Lake Superior Summer Creel Fishing Report

The Lake Superior summer creel survey has been conducted annually since 1969. The summer creel survey provides estimates of angling pressure, harvest, and catch rates along the North Shore of Lake Superior. The survey focuses mainly on Lake Trout, Chinook Salmon, and Coho Salmon.

Two creel clerks conduct the summer creel survey from the Memorial Day weekend through the first full weekend in October. The Lower Shore clerk interviews anglers from Duluth to Two Harbors, while the Upper Shore clerk interviews anglers from Twin Points to Hovland. Clerks follow pre-determined schedules to ensure that their data accurately represents all anglers’ effort and catch on Lake Superior.

Fishing reports are updated on Thursdays at the Minnesota DNR’s web page for the Lake Superior fisheries office. The web address is at http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/lakesuperior/2020-su-creel.pdf. You may also call our office at 218-302-3293 and selecting 1 for the updated fishing report.

Update 10/8/2020:

The Lake Superior Lake Trout Fishing season and the Summer creel survey have ended. The Lake Trout season will reopen on December 1. To protect spawning Lake Trout, fishing is not allowed during October 5 through November 30 from boats, in an area near Duluth between the mouth of Chester Creek and the Duluth lighthouse. Otherwise, anglers may fish for salmon, Rainbow Trout, and Walleye in Lake Superior and in tributaries below posted boundaries. Most salmon are caught while trolling near shore in the upper 80 feet of the water surface. All unclipped Rainbow Trout must be released immediately. Walleye season will close after March 1 and re-open on May 15. Biweekly fishing reports will begin again next spring when the tributaries open up and the Spring Creel survey commences. The Summer creel survey will begin on May 29 and weekly Summer fishing reports will begin on June 3. If you would like to see any of the past weeks reports, go to the Minnesota DNR’s Lake Superior office website and click on Updates for Lake Superior fishing reports and then choose the summer report.

Update 10/1/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
Surface temperatures were in the mid-50s near Duluth and the mid 40s from McQuade to Two Harbors and the temperatures varied with the wind. Fishing effort was up and down this past week, as some days were rather windy. There was very heavy pressure over the weekend, probably in anticipation of the end of the Lake Trout season and the possibility of catching the start of pre-spawn staging by Lake Trout near shore. Anglers caught just ¾ fish per trip, nearly all Lake Trout. Many charter captains and other marina folks are pulling their boats out of the water for the winter. Anglers reported that Lake Trout have begun to move onto the spawning reefs, but the bite was slower than expected when jigging those locations. Spoons (pink/chartreuse) and stickbaits (orange) picked up most of the trolled fish. The Lake Trout ranged from 16 to 28 inches long, with more of the smaller fish from trolling and the larger fish from jigging on spawning structure. Shorecasting near Knife River and Two Harbors has been producing only lake herring. The clerk only saw one salmon this past week and it was a small, 13 inch Chinook Salmon. The salmon are moving toward and into the spawning rivers now. Fishing effort in the St Louis Estuary was minimal.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water temperatures have been swinging between the low 40s and 50 degrees. Angling effort was light, which is typical this late in the season. Anglers from Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais report that adult Lake Trout are beginning to congregate, mostly in specific deeper water areas adjacent to shore. Although
most anglers have struggled to put together a good catch recently, a few anglers have found the Lake Trout collections and overall anglers caught about a fish per trip. Lake trout are not yet moving into very shallow water and so far shore casting has been slow. Anglers continue to target salmon and their catch consists of a few smaller Chinook Salmon. Anglers also caught steelhead on occasion, especially when trolling in the upper part of the water column, and some of these fish were larger than average. In the tributaries, Pink Salmon, or humpies, moved in a couple of weeks ago, however their numbers are not as high as their earlier catches in the lake fishery would indicate. The humpies will not last much longer and they are showing signs of wear as their spawning run reaches its end.

As a reminder, the Lake Trout fishing season on Lake Superior ends after this next weekend, on October 4. Fishing remains open for salmon and other species after that, except near the lighthouses and to the Northeast from the Canal Park area. Please see the Minnesota fishing regulations for details.

