

News Reel

Waterville Area Fisheries Newsletter

Spring, 2018

Pike spawning waits on Mother Nature Waterville staff stays ready

- Craig Soupir, Waterville Area Fisheries supervisor



Craig Soupir

If things were only that simple! We are all waiting for that "its spring, duh!" moment.

Spring will arrive, eventually. Meanwhile, we wait - weather ultimately dictates our work at Waterville Area Fisheries, especially in the spring.

Northern pike spawning typically kicks off production season at Waterville Area Fisheries. Pike usually spawn right after ice-out,

When I asked my twin sons where their coats were (it was 17 degrees outside), they told me, "We don't need coats anymore Dad, 'its spring, duh!'"



but have been known to spawn when lakes are still largely ice-covered if the ice-out date is late enough. Historically, the target date for peak northern pike spawning at Waterville Fisheries has been near April 1. Staff have collected eggs as early as the first week of March and as late as the end of April, so that's a pretty wide range of possibilities. The pike spawning duration can also be quite narrow - even less than a week. Waterville staff collects northern pike adults from local lakes and bring them back to the hatchery to strip eggs, so net

placement in this short window is very important. Lakes need to be mostly ice-free for nets to be set. We are ready to go, but are just waiting for Mother Nature.

We hope you enjoy this issue of News Reel! If there are topics you would like covered, please let us know.

ABOVE: Turkey feathers are best for gently stirring fertilizing eggs, and supplies are ready!

LEFT: Northern pike are captured, then released after eggs and sperm are collected.



Waterville Hatchery geared for spring

As Minnesota's largest coolwater hatchery, Waterville raises northern pike, walleye, muskies and channel catfish. Northern pike are the first fish to incubate at the Waterville hatchery, but thousands of other fish are raised there as well. The Waterville hatchery is the only DNR hatchery in the state to raise muskies from egg to fall fingerlings.

Last year's production included:

- Over 39 million walleye fry
- 10,350 muskie fingerlings
- 12,000 walleye fingerlings
- 1.05 million northern pike fry
- 125,000 walleye frylings
- 20,450 channel catfish fingerlings

Take Mom Fishing Weekend: May 12-13
Minnesota resident moms fish free

Take a Kid Fishing weekend: June 8-10
Minnesota residents 16 and older fish free with children younger than 16.

**Fishing Opener:
MAY 12**

ABOVE: Mending nets used to capture fish is completed during winter months. Staff uses about a mile of twine each winter to mend nets - with a knot at every inch! Each year over one hundred nets must be repaired from regular wear and tear and damage caused by muskrats and turtles.

TROUT STOCKING 2018

Stream Trout Opener: APRIL 14

PAUL'S CREEK (St. Peter trout ponds)

4/13/18: 1,500 rainbow yearlings

Week of 4/16/18: 1,500 rainbow yearlings

Week of 4/30/18: 1,000 rainbow yearlings

Week of 5/14/18: 1,000 rainbow yearlings

7-MILE CREEK (between St. Peter/Mankato)

Week of April 30 - 300 brown trout adults



ABOVE: DNR Waterville Area Fisheries staff Brandon Eder and Skyler Wigen stocking trout at seven-mile creek last year. The fish are carefully transported in specialized tank trucks complete with oxygen. **BELOW:** A close-up of one of the adult brown trout being released at Seven-mile creek last spring.



New regs for northern pike intended to benefit anglers

Regulations for northern pike are being changed for the first time in 70 years. They will take some getting used to, however they are being implemented to improve northern pike fishing. Anglers statewide will benefit.

New regulations are NOT meant to create trophy northern pike lakes. The goal is to increase the number of medium-sized northern pike, while protecting existing populations of large fish. A balanced northern pike population can benefit other fish as well - such as yellow perch and bluegills, and can make walleye stocking much more effective.

Three Zone Concept

Minnesota is now split into three zones: the Southern, North-central and Northeast (see map at right). The zone concept is similar to sunfish regulations in the 1930's when Northern and Southern zones each had different rules. Zone management is a big change for northern pike management, but acknowledges that a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in a state with lakes as diverse as Minnesota.

Regulations in each zone are a departure from the previous statewide regulation of three fish per day with only one fish longer than 30 inches.

SOUTHERN ZONE: Limit two per day, both of which must be at least 24 inches long.

NORTHEAST ZONE: Limit two per day, with only one over 40 inches allowed. Northern pike between 30 and 40 inches must be released.

