

Central Region Fishing Outlook for 2026

We wish you an enjoyable 2026 fishing season!

These fishing outlooks contain a wide range of fisheries information compiled in April by local DNR Fisheries staff. You can find more information about the management, habitat and oversight work performed by area fisheries staff, and how to contact them, on the [DNR area fisheries pages](#). Following these outlooks, we have included other important reminders to consider for your fishing season.

Outlook by areas

Forest Lake

Located within the city of Forest Lake and just east of Interstate 35, Forest Lake had good numbers of northern pike (12 per gill net) and walleye (8 per gill net) in the 2025 survey. Walleye fingerlings are now stocked annually and produced a walleye population that averaged 19 inches. Northern pike averaged a respectable 26 inches. Don't forget about the quality muskellunge fishery that opens on June 6 and the new catch and release bass season that allows anglers to fish bass year-round. Three public accesses and a private marina provide access to a lake comprised of three basins and plenty of structure.

Coon Lake

If you like fishing for bass, pike and walleye, give Coon Lake a try this season. In 2025, pike were very abundant (26 per gill net averaging 21 inches) and walleye numbers were up (3.2 per gill net) from the 2019 survey of 0.7 per gill net. Don't forget about the walleye 17-inch minimum size limit. Bass fishing is always good and the panfish are respectable. If harvesting pike, anglers can keep 10 pike, with not more than two over 26 inches and all pike from 22-26 inches need to be released. Two public accesses provide easy access to a great multi-species lake.

Turtle Lake

Located in Shoreview, Turtle provides a solid, multi-species fishing experience for bass, pike, walleye and panfish in a smaller lake setting. In 2025, walleyes were sampled at 5 per gill net and averaged just under 18 inches while the pike were present in good numbers (10 per gill net) with most fish under 23 inches. An experimental regulation for largemouth bass was put in place in 2020 with a protected slot of 14-20 inches. The goal of this regulation is to allow harvest of smaller bass and increase average bass size. Ramsey County Parks operates a popular park facility on the southeast corner of the lake. Facilities include a picnic area, boat ramp and swimming beach.

Smaller lakes

If fishing 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 2026. 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. Cobblestone Lake had eight walleyes per gill net in 2025 survey and should provide solid shore fishing and ice angling opportunities in 2026.

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, muskie, white bass and smallmouth bass. Please refer to the Wisconsin-Minnesota Border Waters page in the 2026 Minnesota Fishing Regulation Booklet for the current

regulations for the St. Croix River. 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 is catch and release of walleye, sauger, largemouth and smallmouth bass year-round with no closed season. Pool 2 regulations apply to all backwaters and connected lakes the Mississippi River except for Crosby, Pickerel, Upper, Little Pigs Eye and North Star Steel lakes.

West Metro Area

Lake Independence in Hennepin County

Only about a half hour west of Minneapolis, Lake Independence is a great multi-species option for metro anglers. This 832-acre lake near the city of Maple Plain is bordered to the southeast by the Baker Park Reserve which is operated by the Three Rivers Park District. This park provides a two-lane concrete boat access as well as ample shore fishing opportunities, including a pier. There's also an expansive swimming beach and recreation area. While entrance is free to 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.

Lake Independence is primarily known for its walleye and muskie fishing, but black crappie and bluegill fishing can also be good. Walleye are stocked every other year and numbers in the lake are high compared to other similar lakes in the state. Good numbers of walleye were caught in the 2025 survey, and the fish were of healthy size. The average walleye in the 2025 survey was 19.4 inches and 3.02 pounds, with the largest measuring 27.8 inches. Seventy-four percent of the sample were 15 inches or longer, 57% were 20 inches or longer, and 10% were 25 inches or longer.

Muskie are also a popular target for anglers when the season opens in June. Stocking has produced good numbers of these top predators and fish over 50 inches have been reported. Northern pike aren't as common as they may be in other metro lakes but those that are present grow to large sizes. In the 2025 survey, 48% were longer than 28 inches and the largest pike sampled was 38 inches.