Update 9/24/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
Fishing was slow again this week, and it looks like salmon are likely staging or ascending rivers. The thermocline was at 40-50 feet down, although the wind occasionally set up a surface temperature break from 53°-48°. Lake Trout averaged 17-23 inches, with a few in the 26-28 inch range. Chinook Salmon were mostly 12-14 inches and 21-23 inches, with the larger adult fish being harder to find. One random 27-inch Northern Pike was caught off Duluth. Spoons on downriggers and stickbaits on leadcore took fish 35-60 feet down in 40-120 feet of water, although flasher/fly rigs picked up a few of the larger fish. Pink and green are still good general colors. Some anglers are reporting that Lake Trout don't seem to be up on the spawning reefs in big numbers yet. There were a few Estuary anglers, but fishing success was relatively low. There was some nice boating weather this week, which resulted in a high proportion of pleasure-boating traffic at Rice's Point, as well as some low-intensity fishing effort (more of a slow boat ride). Hopefully we get more rain this week to set up mud-lines and allow salmon to spawn on the North Shore.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Anglers from upper shore waters have continued to report slow fishing, less than ¾ fish per trip on average, despite a moderation in water temperatures from very cold water earlier. Water surface temps averaged in the mid 40s along the upper shore area with some slightly warmer water, near 50 degrees, closer to Silver Bay and South. Similar to the lower shore area, Lake Trout remain scattered and are not yet congregating in usual late season areas. Charters are doing somewhat better and also some dedicated deep water anglers but the bite has been tough for these anglers, though their better success indicates that best angling opportunity is to be had in deep water haunts. The salmon have dissipated and catches are sporadic. Pink Salmon are present in larger tributaries in modest numbers. Water levels are quite low in upper shore tributaries and only the larger rivers have water available for Pink Salmon to enter. Angler pressure on tributaries was light to moderate with the Baptism, Temperance, Cascade, Devil Track and Brule receiving the most attention recently. We’ll see if the recent rain brings in more salmon.

As a reminder, the Lake Trout fishing season on Lake Superior ends on October 4. Fishing remains open for salmon and some other species after that, except near the lighthouses and to the Northeast from the Canal Park area. Please see the Minnesota fishing regulations for details.
Update 9/17/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
Switching winds made finding fish more difficult this week. On average, anglers only caught 1/3 fish per trip. Things started out with a good surface bite on 9/10-9/11 off Duluth, starting with green stickbaits and moving to orange/gold, but the wind started shifting, first from the Northeast which pushed fish deeper, and then Southwest winds moved water offshore again. Lots of folks got out fishing over the weekend, with low success and especially from small boats, but effort dropped off during the workweek. The water is cool enough for Lake Trout to move relatively close to shore in 100 feet of water or less, although the temperature break at 49-56°F holds the most fish if that break can be found. Flasher/fly rigs with meat still took some fish, as well as spoons. Green, pink, and orange seem to be the best colors, depending on the day. The thermocline has been moving around as the wind moves the water, but much of the best fishing has been from the surface down to 50 feet, and probably on the bottom when jigging as well. The thermocline at the offshore buoy is currently at 35-85 feet. Lake Trout ranged from 18 to 29 inches, the few Coho Salmon that were caught were 9-21 inches, and several Chinook Salmon were anywhere from 13 to 27 inches long. Minimal fishing occurred from Rice’s Point, mostly shore fishing.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Poor weather conditions and cold water have held angler pressure down and, as is usual, angler pressure is diminishing at this time of the season on the big lake. Strong winds blew on a daily basis, mostly from the North and West. Water temperatures barely exceeded 40 degrees in nearshore waters. Fishing is slow overall at about ¾ fish per trip. The Lake Trout are not yet staging in very nearshore areas, and the fish are not being caught in reliable deep water areas either. Given how close to the spawning season it is, the fish should be moving close to shore soon. Salmon catches are minimal, especially from Taconite Harbor and Northward. Anglers from Silver Bay and Twin Points caught a few Coho and Chinook Salmon, however those catches are declining as well. Pink Salmon are now entering upper shore tributaries and fair numbers of humpies were easily spotted on shallow gravel spawning areas at the Brule and Devil Track Rivers.

