species, the Expedited Emergency Rule adopted on April 28, 2025 remains the same.

ORDER

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, pursuant to authority vested in me by law, including *Minnesota Statutes*, section 97C.005, subdivision 3, that:

1. The winter angling season for walleye begins at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2025, and continues to 11:59 p.m. on February 22, 2026. While a person is on or angling in Lake Mille Lakes or its associated tributaries to the posted boundaries, the daily and possession limit for walleye is three, provided:

- a. a walleye in possession must be 17 inches or more in length, and
- b. only one walleye in possession may be greater than 20 inches; all other walleye must be returned immediately to the water.

2. The winter angling season for yellow perch begins at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2025, and continues to 11:59 p.m. on May 8, 2026. While a person is on or angling in Lake Mille Lakes or its associated tributaries to the posted boundaries, the daily and possession limit for yellow perch is ten.

3. The winter angling season for northern pike begins at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2025, and continues to 11:59 p.m. on March 31, 2026. While a person is on or angling in Lake Mille Lakes or its associated tributaries to the posted boundaries, the daily and possession limit for northern pike is five, provided:

- a. only northern pike less than 30 inches may be harvested; all other northern pike must be returned immediately to the water.

Fishing regulations for all other species, including largemouth and smallmouth bass, muskellunge, cisco, and panfish, are unaffected by this order.



Sarah Strommen, Commissioner

Date: November 21, 2025