

Northwest region outlook for 2019 fishing opener

Ice-out across northwest Minnesota is expected to be somewhat later than normal this spring. The snowpack across much of the region is rapidly deteriorating with early April warming trend and rains. Most lakes have 20-30 inches of solid ice. Ice thickness on the Canadian border waters is 36 inches plus. The weather forecast through the middle of April is for slightly below normal temperatures and above normal precipitation patterns.

With the opener falling on May 11 this year there is some possibility that ice may be present on some of the larger northern lakes on the opener. Ice out dates are expected to be 3-7 days behind normal on most waters. The heavy snowfall experienced this winter will result in elevated lake and river levels across the region. Overall this is positive given drought conditions experienced the last several years. Pending a rapid warm up in May water temperatures will be very cold for the opener.

Fish spawning activity is expected to be about a week behind normal. Traditional walleye opener lakes that tend to have earlier ice out dates with large expanses of shallow water and those with streams and rivers flowing through them will be the best bets for the opener. Anglers fishing lakes that are prone to winterkill on severe winters should check with local [DNR Fisheries offices](#) to make sure their lakes did not succumb to winterkill.

Walleye populations in our natural walleye lakes and many of our stocked lakes have excellent abundance and fish of a variety of sizes. Various strong year-classes of walleye are common across most of our natural walleye lakes and stocking efforts have contributed to good success on others. Walleye from good year-classes produced from 2013-2016 (14-20 inches) will comprise the bread and butter fish from most of our primary walleye lakes.

There are also many lakes with walleye from the strong 2011 year-class which will provide opportunities to catch quality sized walleye from 20-24 inches. Walleye anglers can expect excellent walleye fishing on our large walleye lakes, particularly on Leech, Upper Red, Lake of the Woods and Cass lakes. The walleye population on Leech remains strong and anglers can expect abundant walleye from 12-26 inches.

Walleye numbers in Upper Red remain high. Multiple strong year-classes have produced many fish in the 12-18 inch size range. Walleye harvest regulations have been relaxed on Leech and Upper Red lakes to take advantage of abundant populations of spawning age walleye. Protected slot limits remain in effect Lake of the Woods and several secondary basins in the region.

Walleye abundance remains strong on Cass Lake. Walleye and sauger abundance in Lake of the Woods are well above average with excellent size distributions. The northwest region also boasts arguably the best trophy northern pike lakes in the state of Minnesota: Lake of the Woods and Upper Red Lake. While the opening weekend is not typically prime time for big pike, anglers should not rule out an

encounter with one of these brutes. Anglers are reminded that special regulations are in place to protect large pike on both of these waters and about 50 other lakes in the region.

Pike zone regulations

This year in 2019 will be the second year with the statewide northern pike zone regulations. These regulations apply to all waters with the exception the above-referenced special regulation lakes and North Dakota border waters. The new statewide northern pike regulations are based on management zones that have been tailored to the specific population characteristics of each zone. Much of northwest Minnesota lies in the north-central zone which has the following regulations:

- Daily and possession limit of 10 pike
- Not more than 2 pike may be over 26 inches
- All pike from 22-26 inches must be released immediately

Each year, public accesses need a considerable amount of work to repair ice heave damage and to ensure accesses are in order for the opener. With late ice-out across the region our DNR Parks and Trails staff will have limited time to fix-up the ramps and get the loading docks installed before the May 11 opener. Anglers are reminded to help prevent the spread of invasive species by inspecting their boats for invasive plants and animal, draining all water from their bilges and livewells and remembering to pull their drain plug before traveling down the road.

Here is a general opener forecast by management area, a few noteworthy lakes that could provide some exceptional fishing, and an overview of the status of the large walleye lakes.

Baudette

Rainy River

Each spring, walleye migrate from Lake of the Woods to the Rainy River to spawn. Many of those fish are still in the river when the walleye season opens in May. This can lead to some great fishing opportunities for anglers. And, although hundreds of anglers flock to Lake of the Woods for the annual walleye opener, not many people fish on the Rainy River at that time of the year.

The Rainy River and its tributaries are also home to a high quality northern pike population. Northern pike fishing can be very good in spring and early summer. Besides great fishing, the Rainy River corridor can also offer some protection from the cold winds that often occur during the early part of the walleye season. There are several public boat ramps located along the Rainy River, there is a public fishing pier located on Baudette Bay in the city of Baudette, and there is shore fishing opportunities near most public boat ramps and in Franz Jevne State Park.

