

# Northeast Region Fishing Outlook for 2025

## Reminders for a great season

Welcome to the 2025 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](#). We hope you have a great fishing experience. And we'd also encourage you to take a kid fishing or [introduce someone new to fishing!](#)

### 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](#).

### 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

Anglers can find fish consumption guidance on the [Minnesota Department of Health website](#). Anglers should check for site-specific advice that pertains to the water they're fishing. If eating fish from a variety of waters or a specific water isn't listed, anglers should follow the statewide guidelines. The MDH website has both site-specific and statewide guidance on eating fish.

### 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](#).

## Outlook by areas

### Duluth area

The St. Louis River Estuary provides exceptional fishing opportunities for walleye and other species such as muskellunge, smallmouth bass, black crappie and channel catfish. The 2018 and 2019 walleye year-classes are both very strong, and most of these fish are currently 16 to 20 inches long. Anglers will have success trolling crankbaits and jugging minnows early while crawler harnesses become popular on the estuary after the water warms. Anglers may encounter creel clerks at accesses along the estuary in 2025. Please engage with the clerks and tell them about your fishing experience. These surveys provide valuable information about anglers' experiences that help inform management. Please note that the St. Louis River Estuary downstream of the Minnesota/Wisconsin border cable is managed as a border water and has different regulations than other inland Minnesota waters. Lastly, anglers should be aware that there is a seasonal fish sanctuary which prohibits angling until May 19 at the upper end of the estuary extending from the border cable downstream to Highway 23.

Other excellent angling opportunities exist among the reservoirs north of Duluth. Fish and Boulder reservoirs are shallow and warm quickly and may provide more consistent early season action than some other larger and deeper lakes. These waterbodies offer ample year-classes of eater size walleye with some opportunities for trophy catches. Quality panfish opportunities also exist here and on many other local lakes. Anglers looking for fast action for smaller walleye may want to consider Island Lake Reservoir, which has an experimental fishing regulation that encourages the harvest of small, abundant walleye. The regulation is a 15- to 20-inch protected slot limit (all walleye from 15 to 20 inches must be immediately released), bag limit of 10 with not more than one walleye over 20 inches in possession. The goal of the regulation is to improve the average size of walleye while also enabling the sustainable harvest of abundant small fish while protecting most large walleye from harvest.

Anglers looking for stream trout fishing opportunities have ample options in the Duluth area. Some streams adjacent to Lake Superior take springtime spawning runs of steelhead rainbow trout like the Knife and Lester rivers. Many local inland streams support brook trout populations including the Knife, Blackhoof and Sucker rivers. Other brook trout opportunities closer to the Duluth metro include Miller, Knowlton and Keene creeks.

### **Aitkin area**

The Aitkin fisheries area offers a variety of quality fishing opportunities for anglers. The start of open water season in Aitkin County can provide the most productive and consistent action for anglers targeting walleye, northern pike and panfish.

Several year classes of walleye from 2018 to 2021 appear to be pretty strong in the area, so numbers of walleye 14-20 inches should be available to anglers. With relatively normal ice out dates this year, most walleye in the area will be exhibiting post-spawn behavior and actively feeding in areas with warmer water or current. Slow trolling or drifting with live bait is often one of the best methods to put fish in the boat this time of year.

Some lakes in the area with decent walleye populations include Farm Island, Big Sandy, Minnewawa, Round (W. of Palisade), Esquagamah, Round (N. of Garrison), Ripple and Cedar (near Aitkin) lakes. The dark water of Big Sandy and Esquagamah are usually the first to warm in comparison to the clearer waters of Cedar, Round and Farm Island, sometimes resulting in a better early season bite. Don't forget there are special regulations for walleye on Big Sandy and connected waters, Minnewawa and Farm Island lakes.

Shore fishing opportunities are scattered throughout the county and can often be very productive in spring. We have three designated fishing piers around the area. One is located on the Mississippi River in Palisade, while the other two are located at Little Pine Lake just south of Aitkin and at Hill Lake in Hill City. In addition to our fishing piers, anglers typically have good luck shore fishing near bridges and culverts, or even wading along the shallows in various rivers and lakes throughout the county.

