



News Reel

Waterville Area Fisheries Newsletter Winter 2025 Edition

Soup's final take

Above: An adult Northern Pike from Aitkin County, lays on the ice during a recent winter stocking at Greenleaf Lake. See story on page 3 for more info.

In 2013, I accepted the Area Fisheries Supervisor position at Waterville. I came into this job a bit naïve, but with an excitement at new possibilities. My first goal was to change the culture, and we sure did! We adopted a positive can-do spirit about our work at Waterville and its value to the local natural resources and our public. We used innovative approaches to find solutions and bring new opportunities to anglers. Trout smiles! We led efforts to adaptively manage resources. Yearling muskie! We even reignited work from our past. LMS Walleye! We pursued a feasibility study for hatchery improvements. A new Waterville hatchery in 2027! When you visit that new hatchery be sure to note new technologies, hopefully from a central public viewing room. A testament to innovative possibilities thinking that will assure a resilient and sustainable hatchery system and put those that matter most front and center.

Speaking of focusing on you! Our goal was to build a team atmosphere by engaging the public at every opportunity. NewsReel was an original goal. Over the years NewsReel has included articles contributed from staff in multiple DNR Divisions and even from avid anglers. Look no further than this very issue that contains a great from-the-heart writing by John Underhill. Highlighting the value of angling to the essence of people's lives. That article epitomizes why we do our work! To be inclusive, NewsReel has come in five languages to serve ALL our people!

The Fisheries Information SHaring network (FISHn) was formed based on in-

put from local anglers! Implemented was an intentional approach to sharing information on social media, through local legacy media, and by every means available – using positive messaging – emphasized by drawing people into the conversations. FISHn meetings with 100s in attendance. Call-ins and visits to the hatchery – all-time highs. Demands for staff to be involved in local meetings/events! A palpable community 'buzz' has formed. Mission accomplished; we pulled YOU into the team.

As I write this, my final Soups Take for NewsReel, I reflect on the past 12 years and the accomplishment that we have achieved. Although I will be moving on rest assured, I won't be going far. In my new role as Southern Regional Fisheries Manager, I will continue to serve Waterville Area, albeit in a different capacity. This wasn't an easy decision leaving this job I have put my heart/soul into and loved, for another that brings forth unknown. However, in deliberating on this new adventure I continued to be drawn to it by possibilities, not unlike when I took on the Waterville Supervisor job years ago.

A sticky note that has been on my desk reads: When you focus on problems you'll have more problems. When you focus on possibilities, you'll have more opportunities! There are possibilities awaiting us, and ultimately it is what we do with those possibilities that make a difference. Moreso, it's the people that we pull in along with us that matter most. Thank you for being those people!

- Craig Soupir, area supervisor

FISHn Meeting

- February 27th @ 6:00 pm
- Mankato Country Inn and Suites
- DNR talks and open discussion
- Everyone is invited. Treats!

The Waterville office permits 20-30 bass tournaments each year (along with unpermitted tournaments). Part of the permitting process is to report results. Here is a summary of results since 2008.

- Most tournaments: East Jefferson (41), Madison Lake (35), Lake Washington (33), Tetonka Lake (30), Cedar Lake (27)
- Average number of boats: 23.1
- Average bass per boat: 3.3
- Highest average bass per boat: Cannon Lake (4.0), Cedar Lake (4.2), Lake Frances (4.4)
- Lowest average bass per boat: Lura Lake (3.0), Lake Washington (2.3), Madison Lake (2.2)
- Average bass weight: 2.6 lbs
- Heaviest average bass: Shields Lake (2.9 lbs), Cannon Lake (3.2 lbs), Lura Lake (3.5 lbs)
- Biggest bass: 8.1 lbs (Cedar Lake 2019)
- Heaviest average "big bass": Cannon Lake (5.5 lbs), Shields Lake (5.7 lbs), Lura Lake (5.9 lbs)

Jan's Rocks!

