

# Central Region Fishing Outlook for 2022

## Outlook by areas

### West metro area

#### *Walleye*

Lotus Lake is a 245-acre lake located north of Chanhassen. The 2021 survey found the highest catch rates for walleye (9.5/net) ever recorded on this lake. Walleye caught ranged in length from 10 to 24 inches and averaged 15.7 inches. Spring Lake is a 591-acre lake located southwest of the city of Prior Lake. This lake also yielded a high catch rate for walleye (10.3/net). Walleye lengths were between 11 and 26 inches, averaging 17.6 inches. Both lakes should provide excellent walleye fishing when compared to other metro lakes.

#### *Northern pike*

2021 surveys on two Eden Prairie lakes, Staring Lake and Lake Riley, showed promising results for anglers. Both lakes had high gill net catches and average length was 27 inches. The largest fish measured at Staring was 37.4 inches, while the largest fish measured at Riley was 39 inches. As a reminder, anglers can keep 10 northern pike on either Staring or Riley lakes, but not more than two pike longer than 26 inches; and all from 22 to 26 inches must be released. Both lakes should provide quality northern pike fishing for both catch and release and harvest angling.

#### *Bass*

Two other Eden Prairie lakes made the list for excellent largemouth bass catch rates in 2021, Red Rock Lake and Mitchell Lake. In Red Rock Lake, springtime electrofishing revealed an abundant largemouth bass population averaging 12 inches. Fish ranged in length between 4.7 and 20.5 inches, and 23% of the sample exceeded 16 inches. Mitchell Lake also revealed an abundant bass population with an average length of 14.5 inches and 28% of the fish were larger than 18 inches. Both lakes have abundant vegetation and offer high quality largemouth bass habitat.

#### *Crappie*

Cedar Lake is a 793-acre lake located northeast of New Prague in southern Scott County. Extremely high numbers of black crappie were sampled with gill nets (120.8/net) and trap nets (66.6/net) in 2021. There were 863 black crappie sampled during the 2021 survey, with an average length of 8.8 inches and the largest fish measured 12.9 inches. Black crappie fishing on Cedar Lake was excellent during this year's ice fishing season and is likely to continue during 2022 open water season with this large year class of crappie. Bluegill and walleye were also captured at high numbers during the 2021 summer survey providing additional species to target.

#### *Trout*

Fishing in trout lakes will again feature Courthouse Lake in Chaska — the only local lake where trout are regularly stocked for the spring opener. The lake will receive its full quota of 1,500 yearling rainbow trout before the season opens. Survivors left from previous stocking could provide added action at both Courthouse Lake, and Quarry Lake in Shakopee, as a 2021 summer survey of Quarry Lake's fish population collected surviving fish from the 2020 winter stocking.

Fishing in the Neighborhood (FiN) has plans to stock 20 lakes in spring 2022, with the majority of these receiving bluegill and other sunfish. Other species include black crappie, largemouth bass, northern pike and yellow perch if

available. Hennepin County lakes on the schedule to be stocked are Brooklyn Park, Centennial, Champlin Mill, Cornelia, Hogback, Loring, Powderhorn, Ryan, Smith, Taft, Westwood, Wirth, Wolfe and Youth. Carver County lakes on the schedule are Firemen's and Riverpointe, while Jeffers', Lakefront, Lions Park and McColl in Scott County will be stocked. Visit the [DNR website](#) for further information about the FiN program.

## **East metro area**

### ***Forest Lake (2,251 acres)***

Located within the city of Forest Lake and just east of Interstate 35, Forest Lake boasts good numbers of northern pike and walleye. Northern pike and walleye were captured at a rate of 8 and 4.8 per gill net, respectively, during the 2021 survey. Walleye fingerlings are now stocked annually, and produced a walleye population that averaged 16.7 inches. Northern pike averaged a respectable 24.8 inches. Don't forget about the largemouth bass and muskellunge opportunities that begin on May 14 and June 4, respectively. It is catch-and-release for largemouth bass through May 27. Three public accesses and a private marina provide access to a lake comprised of three basins and plenty of structure.