Speaking of rivers, other fishing options in the area are the Mississippi River and its larger tributaries (Willow, Sandy, Swan, Rice and Ripple Rivers) plus the Snake River in the southeast part of the county. These moving waters often don't get the same fishing pressure of the more popular lakes and can provide for some fast action for walleye, channel catfish, northern pike and later in the season smallmouth bass. With over 100 miles winding throughout the Aitkin area, the Mississippi River can be a great place to get away from the crowds.

Also, don't forget there are a handful of lakes with special sunfish regulations. Dam, Minnewawa, Horseshoe, Waukenabo, Rat, Vanduse, Clear (near Glen) and Gun Lakes now have 10-fish limits for sunfish, while Big Sandy and connected waters also have five-fish limits for sunfish. These rules are meant to maintain or improve quality in the sunfish populations. Once a population suffers from poor size structure, often due to over harvest, it is a long and difficult process to reverse the trend. Anglers are encouraged to be selective with their harvest of bigger sunfish. By recycling these large fish, the next time you or your kids are out in the same area, you'll have another chance at catching a trophy, which may be even bigger the second time around.

In addition to these typical species, stream trout roam the waters of Blue, Taylor (near Hill City) and Loon lakes, as well as Morrison Brook and Two River Springs.

We ask anglers to do their part in preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species by remembering to clean-drain-

dispose each time you leave a lake. But the most important thing we ask is that everyone stay safe and have fun during the upcoming season — sober boating and wear your PFDs! From all of us at the Aitkin Fisheries Office, good luck and have a great year!

## **Finland Area**

The Finland area experienced a milder than average winter in 2024-2025 but late season snowfall events and a cool start to spring will likely result in ice-out dates of late April to early May for many of the lakes in the area. The increased snowpack compared to winter of 2023-2024 may limit early season travel in some areas of the Superior National Forest where roads are not plowed but should improve quickly once the weather begins to warm. Access to campgrounds and lakes along maintained system roads should be clear for anglers participating in the 2025 fishing opener.

May and June are excellent months to fish the stocked stream trout lakes managed by the Finland Fisheries Office. Many of these lakes receive annual stockings of catchable-sized (yearling) rainbow trout and brook trout prior to the May opener and can provide good action during the early season when water temperatures are still cool and fish are active. Most of the lakes managed for rainbow trout also receive fall stockings of Splake which provide a chance to catch multiple species of trout during a trip. The most popular and easily accessible trout options in the area include Echo, Hogback and Divide lakes. These lakes are stocked with rainbow trout yearlings in the spring and fall, have small boat ramps or carry down accesses, and good shore fishing opportunities. For anglers looking to escape the beaten path, there are many remote trout lakes in the area that can provide both solitude and good fishing for stocked brook trout. To view all the trout water in the Finland area, check out the [DNR's Troutfinder page](#).

Walleye and northern pike fishing on area lakes can be a little slow during a typical spring due to colder water temperatures compared to other portions of the state. The area's shallower walleye lakes with darker water warm faster and tend to provide better early season catch rates than the deeper, clearer lakes. Good early season options that have federal campgrounds and boat launches include North McDougal, Silver Island and Four Mile lakes. As the season progresses, walleye fishing will improve in the clearer, deeper lakes like Whitefish, Wilson and Dumbbell. Dumbbell Lake also supports a population of Shoepack strain muskies that provide a unique fishing opportunity for the area.

The Finland area also supports good stream fishing opportunities for resident brook trout. Fishing in streams usually starts to pick up after the spring runoff period when the water temperatures approach 50 degrees. Popular options for inland brook trout fishing in the area include the Caribou, Manitou and Little Isabella rivers. Steelhead fishing on Lake Superior tributary streams usually starts in mid-April and can run through late May depending on water temperatures and flow conditions. Good options for steelhead anglers include the lower portions of the Gooseberry, Split Rock and Baptism Rivers within the state parks.