I wrote this 8 years ago and just found it. I never shared the whole story I guess, but it's time. I've had people ask me about my favorite or biggest fish; but my favorite was not hooked by me. When you think of profound moments in your life, they involve people and the things that change you, make you what or who you are today. Since that day I've not concerned myself with things like catching my next fish. Fishing has become secondary to the moment that changed me profoundly. This is how it happened.

I have a story about an incredible fish and a good friend; I was working my way through some tough times with the loss of my sister when my friend Dan called me and invited me along the next day to go fishing, "Your Going!" Dan was the President of Muskies Inc Chapter 54 and knows his way around the water for most species but particularly muskies and pike. So how could I say no, especially with his demand!

As I made the journey to meet him I thought about the last conversation with my sister just days before and her telling me where and when I should be fishing. Jan told me to fish the rocks a few days before or after the full moon. I asked if it was going to be a big one? A giant one, she added. I tried to keep the talk going that late night, I suppose to entertain her possibly. My sister was at the end, and we didn't have any moments left. This was coming from a woman who never caught a muskie but liked them for what they were, and that being so important to her that muskie would be the topic of her last conversation. Jan didn't just like muskies, she loved them as one of the lady's living in the hospice told me on the day she passed.

During the drive to the lake I had a very good feeling and hoped Dan would catch her, when I arrived at the landing we made light of our chances,

and Dan said, "you're going to get one today." I said no! Dan you're going to catch her! Dan said if so he wanted to get her on the figure 8 with our buddy Steve's new Spinnerbait. I said you better be quick with the free spool if you do, and we laughed. We had talked about Jan's premonition of the new moon rock giant, so in fairness it was in our thoughts and hopes.

After about 2 hours of weeds and shoreline Dan suggested that there was a little point running out that most guys miss, let's hit that it may have rocks. Keep in mind that Dan had no GPS and fishes strictly from memory, so we moved and started casting on that July afternoon, with the moon underfoot at 1:00pm. There was slightly stained water and we didn't see any rocks, but we felt this was our window. I was changing baits to a pike pattern AP Glider as Dan said "(#!@%) there she was, (screaming another expletive he exclaimed) I blew it". As I turned slowly I saw a head that looked like a five-gallon bucket rise on the upward rake of his figure 8 flaring her gills snatching the black spinner like a tiny mayfly rising from the depths. He set the hook back into her as she rolled and dove pulling the front of his 16-foot boat around like a weathervane on top of a cupula.

She made a run around the boat rolling and shaking, driving hard away from us pulling the boat. I reached for the net and leaned out as far as I could for the holy grail catch as she came past us, she saw the net and bucked back hard shaking her head out of the water. As I leaned forward, I felt the hook point of one of the lures hanging in the boat sink into my knee, deep enough if you know what I mean. I looked down to see a Believer stuck in my leg, I figured I was out of luck with my leg pinned to the bait and the boat. I just loosened up, shook my knee a little, and the bait fell out; crazy! I pulled back then

reached out again with her making a rush straight into the net as I balanced on one leg like an overfed ballerina. Dan referred to this move as something a bit different [laugh]. We got her up to the boat and had the hooks out in a few seconds.

I asked Dan if he was ready for this? He said I've been waiting 22 years for this moment! As he raised her up I got some quick pictures and he gently set her back on the other side of the boat. We grabbed the measuring stick and got her at a solid 55 inches in the water. She quickly revived and we made a few more shots of her in the water as she swam into the dreams of another angler. Dan turned and looked at me with a huge smile and said: "I think we had a little help from a third person in the boat."



Dan with the muskie from Jan's rocks.

It was something we just shared with a few friends, not the fish rather the particulars of the catch.

Subsequently, in another fishing trip that November it was a very nice calm day and we both went back out to the spot we caught her. As Dan navigated us over to the spot I was distracted as I often am while on the water since that day. Dan said "Dude look at this" as I looked over the light pale green of the water was lit up with a small pile of white granite boulders, basketball sized. We didn't say much more as we stared into the illuminated water.