Update 9/10/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
Strong West to Northwest winds this week managed to push the warm water offshore, leading to water temps as low as 39 in some places nearshore. Overall, anglers caught about ¾ fish per trip on average. Anglers near Duluth had better success trolling in 140-160 feet of water at depths of 60-80 feet, as well as down near the bottom. Flasher/fly rigs with meat as well as spoons did well. A color pattern hadn’t really developed yet, although the Chinook Salmon seemed to like pink. Jigging at 80-120 feet picked up a few Lake Trout, though not as effective as previous weeks. While spreading fish out throughout the water column, the cold water did bring a few fish closer to shore where trolling or casting stickbaits and spoons picked up some Herring and small salmon, Pinks and small Cohos. The average Lake Trout this week was 20-24 inches long, but a few larger fish of 28-34 inches were reported. Fishing pressure from small private boats out of Duluth was light again this week, with the bulk of the trailered boat traffic from McQuade to Two Harbors on Saturday.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
During this past week anglers experienced difficult conditions with strong westerly winds causing consistently rough lake conditions. The winds led to sharply colder nearshore temperatures, running consistently from 38 to 42 degrees throughout the area. As a result, fishing has been very tough and anglers caught
barely over ½ fish per trip on average. The Lake Trout were scattered and the salmon catches were diminished. Many of the Lake Trout that anglers did catch were nice sized 5-8 pounders. Anglers caught steelhead throughout the area and some of the fish were up to 28 inches long. Chinook Salmon were fairly small at 2 to 4 pounds and the Cohos were relatively decent sized at 2 to 4 pounds also. The Cohos are taking on more spawning colors. Anglers also caught a fair number of smaller Cohos, in the 10-14 inch range. Lake anglers caught a fair number of Pink Salmon previously, however the Pinks appear to have headed to the upper shore tributaries. By now they should be easy to see in streams, especially since the water is so low and the fish usually have visible light-colored patches by now, but spotting them has been difficult at least as of Wednesday, September ninth.

**Update 9/3/2020:**

**Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:**
East to Northeast winds again pushed the warm water toward Duluth for the first half of week, keeping fish deep. However, strong westerly winds in the second half of the week have moved the nearshore thermocline as high as 35-60 feet down, with the offshore thermocline in the 70-100 feet range. Fishing pressure was high when the winds allowed, but the fish were so deep, at least 100 feet down, that most anglers had limited success. Overall, anglers caught about ½ fish per trip. Those that did the best were fishing flasher/fly or dodger/fly combinations with meat. Green and white are still good attractor colors (typically with some glow-in-the-dark), and occasionally pink trolling flies did well. Jigging for Lake Trout is still productive closer to Two Harbors. The fishing effort near Duluth came mostly from Charters and a visit by Vice President Michael Pence closed the Rice’s Point access on the 28th. Lake Trout averaged 20-23 inches, with a couple 30-40 inch fish also reported. Minimal other fish besides Lake Trout were caught; even the Chinook Salmon were caught in deeper water. The weather pattern has shifted with cooler temps and more wind in the forecast, so we may see fall patterns develop soon.

**Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:**
As east winds dominated through this reporting period, warm surface water pushed against the north shore and water temps were consistent through the entire shore range at 61-63 degrees. Some anglers with down rigger temp instruments reported that warm water was deep into the water column. Overall angler pressure has been lighter during this period due to poor weather conditions. The weather will probably keep it that way. Overall the catch rate was looking up, with anglers catching 1 ¼ fish per trip. Anglers from upper shore stations continue to report fair catches of salmon, both chinook and Coho salmon, though in diminishing numbers. Anglers report improving catches of Lake Trout in most stations and more so in upper shore areas. While Lake Trout are not yet moving into near shore, shallow water, they are being caught more so suspended through the water column in near shore deep waters. A few large Lakers of near twenty pounds were reported.

