

News Reel



Waterville Area Fisheries Newsletter Winter 2024 Edition

Soup's Take

"Getting a timely and friendly response from DNR staff is so appreciated!"

"The way you explain things, I wish every DNR office would do more of this."

"This information about the day-to-day work of a Fisheries Office is fascinating, keep it coming."

These are just a very small handful of the positive comments we have received from you in the past year. But, I have a question for you to consider. Do you feel part of the DNR Waterville Fisheries Team? Do you even consider us collectively (DNR and Anglers) as a team?

Over the past year the Waterville Fisheries office staff have been working extra hard on Outreach. Last November, I announced this would be happening and made it a top priority for 2023. That priority was to establish and develop better relationships and communication with our local anglers.

What a year! From the kickoff of the Fisheries Information Sharing network (FISHn) last fall, the inaugural FISHn meeting in February, to the Governor's Fishing Opener, the hatchery open house, expanded outreach to youth and underserved within our communities, the Get Out More initiative, the too many to count media stories, the countless text messages, the continuous chats and private messages shared on Facebook and social media, hatchery tours, phone calls, to the nearly daily social media posts to empower anglers with knowledge. The Waterville Fisheries Office has proactively put itself out

Above: Several adult Rainbow Trout with leucism - a trait that causes a white, yellow, or gold color - were stocked in the St. Peter trout ponds last spring.

there for you, and you responded!

We want you to feel like you are part of the Fisheries team! We want you to understand what work is being completed, how data is interpreted, be a part of the fisheries management process, and we especially want your input because the more people involved with coming up with solutions the better solutions we can find together. We hope when you think about fishing that you have the trust with Waterville Fisheries staff to simply call us up and talk about it knowing you are being heard and contributing, that you get honest answers, and that you have a seat at the table. This is how authentic advocacy is developed. This is teamwork!

The past year of information exchange through FISHn has not been by accident, it was intentional, and it was to inspire YOU to become involved. Just as important though, it was to push ourselves (DNR staff) to assure that you have an opportunity to be involved. Communication takes effort, from everyone, you included! We plan to continue more of the same in 2024. Expect to see more information sharing, and even more opportunity for engagement. The bottom line is we need you involved, because you ARE part of the Fisheries Team! So, pull up a chair and join us at the Fisheries Team table!

Happy fishing, be safe, and we hope to see you March 5 in Mankato for the next FISHn meeting!

-Craig Soupier, area supervisor

FISHn Meeting!

When: **March 5th** @ 6:30 until 9:00

Where: Country Inn and Suites,
Mankato

Who: Everyone!

Survey stats

Below are some fun stats from the 2023 survey season - including some pretty big fish!

- **15,426 fish sampled** using gill nets, trap nets, and boat electrofishing.
- **24 species of fish sampled:** 26% bullheads, 15% Bluegills, 13% crappies, 10% Yellow Perch, 9% Freshwater Drum, 5% Bigmouth Buffalo, 5% Largemouth Bass, 4% Northern Pike, 4% Walleye, 9% "other" species.

All of those fish laid end-to-end would measure **1.72 miles!** Here are some of the biggest.

- Black Crappie - 15.9" Hunt Lake
- Bluegill - 10.5" Fox Lake
- Largemouth Bass - 20.6" Beaver Lake
- Northern Pike - 39.2" Shields Lake
- Walleye - 28.0" Cannon Lake
- White Bass - 18.5" Shields Lake
- Yellow Perch - 10.9" Shields Lake

-Tyler Fellows, fisheries specialist

Creel Summary

Waterville staff have interviewed anglers at 9 lakes (some lakes had multiples surveys) since 2012. These surveys, called creel surveys, are difficult to design, conduct, and analyze but provide a lot of useful information for fisheries managers. From creel surveys we can learn: who is fishing, how much they fish, what fish they target, what fish they catch, how many fish they catch, how many fish they harvest, the size of fish they catch and harvest, attitudes about regulations or other management decisions, and on and on. Creel surveys are an important tool. Here are some bits from the last 11 years of surveys.

Who are anglers?

Waterville anglers were 84% male. Over 95% of open-ice anglers and spearers were male. Female boat anglers represented 62% of all female anglers. Anglers were equally distributed among the age groups with roughly 50% of anglers being between 25 and 54 years of age, 25% being younger than 25, and 25% being 55 or older. Waterville anglers do not appear to be in danger of "aging out".

Over 96% of anglers were Minnesota residents and 2.5% were Iowa residents. Anglers in 2012 drove an average of 81.1 miles to reach Lake Tetonka. That distance dropped to only 33 miles in 2020.

How often do they fish?

Waterville anglers fish a lot. Especially in the winter. Total hours fished during the winter was greater than during open water at 6 of the 10 surveys that included both seasons. Open water pressure exceeded the statewide average during 8 of the 13 surveys and winter effort exceeded the statewide 75th percentile during 9 of the 10 winter surveys!

What do they catch?