-continued on page 3

...continued

We call them Jan's Rocks, and we've been back many times. Maybe in search of her or just that feeling when you know it's all right. A comforting place where your perception changed as quickly as the flash of a silver giant. Some fish are miracles, and some people give back more than they will ever receive! Then there are the times when these paths cross. Muskies are much more than just another fish, sometimes they mean so much more.

-Contributed by John Underhill, avid angler



Above: Northern Pike rescue in progress.



Above: Intern Bryn with a Walleye from German Lake.



Above: Two young anglers pose with bass trophies.

It's a trap!

Stocking is one of the original, and most commonly used fish management tools. Managers stock for a variety of reasons but we also stock during a variety of seasons. Most are familiar with spring stocking of Walleye and Northern Pike fry. In autumn Waterville staff are busy stocking Walleye and Muskellunge fingerlings. But, many may not know that we sometimes stock adult Northern Pike during the winter. Why adult Northern Pike and why winter?

Sometimes a lake management plan calls for adult Northern Pike to be stocked as an angling opportunity or to get some "teeth" in a lake with small fish that may need control. One of the easiest ways for us to obtain adult Northern Pike is via winter-rescue operation at the Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Aitkin County.

Here is a little history and explanation of how the rescue operation works from Aitkin area supervisor, Rick Bruesewitz:

"...this is also the time for us to start operations of the fish trap at the outlet of the Rice River in Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge. (The trap) has been operated since the 1950s. While in the "old days" the fish were used to stock a multitude of lakes in Aitkin County, we now know better than to stock on top of already high density Northern Pike Populations. The Fish we catch these days typically end up in southern Minnesota, in waters that have very poor, or even no, natural reproduction.

In a typical year, Aitkin staff will harvest several thousands of pounds of pike."

Aitkin staff harvested about 5,800 Northern Pike this year. Roughly 1,200 of those fish were stocked by Waterville staff at Greenleaf Lake and Sunfish Lake.

-Brandon Eder, ass't area supervisor

2024 Survey facts

Waterville staff are busy putting the finishing touches on the 2024 lake survey season. We spend most of the winter reading otoliths and writing reports. So, while we wait for the final work to be done lets look back at some numbers from the 2024 season that might interest you:

16,097 - fish sampled in nets and electrofishing.

21 - species of fish sampled.

1.56 - miles of fish measured.

1,412 - fish to be aged over the winter.

Longest fish of 2024

- Black Crappie - 14.8" (Bass Lake)
- Bluegill - 9.9" (Bass Lake)
- Largemouth Bass - 20.3" (Clear Lake, Waseca County)
- Northern Pike - 39.3" (Fountain Lake)
- Walleye - 28.3" (German Lake)
- White Crappie - 15.4" (Bass Lake)
- Yellow Perch - 11.5" (Horseshoe Lake)
- Longnose Gar - 46.7" (German Lake).

Our nets don't necessarily target large fish but those numbers should give you an idea of how rare big fish such as 10 inch Bluegills, 15 inch crappies, or 30 inch Walleyes really are.

-Tyler Fellows, fisheries specialist



Above: Intern Ian with a Largemouth Bass from Clear Lake.

WATERVILLE AREA FEATURES:

Clear Lake - Waseca County

Managment History

Clear Lake has a long management history with records dating back to 1926. Primary management has centered around stocking with Walleye, Northern Pike, Yellow Perch, Largemouth Bass, Bluegills, Channel Catfish, crappie species, bullhead species, and minnow species all stocked at some point. Current stocking plans call for Walleye stocking in odd years and Northern Pike stocking in even years with additional species stocked, if necessary, after winterkill. Management has also included fish removal for Common Carp, Freshwater Drum, Bigmouth Buffalo, sucker species, Bluegill, and crappie species.

Lake reclamations, killing all fish in the lake in order to eliminate undesirable species such as Common Carp and Black Bullheads, have also been used. The first reclamation was conducted in 1963 and was initially succesful. By the late 1970s the fish community was again dominated by Common Carp and Black Bullhead. A second reclamation was conducted in 1987.