**Update 8/27/2020:**

**Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:**
East to Northeast winds pushed warm water back toward Duluth this week, pushing the fish deep and eliminating the surface bite near shore. As of today, Thursday, the surface temps near shore are in the mid 60s and cool water is deeper than 110 feet down. Offshore, a good thermocline occurs in the 50-80 feet range. Most anglers are fishing further North. Overall, anglers caught about a fish per trip on average. Jigging spoons at 80-120 feet worked well again for Lake
Trout, although trolling pink/purple or glow-in-the-dark spoons and flasher/fly rigs with meat from 80 feet to the bottom in 100-300 feet of water worked okay also. Some Coho Salmon were caught earlier this week on spoons that were trolled 40-70 feet down, but that was before the warm water moved in. The average Lake Trout was rather small, at 18-21 inches long, but a few larger fish at 29-34 inches were caught also. In the St. Louis Estuary, fishing effort was very light and fishing was slow.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Upper shore water surface temps have been steady in the upper fifty to low sixty degree range. East winds have recently pushed this warmer water into near shore areas and this warmer water is reported to extend quite deep in the water column. Angler pressure has been moderate from mid shore areas and heavier from Grand Marais. Overall, anglers caught less than ¾ fish per trip, which is noticeably low for this time of year. Anglers from Twin Points and Silver Bay have reported mostly slow fishing lately for Lake Trout and salmon. Anglers from Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais report some slightly improved fishing for Lake Trout and the fish appear to be moving from being scattered throughout the water column to being closer to shore. From Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais, numbers of salmon have been modest but steady. A few larger Chinook Salmon were caught with a few fish reaching into the mid teens pound class but most of the Chinooks are in the 3-6 pound range. Small Chinook and Coho Salmon have begun to show for upper shore anglers as is common at this time of late summer. Many anglers call these small salmon Pink Salmon but either way the fish are only 10-15 inches and anglers release most of them. Pink Salmon catches are declining and the fish will soon begin to enter tributaries, usually after the first rains in early September. The Pinks are changing quickly now and the males’ hump backs are now prominent. Very few steelhead have been reported by anglers from any stations.

Update 8/20/2020:
Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
Wind conditions were such that water temperatures near shore stayed relatively cool and the thermocline was not very deep, running from about 15 feet down to 48 feet or so. Offshore, the surface layer was in the 60s but colder, 45 degree water began at just 50 feet down. The narrow warm layer tends to concentrate the salmon and the wide cold layer spreads out the Lake Trout. Overall, anglers caught about ¾ fish per trip; that is, this past week the fishing had yet to be really good like it usually is as summer wanes. Given similar water conditions that were like last week’s conditions, fishing success and best presentations were similar also. Jigging deep at 90-180 feet did well again for Lake Trout, and trolling glow-in-the-dark or gold/orange spoons and flasher/fly rigs with meat 80 feet down to the bottom in 120-300 feet of water picked up some fish, especially to the South. A few Coho Salmon were caught while trolling stickbaits or casting spoons close to the surface, although the fish are still very spread out laterally.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water surface temperatures varied, ranging from the low to mid 50s near Grand Marais to the upper 50 and low 60s farther South. For a brief period, cold water intruded into the near shore waters and drove the surface temps to the low 40s; since then warmer water has pushed back toward shore. Fishing effort was mostly moderate last week, except for a couple of busy days at Grand Marais. Overall, catch rates improved to 1 fish per angler trip. Anglers are beginning to catch more Lake Trout, however the fish remain fairly widely scattered, suspended in the water column and spread out from nearshore to offshore. The size range is wide too, anglers often catching 3-5 pounders but some 10 pounders as well. The fish are hitting spoons mostly. Near Silver Bay and Grand Marais the fish are smaller at 2-4 pounds each and shallower and closer to shore, which puts them in range of shore anglers and especially smaller boats. Anglers from Silver
Bay to Horseshoe Bay caught fair numbers of salmon. The Coho Salmon hit consistently and the fish were 20-23 inches long on average, whereas catches of Chinook Salmon have declined. The Chinooks were 23-28 inches long on average and weighed 5-9 pounds. No one has reported bigger Chinooks. Pink Salmon catches are increasing, especially near shore farther North, and the fish were 17-18 inches long. The Pinks are taking on their new, river-run look and are more easily recognized as Pink Salmon now. Overall, folks used various techniques including planer boards for surface presentations, dipsy divers and lead core lines to present lures slightly deeper, and downriggers for deep water.