Lotus Lake in Carver County

Lotus Lake is a 245-acre lake located north of Chanhassen in northeastern Carver County. Lotus is primarily managed for walleye and largemouth bass but also supports catchable populations of bluegill, black crappie, and northern pike. The 2025 walleye catch rate from the DNR's survey (10.5 per net) was the highest recorded on Lotus Lake in the previous 30 years. Walleye averaged 18.8 inches in length and the largest fish sampled in the 2025 survey was 25.8 inches.

High numbers of bluegills and moderate numbers of black crappies were sampled during the 2025 survey. Despite extremely high numbers of bluegill, nearly 20% of fish sampled were greater than 7 inches. The black crappie catch averaged 6.8 inches in length but fish over 10 inches were sampled. These two species should provide good angling opportunities throughout the day when the walleye bite is generally slower.

St. Cloud area

Clearwater Lake

This 3,158-acre lake is located two miles north of the city of Annandale on the border of Wright and Stearns counties. Clearwater is the largest lake in the Sauk Rapids management area and a popular destination for bass fishing and other recreation. 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 relatively high numbers. In 2025, pike averaged 23.3 inches and 2.9 pounds, with fish over 33 inches also being sampled. Largemouth bass numbers are also high and can provide plenty of action for anglers. Crappie are abundant and have a quality size structure. Similarly, bluegill are also abundant, and larger fish can be found as well. Bluegills greater than nine inches were sampled in 2025. Clearwater Lake has a daily possession limit of 10 sunfish and five crappie. These regulations include the connected lakes of Augusta, Caroline, Grass and Otter.

Walleye numbers in Clearwater Lake continue to be lower than what would typically be expected for lakes of its size and location. In 2025, walleye averaged 20.4 inches and three pounds, with fish nearly 28 inches also being sampled.

There are two public accesses on the west basin and a private fee access located on the east basin. Invasive species present include Eurasian Watermilfoil, Starry Stonewort and Zebra Mussels. It is important to take extra caution and prevent spreading these species to other bodies of water. Make sure to clean, drain and dry your boat and equipment before entering or leaving the water to avoid accidental transfer of these invasive species.

French Lake

This 346-acre lake is located three miles southwest of the city of Annandale. Anglers can expect good fishing for walleye, northern pike and largemouth bass. In 2025, walleye catches were the highest on record, over triple the catch from the previous survey. The 2023 year class dominated the catch and should provide quality angling opportunities for “eater” fish into the future. Larger fish up to 27.5 inches were also sampled. Similarly, northern pike catches also reached a record high in 2025. Pike averaged 23 inches and 2.8 pounds, with fish over 34 inches also being sampled. The overall size structure is encouraging and should provide ample angling opportunities. Largemouth bass did not have a high catch rate in 2025; however, the size structure was solid. Bass averaged 14.7 inches and 2.8 pounds, with fish greater than 19 inches also being sampled. Thirty-two percent of the bass were 15 inches or longer. French Lake has one public access on the northwest portion of the lake and is infested with Eurasian Watermilfoil. Please remember to clean, drain and dry to prevent the spread of invasive species.

Grand Lake

This 655-acre lake is located about two miles south of Rockville in eastern Stearns County. Grand Lake continues to support a balanced and moderately productive fishery typical of central Minnesota lakes, and anglers can expect good fishing for walleye, northern pike, largemouth bass, bluegill and black crappie. Walleye remain the primary managed species in Grand Lake and continue to perform well under the current fingerling stocking program.

The 2025 lake survey found that walleye abundance was higher than in 2020 and slightly above the long-term average. Walleye ranged from 11 to 26 inches and averaged 16 inches and 1.5 pounds. Strong recruitment from the 2022 and 2024 stocking years should provide anglers with consistent action and a dependable chance to catch quality fish. Northern pike also remain abundant, and although the population still includes plenty of smaller fish, the size structure improved compared to 2020. Pike ranged from 16 to 34 inches and averaged 23 inches and 2.7 pounds, with 17% of sampled fish longer than 26 inches.

