

News Reel

Waterville Area Fisheries Newsletter Winter 2026 Edition

Introducing...

Change is a constant in life and in natural resource management. Science is an evolving field; the science-driven resource manager must pledge to use the best available science and data to make decisions. In fisheries management, habitats change, fish populations change, and the anglers themselves change: think of lakes where the waters became clear and plants dominated after a winterkill, a lake where an exceptional year class produced exceptional fishing for a period of time before fading out over time, or think of angler behavioral change with technology or intergenerational differences in attitudes and opinions of angling. The only thing constant in life...is change!

Change has come to Waterville DNR Fisheries as well. After 11 years as Area Supervisor, Craig Soupir has moved over to New Ulm to be the Southern Region Fisheries Manager. Stepping into the Area Supervisor role is yours truly, now 17 years into the journey with Minnesota DNR. After spending the last 9 years in Hutchinson as the Area Supervisor, I've returned to Waterville and to the place where my career began. While in Waterville, I worked as a Fisheries Specialist, Assistant Area Supervisor, and as a Regional Habitat Specialist. And I never stopped fishing the area, knowing how fantastic the bass-panfish lakes of the area are, angling and camping on the Minnesota River, and checking in on some favorite fishing honey holes from time to time. The staff in Waterville, while largely changed from my first time here, are incredibly talented. They are passionate anglers too, with knowledge of the area and resource, dedication to their role, and each with a desire to per-

form at their best to provide the best fishing opportunities to fishery users.

2026 will bring even more change. The Waterville State Fish Hatchery, built in 1956, will be used to spawn and rear fish. But 350 yards up the road, a new hatchery will be built. It's long been a need and finally after 70 years, the future is arriving. The staff, the state, our anglers, and our local community is excited. New technology, biosecurity, and efficiency will all play prominent roles in the new building, paired with a top notch, dedicated staff.

Some things will remain the same. You can still stop by our office, call us on the telephone, visit our website, and talk to our friendly and helpful staff. We still want to connect with you, our users, to address your comments, questions, and concerns and to stay paired into a changing future. And we still want to provide excellent fishing opportunities on the waters we manage – a grandchild's first fish off the dock, a local high school fishing team catching five plump largemouth bass to earn a trophy, or that big walleye you caught at sunset on your last cast, memorialized in a photo that still brings you a smile.

Tight Lines,

-Scott Mackenthun

Waterville Area fisheries supervisor



Lock it up

Lake Tetonka was nearly 100% ice-covered as of December 2nd. The average ice-up date is December 3rd...right on schedule and a month earlier than 2023 which didn't happen until 2024!

Elysian creel

It has been three years since the last severe winterkill and, if you've been paying attention, you've probably noticed one significant development...Walleyes.

Many of our area boom/bust lakes and rearing ponds are entering the boom phase that anglers enjoy. The first hints of good Walleye fishing began to show last winter. This fall, anglers are finding willing Walleyes on many area lakes. A good fall bite typically translates into good winter fishing.

With expectations of good winter fishing ahead, the Waterville Fisheries office will conduct a creel survey on Lake Elysian during December and January.

The goal of the creel survey is to get an idea of how many hours of fishing and how many Walleyes, and other fish, these boom/bust lakes provide anglers.

If you are greeted by a creel clerk please take a couple minutes to provide input. It's quick, easy, and valuable. Thank you!

2025 recap and looking ahead to 2026

It was another busy year at the Waterville Fisheries office and hatchery. We welcomed many new faces - some permanent, some temporary. The biggest news was the hiring of new area supervisor Scott Mackenthun (see page 1 for more on that). Other hires included:

- Nick Heseltine, hatchery 10-month laborer - a familiar face in a new position
- Katie Paczosa - Fench Lake creel clerk
- Sydne Bauer - intern
- Jasmine Tseng - intern

With help from those new hires we were able to complete a number of lake surveys including standard gill net and trap net surveys at:

- Cedar, Frances, Mazaska, Madison, Duck, Washington, Fish, Volney, Ballantyne, Steele, and Gorman.

We also completed IBI surveys (small fish surveys) at Madison and Ballantyne.

We tried our hand at a Largemouth Bass population estimate at Ballantyne Lake. This survey differed from our standard bass electrofishing in that it was an attempt to estimate the number of Largemouth Bass over 12" in the lake versus giving an index of how many fish we sample per hour of electrofishing. These surveys are time consuming but provide more information than an index.