**Update 8/13/2020:**

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
A few stormy days reduced fishing pressure and success seemed to be low near Duluth. Charter fishing was more active and they tend to catch more fish. Overall, anglers caught ¾ fish per trip this past week. Currently a sharp thermocline exists at 15 to 60 feet or so, according to the University of Minnesota-Duluth’s temperature buoys. Trolling flasher/fly rigs with meat 80-90 feet down in 140 feet and deeper seemed to do best with green and/or glow being good colors. Stickbaits and spoons behind 5 colors of leadcore picked up a few Lake Trout in 70 feet of water when the West wind pushed out the warm water. Glow-in-the-dark spoons and flasher/fly rigs have caught fish throughout the area. Trolling gold/orange spoons picked up fish farther from Duluth, although jigging has been working well as Lake Trout are relating more to deep structure (120-250 feet of water). Over 1/2 of the Lakers reported from McQuade and Northward were caught by jigging and were released. The fish ranged from 15-28 inches, with a few in the 32-33 inch range as well. A few anglers in the St. Louis Estuary targeted and caught Channel Catfish that were 16-24 inches long.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water surface temperatures varied as prevailing wind has varied, as is typical. After some strong west winds, near shore water temps dropped into the low to mid 40s and then winds switched from the East and water temps rose into the mid 50s near Grand Marais and Taconite Harbor and into the low to mid 60s near Silver Bay. When weather was good, fishing pressure was heavy, especially near Grand Marais. Overall, anglers caught almost a fish per trip. Silver Bay anglers reported fair catches of 22-24 inch Chinook Salmon but Lake Trout were scattered and difficult to find. Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais anglers were finding more Lake Trout though, especially near shore. The Lakers are scattered through the water column and are difficult to pattern. Anglers often use a variety of techniques to target Lake Trout and salmon including flasher/fly combos and spoons, mostly by trolling in the top 100 feet and targeting suspended fish. Some anglers report success trolling lures right at the surface. Folks who fished near Taconite Harbor, Grand Marais, and Horseshoe Bay had modest but steady catches of 20-27 inch Chinook Salmon. Anglers have been interested in following the best salmon locations recently but salmon seem to be scattered and on the move, and reports change daily. Coho Salmon remained scarce and the fish were generally 19 to 22 inches long. Pinks will soon be moving into the rivers to spawn, in early to mid September. The Coho population appears to be fairly low on this side of the lake this year. Pink Salmon, however, were caught in fair numbers and the fish are robust and are up to 18 inches long. The steelhead catch has declined, and hopefully fewer folks are keeping these fish illegally. Remember that unclipped steelhead must be released immediately.

**Update 8/6/2020:**

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
Fishing pressure, not including charter trips, seemed to be lower this week than last, in part due to a few windy days. Water temperatures were more moderate this past week, with cooler water for Lake Trout starting at about 50 feet down offshore and 70 feet down near shore. Fishing success declined as well, resulting in about 2/3 fish per angler trip. Trolling flasher/fly rigs with meat 50-80 feet down in 120 feet and deeper seemed to do best near Duluth, with green and/or glow being good colors. Trolling gold/orange spoons picked up fish farther North, and also jigging worked well as Lake Trout are now relating more to deep structure (120-250 feet of water). Glow-in-the-dark spoons and flasher/fly rigs have caught fish throughout the lower shore area. Lake Trout ranged from 15 to 28 inches, and a few Chinook Salmon and Walleye were caught near Duluth. In the St. Louis Estuary, lots of pleasure boaters were out on the water during great weather.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water surface temps have been warming along the upper shore with average surface temps from Twin Points and Silver Bay climbing into the mid 60s, Taconite Harbor had low 60s, and Grand Marais and Hovland were in the mid to upper 50s. Anglers from Twin Points to Taconite Harbor are having a tough time finding reliable fishing and as water temps rise, the fishing seems to be slowing down. Pressure in some areas has dropped too, but Grand Marais had lots of folks out fishing at times this past week. Overall, anglers caught 1 ¼ fish per trip on average, with a fair mix of Lake Trout and Chinook and Pink Salmon. Anglers from Grand Marais and Hovland report fair fishing for scattered Lake Trout and Chinook and Pink Salmon in near shore waters. Some anglers from Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais have been fishing far from shore targeting larger Lakers and a few fish were near 20 pounds. Coho Salmon catching was slow and scattered throughout the upper shore. Anglers are catching more Pink Salmon and the fish are plump, healthy-looking, and averaging 15 to 19 inches long. Many anglers thought these were Cohos due to their size, but they are still Pink Salmon and tend to be on the small end of what anglers will keep. Anglers continued to focus on Chinooks, success varies from day to day, and sometimes anglers are rewarded for their efforts with 20-27 inch fish. Steelhead catches have increased, especially near Grand Marais, and unfortunately some folks are keeping steelhead that are unclipped and not legal; these fish must be released immediately when caught. Steelhead were often in the 22-26 inch size range. One hint here is that salmon have dark or dusky gums, whereas steelhead of white gums.