## **Tower area**

Ice out in 2025 is trending toward being near average. This typically corresponds with an intermediate spawn timing, and possibly cooler than average water temperatures for gamefish opener. The vast majority of walleye will likely be done spawning by opener; however, they may still be found close to their spawning grounds. Fishing should continue to pick-up as the water temps rise. Dark water lakes and areas of current should be considered good options early in the year.

On Lake Vermilion, excellent walleye year-classes produced in 2018 and 2021 should provide anglers an opportunity to catch fish across a wide range of sizes. However, abundance is down slightly from recent years, but there is still decent numbers of keepers in the 13- to 19-inch range. The protected slot from 20 to 26 inches with a four-fish bag limit is still in place.

Lake Vermilion muskie fishing continues to produce trophy fish for those willing to gear up for the challenge. Muskie fishing on inland waters begins June 7, 2025. Lake Vermilion can also provide good fishing opportunities for black crappies, especially in the spring. Recent surveys suggest decent numbers are found in Vermilion compared to other area lakes. Plus, the crappies run large, averaging close to 10 inches, with fish over 14 inches in the population. Both

basins can produce large fish, but higher overall numbers can be found in West Vermilion.

On several area lakes, smallmouth and largemouth bass fishing should continue to be good, with water temps conducive to spawning by the end of May. Lake trout anglers may also find fish still cruising some of the shallow water, especially early; however as water temps increase, lake trout will follow the cold-water refuge to deeper depths.

The Tower area hosts several designated stream trout lakes. Some have improved boat landings, some require portaging, some have a wilderness component, and some are suitable for shoreline angling. Trout species available in this area include rainbow, brook, and brown trout, and splake. A trout stamp is required to fish on designated stream trout lakes or to possess trout. A few of the more accessible stream trout lakes in the area include Tofte, Miner's Pit, St. James Pit and Jammer Lake. Regarding any type of fishing in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, all lakes require a valid travel permit that is administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

### **Brainerd area**

The timing of spring in the Brainerd lakes area seems to be about average and with over 400 lakes and several rivers and streams, this area has lots of quality angling opportunities. Best bets for walleye fishing are the largest of the area's lakes — Gull, Pelican, North Long, Edward, Round and Whitefish lakes. Good year classes of walleye are present and early season angling in May and June can be good. These lakes are also great choices for quality-sized northern pike. Anglers should be aware that the Gull Chain, including Round, has a new northern pike regulation: a bag of two fish with a 30- to 40-inch protected slot with only 1 greater than 40 inches.

Crosslake, located on the east end of the Whitefish Chain, will be host to the 2025 Governor's Fishing Opener. The lakes in this chain have very diverse habitat types and therefore provide good angling opportunities for a variety of fish species including walleye, bass, and panfish. Expect increased activity here opening weekend.

Bass anglers will find numerous lakes with quality bass populations. Though the larger lakes and lake chains attract numerous tournament anglers, anglers should not overlook the smaller lakes. Many have high numbers of bass and have the capacity to produce trophies over 20 inches.

The many smaller lakes in the area will have warmed up sooner, and crappies and sunfish can be caught in the warmest areas of the lake early in the season. There are excellent opportunities for catching numbers as well as big panfish throughout the area. Quite a few area lakes have a five-fish daily bag limit for sunfish and crappies, so anglers are reminded to check the regulations for the waters they intend to fish.

Trout fishing in the Cuyuna Country State Recreation Area is a great alternative fishing outing especially for those with smaller crafts or shore anglers. Angling is generally very good early in the season on these lakes with rainbow, brook, brown and lake trout available depending on the lake.

### **Lake Superior area**

Angling opportunities on Lake Superior typically begin well before the walleye opener and anglers started targeting Coho salmon in the nearshore areas around Duluth by mid-March.

