

Central Region Fishing Outlook for 2023

Hinckley area

Chisago County

The Chisago chain of lakes (South Center, North Center, South Lindstrom, and Chisago) have had good numbers of Walleyes in recent surveys. Northern pike grow well in these lakes; there is a 24-36" protected slot for pike in North and South Center. Largemouth Bass fishing action should be good for the catch and release season which opens on the same day. These lakes all have good sized public accesses with ample parking.

Isanti County

Green Lake west of Cambridge is a good all around lake for walleye, northern pike, largemouth bass, crappies, and sunfish. The Rum River, with several access points in the county, also offers the opportunity to catch numerous species by boat or from shore.

Kanabec County

Knife Lake has a self-sustaining Walleye population, and numbers in the 2022 lake survey were higher than in recent surveys. A 2021 creel survey showed good catch rates for walleye. There is an 18-24 inch protected slot for walleye on Knife Lake. Fish Lake, Ann Lake, and the Snake River are also good bets for action for walleye, bass, and other fish species.

Pine County

Cross Lake and Pokegama Lake, connected to the Snake River system, offer a variety of fish species. If Walleye are not biting, these lakes usually have some good sized crappies and sunfish, as well as channel catfish and sucker species. Lake sturgeon are also present in the Snake River system; catch and release season for sturgeon begins on June 16.

Further north, the trio of Island, Sand, and Sturgeon lakes in northern Pine County are worth a try. Easily accessible off I-35, all three of the lakes boast abundant northern pike populations, although sizes tend to be small. Island and Sturgeon also have walleye populations successfully maintained through fingerling stocking. All three lakes offer good sunfish and crappie fishing and catch and release fishing for largemouth bass from May 13-May 26 before the harvest season begins.

The season for trout in inland lakes also begins on May 13. Grindstone Lake west of Sandstone will be stocked prior to the opener with rainbow trout, brown trout, and lake trout, providing a unique fishing opportunity for the area. Grindstone is managed as a "two story" fishery, with fishing for panfish, northern pike, and largemouth and smallmouth bass along with the trout species. A trout stamp is required to keep trout.

Little Falls Area

Big Swan Lake

This 950 acre lake is a gem in Todd County, just outside the city of Swanville, MN. With healthy pike, walleye, bass crappie and bluegill populations, the lake has plenty to offer anglers that venture out this way. Extensive bulrush beds and excellent submerged vegetation make this an anglers paradise with ample structure. Recent walleye fingerling stocking has survived well and opportunities to catch some quality walleye are available. Special regulations are present for northern pike (24-36" protective slot, with only one over 36" and a six daily bag limit). Size structure of the pike has been impressive, with quite a few individuals over 30" present. Additional opportunities are available for quality bass, crappie and "eater" size bluegill as well. More information can be found on the Lakefinder site here: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/showreport.html?downum=77002300>

Sullivan Lake and attached Platte Lake

With 1100+ acres and habitat variety, Sullivan and connected Platte Lake (1600+ acres) offer up some excellent fishing opener choices. With some natural reproduction and supplemental walleye fry stocking, several decent year classes are present in both Sullivan and Platte Lakes. Located on the northeast corner of Morrison County, several lakes can be found in the area, but Sullivan and Platte offer a nice variety of angling options with excellent walleye, pike, bass and crappie. An experimental 10 fish daily bag limit is in place for sunfish for the lakes. Only 10 total can be kept daily from both Sullivan and Platte combined. Bulrush beds abound in both lakes and Sullivan offers some unique structure to challenge anglers as well. More information can be found on our lakefinder suite here: Sullivan Lake – <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/showreport.html?downum=49001600>

Platte Lake - <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/showreport.html?downum=18008800>

Little Rock Lake/Mississippi River

Home to the 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, and improving water quality in the watershed since 2012 has likely had a positive impact. A recent trapnet survey (spring 2022) revealed a significant increase in bluegill, crappie and bass recruitment, with bluegill over 10" in the sampling effort. Our 2020 survey of Little Rock Lake found the highest catch of walleye ever recorded for the basin. Plenty of "keeper" size fish are available, with some approaching 30". This, along with a strong population of channel catfish, black crappie, 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: <https://www.genesismaps.com/SocialMap> Lake survey information on Little Rock Lake can be found on the DNR Lakefinder website here: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/showreport.html?downum=05001300>