NORTH-CENTRAL ZONE: Limit 10 per day but only two of those may be over 26 inches. Any northern pike between 22 inches and 26 inches must be released.

Anglers in the southern zone sometimes express concern of low northern pike numbers. A lack of suitable spawning habitat means the DNR must stock northern pike to maintain fishable populations. The 24-inch minimum size limit may seem high to some anglers. Luckily, northern pike stocked in southern Minnesota grow fast.

The hope is that by protecting fish until they reach 24 inches, they will grow to greater lengths and give anglers a better chance of catching a medium to large fish. Dropping the daily limit from three fish to two fish means spreading the harvest among more anglers and perhaps means more northern pike in area lakes. Since the number of northern pike in southern zone lakes is generally determined by stocking, the possibility of an over-abundance of large northern pike is unlikely.

The new regulations took effect March 1, but won't affect Waterville area anglers until the May 12 opener. Lakes with existing special regulations, like St. Olaf near New Richland, will continue to be managed



under those special regulations. For more information and details regarding changes to the regulations for spearkers visit <http://www.mndnr.gov/pike> or check out the 2018 regulation book available wherever you buy a license, at the Waterville Area office, or online here <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fishmn/regs.html>

Waterville Area Fisheries

Northern Pike Fry stocking goals for 2018:

1,292,050

2017 LAKE SURVEY SUMMARY



ABOVE: Skyler Wigen, fisheries specialist at Waterville, watches for bass while electrofishing late in the day. Skyler compiled and contributed the survey summary results shown here.

1.7 MILES OF FISH...

Waterville area fisheries staff measured **11,497 FISH** in 2017 for the state data-base. The cumulative length of all those fish was 1.7 miles - or the length of

30 football fields!

14,112 FISH were sampled in the Waterville fisheries area using gill nets, trap nets, and boat electrofishing:

11 STANDARDS SURVEYS on Beaver, Circle, Emily, Fox, French, Hunt, Lura, Roberds, Shields, Sunfish and Tetonka

12 TARGETED SURVEYS on Clear, Elysian, Greenleaf, State Line, Duck, Fountain, Frances, French, Ida, Morin, Rice and Caron

498 turtles were caught in nets (as bycatch) and released.

- 443 painted
- 47 snapping turtles
- 8 spiny softshell turtles



The cumulative length of all gill nets lifted by Waterville Area Fisheries staff in 2017 was about **3.5 miles!**

Correct handling helps assure fish survival after release

- Brandon Eder, assistant supervisor, Waterville Area Fisheries

Social media is great for bragging about how smart your kids are; cat videos; pictures of your supper... and igniting knock-down, drag-out fights between complete strangers in opposite corners of the world. Social media also presents a great way to share/brag about fish stories.

Fish are horizontal creatures. Their bodies are not designed for vertical activities.

And nothing gets complete strangers from opposite corners of the world more fired up than fish pictures. "PHOTOSHOP," they scream in all caps! "Stop holding the fish so close to the camera," they demand! "Never hold a catfish by the jaw," they chastise... actually, I agree with that last one.

Horizontal, not vertical

Fish are horizontal creatures. Their body is not designed for vertical activities. What's more, that horizontal body spends its days supported by water. When an angler holds a horizontal creature vertically the possibilities for stress and strain are numerous. Organs, normally supported in part by water, stretch and move, vertebrae are stressed and even separate, and stress on



parts of the body used for gripping, like a largemouth bass' jaw or a lake sturgeon's gill plates, may be enormous.

Anglers, biologists, and guides have seen first-hand the damage that can occur. We should all take the matter seriously. Just because a fish swims away doesn't mean damage wasn't done. Even if the damage is minimal, why subject a fish to extra stress when it can be avoided?

Proper holding

The first step to a proper hold is to have the correct equipment. If you are chasing muskies, big northern pike, or flathead catfish make sure you have the right gear to fight and land big fish. Chasing big fish? Get a big net. And while you have that big fish in that big net keep it there. It's a lot easier to take the hooks out while that fish is supported by the net and outside the boat. No flopping. No dropping. No hooks in your thumb. Get a big, long needlenose pliers to make hook removal easier and safer. Got the hook out? Good. Keep your fish in the net. Then get the camera.



the net, support the head with one hand and the body with the other and take some trophy shots. Take the pictures quickly and release the fish gently back into the lake.

The same advice holds true for big "small" fish. Crappies and bass have built-in handles. The lower jaw of these fish presents an easy place to grab and hold while removing hooks and taking pictures. However, cranking that mouth open and then holding the fish by the lip effectively puts all the fish's weight on the jaw - which it's not designed for.

