The Ortonville Area Fisheries staff oversees fisheries and habitat management in Traverse, Big Stone, western Lac Qui Parle, western Swift, western Yellow Medicine and northern Lincoln counties.

Popular lakes include Big Stone, Lac qui Parle and Traverse. The Minnesota River and many smaller lakes and streams also provide numerous additional angling opportunities. Due to the shallow, productive nature of these lakes and streams, fish grow fast and quality populations of Yellow Perch, Walleyes, crappies, Freshwater Drum and White Bass are common.

Fisheries staff routinely evaluate fish populations in these lakes and streams using gill nets, trap nets, seines and electrofishing. The data are used by them to make management decisions. The data are also available to anglers in survey reports which are useful for deciding where to fish. The data presented here are from 2017, 2018 or 2019 and should be indicative of the current status of these fisheries.
Walleyes

Most lakes are routinely stocked with Walleyes, however good natural reproduction does occur in several lakes and streams. Walleyes are most abundant in Traverse, Long, East Toqua, and Steep Bank. Big Stone, Oliver and Lac qui Parle also have quality populations. Although “eater-sized” Walleyes (13-17 inches) are most common, plenty of larger Walleyes can be found throughout the area’s lakes. Walleyes are also present in the Minnesota River and fishing for them can be very good, especially during spring and fall.

Yellow Perch

Yellow Perch angling is very popular locally and there are numerous options. Big Stone is a perennial favorite with high numbers of perch, many from 8-10 inches. Hendricks is also a very good perch fishery and good numbers of large perch have been present during recent years. If smaller lakes are preferred, try your luck in East Toqua, Steep Bank or Perch. Yellow Perch grow fast in these lakes and many have good numbers of 9-10 inch fish.

Crappies

While Walleyes and Yellow Perch are fairly ubiquitous in the area, fishable populations of crappies and Bluegills are not. An exception is Lac qui Parle which has been a crappie “factory” for many years. When the bite is on, good catches of 12 and 13 inch crappies can be common. Artichoke has a high number of crappies, but during the last survey most were less than 8 inches. Larger crappies are present, and at times anglers do find them. Big Stone and Traverse have lower numbers of crappies, but angling for them can be good, especially in the spring.

Bluegills

Bluegill populations are somewhat limited in the area, though numbers are increasing. Improved water clarity has led to increased vegetation in Big Stone and Traverse. This has provided better Bluegill habitat. In the last several years Bluegill have become an important component of the fishery in Big Stone. In Traverse, Bluegills can be locally abundant. In both lakes anglers have a chance to catch a trophy.
Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass

Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass numbers have increased substantially in the area during recent years. Big Stone is becoming known for its quality Largemouth Bass fishing. Increased vegetation has led to better survival and recruitment of bass. Growth is fast and many bass over five pounds are caught. Smallmouth Bass are present in Traverse and Oliver. Traverse has a substantial amount of rock and Oliver has abundant flooded timber, cover types that commonly hold bass.

Northern Pike

Although Northern Pike are somewhat limited in the area, those present grow very fast. Lac qui Parle, Del Clark and Hendricks have the most pike with decent numbers over 30 inches. Big Stone and East Toqua have low pike numbers, but catches of pike over 40 inches are reported every year.

Catfish and Bullhead

Lac qui Parle, Traverse, and the Minnesota River all have high numbers of Channel Catfish. Catfish grow fast and fish longer than 30 inches are sampled every year. Most lakes have low numbers of bullheads but Big Stone and Lac qui Parle have decent numbers of large bullheads. Black, Yellow, and Brown Bullheads are all present in the area.

Freshwater Drum and White Bass

Many area lakes and rivers provide good fishing for Freshwater Drum and White Bass. Freshwater drum are commonly known as “sheepshead”. Drum can be caught in Artichoke, Lac qui Parle and Big Stone, whereas the best bets for White Bass are Traverse, Big Stone and Hendricks. Both species can routinely be caught from many reaches of the Minnesota River. These species are very good to eat and they continue to become more popular with anglers. Their flavor can be improved by bleeding them prior to cleaning (cut through their gills when on a stringer or in the live-well), by keeping the slime from getting on the meat during filleting, and by trimming away the reddish “mud-line” flesh from the outer edge of the fillets. Excellent recipes for preparing drum can be located on the internet by searching "drum recipes".

Enjoy fishing our valuable area lakes and streams, Sincerely the Ortonville Area Fisheries staff.
Recent Northern Pike Net Catches
(Data is from 2017 to 2019)

Number per gill net

Recent Black Crappie Net Catches
(Data is from 2018 and 2019)
For more information search “Ortonville Fisheries” or “Lakefinder” on the MNDNR webpage (www.dnr.state.mn.us)

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