### ***Lake Owasso (375 acres)***

Located within the city of Shoreview, Lake Owasso provides a solid fishery for sunfish, bass, northern pike and walleye (stocked annually). In 2021, walleye (averaging 19.4 inches) were sampled in good numbers (7.5 per gill net) and up from the 2018 survey of 3.5 walleyes per gill net. Both pike and bass are in good numbers and of average size. The bass catch and release season runs from May 14 through May 27 and a new sunfish daily limit of five is in effect to attempt to increase average sunfish length. One public access operated by Ramsey County is located just off North Owasso Boulevard on the north side of the lake.

### ***Smaller lakes***

If fishing the east metro's larger lakes is not your thing, give one of our smaller Fishing in the Neighborhood (FiN) lakes a try for walleye in 2022. Carver (Woodbury), Cobblestone (Apple Valley), Como (St. Paul) and Ravine (Cottage Grove) lakes are stocked every year with yearling and adult walleye to provide quick action in a smaller lake setting.

### ***Don't forget about east metro's river systems.***

The St. Croix River from Taylors Falls to the confluence with Pool 3 of the Mississippi River offers solid fishing for lake sturgeon, flathead and channel catfish, walleye, sauger, muskellunge, white bass and smallmouth bass. Please refer to the [Wisconsin-Minnesota Border Waters page](#) in the 2022 Minnesota Fishing Regulation Booklet for the current regulations for the St. Croix River. In addition, Pool 2 of the Mississippi River (Ford Dam to Hastings Dam) is a great place to catch a variety of fish species and the fishing season is open year-round and catch and release for walleye, sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass. Pool 2, also boasting good populations of white bass, channel catfish and flathead catfish, is comprised of all backwaters and connected lakes except for Crosby, Pickerel, Upper, Little Pigs Eye and North Star Steel lakes.

### ***Lake Pulaski***

Lake Pulaski is a 700-acre lake located within the city limits of Buffalo in Wright County. The lake has one city owned public access which can be very busy on the weekends. As with many lakes in the area, Lake Pulaski offers fishing opportunities for a variety of species; however, the lake is primarily known for its bass, crappie and walleye populations.

The lake has a long history of stocking dating back to 1908 with some rather unusual species being tried over the years such as brown trout, steelhead, lake trout and Chinook salmon! When none of these species panned out the goal shifted to walleye management. Walleye were first stocked into the lake in 1946 and were stocked every one to two years. Since 1973, walleye have been stocked every other year. While the lake is stocked regularly by the DNR, there appears to be some natural reproduction taking place in the lake as well as about 10-20% of the

walleye collected during recent surveys have been related (verified through ageing) back to non-stocked years. The most recent lake survey conducted in 2020 found relatively high numbers of walleye (8.0/gill net) although similar to the past three (3) surveys (2015, 2010, 2004). Walleye caught ranged in length from 11 to 26 inches and averaged 18 inches and just over two (2) pounds. Walleye growth is above average for the area only taking two (2) years to reach 15 inches. Even though walleye appear to be abundant, anglers complain that they are hard to catch. This is probably a combination of the lake being very clear and that it receives a lot of recreational traffic making it difficult to fish.

## **Sauk Rapids area**

Lake Pulaski is probably best known as a largemouth bass lake and there are plenty to be had. The most recent bass numbers collected between 2004 and 2015 were above average. In 2015, bass collected ranged in length from seven to 18 inches with an average length and weight of 13.5 inches and 1.5 pounds. Eighty-four percent of the bass sampled were longer than 12 inches and 22% were longer than 15 inches.

Black crappie are another highly sought after species in the lake and at times can provide excellent fishing. Crappies sampled in 2020 ranged in length from 5.5-13.1 inches with an average length of 7.7 inches. Twenty-four percent of the crappies sampled were longer than eight inches and 10% were longer than 10 inches.

Northern pike abundance remains high and the average size is relatively small at 19 inches and 1.5 pounds. Anglers will encounter numerous pike under 22 inches as only 14% of the catch were longer than 22 inches; however, there is a chance to catch a few pike over 30 inches as pike up to 35 inches have been caught in previous surveys. Northern pike growth is average for the area, taking six years to reach 25 inches. With the relatively high abundance of small northern pike, anglers are encouraged to take advantage of the liberal statewide regulation on pike. The statewide regulations implemented in 2018 allow anglers to harvest up to 10 northern pike of which only two can be over 26 inches. All pike between 22 and 26 inches (inclusive) must however be immediately released.