Just because a fish swims away, doesn't mean damage wasn't done.

Support small fish by the belly as well, it's easier on the fish and the pictures look great.

As experienced anglers, we should set good examples and practice proper handling of the fish we catch. It's easy and it's worth it. If you are prepared and handle everything right, that fish probably won't be out of the water very long. So, be prepared for a splash of water to the face from a healthy fish that swims easily away - and whole bunch of likes from complete strangers in opposite corners of the world.

Figure out where you will stand (or sit). Figure out where your photographer will stand. Take your time. After all, the fish is in the water and sitting comfortably in your big ol' net. Compose a fantastic picture - it's a big fish and you should be proud. Then, only when you have everything ready, take the fish out of

2017 LAKE SURVEY SUMMARY

- 7,044 fish from 113 trap nets**
 - 21 different species
 - 40% bluegill, 26% black crappie, 12% black bullhead, 5% freshwater drum, 5% common carp, 2% yellow perch, 2% yellow bullhead, 2% bowfin and 6% other
- 5,978 fish from 73 total gill nets**
 - 20 different species
 - 21% yellow perch, 21% black crappie, 16% black bullhead, 12% bigmouth buffalo, 7% bluegill, 5% walleye, 4% freshwater drum, 4% golden shiner, 3% northern pike, 2% common carp and 5% other
- 1,090 fish from 14.3 total hours of boat electrofishing**
 - 1,088 largemouth bass
 - 2 smallmouth bass

BIGGEST FISH	Inches	Lake	County
WALLEYE	27.8	Tetonka	Le Sueur
NORTHERN PIKE	41.3	Roberds	Rice
LARGEMOUTH BASS	21.1	Emily	Le Sueur
SMALLMOUTH BASS	20.1	Tetonka	Le Sueur
WHITE BASS	18.7	Tetonka	Le Sueur
BLUEGILL	10.3	Lura	Blue Earth
BLACK CRAPPIE	14.8	Hunt	Rice
WHITE CRAPPIE	13.9	Emily	Le Sueur
MUSKELLUNGE	51.1	French	Rice
CHANNEL CATFISH	30.5	Roberds	Rice

ABOVE: This table shows the biggest fish of popular species, measured during the 2017 surveys, along with the lake in which they were caught, and the county. More information on lake survey results for specific lakes can be found at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html>

WATERVILLE AREA FEATURES: Madison Lake

IN BLUE EARTH COUNTY

Madison Lake is a traditional opening day hot-spot, and for good reason. The lake typically holds a good population of healthy walleye and has also seen a recent increase in northern pike. Combine that with its location, barely 10 miles from Mankato, and that's a healthy recipe for long lines at the ramp on opening morning.

Time for 'eyes

Many folks will say those lines are worth it. Walleye numbers in the 2016 survey were above the long-term average for the lake and well above the average for similar to Madison.

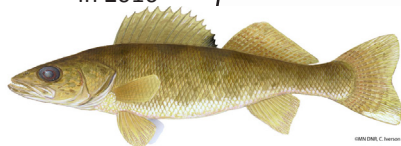
Average length of walleye in 2016 was 17 inches. Walleye up to 28 inches were sampled. Part of the great walleye fishing at Madison Lake can be attributed to excellent natural re-production in recent history. Madison Lake is one of the few lakes in the Waterville area with any natural reproduction.

Change of pace

Northern pike anglers should be happy to hear numbers of the toothy predator were also high in 2016. Northern pike from that survey averaged 23 inches – below the new 24 inch minimum length limit – but fish nearing the magical 40 inch mark were also caught.

Of course if the walleye or northern pike aren't biting, anglers can always chase bluegills and crappies at Madison Lake. Madison

Lake contains both black crappies and white crappies and there are plenty of keepers to go around. Same goes for bluegills. Bluegill numbers in 2016