Steelhead anglers started to see good fishable waters in the tributaries around mid-April and smelters using seine nets along Park Point in Duluth and dipnets in the tributaries saw good opportunities as water temperatures slowly increased to the magic 40-degree mark. Non-native smelt populations have declined substantially since the 1960s and 1970s with the rehabilitation of lake trout but pulled off a good year-class in 2022 similar to the historical Cisco (Lake Herring) boom that fed lake trout, Coho and Chinook in Lake Superior the past two years. Non-native salmon responded immediately to the rare overabundance of food in Lake Superior with 12-pound Coho and over 35-pound Chinook salmon being caught. As spring turns to summer the lake trout fishing is anticipated to be great again this year with DNR surveys showing record-high abundance.

Anglers may notice more sea lamprey wounds on Lake Superior lake trout and salmon this year due to deferred treatments by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 2020 due to COVID; however, increased treatments the past few years

should push back against higher than normal Sea Lamprey abundance.

### **Grand Marais area**

Despite a relatively mild winter, late season snowfall and cold temps caused snow and ice to persist. This is a strong contrast to last year's early snow melt and ice out. Depending on warm weather and rain events, ice out might occur just before the opener. Some lakes may still see ice cover. Given the predicted cold-water temperatures for the opener walleye may still be spawning in certain areas. Fishing should be good. The Grand Marais area has a handful of waters that are closed in May to protect walleye spawning populations so please check the regulations prior to your fishing trip. Signs are placed on shore or with floating signs at those locations. Also new walleye regulations exist for the popular Sea Gull, Gull and Saganaga lakes, with a three-fish bag limit, only one fish larger than 20 inches. Good northern pike fishing can likely be found in shallow warmer bays of larger lakes for trophy sized pike but are typically low in abundance. Water temps may need to rise before they are aggressive. Smallmouth bass fishing will be extremely slow for the opener but will slowly pick up after Memorial Day.

Lake trout fishing, in relatively shallow water, should be excellent for the opener due to late ice out. For anglers looking to target stocked rainbow trout lakes, try Birch, Esther, Kimball, Mayhew, Mink, Pine (i.e. Trestle Pine), Thompson, Trout and Leo lakes. Those lakes are stocked annually with yearling rainbow trout in May. Many area lakes are also stocked with fall fingerling brook trout or splake, both inside and outside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Backcountry fishing for brook trout, lake trout and splake can be outstanding. Fishing for trout should be good this spring with cold temperatures keeping fish in shallow waters and more accessible to shore or canoe anglers.

The major tributaries of Lake Superior in the Grand Marais area might still hold some steelhead into May as runs will be later than usual. Considerable stream ice and deep snowpack are contributing to this. Popular tributaries to fish on the upper shore are the Temperance, Cascade, Devil Track and Brule rivers. Brook trout fishing in streams (above barriers) may be good with decent stream flow but variable. Anglers should be aware that some forest roads and portage trails may be in poor spring conditions and to plan accordingly.

### **International Falls area**

In the International Falls area, the best and most consistent walleye-angling success on Rainy Lake usually occurs during the summer months when fish can be found on the mid-lake reefs. Rainy is a large, deep lake that warms up slowly and, as a result, early season angling for walleye can be challenging. However, success can be found in shallow bays that warm quickly (Black Bay for example) and areas with current.

The 2024 fall assessment of Rainy Lake found near average overall walleye numbers with a lot of fish in the 10- to 14-inch length groups. Rainy Lake appears to have produced a large cohort of fish in 2021 and most of these were in the 10 to 12-inch length groups in the 2024 survey. There were also a good number of walleyes produced in 2019, and they were in the 12- to 14-inch length groups and will continue to grow to preferred harvestable sizes over the next couple years. Rainy is also known to produce large walleyes for those seeking memorable and trophy-sized fish.