Big Sauk Lake

This 2094 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 management 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. 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. Further details can be found at the Lakefinder site here: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/showreport.html?downum=77015000>

Alexander Lake

This 2708 acre lake Located in northern Morrison County is a known destination for walleye, pike, bass, crappie and musky. 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. Although Alexander has Eurasian Water Milfoil, fish tend to use both the inside and outside edges of the beds when foraging. Due to the better than average water clarity, it might to fish during evening hours for walleye. Good year classes in recent years should allow anglers ample opportunities to catch “eater” walleye as well as the occasional trophy. Further details can be found at the Lakefinder site here: <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/showreport.html?downum=49007900>

Lake City Area

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 has been stocked periodically with Walleye fingerlings, but recent studies have documented substantial natural walleye reproduction and 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 found in Lake Zumbro, along with some larger northern pike.

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 SE MN. Both rivers have good walleye and smallmouth bass populations. The Zumbro River also has a good population of muskellunge.

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. The big river is very dynamic and currently water levels are very high. In late April, high water levels closed nearly all boat accesses on the river. Given the extended high water this spring, it is unclear when boat accesses will be operational again. Anglers are advised to check current conditions and access availability before planning a trip to the Mississippi. As always, the Mississippi River boasts excellent populations of walleye, sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass, northern pike, bluegill, yellow perch, white bass, channel catfish, and flathead catfish.

The fish population in Lake Pepin/Pool 4 are in excellent shape right now. Three of the four highest gill net catches on record have been observed in the last three years. Sauger reproduction has been more sporadic in recent years, however the 2020 year class is the 3rd strongest recorded since 1965. Sauger

from the 2020 year class are now about 15 to 17 inches in length. 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. White bass numbers and size seem to be rebounding after a long period of decline.

Bag and size limit regulations were changed on the Mississippi River border with Wisconsin in 2020. Anglers should check the regulation book if they haven't fished the river for a few years. A creel survey is also underway on Pool 4, so anglers may be asked questions about their fishing trip. The creel survey will provide information on the current catch and harvest levels post regulation change.

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 there is open year-round.

Lanesboro Area

Anglers looking to avoid the crowds might consider fishing the trout streams of southeast Minnesota while the crowds head to lakes pursuing other species. Trout fishing with harvest opportunities in southeast streams opened April 15th. Stream conditions are great after a very mild snowmelt and warmer early spring. Many areas streams had record reproduction a couple years ago, which has led to higher abundance of catchable size adults this year. Rainbow Trout will be stocked throughout the season and the new strain of Brook Trout (MN Driftless) will be stocked in late-summer in efforts to reintroduce heritage genetics into area streams. Good streams to try include Trout Run, Rush Creek, all three branches of the Whitewater River and the South Branch of the Root River. Anglers can learn more about streams is available on the DNR's [Stream Finder](#) page and there are also [online](#) and [downloadable](#) maps showing reaches with public access.

East Metro Area

Big Marine Lake (1799 acres)

If you like catching sunfish, largemouth bass, northern pike and an occasional walleye in clear water, Big Marine is worth a try. Located in Washington County, Big Marine provides quality year-round fishing. Walleye fingerlings have been stocked every year since 2016 and provide decent opportunities. You may have to fish at night for walleye due to the clear water. Pike are numerous but small in size and could benefit from harvesting some of the smaller pike and following the current regulation where the possession limit is 10 with not more than 2 over 26 inches and all pike from 22-26 inches need to be released. Two DNR accesses and one county access (fee/permit needed) provide options to the angler venturing out on Big Marine.

Bald Eagle Lake (1,047 acres)

Located within the City of White Bear Lake and right off of US Highway 61, Bald Eagle Lake provides a solid fishery for both northern pike and walleye (stocked annually). In 2022, walleye (averaging 17 inches) were sampled at their highest levels since 2008 while northern pike, averaging 24 inches were sampled in good numbers. Pike should provide some good action this year with some larger sizes present in the population (7% of sampled pike exceeded 30 inches). Bald Eagle also provides respectable panfish, largemouth bass and muskellunge fishing opportunities. Don't forget the bass

catch and release season runs from May 13th through May 26th. One public access operated by Ramsey County is located just off of Highway 61 on the east side of the lake.