Largemouth bass are another bright spot in Grand Lake. Spring electrofishing in 2025 showed bass abundance well above area averages, with fish ranging from 9 to 19 inches and averaging 13 inches. Sixty-eight percent of bass sampled were longer than 12 inches and 19% exceeded 15 inches, so anglers should have a good chance at catching quality fish. Bluegill are abundant but remain on the smaller side, which is common in productive central Minnesota lakes. Bluegills ranged from 3 to 9 inches, with 35% longer than 6 inches and a few fish over 8 inches. Black crappie numbers improved from the previous survey, and while average size was about 8 inches, anglers can still expect some crappies up to about 11 inches.

A DNR public access is located on the southwest corner of the lake off Grand Lake Road. Grand Lake is also designated infested with starry stonewort and zebra mussels, so anglers should remember to clean, drain and dry boats and equipment to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species.

Maple Lake

This 777-acre lake is located east of the city of Maple Lake in Wright County. It continues to offer a mix of angling opportunities for walleye, northern pike, largemouth bass, bluegill and black crappie. Walleye remain the primary managed species and are supported through regular fingerling stocking. Even so, walleye numbers in the 2025 survey were still on the low side, but the fish that were sampled were in good shape and ran from 14 to 24 inches, averaging 19 inches and 3 pounds. Growth remains fast, with fish reaching about 20 inches by age 4, so anglers may not see big numbers but still have a shot at quality fish.

Northern pike continue to be abundant in Maple Lake, but most are on the small side. Pike in the 2025 survey ranged from 13 to 33 inches and averaged 21 inches and 2 pounds, with just 11% topping 26 inches. Largemouth bass remain another good option. Bass sampled in spring 2025 ranged from 5 to 18 inches and averaged 11 inches, with 41% longer than 12 inches and 16% over 15 inches. Bluegills were average for this type of lake and ranged from 3 to 9 inches, while black crappies continue to provide some of the better panfish potential, with fish running 5 to 12 inches and averaging about 9 inches.

Maple Lake has two public accesses, one on the northeast end and one on the southwest end. The lake also contains Eurasian watermilfoil, flowering rush, and zebra mussels, so anglers should clean, drain, and dry boats and equipment before heading to another lake.

Pulaski Lake

This 702-acre lake is located within the city limits of Buffalo and remains a popular destination thanks to its clear water and strong mix of gamefish. Walleye are maintained through fingerling stocking in even-numbered years. The 2025 survey found walleye numbers were down sharply from 2020, but the fish that were sampled were larger on average. Walleyes ranged from 11 to 28 inches and averaged 20 inches and 3 pounds. Most of the fish sampled were at least 15 inches long, and more than half were 20 inches or longer, so anglers may catch fewer walleyes than in past years but still have a good chance at finding quality fish.

Northern pike remain abundant and continue to provide steady action, although most fish are small. Pike ranged from 11 to 30 inches and averaged 19 inches and 1.5 pounds, with only a small percentage longer than 26 inches. Largemouth bass are one of the brighter spots in the lake. Bass sampled in spring 2025 ranged from 8 to 19 inches and averaged 14 inches, with 69% longer than 12 inches and 46% over 15 inches. That should give bass anglers a solid shot at good numbers of quality fish. Panfish were more mixed in the 2025 survey. Bluegill and black crappie numbers were both down from 2020, although some larger crappies were present, while pumpkinseed numbers increased noticeably.

A city-owned public access is located on the southwest side of the lake next to a public swim beach and fishing pier. Eurasian watermilfoil is common in Pulaski, and zebra mussels were found in 2022, so boaters should take steps to avoid spreading aquatic invasive species.

East and West Lake Sylvia

These lakes are located three miles south of South Haven in Wright County and are connected by a navigable channel. East Sylvia is 669 acres with a maximum depth of 78 feet and West Sylvia is 904 acres with a maximum depth of 97 feet. The lakes are primarily managed for walleye, black crappie and bluegill.