Kabetogama Lake usually becomes ice free about a week before Rainy Lake and warms more quickly since it is smaller and not as deep. The earlier warm-up often results in good early season success for walleye anglers. Much of the shoreline provides excellent walleye spawning habitat so the fish are well distributed, and anglers don't have to go far to find fish. Fishing from shore can be good some years. Strong year-classes of walleye produced in 2015 and 2016 have now largely grown into the protected slot but continue to provide opportunities for catch and release of larger fish. The 2024 Kabetogama fall assessment showed above average numbers of walleyes in the 13- to 16-inch length groups which should provide anglers with good opportunity to catch harvestable sized walleyes in 2025. The 2020 year-class is the most recent strong year-class and ranged from 11.9 to 18.5 inches with most individuals in the 13- to 16-inch length groups in 2024. The 2024 survey also saw above average numbers of 18- to 25-inch walleye.

Anglers are reminded that both Rainy and Kabetogama lakes currently have a protected slot limit for walleye. All walleye from 18 to 26 inches long must be released, with one walleye over 26 inches allowed in a possession limit of four (applies to all lakes in the Namakan Reservoir as well).

Echo Lake near Buyck is a moderate sized (1,142 acre) lake with a diverse fishery that provides anglers opportunities to catch walleye, northern pike, smallmouth and largemouth bass, black crappie and bluegill. Echo Lake has no special regulations. Fishing regulations follow statewide regulations for inland waters. Northern pike regulations follow the Northeast zone regulation. Strong year-classes of walleye produced in 2019 and 2021 are supplying good numbers of 12- to 16-inch fish. Echo Lake is also known for its quality black crappie fishery. The 2024 assessment found above average catch rates with an average size of 9.4 inches. Those seeking a fishing opportunity on a smaller lake will find plenty of lakes in the Orr and Crane Lake area with opportunities to catch walleye, northern pike, largemouth and smallmouth bass, black crappie, bluegill and yellow perch.

### **Grand Rapids area**

The Grand Rapids area provides excellent walleye angling opportunities, and May and June can prime time on many of our best waters. Anglers looking to catch good numbers of quality walleye, along with some fish for the frying pan should focus on shallow, fertile lakes early in the fishing season. These lakes have stained water that warms up quickly and are typical favorites for early season anglers. With early ice out though some lakes could be a little ahead of schedule this year in terms of where the fish will be in their seasonal progression. Some lakes to consider would include Winnibigoshish, Cut Foot Sioux, Island, Split Hand or Round lakes. Anglers will find that these lakes support good numbers of keeper size fish and provide the chance at catching a large fish. Be sure to note that special regulations exist on these waters so consult the fishing regulation book prior to heading out. Anglers looking for numbers of smaller walleye should consider Bowstring, Sand or Jessie lakes. Cold, clear, deep lakes such as Pokegama, Siseebakwet and Trout lakes also provide excellent walleye fishing opportunities, but the action typically improves a little later in the season, as water temperatures slowly increase.

Northern pike anglers will find many good options in the Grand Rapids area. Large pike can be found in several area lakes including Swan, Trout and Pokegama. Although these lakes do not have special pike regulations, anglers are encouraged to protect the resource by releasing pike over 26 inches. Balsam, Spider, Coon-Sandwich and North Star are other good lakes for catching a large pike. These lakes have a special regulation requiring the release of pike from 24 to 36 inches.

Anglers looking for alternative species will find excellent panfish opportunities throughout the Grand Rapids area. Several area lakes provide good bluegill and crappie action early in the season. Smaller lakes typically warm faster and can provide excellent opportunities for catching numbers and in some instances larger panfish. Several area lakes have special five-fish daily bag limits, so anglers are reminded to consult this year's regulations prior to hitting the water.

Bass anglers will find many lakes with populations of largemouth and smallmouth bass. Most lakes have largemouth bass, and if anglers do some research, they will find some lakes that have good numbers, and some will have lower numbers but with a good average size. Deer Lake and Bass Lake (Cohasset) are lakes with known smallmouth bass fisheries and there are many others.

Aside from the vast number of lakes throughout the Grand Rapids area, anglers may also consider rivers and their connected tributaries. Water levels in rivers can fluctuate widely so caution must be taken; however, these often-overlooked resources provide ample opportunity for walleye, northern pike and smallmouth bass.