## **Little Falls area**

### ***Little Rock Lake/Mississippi River***

Home to the Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener in 2017: Between both of these connected waters, about 3,000 acres of water are navigable with naturally reproducing walleye, smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, channel catfish, northern pike, black crappie and bluegill available to anglers.

Recent efforts to improve fish habitat and water quality using a short-term drawdown on Little Rock Lake in 2019 is certainly having some benefit from a fishery perspective. The improving water quality in the watershed since 2012 has also had a positive impact on the fishery. A recent trapnet survey (spring 2022) revealed a significant increase in bluegill, crappie and bass recruitment, with bluegill over 10 inches in the sampling effort. Our 2020 survey of Little Rock Lake sampled 17.18 walleye per net, which is the highest ever recorded for the basin. Plenty of "keeper" size fish are available, with some approaching 30 inches. This, along with a strong population of channel catfish (13.73/net), black crappie (14.64/net) and reasonable population of northern pike, offers some distinct opportunities for anglers for the fishing opener and beyond. The Mississippi River offers some great opportunities above the Sartell Dam. Caution is advised if boating further upstream (beyond the Rice Bridge), as shallower water does prevent conventional boat traffic most of the time. Smallmouth bass, walleye, channel catfish and even muskellunge can be caught in this stretch of river. Mapping efforts associated with the drawdown were completed and available on the [C-Map Genesis website here](#).

### ***Big Sauk Lake***

This 2,094 acre impoundment in the Sauk River in Sauk Centre had continued success with walleye fry stocking and puts Sauk Lake on the top of the list for better opener bets within the Little Falls area. Excellent survival and fast growth have made a good number of keeper walleye available to anglers. Our sampling in 2019 yielded the highest catch rates ever for walleye (14.5/net). You should expect a good numbers of fish between 15 and 25 inches this

spring with the occasional larger fish thrown in. This long body of water has the Sauk River running through it that can offer some ample opportunities to use current to your advantage. Big Sauk Lake can offer some great opportunities for largemouth bass, yellow perch and black crappie as well.

### ***Alexander Lake***

This 2,708 acre lake located in northern Morrison County is a known destination for walleye, pike, bass, crappie and muskie. It offers complex habitat types to choose from and a variety of presentation options to catch walleye. Walleye fry are stocked annually and have had success reaching adult size. Due to the better than average water clarity, it might be a good idea to spend some time during evening hours fishing for walleye. Good year classes in recent years should allow anglers ample opportunities to catch “eater” walleye as well as the occasional trophy.

### ***Big Birch Lake***

This 2,112 acre Todd County lake near Grey Eagle attracts attention from a wide variety of anglers. One of the more common species sought after here besides walleye are northern pike. Big Birch was managed for over 20 years with experimental regulations for pike; however, the local anglers wanted to see a change in spite of some noted improvements from the regulation. Bets are good to come across plenty of sub-22 inch fish as well as some greater than 26 inches as well. The lake offers opportunities to try different habitat types with an upper and lower basin, humps, bays and vegetation changes throughout both. Other species of note include smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, bluegill and crappie in decent sizes and numbers to offer opportunities for angling.

## **Hinckley area**

### ***Walleye***

As the first week of April ends, ice out appears to be following a typical track in the Hinckley area with walkable ice remaining on some lakes and open water surrounding others. Assuming spring temperatures follow suit, look to shallower lakes for active walleye come the opener. Likely choices in the Hinckley area are North Center, Pokegama, Knife and Green (Isanti County). But don't let the tradition of targeting walleye on the opener diminish other opportunities.

### ***Bass***

Catch and release angling for bass begins on the opener and continues through May 27. The Chisago Chain of Lakes are a top pick with numerous accesses, connections and bass.

### ***Northern pike***

Pike are willing biters on the opener. Both East and West Rush lakes and nearby Goose provide good action as well as true trophy potential. East and West Rush have a special regulation for northern pike with a possession limit of three, a protected slot from 26 to 40 inches and only one pike greater than 40 inches allowed in the bag.

### ***St. Croix River***

For some early (or opener) action, the walleye and northern pike season on the St. Croix River opens April 30. The river has many accesses for small boats and also ample shore and wade fishing opportunities with much of the riverbank in public ownership. Being a border water, size and bag limits are different. The walleye bag is six but with a 15-inch minimum. The northern pike bag is five with no length restrictions.