Crappies were the main target species of 30% of parties interviewed followed by sunfish at 23% and Walleye at 19%. Bullheads were targeted by just 0.3% of all parties.

How many fish do they catch?

Anglers caught nearly 600,000 sunfish. Almost 66% of sunfish were caught in open water. The opposite is true of crappies - more crappies were caught during winter than summer.

Anglers harvested nearly 175,000 sunfish and nearly 67,000 crappies during the creel surveys. These numbers dwarfed the next greatest harvest which was Walleye at just over 10,000. Anglers harvested just under 7,000 Northern Pike and about 4,200 Largemouth Bass.

How long does it take?

On average, it took anglers nearly 8 hours of fishing to harvest a crappie, over 22 hours to harvest a Northern Pike, 1 hour to harvest a sunfish, and almost 50 hours to harvest a Walleye. Most anglers do not harvest any fish during most trips.

Managers use all of this data, and much more, gathered during creel surveys when making management decisions for specific lakes and areas. Creel data are an important piece of the fisheries puzzle.

-Brandon Eder asst. area supervisor

Do 10% of anglers harvest 90% of the fish? This table shows the percent of parties that kept 0 fish and the percent that kept a limit...

Percent of anglers who kept no fish or a limit				
Anglers who...	Crappie	Sunfish	Pike	Walleye
Kept 0	72%	60%	86%	88%
Kept a limit	2%	3%	3%	0.3%

Under Pressure

DNR staff from across the state are studying the effects of catching crappies from deep water. The change in pressure as fish are brought to the surface, known as "barotrauma", can be lethal to fish.

At the suggestion of the Citizen's Panfish Workgroup, we conducted an experiment to demonstrate barotrauma effects on crappies. Fish were caught from different depths, held overnight,

and observed the next day.

We did observe physical signs of barotrauma which increased in number, and severity, as depth increased. Our results were consistent with other studies showing barotrauma becoming a concern for other species when fishing deeper than about 25 feet.

Visible signs include bulging eyes, protruded stomach (not the air bladder), and bleeding around the gills.

If you are fishing deep consider keeping every fish (within your limit) or moving shallow to avoid barotrauma.



Crappie with signs of barotrauma.

One Day Closer to Spring

I am an avid angler. I especially enjoy open water fishing. I do go ice fishing, but it's difficult to troll or cast. On December 29, 2023, my brother-in-law, Leon, and I went open-water fishing. This was the latest either one of us have ever gone. You have to consider we live in southern Minnesota, normally we could be ice fishing for several weeks by now.

Against the odds

This adventure started out as simple as two anglers defeating the odds of mother nature letting us fish in a boat, on a lake, this late in the season. I called Leon, "It's going to be a great day, lets going fishing." His reply was, "What time do you want me to pick you up?" My boat was in storage for over a month, but his boat was still ready to go. Yes, I know you can go river fishing later in the season, but we are both lake fishermen.

When we stopped at the local bait shop there were two people (reporter and camera man from KEYC-TV, Mankato, MN) looking to interview anglers who were going out on the lake on this winter day. Of course, we were game for the interview. We did the interview in the parking lot, standing next to Leon's boat.

After the interview we suggested they follow us to the lake to get some video of us launching the boat. They followed us to the boat ramp and took

video. Being the goof I am, I added that they should go in the boat for more video which they did most enthusiastically.

Time to fish

After the interview was behind us, we headed out on the lake to find some crappies. Using the depth finder, we found fish in 20 to 25 feet of water. The water temperature was 34 degrees. We found fish stacked up to 10 feet below the boat. At one point, the locator was reading off the top of the school of fish. They were that thick. We found eager biters in 10 to 15 feet of water. Most of the fish were on the small side, but we hooked enough bigger ones to take a few meals home. It's been a while since either one of us had a fresh meal of fish. We boated a lot of crappies and one small walleye.

To catch these really soft biting crappies, we fished them as though we were on hard water. Small tungsten jigs tipped with maggots worked the best. We tried a jig and minnow, but

the crappies were not interested in that at all. It was like the fish thought it was late December and they had a sheet of ice over them for weeks now.

At one point there were eight boats in the same area with us. We weren't the only fishermen enjoying a beautiful day on the water.

Reflections

This fishing trip will go down in our record books as the latest day of the open water season for us to fish in a boat. A record that may never be broken. We had a most enjoyable time, with a stunning sunset reminding us what a remarkable day we had.



Above: A beautiful sunset ends a great, late, six and ten o'clock day of open water angling.

Having our fifteen minutes of fame, on the news, was the icing on the cake. It was a fantastic day to be alive. See you on the water and keep a tight line.

-Jeff A. Groskreutz RetroAngler

2024 Lake Management Plan Updates

The DNR will be taking public input on Lake Management Plans in 2024. Lake Management Plans are drafted using survey data and other considerations, including social. A Lake Management Plan summarizes goals, objectives, and actions (regulations, stocking, etc.) on a particular lake. A press release will direct the public to a webpage where they can view individual

plans. Input on plans can be submitted to Area offices. Waterville will be accepting input on plans for:

Cedar Lake, Gorman Lake, Roemhildt's Lake, Reeds Lake, St. Olaf Lake, Volney Lake, Crystal Lake, and Loon Lake (Blue Earth County).

