

Northeast Region Fishing Outlook for 2024

Reminders for a great season

Welcome to the 2024 fishing season! These fishing outlooks contain a wide range of fisheries information compiled from 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 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

Tower area

As is the case in the rest of the state, spring came early in the Tower work area. This typically corresponds with an early spawn, and warmer than average water temperatures for gamefish opener. Walleye are more likely to be found moved off their spawning locations, but still in an active feeding patterns as they replenish their resources after the spawning season.

Excellent walleye year-classes produced in 2018 and 2021 should provide Lake Vermilion anglers an

opportunity to catch fish across a wide range of sizes. The protected slot from 20 to 26 inches with a four-fish bag limit is still in place. Abundance remains excellent with plenty of keepers in the 14- to 19-inch range, especially in West Vermilion. Larger fish are more abundant than normal too, including many in or above the protected slot limit.

Lake Vermilion muskellunge fishing continues to produce trophy fish for those willing to gear up for the challenge. Muskie fishing on inland waters begins Saturday, June 1.

Good walleye fishing can be found in many other lakes in the area, especially those that are challenging to get to. Smallmouth and largemouth bass fishing should continue to be good on several area lakes, with water temps conducive to spawning by the middle to end of May. Lake trout anglers may also find fish still cruising some of the shallow water, however as water temps do increase, lake trout will follow the cold-water refuge to deeper depths.

The Tower area hosts a number of 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.

Grand Rapids area

The Grand Rapids area provides excellent walleye angling opportunities, and May and June are considered to be 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](#) before 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, the North Central Zone pike regulations apply. 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 24-36 inches.

Anglers will find excellent panfish opportunities throughout the Grand Rapids area. Several area lakes provide good sunfish and crappie action early in the season. Popular spring panfish locations include Split Hand, Bass, Graves and Dixon lakes. These lakes are known for big panfish and have a special five-fish bag limit for sunfish. Split Hand also has a five-fish bag limit for crappie and produces some very large fish at times.

Bass anglers will find many lakes with populations of largemouth and smallmouth bass. Most lakes have largemouth bass, and anglers 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.

Several lakes in the area are infested with invasive species including Eurasian milfoil, curly leaf pondweed and faucet snails. Zebra mussels are found in Winnibigoshish, Pokegama, Bowstring and Sand lakes in recent years. They were also discovered in two more area lakes this year which were Jesse and Turtle. Starry stonewort, an invasive algae that forms thick mats, is in Lake Winnibigoshish. Anglers are reminded to drain their boats, live wells, and bait buckets and to transport their boat with the drain plug removed. The transportation of invasive species is illegal, and anglers are encouraged to thoroughly wash their equipment before moving it into another lake. Water levels at accesses on lakes and rivers could be low this year because of the lack of precipitation so anglers are reminded to use caution when launching.

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 2023 fall assessment of Rainy Lake found above average overall walleye numbers with a lot of fish in the 7- to 14-inch length groups. Rainy Lake appears to have produced a large cohort of fish in 2021 and a good number of walleyes produced in 2019 that 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 2023 Kabetogama fall assessment was dominated by fish in the 7- to 13-inch length groups. The 2020 year class is the most recent strong year-class and ranged from 8.5 to 16 inches with most individuals in the 11- to 13-inch length groups in 2023. Anglers can expect to encounter more harvestable-sized walleyes from this large year-class as they continue to grow in 2024 and beyond.

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

Ash Lake near Orr is a smaller (699 acre) lake with a diverse fishery that provides anglers opportunities to catch walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, bluegill and black crappie. A special regulation for northern pike is currently in place, with a possession limit of three with only 1 over 36 inches and all northern pike between 24-36 inches must be immediately released. Those seeking a fishing opportunity on a larger 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 crappies, bluegills and yellow perch.

Aitkin area

The outlook for walleye fishing in the Aitkin area looks better than previous years, based on catches during our most recent lake surveys. Additionally, anglers have already had some luck with pre-season panfishing as fish had started to transition into shallow bays and shorelines.

Several year classes of walleye from 2017 to 2020 appear to be pretty strong in the area, so walleye 14-20 inches can be expected. With the early ice outs around the area, walleye may be further along with spawning and not as concentrated in shallow areas like typical years. It may be worth your while to start fishing in shallow or moving water where temps are typically warmer, but don't be afraid to move around as spawned out walleyes will be focused on foraging throughout lakes in a variety of depths. Also, 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 good walleye populations include Farm Island, Big Sandy, Minnewawa, Dam, Round (west of Palisade), Waukenabo, Esquagamah, Round (north of Garrison), Hill (at Hill City) 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 and Farm Island, yet since we've had open water for so long already, this may not be as important a factor for finding hungry fish this year. Don't forget there are special regulations for walleye on Big Sandy and connected waters, Minnewawa and Farm Island. 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. 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, remember there are a handful of lakes with newer sunfish regulations. Dam, Minnewawa, Horseshoe, Waukenabo, Rat, Vanduse, Clear (near Glen) and Gun Lakes now have 10-fish limits for sunfish. 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 of large sunfish, it is a long and difficult process to reverse the trend. Anglers are encouraged to be selective with their harvest of bigger sunfish. By releasing 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 species, stream trout roam the waters of Blue, Taylor (near Hill City) and Loon lakes, as well as Morrison Brook and Two River Springs. Newer to the trout scene is Long Lake, near Glen. Splake were stocked there beginning in 2018 and so there may be some nicer ones now available.