Walleye have been managed through fingerling stocking and the catch in both East and West Sylvia was similar to the long-term average for the lakes. Combined lengths ranged from 10 to 25 inches with average lengths of 18 and 14 inches for East and West Sylvia respectively, so anglers should have a good chance of catching quality size fish.

East and West Lake Sylvia have consistently had a healthy population of largemouth bass and the survey in 2025 was no different. East Sylvia's catch rate was slightly higher compared to West Sylvia, but both basins exceeded the Sauk Rapids Fisheries Area abundance goal and had a wide variety of sizes represented. Lengths ranged from 5 to 19 inches with an average length of 11 inches for both East and West Sylvia. While the average lengths are on the smaller side, a 21-inch largemouth bass was caught in a gill net on West Sylvia, so there are trophy fish out there to catch.

Reduced bag limits for sunfish (10-fish daily) and crappie (five-fish daily) were introduced for West Sylvia Lake beginning March 1, 2021. Between the two lakes, bluegill lengths ranged from 3 to 10 inches with an average of 7 and 8 inches for East and West Lake Sylvia respectively. Anglers can expect to catch a good number of quality sized bluegill. Black crappie were not sampled in as many numbers, but this was likely due to the later date of the survey in 2025 compared to past surveys. Lengths ranged from 6 to 14 inches with average length of 12 inches for both East and West Lake Sylvia.

Both lakes are very popular in the summer for recreational boating and fishing. Eurasian milfoil, zebra mussels and starry stonewort are present in the lakes and users should be careful not to spread these invasive species to other lakes.

Kings Lake

This 204-acre lake is located two miles northwest of Freeport in Stearns County. The lake has a maximum depth of 44 feet and a public access is located on the south end of the lake. Kings Lake anglers can expect good fishing for largemouth bass, northern pike and walleye.

Largemouth bass were sampled by daytime electrofishing in good numbers. The catch rate was comparable to the Sauk Rapids daytime target and over three times higher than the catch rate in 2015. Lengths ranged from 4 to 21 inches with an average length of 13 inches. Forty-eight percent were longer than 15 inches.

Northern pike numbers in 2025 were higher than in 2015, but very similar to the historical average. Lengths in 2025 ranged from 21 to 33 inches with an average length and weight of 27 inches and 4 pounds. Northern pike size was favorable with 56% longer than 26 inches and 21% longer than 30 inches. Many lakes in the area have high numbers of pike, which often results in smaller fish, but Kings Lake is an exception.

Walleye were stocked by the DNR until 2003, and since 2005 the local sportsman's club has stocked fingerlings almost annually and has maintained a viable fishery. The catch in 2025 was similar to 2015 and consisted of many larger fish. Lengths ranged from 7 to 25 inches with an average length and weight of 18 inches and 2 pounds. Seventy percent of walleye caught were over 15 inches and 61% were over 20 inches. Walleye grew to 13 inches in length in 2 years, which is faster than the statewide average, but similar to the Sauk Rapids area average.

Bluegill numbers in 2025 were similar to 2015 with lengths ranging from 3 to 8 inches with an average length of 6 inches. The black crappie catches were less than 2015, but higher than 2004. Crappie sampled were on the smaller side, ranging from 6 to 9 inches and averaged 7 inches.

Kings Lake does not have any special regulations, nor does it have any invasive species listed. Users should maintain diligence with aquatic invasive species protocols by cleaning and drying boats and equipment used in infested waters before entering lakes such as Kings Lake to prevent the spread of invasive species.

Little Falls Area

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. Sampling in 2023 yielded the second highest catch rates ever for walleye (12.7 per 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, smallmouth bass, yellow perch, black crappie and with recent increases in submerged vegetation, bluegill have been doing well. Further details can be found at the [Lakefinder webpage for Big Sauk Lake](#).

Big Swan Lake

This 950-acre lake is a gem in Todd County, just outside the city of Swanville. 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 inch protective slot, with only one over 36 inches 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 webpage for Big Swan Lake](#).