Update 7/30/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
West to Northwest winds kept the warm surface layer from pushing deeper than 50-60 feet this week, despite the warm weather, resulting in more surface-oriented fish. More anglers are fishing now, especially on the calm days we have had, and the catch rate is about a fish per trip. Fish continue to be caught on pink and/or green spoons and flasher/fly rigs down 50-120 feet, and near Duluth a few Walleye were caught suspended above the thermocline. Also, the flasher/fly rigs are often more effective when used with prepared smelt or herring. The average Lake Trout was 18-23 inches long, with some released of 32-35 inches as well. The Coho Salmon were about 20 inches long and the Chinook Salmon were 24-26 inches long. In the St. Louis Estuary, fishing pressure was relatively low, with a large proportion of pleasure-boating. A few Muskellunge were reported in the estuary, but no reports of muskies over 40 inches.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Wind and water conditions this past week resulted in variable but generally cooler surface water temperatures. Water temps cooled from 60 degrees to the low to mid 40s near Grand Marais and slightly warmer to the South. Angler pressure increased again this past week and is now moderate. Overall, folks caught almost a fish per trip. Chinook Salmon fishing was better around Silver Bay last week and the fish were 4-6 pounds on average, but now the fishing seems to
have shifted toward Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais. Most of the Chinooks were nice, at 22-28 inches long with numerous 4-7 pound fish. Coho fishing is still slow but the fish have grown into the 18-22 inch range. A few folks caught a smattering of steelhead and 14-16 inch Pink Salmon across the upper shore area as well. Be careful with your IDs, Pinks and steelhead are often mixed up with cohos or chinooks. For Lake Trout, catches were fair across the upper shore area. The Grand Marais area produced mostly smaller 18-22 inch lakers, especially while trolling lures for salmon within 100 feet of the surface. Anglers observed that Lake Trout were more often caught near shore or suspended over deep water rather than close to structure in deep water. For larger Lake Trout, anglers fishing out of Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais travelled miles from shore and fished near the surface. Water surface temps were often warmer far off shore. Shore-based anglers did well at times too, catching smaller 1-3 pound fish.

Update 7/23/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
This week began with hot weather and hot water, with surface temps in the upper-60s near Two Harbors and mid-70s near Duluth. Strong West to Northwest winds pushed the warm water offshore on July 19, dropping the surface temps into the low 40s near shore for a couple days. Strong northeast winds on July 22 reduced fishing pressure near Duluth. The changing conditions resulted in a shift from last week's fishing patterns, pushing some fish offshore while setting up a nice thermocline 40-50 feet down near Duluth by Tuesday, July 22. The University of Minnesota-Duluth’s Large Lake Observatory manages a nearshore and an offshore buoy near McQuade safe harbor, and the nearshore buoy shows this pattern. Overall, anglers caught about ½ fish per trip this past week. Early in the past week Lake Trout and Chinook Salmon were caught on pink and/or green spoons and flasher/fly rigs 70-150 feet down near Duluth. Adding meat to deep flasher/fly rigs has produced fish, as it does this time of year. By the end of the week Lake Trout and a Walleye were found 50-70 feet down in 120 feet of water. The average Lake Trout size was 20-24 inches this week, with a couple fish in the 32-35 inch range too. The Coho Salmon were 18-20 inches while the occasional Chinooks were 26-28 inches and 8-9 pounds. A couple of 18-25 inch long Steelhead were caught and released too. Runoff from recent rains is resulting in mudlines that may be worth targeting with spoons and stickbaits. St. Louis Estuary fishing pressure was relatively low, although some anglers who targeted Walleye did well. Most Walleye were released.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water surface temps took a major fall along the entire upper shore this past week following a strong West wind that lasted an entire day and night. The following morning, after the winds had subsided, water surface temps had dropped down to the upper 30s near Grand Marais and into the low 40s near Silver Bay and South. Fishing success went from improving a week or so ago to declining at the end of this week. Overall, anglers only caught ½ fish per trip. However, more folks are getting out to fish throughout the upper shore area now. Anglers continue to report light to moderate numbers of Chinook Salmon in the 23-28 inch range with a good average size of around five pounds. Coho Salmon have been more scarce than Chinooks with only an occasional Coho reported in the 19-22 inch range. Anglers from Grand Marais, and at most other accesses, are targeting both Lake Trout and salmon in the same areas, generally within a mile or two from shore and running lures suspended in the water column and usually in the top 100 feet, especially for anglers targeting salmon. Rain fall has been plentiful recently and tributaries have been replenished for the moment.