Hayes Lake

Located in northwestern Minnesota, Hayes Lake is 108-acre reservoir on the Roseau River. Hayes is located entirely within Hayes Lake State Park and only electric motors are permitted on the lake. A fishing pier is available within the park along with a paved boat ramp on the southeast end of the lake. There is also a dock and canoe access located near the campground on the south side of the lake. As Hayes Lake lies within a state park, state park vehicle permits are required.

Hayes Lake offers some great fishing opportunities for multiple species. Good numbers of northern pike are present with the potential to catch a large fish being a possibility. Bluegill are also a popular option with decent numbers of quality size fish up to ten inches in the population. Largemouth bass provide a third option for anglers with a healthy population present in Hayes Lake. The season for northern pike begins on May 11. A reminder to anglers, the limit for northern pike is 10 and all northern pike between 22 and 26 inches must be immediately released. Two northern pike over 26 inches may be harvested. For other regulations refer to the [2019 Minnesota fishing regulations](#).

Bemidji

Considerable snowpack in the Bemidji area this winter may delay ice out beyond normal. A wet fall plus spring snow melt has restored lake levels and stream conditions. If ice out is exceptionally late there may be some seasonal stream closures may be in place in the Bemidji area. Check the DNR website for a listing of stream closures. Late ice out can also delay spring maintenance work on boat landings subjected to winter ice damage. DNR Parks and Trails crews will be working to repair damaged boat ramps and installing launching docks ahead of the fishing opener rush.

Blackduck Lake, Beltrami County (2686 acres)

Blackduck Lake is no secret as a destination walleye fishery in the Bemidji Area, but the recent 2018 population assessment confirms it. The most recent gill net catch rate of 18.75/net marks four consecutive assessments with catch rates well above the median for this lake class. The Blackduck Lake walleye population is maintained with fry stocking on a two of every three-year stocking rotation. The year-class currently dominating this population is the 2015 year-class, making up nearly 70 percent of the gill net sample. The dominance of this year-class is no surprise either as they were sampled as young of the year in fall of 2015 at record numbers of 750 per hour of electrofishing. This year-class is now prime for the harvest fishery ranging from 13-17 inches.

Blackduck Lake

Anglers should expect a fair amount of northern pike action as well when fishing Blackduck Lake. The gill net catch rate of 6.27/net is not exceptionally high but there is an abundance of small pike under 22 inches in the population right now. These are perfect for the new expanded 10 fish bag limit in the north-central zone, but remember to release all northern pike from 22 to 26 inches. Once waters warm up and the bluegill start biting, Blackduck will put out some high quality fish. Be aware that a special regulation limiting anglers to a five fish bag limit is in place.

Balm Lake (537 acres)

Balm Lake in Beltrami County is one of the lakes managed with walleye fingerling stocking in the Bemidji area. The alternate year stocking rotation has been very successful producing a walleye population sampled at 15.67/gill net in the recent 2018 assessment. While this sounds appealing as a walleye destination you might want to wait for the bass opener to visit Balm Lake.

Largemouth bass, not typically sampled very well in gill nets, were sampled at an astounding 26 fish/gill net. A special regulation on largemouth bass was recently modified from a 12-20 inch protected slot to a 14-20 inch protected slot, to allow additional harvest of the abundant young bass under 14 inches.

Other species worth noting are bluegill with good numbers of fish up to 9.5 inches, and northern pike at relatively low density, 2.6/gill net, but good quality sizes available.

Detroit Lakes

As of early April, things are shaping up for a normal to late spring. Some concentration of the snow pack on area lakes has occurred but little actual melting. The snow cover and weather in the end of March and early April is critical in determining the amount of winterkill some of the shallower fishing lakes in the area might suffer. Those lakes that do suffer winterkill will be restocked but it takes several years for a good fishery to develop again. If a late spring does materialize, walleye fishing could prove to be challenging as the fish are still recovering from spawning activities. Northern pike should be active and feeding as they spawn earlier than walleye. Spring fishing for black crappie is generally excellent and can be a great substitute for a slow walleye bite.