Sullivan Lake and attached Platte Lake

With 1,100-plus acres and habitat variety, Sullivan and connected Platte lakes (1,600-plus 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 the LakeFinder webpages for [Sullivan Lake](#) and [Platte Lake](#).

Little Rock Lake/Mississippi River

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 are certainly having some benefit from a fishery perspective. One could argue the improving water quality in the watershed since 2012 has likely had a positive impact on the fishery. A recent trap net survey (spring 2023) revealed a significant increase in bluegill, crappie and bass recruitment, with bluegill over 10 inches in the sampling effort. The DNR's 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 per net), black crappie (14.64 per 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 farther upstream (beyond the Rice Bridge), as shallower water does prevent conventional boat traffic most of the time. Smallmouth bass, walleye, channel catfish and even muskie (legal to fish for after the Saturday, June 6 opener) can be caught in this stretch of river. Mapping efforts associated with the drawdown were completed and available on the [C-Map Genesis website](#). Lake survey information on Little Rock Lake can be found on the [DNR Lakefinder webpage for Little Rock Lake](#).

Hinckley Area

Chisago County

The Chisago Chain of Lakes (North Center, South Center, North Lindstrom, South Lindstrom and Chisago) have good numbers of walleyes. Northern pike grow well in these lakes, and there is a 24-36 inch protected slot for pike on North and South Center which provides a trophy pike opportunity. Largemouth bass fishing is good for numbers and size on all these lakes. East and West Rush lakes are a good bet for walleye and northern pike, as well as good numbers and sizes of black crappies and bluegill. Northern pike also grow well in these lakes, and there is a 24-40 inch protected slot for pike on East and West Rush lakes which provides another trophy pike opportunity. Muskie are stocked in East and West Rush lakes and provide a unique chance to catch a 50-inch fish after the June 6 opener for that species. The Upper St. Croix River is a great multispecies destination if you want to get away from the crowds and have a flat-bottomed boat and a pair of waders. Demonstrating caution while driving is advised while fishing this rocky river.

Isanti County

Green Lake west of Cambridge is a very productive lake that is a great multispecies fishery for walleye, northern pike, largemouth bass, black crappies and bluegill. The Rum River, with several access points in the county, also offers remote fishing opportunities for smallmouth bass and walleye.

Kanabec County

Walleye in Knife Lake spawn in mid-April and should be well dispersed throughout the lake by the fishing opener. Knife has an 18-24 inch protected slot for walleye, with good numbers under 18 inches for angler harvest opportunities. Black crappie and bluegill action is also good on Knife Lake. Fish and Ann lakes are other good options

for walleye, northern pike, largemouth bass, black crappies and bluegill.

Pine County

Cross and Pokegama lakes in southern Pine County are connected to the Snake River system and have a wide variety of fish species. In addition to walleye and northern pike, these lakes have some large black crappies and bluegill, as well as channel catfish, and white bass. Muskie are stocked in Cross Lake, which provides an opportunity to catch a 50-inch fish. Lake sturgeon are present in the Snake River system, with a catch and release season beginning in mid-June. The Snake and Kettle rivers are great multi-species destinations if you want to get away from the crowds and have a flat-bottomed boat and a pair of waders. Caution is advised while navigating these rocky rivers.

Island, Sturgeon and Sand lakes are great fisheries in northern Pine County. Island Lake is the better choice for walleye, 20-inch-plus northern pike, and keeper size yellow perch, while Sturgeon has better numbers and sizes of black crappies and bluegill. If your kids are looking for action, Sturgeon Lake has an abundant largemouth bass and northern pike population. Sand Lake is also an action lake to take kids to for largemouth bass and bluegill, with a chance to catch a walleye.

The season for trout in inland lakes begins in mid-May. Grindstone Lake is the only trout lake in the Hinckley Fisheries Area and is stocked annually with rainbow trout and brown trout. Other trout species periodically stocked include splake, lake trout and brook trout. While Grindstone is not a designated trout lake, a trout stamp is required to keep trout.