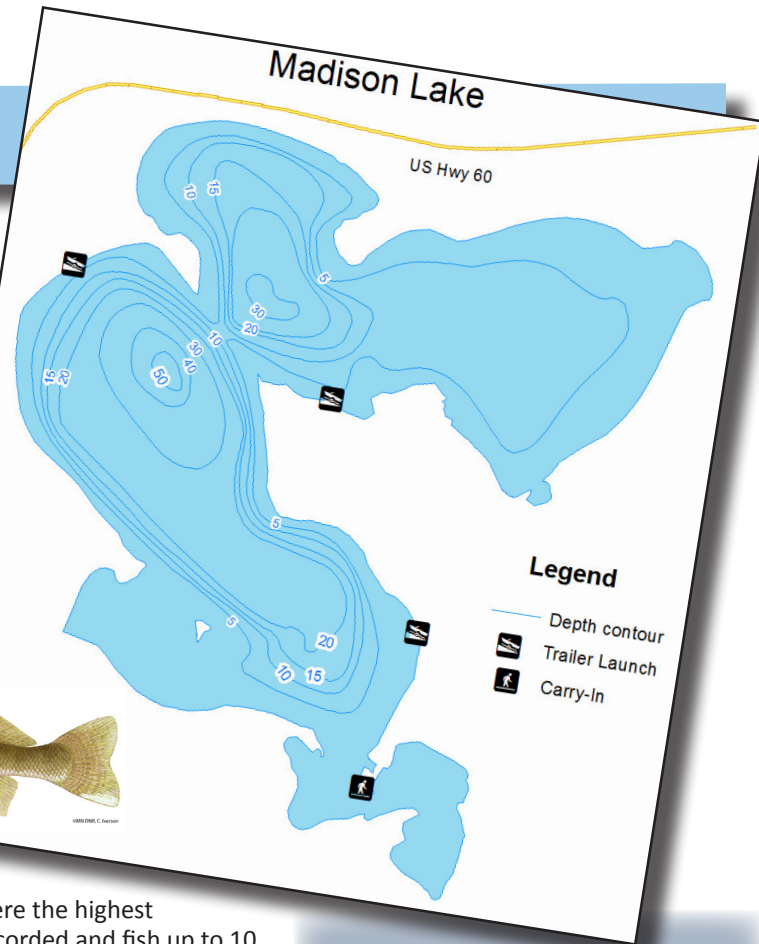


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were the highest recorded and fish up to 10 inches were caught.

Madison Lake continues to be one of the best walleye angling lakes in south-central Minnesota. With numerous year classes present and plans to continue stocking the lake with walleye, anglers should expect to experience quality walleye angling for years to come. Black crappie also continue to draw anglers to Madison Lake, especially during the winter. The convenient public access and numerous game fish species of Madison Lake make it a great option for anglers. The lines are worth it.

Contributed by Brandon Eder, assistant supervisor, Waterville Area Fisheries.

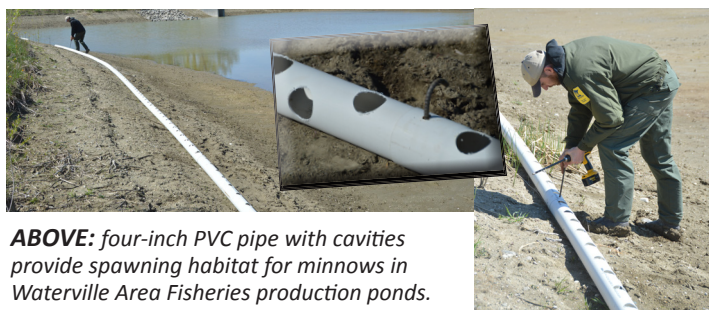


OTHER FISH

Madison Lake's walleye, pike, bluegills and crappies are not alone. Other fish like black bullhead, channel catfish, green sunfish, largemouth bass, pumpkinseed, white bass, yellow bullhead, common carp, freshwater drum (sheepshead), highfin carpsucker, longnose gar, shortnose gar, white sucker and bowfin (dogfish) also call this lake home.

Muskies, Inc helps fund minnow habitat in Waterville production ponds

Waterville Area Fisheries received funding last year from Muskies, Inc. through a grant application to fund over 4,000 feet of minnow habitat. Four-foot by 10-foot sections of PVC pipe were drilled with 2.5-inch holes, and anchored in production ponds - to be just below the water's surface once the ponds are filled. Ponds were stocked twice-with ten gallons of adult-size minnows per acre, each time. Cavities provide a place where female minnows can lay eggs, and males can guard the nests. The percent return (survival) and size at harvest (rate) of muskies were at 10-year highs in 2017. More PVC is being added this spring.



ABOVE: four-inch PVC pipe with cavities provide spawning habitat for minnows in Waterville Area Fisheries production ponds.

To receive your complimentary copy of **NEWS REEL** or to submit topic ideas, contact Amy Roemhildt, newsletter editor, at amy.roemhildt@state.mn.us or call 507-362-4223 ext. 221.

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