Update 7/16/2020:
Hot weather continued this week, with surface temps ending the week around 69°F near Duluth and 65° near Two Harbors. A few days of light winds led to lots of pleasure boaters as well as anglers on those days. Despite the warm surface, a few fish were caught in the top 30 feet on spoons and stickbaits as they were feeding on insects in the surface film from McQuade northward. Otherwise, folks caught Lake Trout while trolling spoons and flasher/fly rigs 50 feet down to the bottom in 120 feet or deeper. Many of the Lakers were in the 18-23 inch range, with reports of a few in the mid 30s on some days, while the occasional Coho Salmon were 18-21 inches long. No Chinook Salmon were reported to the clerk this past week. Overall, anglers caught about ¾ fish per trip, which is typically slow for mid-July. Spoon color patterns consisting of pink, chartreuse, and/or green took a few Lakers, but flasher/fly rigs were also effective, and adding meat has continued to produce. Fishing continues to shift northward, as is typical this time of year. In the St. Louis Estuary, fishing pressure was relatively low, with lots of pleasure-boating. Most of the fish caught in the Estuary were small and were released.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water surface temps are more moderate this week compared to last week. Temperatures were in the mid 60s near Twin Points and Silver Bay, the upper 50s to mid 60s near Taconite Harbor, and the mid to upper 50s near Grand Marais and Hovland. For a few days, sharp west winds near Grand Marais caused water temps to drop into the low to mid 40s there. Overall, effort has been moderate and increasing throughout the upper shore area and anglers caught a bit more than ¾ fish per trip, which is a bit slow for this time of year. Fishing was slower at Twin Points and Silver Bay, where Lake Trout were scattered and were most frequently caught in deep water and close to bottom. Folks picked up just a few salmon near Twin Points and Silver Bay. Fishing improved near Taconite Harbor and Grand Marais, especially for Chinook and Coho Salmon but Salmon are still fairly hard to catch. Chinooks were nice, running around 23-27 inch long and averaging 4-8 pounds, whereas Cohos were 2-3 pounds on average. Most of the Chinooks were caught 60-90 feet below the surface while Cohos were higher up in the water column. Steelhead catches were low but anglers are reporting increased catches in recent days. Grand Marais anglers did better for Lake Trout when fishing in three habitats; suspended over deep open water, in shallow and nearshore areas, and in deep water near the bottom in 150-200 feet of water. The larger Lake Trout were mostly suspended over deep water whereas fish caught in shallower water or on the bottom in deep water were consistently smaller.