Brainerd area

With more than 400 lakes and several rivers and streams, the Brainerd lakes 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 walleyes 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 2 fish with a 30-40 inch protected slot with only 1 greater than 40 inches allowed in possession.

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 fishing outing especially for shore anglers or those with smaller crafts. 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 with a warmer than usual winter anglers have been fishing the big lake for a few months already. Early spring boat anglers targeting nearshore lake trout and coho salmon near Duluth have done well trolling stickbaits near the surface. Steelhead anglers will be swinging egg patterns or spawn sacs with the lower shore streams warming up first and progressing up the North Shore as the air and water temperatures increase.

Smelters using seine nets along Park Point in Duluth and dipnets in the tributaries should see decent smelting opportunities as water temperatures slowly increase to the magic 40-degree mark. Non-native smelt populations have declined substantially since the 1960s and 1970s with the resurgence of lake trout. Many more smelt become fish food instead of ending up in the buckets and coolers of anglers, but with lake trout back as the top native predator in Lake Superior the overall health and stability of the lake is much better. Due to a large 2022 year-class of cisco (also known as tullibee or lake herring) the non-native salmon should be larger than usual for a typically preyfish limited Lake Superior. As spring turns to summer the lake trout fishing is anticipated to be great again this year with DNR surveys showing near record-high abundance.

Anglers may notice more sea lamprey wounds on Lake Superior lake trout and salmon this year due to deferred treatments by US 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.

Duluth area

The St. Louis River Estuary continues to provide exceptional fishing opportunities for walleye and other species such as muskellunge, smallmouth bass, black crappie and channel catfish. The 2018 walleye year-class is very strong, and these fish now exceed the 15-inch minimum size limit. Walleye will spawn early this year, which may result in excellent post-spawn catches, but they may be more dispersed so consider targeting areas well downstream of spawning habitat.

For anglers without a boat, the St. Louis River offers shore-fishing opportunities at Rice's Point, Boy-Scout Landing, Perch Lake as well as several spots along the Waabizheshikana Trail, in west Duluth. Please note that the popular Munger Landing boat launch has reopened to watercraft, vehicle and pedestrian traffic following the completion of extensive habitat remediation and restoration. Also note that the St. Louis River, 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 from the border cable downstream to Highway 23, which does not allow for any angling until May 19.

Other excellent angling opportunities exist among the reservoirs north of Duluth. Wild Rice 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. 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 panfish should be aware that reduced bag limits designed to protect and improve quality sunfish and crappie opportunities have been implemented on six Duluth area waterbodies including Fish, Elliot, Moosehead, Strand, Wild Rice and Whiteface.

Finland area

May and June are excellent months to fish the stocked stream trout lakes managed by Finland Area Fisheries. Many of these lakes receive annual stockings of catchable-sized (yearling) rainbow trout and brook trout before 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. To view all the trout water in the Finland area, check out the [DNR Troutfinder page](#).

With lakes likely starting to warm earlier this year, walleye fishing in May should be more productive than the past two years. 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 Toohey, Silver Island and Four Mile lakes. As the season progresses, walleye fishing will improve in the clearer, deeper lakes like Whitefish, Windy and Dumbbell. Dumbbell Lake also supports a population of muskies that provide a unique fishing opportunity for the area.

Anglers interested in wetting a line before the 2024 fishing opener might consider chasing steelhead during their spawning run up the tributaries of Lake Superior starting in April. The runs can extend into May depending on water levels and temperatures, although the run duration may be reduced in 2024

due to minimal spring runoff. Popular steelhead fishing options within the Finland Management Area include below boundary portions of the Baptism, Split Rock and Stewart rivers. Inland 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 Split Rock, Manitou and Little Isabella rivers.

Grand Marais area

Good year classes in 2018 and 2019 should yield abundant large sized walleye in the 17 to 20 inch size range in many area lakes. Northern pike fishing should be good especially in the shallow bays of larger lakes like Saganaga, Gunflint, West Bearskin, Poplar and Devil Track. Smallmouth bass fishing should be starting to pick up and get better as May progresses.

Each spring the Grand Marais office stocks yearling (9-12 inch) rainbow trout into several easily accessible lakes, including Mink, Kimball, Leo, Birch, Trout, Mayhew and Pine (also known as Trestle Pine). The Grand Marais office also stocks many remote lakes regularly with brook trout and splake. Early snowmelt and warm temperatures should make forest roads and portage trails dry and accessible. Limited snow during winter hindered snowmobilers and reduced ice fishing access to many lakes, which should result in more fish to be caught during open-water fishing.

Lake trout may still be in the shallows and active on the larger accessible lakes like Greenwood, Gunflint and Loon. Lake trout in smaller lakes are likely heading to deeper waters but still catchable from a canoe on opening weekend. Brook trout fishing in streams (above barriers) could be poor because of low stream flows due to lack of spring snowmelt. Anglers may have to cover a lot of ground to find pockets of good habitat that are holding fish. Steelhead runs will likely be over in tributaries of Lake Superior, but with limited stream flows could still provide angling opportunities adjacent to tributary mouths in Lake Superior.