Tamarack Lake (1,389 acres)

Tamarack Lake in central Becker County is approximately 12 miles northeast of the city of Detroit Lakes. Tamarack Lake lies within the Tamarack National Wildlife Refuge resulting in a complete undeveloped shoreline. There are two gravel boat launches in good condition, and a surface use restriction prohibiting recreational watersports such as water skiing and jet skis.

Tamarack Lake has a reputation for exceptional bluegill and black crappie angling, but a survey in 2018 also found a quality walleye population. This survey found nearly eight walleye per net with an average length near 18 inches. These walleye grew fast, exceeding 16 inches in four years. Nearly half of the sampled walleye were two years old, so there should be an abundant number of catchable size fish for the angling season of 2019. Tamarack Lake has a maximum depth of 17 feet and moderate turbidity. These factors should make Tamarack Lake an excellent option for early season fishing, particularly if 2019 starts with a later than normal spring. If walleye fishing is slow, anglers are encouraged to take advantage of the excellent panfish populations. Nearly one quarter of the bluegill sampled in 2018 were over eight inches long, with some fish over ten inches captured. Meanwhile, black crappie averaged almost 10 inches in length.

Marshall Lake (191 acres)

Marshall Lake in southwest Becker County is rather small at 191 acres and a maximum depth of 20 feet, but the shallow nature and dark water make this lake an early season walleye destination for local anglers.

Structure in the lake is also not complex so novice walleye anglers have a good chance at success. The boat access is adequate for all size boats, and there is adequate parking. A survey in 2018 found 11 walleye per net, with these fish averaging over 18 inches in length. A majority of the captured walleye were four-year old or younger and should provide a good number of catchable-sized fish. The fish community in Marshall Lake has historically been quite simple, comprised mainly of bullheads and walleye.

Recently, bluegill, largemouth bass and northern pike have increased in abundance, but these populations have not been established long enough to provide fisheries worth targeting. These species may someday prove to be viable options if they continue to exhibit the excellent growth shown by walleye in the lake.

Fergus Falls

As of early April, area lakes still had plenty of ice and extended forecasts called for below average temperatures. Unless weather conditions changed, ice-out appeared as if it would be late this year, especially on the large, deep lakes; therefore, walleye spawning activities were expected to occur later than normal, with spawning activities likely to occur during late April and into May. Anglers can expect to find walleyes in spawn to post-spawn conditions by the May 11 opener. Late spawning seasons generally make for slower walleye angling on the opener. Northern pike may be more active as they spawn earlier than walleyes. Panfish opportunities may be a viable option if the walleye and northern pike are not cooperating.

Many area lakes presently support abundant populations of bluegill and black crappie with good size structures. Generally speaking, anglers should expect good walleye fishing on area lakes during the 2019 season as several strong natural year classes and supplemental stockings have established abundant walleye populations.

Pelican Lake (3,986 acres)

Pelican Lake in northwestern Otter Tail County is seven miles north of Pelican Rapids. DNR-owned concrete public accesses are located on the east and southwest shorelines. Data collected from the 2018 standard fisheries survey indicate that many fish species are thriving in Pelican Lake. The walleye gill net catch rate was 13.7 per net, which indicates that the walleye population is very abundant. Walleye net catches have consistently exceeded DNR long range management goals for this lake. Walleye age-structure is excellent as five strong year classes were represented in the age-class distribution. Walleye ranged in length from 8.6 to 26.0 inches with a mean length and weight of 16.0 inches and 1.6 pounds.

A moderate density northern pike population exists with a good average size. Pike ranged in length from 14.7 to 31.3 inches with a mean length and weight of 23.2 inches and 2.9 pounds. The black crappie and bluegill populations are also abundant and possess good size structures. Black crappie up to 13.4 inches

were sampled and fifty-three percent of the black crappie sample was 10.0 inches or greater in length. Bluegill up to 8.9 inches were sampled and twenty-seven percent of the bluegill sample was 7.0 inches or greater in length. Pelican Lake also has low density trophy smallmouth bass and muskellunge angling opportunities.

Norway Lake (484 acres)

Norway Lake is located in south-central Otter Tail County two miles north of Underwood. A DNR-owned concrete public access is located along the east shoreline. Data from a spring trapnetting survey conducted in 2018 indicate that several species possess excellent size structures with the potential to catch a trophy-sized fish.