Waterville Fisheries will also be conducting lake surveys around the area in 2024. Lakes to be surveyed are:

- Clear Lake (Waseca Co.)
- Clear Lake (Le Sueur Co.)
- West Jefferson Lake
- East Jefferson Lake
- German Lake
- Fountain Lake
- Horseshoe Lake
- Bass Lake
- Greenleaf Lake
- Guckeen Lake

WATERVILLE AREA FEATURES:

Hiniker Pond - Mankato

Hiniker Pond, at the base of the bluffs dividing Mankato and North Mankato, is a small lake with a big history.

The beginning

Hiniker Pond was excavated in the 1940s by its namesake, John Hiniker. The pond soon became used as a swimming hole for Mankato residents, despite being on private property. The pond was especially popular with students from Mankato State University.

The pond, and surrounding land, was purchased by the City of Mankato in 1975. Swimming continued against city wishes.

The frequent trespassing eventually led the city to begin issuing tickets. However, it was the threat of development in the form of a flood control project that was the biggest threat to use at the pond.

Talks to combine Hiniker Pond, an old Minnesota River oxbow lake, and Spring Lake into a flood control project sparked local citizens to act. A group, eventually called Friends of Hiniker Pond, formed.

The Friends of Hiniker Pond (FHP) advocated for keeping the pond as a swimming hole and a "natural area" for Mankato residents. The FHP were in charge of Hiniker Pond for a short period - even raising money for liability insurance and lifeguards.

The City reclaimed control of the pond and surrounding area after complaints of parties, damage, and injuries. There was even a threat to blow-up a concession stand to be built at the pond.

DNR involvement

Hiniker Pond is connected to the Minnesota River during periods of high water and has likely always had fish. The pond was first stocked by the DNR in 1978 - at the request of another citizen's group, the Key City Conservation Club. Initial stockings included Bluegill and Walleye.

The first survey of Hiniker Pond was conducted in 1981. Fish species present included Black Crappie, White

mouth Bass are stocked as need, or as available. The pond is also re-stocked via the Minnesota River in high-water years and riverine species are still found in the lake.

Hinkier Pond was surveyed in 2023. Bluegill and Black Crappie were the most abundant species but other fish including Shortnose Gar, bullheads, Freshwater Drum, and Walleye were sampled.

A New Chapter

A new, and exciting, chapter in Hiniker Pond history is scheduled to begin in January of 2024 when the Waterville Area Fisheries office, in cooperation with the City of Mankato, will stock 3,000 Rainbow Trout. This stocking will be the first of its kind in the Waterville Area and will provide a unique opportunity for southern Minnesota anglers to target Rainbow Trout through the ice.

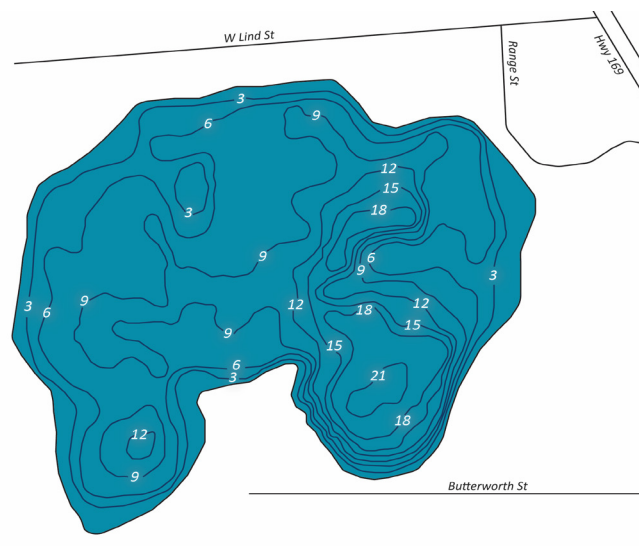
Rainbow Trout are a "cold water" species which means they require cold water for survival.

It also means they are very active in cold water and are easily caught through the ice using techniques and gear commonly used to catch Bluegills or crappies.

We are very excited to offer this opportunity and hope people take advantage.

As always, please use caution when venturing out on the ice - especially this year when many lakes are still open in early January. Good Luck!

-Brandon Eder asst. area supervisor



Above: Map of Hinker Pond.

Bass, Bluegill, and Yellow Perch. Also present were species more suited to rivers such as Gizzard Shad and River Carpsuckers.

Walleye were stocked again in 1990 and 1991. This stocking may have contributed to better growth of Bluegill and Black Crappie but stockings did not continue.

Presently, Hiniker Pond is managed as a Kid's Fishing Pond. Easy to catch fish species such as Bluegill and Large-

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