Smaller lakes

If prefer fishing East Metro's smaller lakes, give one of our Fishing in the Neighborhood (FIN) lakes a try in 2023. Carver (Woodbury), Cobblestone (Apple Valley), Como (St. Paul), and Ravine (Cottage Grove) are stocked every year with yearling and adult walleyes to provide quick action in a smaller lake setting.

West Metro Area

Lake Waconia

Lake Waconia is a 3,080-acre lake located north of the City of Waconia in central Carver County. Public water access is provided at three locations around the lake with 82 vehicle/trailer spots in total. Waconia is primarily managed for Walleye (special regulation: 16-inch minimum length) and Muskellunge (though muskie angling does not open until June 3). In addition, Lake Waconia supports catchable populations of largemouth bass, northern pike, bluegill, pumpkinseed, and black crappie. The 2022 survey marked the highest catch rate of walleye in Lake Waconia in the previous 20 years. Average size of walleye sampled was 16.8 inches and the largest fish sampled was 27.1 inches. The 2022 survey results show Waconia exceeding long-range walleye abundance and size goals, providing excellent angling opportunities. Additionally, black crappie numbers were high with some fish over 10 inches sampled, and sunfish are abundant but with higher numbers of smaller fish. A lesser-known species that anglers may not be aware of existing in Waconia is freshwater drum. Low numbers of freshwater drum were sampled in 2022; however, average size was phenomenal with an average length of 22.3 inches and fish up to 26 inches sampled.

Bryant Lake

Bryant Lake, in Eden Prairie, provides opportunities to catch multiple species from both shore and boat. Rivers' Regional Park property provide a boat ramp, a fishing pier, public access for about a fifth of the shoreline, and multiple park amenities. Bryant offers fishing for four predator species: largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, and hybrid (tiger) muskie. According to the 2022 survey, northern pike action should be good based on an above average survey catch. Northern pike averaged 24 inches and the largest fish sampled was 32.7 inches. The 2022 survey marked the highest catch rate of walleye in Bryant Lake in the previous 25 years. Average size of walleye sampled was 19.7 inches and the largest fish sampled was 26.2 inches. While not naturally occurring, stocking walleye in Bryant Lake has created a healthy, robust fishery. Tiger muskie have been caught in the last three surveys and fish measuring 38 inches in length have been recorded. Tiger muskie are only stocked in a handful of metro lakes and Bryant Lake offers anglers a unique opportunity to target this species when the season opens on June 3. The minimum size to harvest muskie in Bryant is 40 inches. There is also good bass fishing on Bryant with catch and release angling from May 13 until the bass harvest opener on May 27. While entrance is free at all Three Rivers Park District parks when the park is open, a daily or seasonal permit is required to park boat trailers at the access. This narrow-shaped lake receives moderate to heavy recreational boat traffic.

Lake Minnetonka

Lake Minnetonka is perennially a favorite for metro anglers. This multi-species lake has moderate numbers of walleye with a large average size, abundant northern pike in a range of sizes, top notch bass fishing, abundant sunfish and crappie at decent sizes, and opportunity to fish for muskie after June 3. If you choose to fish Minnetonka, plan to arrive early as the public accesses to fill up, especially on weekends.

Lake Nokomis

Lake Nokomis is a good option for anglers looking to fish from shore. The entire shoreline is Minneapolis parkland. In addition to two fishing piers, there are numerous places where anglers can cast from shore. Nokomis has decent numbers of walleye, sunfish and crappie for anglers to pursue. A tiger muskie may also provide a thrill on occasion.

St. Cloud Area

Clearwater Lake

Clearwater Lake is a 3,158-acre lake located two miles north of the City of Annandale on the border of Wright and Stearns County. Clearwater Lake is the largest lake in the Sauk Rapids office management area and a popular destination for bass fishing and other recreation. There are two public accesses on the west basin and a private fee access located on the east basin. Anglers can expect good fishing for northern pike, largemouth bass, and panfish. While walleye opportunities are currently somewhat limited, anglers still have some chances to catch them too.