Walleye ranged in length from 12.2 to 30.2 inches with a mean length and weight of 23.2 inches and 4.7 pounds. The walleye population is sustained by the stocking of large multi-aged fish. Bluegill up to 11.0 inches were sampled and sixty-three percent of the bluegill sample was 7.0 inches or greater in length.

Black crappie up to 15.2 inches were sampled and seventy-nine percent of the black crappie sample was 10.0 inches or greater in length. Anglers should be aware that a set of special regulations are in effect for Norway Lake. Specific regulations included are: a protected slot length limit for largemouth bass – 14.0 to 20.0-inches with one over 20.0 inches in possession – a reduced bag limit for sunfish of 5 fish, and reduced bag and length limits for black crappie with 5 fish in combination with a 10-inch minimum length limit. Statewide limits apply for walleye, northern pike and yellow perch.

Glenwood

Severity of winter cold and heavy snowfall has resulted in oxygen depletion and at least partial winterkill in many shallow lakes. Loss of fish in walleye fingerling rearing ponds is welcome and will help restore lost production capacity caused by surviving fish populations in those waters. Unfortunately, winterkill conditions have likely extended to a number of shallow, but productive fish lakes that have been good bets for early season walleye fishing.

Glenwood staff will have a busy spring completing winterkill assessments to document occurrence and severity of winterkills in managed fish lakes. Anglers are encouraged to contact the Glenwood area office at 320-634-7321 in considering fishing lakes such as Gilbert Lake in Douglas County; Lightning and Thompson lakes in Grant County; Goose, Johanna, Malmedahl and Westport lakes in Pope County; and Hattie, Long and Charlotte lakes in Stevens County. We will get up-to-date status reports on winterkill losses and fishing opportunities in advance of the May 11 opener.

As of late March, there is still one to two feet of snow on the ground. With snowmelt, the lakes will be full and streams flowing at time of the opener. The snow cover insulated the lakes, thus there is less ice thickness than last year. With projected warm ups, it is reasonable to assume that lakes within the Glenwood area will be ice free well in advance of the fishing opener. Lake survey information gained last summer and fall affords optimism for good fishing. Two lakes are highlighted as good choices for the fishing opener.

Pelican Lake (3,761 acres)

Pelican Lake is a large, shallow, fertile lake located in northeast Grant County near Ashby. Maximum depth is 21 feet. Average depth is 10 feet. Due to its irregular shape, the lake has nearly 28 miles of shoreline. An improved public access is located on the northwest shore off State Highway 78.

Walleye are abundant. Gill net catches during the 2017 survey averaged 13.3 fish/net consisting of six age classes. Age structure of gill net captures and fall electrofishing surveys indicated strong year classes of young walleye were established in 2014, 2015 and 2017. A fair year class also established in 2018 with natural reproduction. Four-year-old captures caught during the June 2017 survey averaged 16.6 inches. Five-year-old cohorts of the 2014 year-class should exceed 17.0 inches early in 2019. Due to some contributions of natural reproduction supplemented with effective alternate year fry stockings, walleye fishing opportunities look very promising for the near future.

Pelican Lake also holds good crappie fishery. Both black and white crappie occur in the lake. Total crappie abundance is high with fish from multiple year-classes present. Anglers can expect to see fish from 11-13.5 inches.

Bass anglers can take advantage of quality catch-and-release fishing experiences. Good numbers of 15.0 inch and larger bass were captured during the spring 2017 electrofishing survey. Length frequency of largemouth bass captures extended to 18.3 inches.

Lake Reno (3,808 acres)

Lake Reno is a popular fishing destination. The lake is eight miles south of Alexandria on the west side of State Highway 29. The lake is shallow with a maximum depth of 23 feet. Average depth is estimated at 17 feet. Public access sites exist on northeast shoreline off State Highway 27 and the southwest end of the lake. Anticipate some vehicle congestion on the access sites and plenty of company with fellow anglers.

A most recent standard fisheries survey was completed in early July 2018. Walleye continue to be abundant in response to natural reproduction and alternate year supplemental fry stockings. Gill net catches averaged 18.4 fish/net. Length of captures ranged from 7.4 to 25.5 inches and averaged 17.4 inches. Annual recruitment was good in 2013, 2015 and 2016, thus there is promise of good harvest potential for 15 to 19 inch walleyes in 2019.