Mille Lacs Lake

Mille Lacs Lake will provide excellent angling opportunities for multiple species during the 2026 fishing season. May and June typically offer the best time to fish for most species and especially for walleye, smallmouth bass and northern pike. The walleye bite on Mille Lacs Lake is driven by forage fish numbers and much of the current forage has grown to a size that is making it more difficult for all but the larger walleye to prey on. This should make for a better bite to start the season, at least until the next hatch of perch becomes available for them by mid-July. The walleye population is currently healthy, and anglers will have the opportunity to harvest walleye to begin the open water season this year. Anglers may harvest up to three walleye 17 inches or longer, only one of which may be larger than 20 inches. Harvest will be monitored, and that opportunity may be restricted if harvest approaches the State's fishery quota of 105,300 pounds. A strong 2024 year-class has small walleye abundant currently, and the most abundant size range of keeper walleye anglers can expect to catch are from 17- 20-inches long. There are good numbers over 20 inches, too.

Smallmouth bass and northern pike are also popular species to fish for on Mille Lacs Lake. Both populations are healthy in terms of numbers and size. The smallmouth bass population is managed to provide a very high-quality fishery and is regarded as one of the top fisheries in North America. Smallmouth bass over 20-inches in length are sampled annually and reported by anglers. The season is continuous for catch and release fishing, but anglers can harvest up to three bass less than 17-inches long from May 23 to Sept. 13, 2026. To maintain the quality size structure everything larger than 17 inches must be released.

Northern pike offer a high-quality population and can be found in weedier locations throughout the lake. They have a quality size structure with trophy potential as well. The limit for northern pike is five fish that must be 30 inches or less. Unique to Mille Lacs is that pike season is open through March 31 when most other places are closed.

Muskie offer a low-density population with a high potential for trophy size fish. The current state record and catch and release world record were both caught from Mille Lacs Lake. Muskie season begins on Saturday, June 6.

Southeast Minnesota

Lake Pepin/Pool 4

The 2026 outlook for walleye remains fair to good despite a dip in the 2024 numbers from DNR surveys. The gill-net rebound in 2025 confirms that strong year classes from 2018 to 2022 are still producing large fish, and the 2022

year-class is expected to join the 20-inch plus group in 2026. Sauger fishing should offer good action in the mid- to high-teen size range, as the dominant 2022 and 2023 year-classes fill out, yet the larger and smaller sizes will be less common.

Smallmouth and largemouth bass, yellow perch, bluegill, and black crappie should all provide quality opportunities, with consistent reproduction supporting strong numbers of harvestable fish across the board. Northern pike fishing should offer good opportunities, particularly for larger fish, as successive years of high aquatic vegetation and a strong forage base have contributed to an increase in larger individuals over the past 10-15 years.

Lake sturgeon angling continues to be a unique and growing opportunity in Pool 4, and anglers catching tagged fish are encouraged to [report them to the Minnesota DNR](#).

Mississippi River

Anglers should be aware of new regulations on the inland portion of Pool 3 of the Mississippi River (from Lock and Dam #2 near Hastings, MN to Prescott, WI) where seasons and bag limits now match those listed for Pool 3 of the Minnesota-Wisconsin border waters. One thing to note, however, is that though bag and size limits have changed, a Minnesota fishing license is required by all who want to fish this inland portion of Pool 3.

Yellow perch numbers have declined from recent highs, but remain above historical averages and both numbers and trophy size can be found by persistent anglers. Similar to Pepin, the clearer water conditions that led to good perch numbers in recent years also have likely contributed to numbers of pike that may be larger in 2026 than typically encountered by river anglers.

Spring walleye and sauger fishing (particularly below the upper dams in the system) is expected to be good, with year class strengths likely mirroring those seen in the Pepin report above.