We also completed fall electrofishing for Walleye at Tetonka, Madison, Roberds, Washington, and Cannon. We use fall electrofishing data to assess stocking and natural reproduction of Walleye.

The Hatchery was busy as usual! In 2025 hatchery staff hatched or raised:

- 280k Northern Pike fry and 31k transplants (3 inches).
- 21.5 million Walleye fry from Cutfoot Sioux and 12 million local Walleye fry.
- 38,000 Muskellunge transplants (3 inches), 4,900

fingerlings (11 inches), and 1,400 fingerlings overwintering.

We are a year closer to having a new hatchery building in Waterville. In 2025 a location was chosen - on top of the hill near the highway. The new building is currently at the 60% design stage.

Other highlights include:

- New boilers to replace outdated equipment.
- Tons of trash collected at AMAs.
- 150 quarts of Walleye eggs taken from the Cannon River
- lake association/club meetings
- school events and tours

Looking forward

We anticipate being just as busy in 2026. If not busier! There will be some new faces as we will be bringing in one seasonal intern and hiring a new 5-month seasonal hatchery laborer.

We will be busy monitoring lakes. Standard surveys will be conducted at:

French, Shields, Roberds, Tetonka, Lura, Rays, Upper Sakatah, Lower Sakatah, Cannon, Sabre, Wells

We will also be doing some surveys that target specific species such as a spring trapnetting for sunfish at Lake Mazaska and trying another Largemouth Bass population estimate at Clear Lake in Waseca.

We all eagerly anticipate construction to begin on the new hatchery in spring of 2026. It'll be a mess for a while but should be a fantastic addition when completed in 2027.

All of this plus our annual winter info sharing meeting and other outreach events, trout stocking in St. Peter, Austin, and Mankato. And more!

-Waterville staff

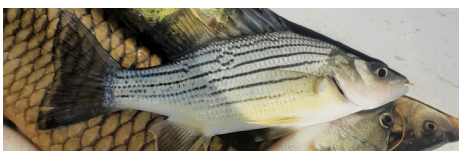


Above: A snapping turtle captured during a lake survey.

Don't move fish

Fish stocking is a fisheries management tool that is viewed favorably by the public and tends to be the first activity that comes to mind when anglers think about what the DNR Section of Fisheries does for them. When done properly, fish stocking can produce tremendous benefits. When done improperly, it can bring on real consequences.

Illegal fish stocking, often done secretly, can have negative consequences. One example has been the introduction of Yellow Bass, a species of fish native to Minnesota but only in the Mississippi River and connected waters. In southwestern Minnesota and in parts of Iowa, these fish have been illegally introduced. The prolific fish soon balloon in abundance, providing direct and indirect competition with other members of the fish community. In far southwest Minnesota, Yellow Bass have been introduced to lakes in Martin County, Jackson County, and Cottonwood County. Earlier this year, illegally stocked Yellow Bass were discovered in Guckeen Lake in Faribault County, just inside the Waterville Management work area. Moving Yellow Bass and other fish species is a pathway to introduce disease and parasites, interrupt established fish communities and disrupt the ecosystem, threaten native species, can bring about many unintended consequences, have long term impacts, and undermine science-based fisheries management. To learn more about the problems with illegal fish stocking, check out this Minnesota Conservation Volunteer article: https://webapps.dnr.state.mn.us/volunteer_index/api/v1/article_pdf?id=8643



Above: A Yellow Bass.

French Creel

A creel survey was conducted at French Lake between May and October of 2025. The focus of this survey was Muskellunge and Muskellunge anglers. We are just beginning to crunch all the numbers but can provide some preliminary summary statistics.

- 481 interviews
- 8,900 total hours angling pressure
- 8,700 hours boat angling pressure
- 1.7 anglers per party on average
- 3.7 hours average trip length
- 243 MUE caught
- 641 LMB caught
- 335 NOP caught
- largest MUE 50.5"
- largest NOP 40.0"
- largest WAE 27.0"
- 33 hrs to catch a MUE
- 25 hours to catch a NOP
- 6 hours to catch a LMB
- Most MUE caught by 1 party = 3
- most LMB caught by 1 party = 40
- most MUE reported in 1 day = 7 (6/14)
- average distance travelled to reach the lake = 30 miles
- MN residents = 96%
- Anglers from IA, SD, KY, MT, VA, CO, FL, IL
- 43 PIT tags reported by anglers

Thank you to all who participated in the creel survey. Your cooperation is vital to a successful study. Also, thank you to Muskellunge anglers who agreed to carry a PIT tag scanner while angling. The information we receive from tag returns helps us understand the muskie population, growth, mortality, and stocking success.