Post reclamation

The 1987 reclamation was successful and fish including Bluegill, Black Crappie, Largemouth Bass, Walleye, and

Northern Pike were restocked. Adult Bluegills and Black Crappie stocked in 1987 successfully reproduced in 1988. Reproduction in 1988 was so succesful Bluegills an crappies overpopulated and grew slowly. The fish were still too small for anglers to target by the early 1990s. Largemouth Bass, howev-

bers seen during the early 1990s - a result of the 1987 reclamation and restocking. There was also some hope that maintaining Largemouth Bass numbers would help reduce the over-abundant small Bluegills and Black Crappie. However, biological control of Bluegill and Black Crappie was *not* a goal of the regulation.

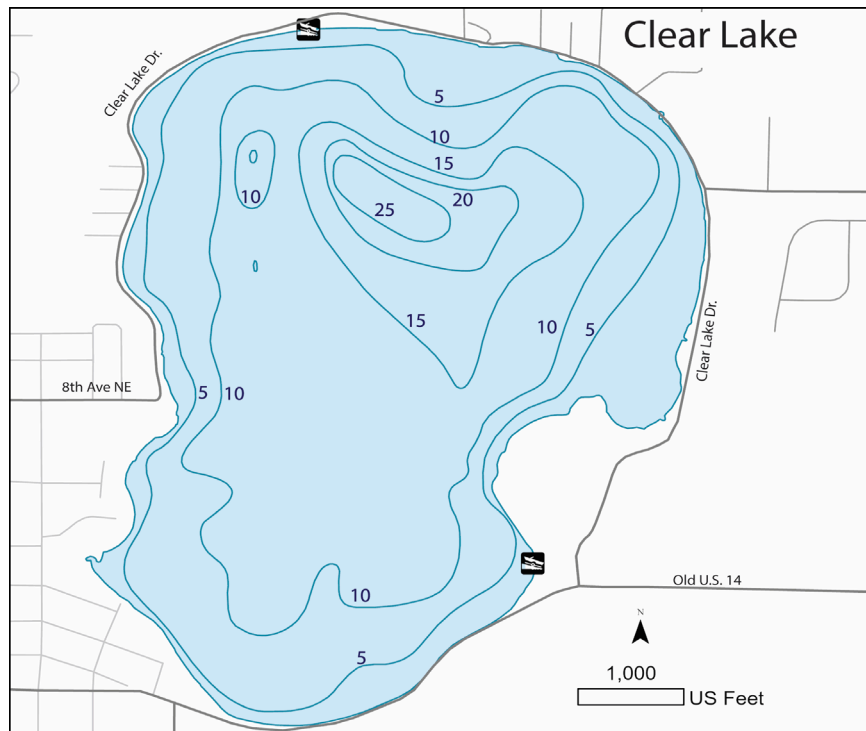
Success?

The effectiveness of the Clear Lake no-kill regulation is muddy. Some of the objectives were met. Largemouth Bass harvest was virtually eliminated and Clear Lake is known as a good to excellent lake for Largemouth Bass fishing. However, catch and release is popular for Largemouth Bass and recent creel surveys show Waterville area anglers voluntarily release over 92%

of the Largemouth Bass they catch. Would the same results have occured without the regulation simply due to high catch and release rates? That's hard to say.

What we do know is Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, and Black Crappies thrive in Clear Lake today and anglers are taking advantage.

-Brandon Eder, assistant area supervisor



Above: Map of Clear Lake.

er, had grown to a size that attracted anglers and harvest was taking place. Managers feared overharvest of Largemouth Bass in Clear Lake could harm the fishery as happened at nearby Loon Lake following a similar reclamation. A no-kill regulation was proposed for Clear Lake and was implemented in 1994. The regulation was intended to eliminate Largemouth Bass harvest and maintain the quality angling and survey num-