Update 7/10/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
Hot, unstable weather was the theme this week, with surface temps ending the week above 70°F near Duluth and 65° near Two Harbors. Thunderstorms and E/NE winds on a few days reduced overall fishing pressure, and the hot weather greatly increased the proportion of pleasure-boaters, especially near Duluth. The catch rate overall was almost a fish per angler. Despite the warm surface, a few fish were caught in the top 25 feet on spoons and stickbaits as they were feeding on insects in the surface film from Knife River northward. The insects were observed all the way out to 2 miles from shore. Otherwise, trolling spoons and flasher/fly rigs 70 feet down to the bottom in 120 feet or deeper produced Lake Trout. Many of the Lakers were in the 18-23 inch range, with reports of a few in the mid-30 inch range on some days, while the elusive Coho and Chinook Salmon were around 18-20 inches. There doesn’t seem to be a set color pattern right now, but glow-in-the-dark rigs seemed to help down deep, as well as adding meat on some days. Fishing effort is fishing pressure is shifting northward, as is typical this time of year. St. Louis Estuary fishing pressure has been low, with lots of pleasure-boating.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water surface temps along the upper shore rose quickly this past week, even into the 70s from Silver Bay and Twin Points, and more moderate in the 60 degree range from Taconite Harbor and the mid to upper 50s from Grand Marais and Hovland. Early in the past week, Silver Bay anglers fished far from shore as warm water continued to build. With the arrival of widespread and very warm water this pattern has ended and most anglers are now fishing nearer to shore. Fishing was slow, averaging ¾ fish per hour, and relatively consistent this past week. Lake Trout catches were light and were scattered widely from all accesses. A few large Lakers in the twenty pound class were reported from Grand Marais and Silver Bay. Anglers caught low numbers of salmon across the upper shore area, with equal numbers for Coho, Chinook, and Pink Salmon. The Cohos were generally in the 20 inch range, the Chinooks were bigger, in the 23-30 inch range and weighing up to ten pounds, and the Pinks were 14-16 inches long. It unusual to see Pink salmon showing up before August. If they continue to growth, these fish could provide good catches this summer.

Update 7/2/2020:

Lower Shore – Duluth to Two Harbors:
The creel survey is back on and the clerks are busy collecting information about fishing effort and catch. The past week started out with hot, calm conditions. Surface temps ranged from the low-50s to the high-60s during the calm weather. The University of Minnesota Duluth’s data buoys have not been placed this year, so providing temperatures in these reports will be less up-to-date. The hot, calm weather lead to extraordinarily high fishing pressure. Though effort was high, anglers reported relatively low catch rates. A few eater-sized Lake Trout of 18-24 inches were caught on spoons and stickbaits in the top 25 feet, which also picked up the seemingly elusive Coho Salmon. Other anglers were successful by trolling flasher/fly rigs with meat, that is, prepared smelt or herring, in anywhere from 70 feet down to the bottom in 120-200 feet of water. The largest fish reported to the clerk was 30 inches and nearly 10 lb. Recently, strong Northeast winds greatly reduced fishing pressure from Monday onward. Hopefully the NE wind will set up better fishing conditions on Lake Superior going forward. In the St Louis Estuary, fishing effort was low.

Upper Shore – Twin Points to Hovland:
Water surface temps along the upper shore took a major upswing during this past week. Cold surface temps only reached into the upper thirty degree range on 6-24 but now are rising into the upper 40s and reaching even 50 degrees at all stations since. Angler pressure was moderate from Grand Marais during this period with excellent weather conditions while conditions from Silver Bay were not so good at times with stiff east winds and fog. Anglers report fair fishing for Lake Trout from Grand Marais, better fishing was found in generally deep water rather than near the surface. One nice Lake Trout of 12 pounds was reported from Grand Marais. Reports from Silver Bay indicate good fishing for Lake Trout and salmon remain scarce. A few anglers did pick up a few Pink Salmon as well and the fish are fairly large for this time of year. Shore fishing was slow, as is usual during early season.

5/28/2020

As of this past weekend, the private sport angling fishery is not being surveyed due to health and safety concerns of staff and the public. Normally the weekly report would describe results from the clerks’ interviews and observation and from auxiliary information. The usual fishing trends are likely to occur this year, therefore this report includes results from the past 2 years. Conditions were cooler last year and heavy rains resulted in some redistribution of effort, therefore results from the more normal year in 2018 are included as well. This information, along with information from fishing blogs, social media posts, and local fishing
shops, should provide a reasonable idea of how best to approach fishing on the big lake at the time you want to go. Above all else, be aware of weather conditions and of boating safety requirements such as floatation devices (please wear them properly) and flare kits and fire extinguishers. Lake Superior is usually cold enough to kill a person before they can reach the shore if they aren’t wearing a wetsuit or dry suit. This Spring, fishing started off quickly including some high effort in April on nice days at the more southern accesses. For information about what is and is not allowed regarding charter fishing, please contact a charter captain, they will be up-to-date and familiar with the restrictions and changes.