Northern pike provide a good harvest opportunity for anglers due to their relatively high numbers. Northern pike averaged two and a half pounds in the 2022 survey with some fish over 32 inches available. Largemouth bass numbers are also high and can provide plenty of action for anglers. Black crappie and sunfish are available in good numbers and some larger crappies (up to 14 inches) are present. The walleye fishery is sustained through fry stocking with additional supplemental fingerling stocking during years with poor fry survival. Walleye numbers in Clearwater Lake in 2022 were lower than what would typically be expected for lakes of its size and location. Despite the declines in catch rates, Walleye up to 27 inches were sampled with an average weight of three pounds.

Sugar Lake

Sugar Lake is a 1,015-acre lake located five miles north of the City of Annandale in northern Wright County. The lake has excellent water quality and is a popular recreation lake. The lake was designated for muskellunge management in 1967 and is also managed for walleye, and northern pike. The walleye and muskellunge populations are managed through annual fingerling stocking. In 2007, experimental fishing regulations were put in place for northern pike (24 to 36-inch protected slot) and black crappie (five fish daily bag limit). A recent fisheries lake survey conducted at Sugar Lake indicated an abundance of game fish, making it an excellent destination for anglers. The lake offers great fishing opportunities for smaller sized northern pike, largemouth bass, and bluegill. Additionally, anglers can expect a chance to catch quality sized black crappie, and walleye with the potential for trophy muskellunge as well once that season opens June 3. There are two public accesses on the lake, one each on the north and south ends of the lake. During the fishing opener, both can be crowded, but the south access has room for up to 18 vehicles with trailers.

Sauk River Chain of Lakes

The Sauk River Chain of Lakes (SRCL) is located in south-central Stearns County near the cities of Richmond and Cold Spring, MN. The Sauk River Chain of Lakes is made up of nine lakes and is formed by the dam near the city of Cold Spring. Several of the lakes are located directly on the Sauk River, while others are off channel but still influenced by the river. There are two public accesses located on the chain, one located on the Sauk River off County Road 22 just east of Becker Lake and the other is off County Road 71 east of Cedar Island Lake. The SRCL is a great all-around fishery with an excellent variety of species for the area. Anglers have the opportunity to catch quality-sized bluegill, black crappie, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, muskellunge, northern pike, and channel Catfish. A fisheries survey conducted in 2021 found high numbers of walleye with an average size of 16 inches and 1 ½ pounds. The lakes also has good numbers of bluegill over eight inches and black crappie over 10 inches. Moderate numbers of northern pike were observed with an average length of 22 inches and 2 ½ pounds with the largest being 35 inches. Anglers have also reported catching muskie in excess of 40 inches. Bass can provide some excellent action with largemouth averaging 12 inches with fish up to 21 inches and smallmouth averaging 13 inches with fish up to 20 inches. Good numbers of large channel catfish are also available with fish averaging 21 inches with a few pushing 30 inches.

Mille Lacs Lake

The most abundant size range of walleye anglers can expect to catch are from 17- through 22-inches long. The majority of the fish in this size range are from the strong 2013 and 2017 year classes. Predicting angling success is difficult, but anglers can likely expect moderate catch rates in May and June. Walleye angling success during the winter of 2022-23 was slow due to an abundance of yellow perch, which are the most important forage item for walleye, and these perch continue to be abundant. Of particular interest to anglers is that there will be an opportunity to harvest walleye through the entire open water season this year, though harvest will be monitored, and that opportunity may be restricted if harvest approaches the State fishery quota of 100,300 pounds. Anglers may harvest 1 walleye from 21-to 23-inches long, or over 28-inches long.

Smallmouth bass are also a popular species to fish for on Mille Lacs Lake. The smallmouth bass population is managed to provide a very high-quality fishery, with about one half of the adult bass measured in spring surveys are at least 17-inches long. Smallmouth bass over 20-inches in length are sampled annually and reported by anglers. To manage the lake to provide a high-quality fishery, all bass longer than 17-inches have to be released, though up to three bass less than 17-inches long may be harvested.

Mille Lacs also contains northern pike with larger fish a good percentage of the population. Anglers can only harvest pike under 30 inches to preserve the quality size of fish.