Bluegill, largemouth bass and black crappie should continue to provide abundant opportunities for anglers with a recent expansion of warmouth (a lesser known sunfish in southeast Minnesota) in Pools 6 and 7 offering an opportunity for new species to anglers. Fish exceeding the current state record for that species have been seen in DNR surveys. Those fishing the main channel borders of the Mississippi will find abundant smallmouth bass opportunities throughout the year.

Recent lake sturgeon efforts by the Minnesota DNR have expanded beyond Pool 4 and have documented good numbers of fish from 30 to 50 inches in length in many pools with opportunities at fish over 60 inches. Anglers targeting lake sturgeon during the catch and release season should be familiar with the differences between lake sturgeon and shovelnose sturgeon and be checking for tags near the dorsal fin as DNRs in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Iowa have begun tagging lake sturgeon in the system. Please [report tagged fish to the Minnesota DNR](#).

Southeast area trout streams

Many streams in the Lanesboro and Lake City areas are at normal flow conditions after another mild winter, with recent snow melt events recharging the groundwater. With fewer large rain events in recent years, sediment has accumulated in many streams. Ideally, spring rain storms will flush sediment through these systems and improve stream conditions for trout and anglers.

Rochester reservoirs

Anglers should expect good populations of bluegill and crappies in the flood control reservoirs. Northern pike will also present good opportunities where they are present (particularly Silver Creek Reservoir). Largemouth bass in both numbers and size are also available across the reservoir system.

As a reminder Bear Creek Reservoir (Chesterwoods), Cascade Lake, Foster-Arend Lake, Gamehaven, Kalmar Reservoir, Quarry Hill Pond, Manor Woods Pond, Silver Lake, Silver Creek Reservoir and Willow Creek Reservoir are all managed under a special regulation that allows for a cumulative daily and possession limit of sunfish, crappie, yellow perch, with a combined possession of 10 and only five may be crappie. Largemouth and smallmouth bass have a limit of one and northern pike have a limit of one.

Minor winter kills associated with varied oxygen levels during the winter are common in these smaller systems but typically have no lasting major effects on the population.

Reminders for a great season

Introduce someone to fishing

Are you planning to introduce someone to fishing? Are you new to fishing and want to give it a try? We have tips and information for you — check out our [learn to fish webpages](#)!

Check the DNR fishing webpage

The DNR has a [fishing page](#) to help answer angler questions. The page links to [LakeFinder](#), which provides maps, special regulation information for individual lakes, other detailed information on lakes throughout the state, and the StreamFinder tool that provides a description, species list, regulations and access information for [trout streams throughout Minnesota](#). The fishing page includes the online versions of the Minnesota fishing regulations booklet in multiple languages. The regulations booklet is available in print anywhere [DNR licenses are sold](#).

Safety must be the priority around cold water

Cold water is dangerous and unexpected falls can quickly turn tragic. About 30% of fatal boating accidents each year happen during the cold-water period, and many involve victims who weren't wearing a life jacket. The most effective way to survive a fall into cold water is to wear a life jacket and make sure the jacket is buckled or zipped. For more information about staying safe on and around cold water, visit the [DNR cold water safety page](#).

Clean In Clean Out

Remember anglers and boaters, Clean In Clean Out when boating or fishing in Minnesota. Protect your waters by following state aquatic invasive species laws. Clean, drain, dispose and keep all plugs out while transporting boats. Find information on aquatic invasive species on the [DNR website](#).

Fish consumption guidance

After analyzing data showing the presence of mercury and per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances in the tissue of some fish from certain Minnesota waterbodies, the Minnesota Department of Health has updated its fish consumption guidelines. The updates include new length-based guidelines for walleye and northern pike, more protective guidelines for northeast Minnesota, and new guidelines for the Vermillion River in Dakota and Scott counties.

The MDH continues to advise that fish are generally a good part of a healthy diet, providing a source of protein and other nutrients, low in saturated fats. Some fish species, such as purchased salmon high in omega-3 fatty acids and low in mercury, help with heart health and brain function.

MDH's [updated fish consumption guidelines](#) provide the information you need to maintain fish in your diet that are low in contaminants.