- Brandon Eder ass't area supervisor

2025 Survey facts

Waterville staff completed 11 standard lake surveys in 2025. Standard surveys sample fish using gill nets, trap nets, and electrofishing. Highlights from 2025 include:

- 12,445 total fish
- 23 species
- 1,754 fish aged

Crappies and Bluegills accounted for 43% of fish sampled. Other species sampled included:

- Freshwater Drum 17%
- bullheads 13%
- Largemouth Bass 5%
- Walleye 4%
- Northern Pike 3%

Nearly all 12,445 fish were measured. The cumulative length of all fish was over 1.8 miles! Here's a list of some of the largest fish from 2025:

- Black Crappie - 16.5"
- Bluegill - 10.0"
- Largemouth Bass - 20.6"
- Northern Pike - 39.4"
- Walleye - 28.7"
- Yellow Perch 11.6"

The longest fish measured was a Longnose Gar from Lake Mazaska that measured 39.6". The heaviest fish was a 14.2 lb. Northern Pike sampled at Madison Lake.

-Tyler Fellows, fisheries specialist



Above: A bluegill sampled at Lake Volney.

WATERVILLE AREA FEATURES:

A new era

Exciting news at the Waterville Fisheries Office!

Big changes

If you were unaware, plans are being made for a new hatchery building on the Area grounds. Statewide fish production needs will be more readily met as capacity for fish rearing is increased. Construction is scheduled to begin spring of 2026 and end spring of 2027.



Above: Location of new hatchery building.

Current plans call for a significantly larger hatchery to be constructed on the hillside near the small ponds.

Hatchery staff, and fish, will benefit from improvements such as increased water temperature control, enhanced

biosecurity, more space and more efficient floor plan, modern plumbing and electrical components, and dedicated laboratory and office space.

In addition, the hatchery will boast a drive-through design to make fish loading easier. An outdoor tank fill location will enhance biosecurity by ensuring clean water and limiting the number of vehicles that enter the hatchery building.

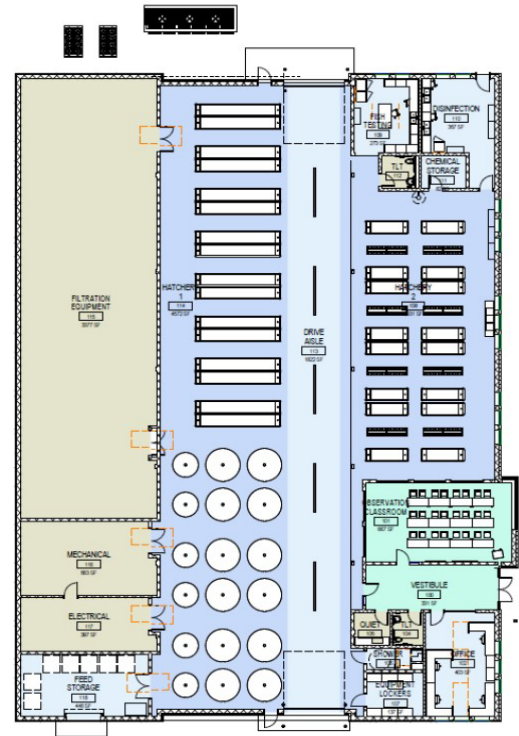
We will continue to raise Northern Pike, Walleye, and Muskellunge with options such as recirculating tanks which allow fish to be kept indoors year-round and raised to larger size.

Enhanced outreach

Educational areas will be a part of the design as promoting a better understanding of our aquatic resources is important for future generations.

New observation areas will also be included. These areas are intended to enhance the tour experience for all and to promote biosecurity at the hatchery.

We will continue to give tours at the hatchery while construction is taking place. Tours will also be offered at the



Above: Detailed plan of hatchery interior including circular and rectangular fish tanks..

new hatchery when it is complete.

Community pride

We hope the local community and anglers from all points will embrace this significant investment in fish production. The DNR is investing in its hatchery system statewide with the goal of providing quality fish in a safe, efficient, and secure manner.

Please introduce yourself to the Waterville Area office and we look forward to serving you!

-Andrew Scholten, hatchery lead

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NATURAL RESOURCES