## **Lake City area**

### ***Mississippi River and Lake Pepin***

There is no opening day on the Minnesota-Wisconsin border waters of the Mississippi river and Lake Pepin, as these waters are open to angling year-round for all species except for a winter closure on flathead catfish and a spring closure for lake sturgeon. While the big river can always change, water levels are currently very good and

most boat access points are open. As always, the Mississippi River boasts excellent populations of walleye, sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, white bass, channel and flathead catfish.

The fish populations in Lake Pepin/Pool 4 are in excellent shape right now. There has been a string of multiple strong walleye year classes in a row and gill net sampling in fall of 2021 showed walleye at the second highest catch rate ever measured. Sauger reproduction has been more sporadic in recent years, however the 2020-year class is the third strongest recorded since 1965. Other species are doing great as well. Crappie numbers and sizes are much higher than long term averages and have produced some excellent fishing. Bluegill and yellow perch fishing has really taken off in Lake Pepin and the size of these fish is truly impressive.

### ***Other lakes***

Anglers venturing out for the inland season fishing opener in the Lake City area will find a good population of walleye in Lake Byllesby near Cannon Falls. This lake is stocked periodically with walleye fingerlings and it also has substantial natural walleye movement from the Cannon River. Lake Zumbro, north of Rochester, is also stocked every other year with 600 pounds of walleye fingerlings. Good populations of sunfish and crappie are also found in Lake Zumbro, along with some larger northern pike.

The Rochester area has a number of ponds and reservoirs that provide good fishing opportunity for panfish and bass. These include Bear Creek Reservoir, Silver Creek Reservoir, Willow Reservoir, Gamehaven Lake and Foster-Arend Pond. Foster-Arend is stocked regularly with catchable size rainbow trout and trout season is open year-round.

### **Cannon and Zumbro rivers**

The Cannon River below Byllesby dam and the Zumbro River below the Lake Zumbro dam both offer very diverse fisheries. A float trip down one of these rivers provides a unique fishing opportunity in southeast Minnesota. Both rivers have good walleye and smallmouth bass populations. The Zumbro River also has a good population of muskellunge.

### **Mille Lacs Lake**

With the anticipated late ice-out due to a cold spring, it is possible that walleye will be concentrated near spawning sites during the early season. Finding a concentration of walleye could result in some high fishing success. The most abundant size group of walleye in Mille Lacs Lake ranges from 17- to 22-inches, with the majority of these fish being from the 2013 and 2017 year classes. From opening day through May 31, anglers can possess one walleye from 21- to 23-inches long, or over 28-inches. All other sizes of walleye have to be released.

Northern pike will have completed spawning by opening day, and will likely be in an aggressive feeding mode. Pike are overlooked by many anglers, but Mille Lacs Lake has a high quality size structure, with individuals over 40-inches long sampled annually. Good numbers of “eater” size pike, in the mid- to upper-20 inch range are available. Anglers may possess up to three northern pike, but all pike longer than 30-inches have to be released.

For a more complete summary of regulations, please visit the [Mille Lacs Lake page](#) on the DNR website. Remember that water levels remain low on Mille Lacs Lake, and several boat launches may not be suitable for larger boats until the area gets significant precipitation and lake levels rise.

### **Southeast Minnesota trout fishing**

Anglers looking to get away from the crowds opening weekend should consider fishing trout streams in southeast Minnesota. Overall, trout populations are very healthy, with good numbers of larger adult fish and abundant smaller fish from strong recruitment in recent years. There are many streams that have public access and abundant brown trout populations, including the South Branch of the Whitewater River, Trout Run and the South Fork of the Root River. There are also increased opportunities for stocked Rainbow Trout angling in Mill Creek, Spring Valley Creek, South Branch Root River, Sylvan Park Ponds, Duschee Creek and all branches of the Whitewater River, which

are stocked prior to trout opener and periodically throughout the summer.

The newest version of the Trout Angling Opportunities booklet of maps can be found at area DNR offices and some outdoors shops or [accessed online](#). This guides anglers to over 255 miles of angling easements, lists which species are present in each stream and identifies the special regulations for select streams. New easements are being acquired each year to ensure anglers can find a unique spot to enjoy fishing southeast Minnesota's trout streams.