Black crappie fishing success was exceptional for an extended period with recruitment of very strong 2010 and 2011 year classes to a harvestable size. Catches have moderated with harvest and loss of those year classes to old age. Age frequency distribution of 2018 crappie catches describes establishment of a fair year class in 2015, followed with a very strong year class produced in 2016.

Lake Reno also supports good fishing opportunities for largemouth bass, bluegill and northern pike. Length distribution of bass captures caught during the spring electrofishing survey extended to 17.6 inches. Forty-nine percent of bass captures measured at least 15.0 inches in length.

Anglers are reminded of northern pike harvest regulation changes and encouraged to take full advantage of expanded harvest opportunities for pike within the north central harvest zone. Many lakes in west-central Minnesota hold an over-abundance of small pike. Increasing harvest and reducing densities of 22-inch and smaller pike is projected to improve growth and average size of northern pike and increase survival and effectiveness of walleye stockings.

Park Rapids

Although we had a significant snow pack, long-range forecasts are predicting spring temperatures fluctuating around normal. That may mean a normal ice out, around mid-April on most lakes. Northern pike spawning begins as the ice is going out and walleye spawning begins a week or more later, so most fish will likely be in post spawn patterns by fishing opener. Plenty of snow may help increase water levels on some area lakes and ponds. Because of the longer winter, and ample snow some smaller or shallow lakes may have experienced partial or full winterkills this year.

Anglers are reminded that new statewide northern pike regulations were implemented last spring. In the Park Rapids area, anglers can keep up to 10 northern pike, but not more than two pike can be longer than 26 inches, and all from 22 to 26 inches must be released. This will affect all lakes that do not have special northern pike regulations already (see below).

Some Park Rapids area lakes have special or experimental regulations that differ from statewide regulations. Please note specific regulations in the [2019 Minnesota fishing regulations](#).

- All species: Lester and LaSalle
- Bass: Little Mantrap and George.
- Crappie: Big Mantrap and Spider
- Northern pike: Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Crow Wing; George; Big Mantrap (Mantrap) and Blueberry.
- Walleye: Big Sand and Kabekona

Anglers can also fish for bass statewide starting May 11, as long as they release all bass during the first two weeks (until May 24).

Kabekona Lake (2,433 acres)

Kabekona Lake is located about three miles south of Laporte in northeastern Hubbard County. It has a maximum depth of 133 feet. A county owned access is located at the west end of the lake, off highway 64.

Kabekona has had an experimental walleye regulation since 2006. Currently, all walleye between 20 and 26 inches must be immediately released. Anglers are allowed to harvest walleye less than 20 inches and one over 26 inches in a possession limit of four. The regulation was intended to improve natural reproduction of walleye. Evaluations indicate that more young walleye are being naturally produced, and abundance in 2017 was the highest ever observed at Kabekona. There were plenty of walleye in the protected size range, but there are also more 15 to 20 inch fish in recent years than there ever have been.

Northern pike have never been very abundant in Kabekona, but they can reach good sizes. Largemouth and smallmouth bass, black crappie, bluegill and pumpkinseed sunfish can also be found in this lake, but those species are not abundant.

Upper and Lower Bottle Lakes (459 and 641 acres)

Upper and Lower Bottle Lakes have maximum depths of 55 and 110 feet. They are located about eight miles northeast of Park Rapids. A state owned public access is located on the north end of Upper Bottle Lake. Additional access is available off County Road 40, through Emma Lake and the Sand River to Lower Bottle, but it may be difficult for larger boats.

During assessments of the lakes in 2013, walleye abundance was higher in both lakes than any previous sample. Abundance declined in 2018 samples, but was still higher than other similar lakes. Strong year classes of walleye have been observed from both stocked and non-stocked years, suggesting that stocking and natural reproduction are both contributing to the lakes' walleye populations. Most of the walleyes in the 2018 samples were 14 to 17 inches, with fish up to 24 1/2 inches.

Northern pike are very abundant in the Bottle Lakes. Most are 17 to 25 inches, with fish up to 39 inches sampled. Largemouth Bass are not real abundant, but can range up to 19 inches. Smallmouth bass were lower in abundance, and reached 16 ½ inches in the 2018 sample. Crappies are not very abundant, but can be good sized.

Eleventh Crow Wing Lake (751 acres)

Eleventh Crow Wing Lake is located in Akeley, in eastern Hubbard County. It has a maximum depth of 80 feet. There are two basins, separated by State Highway 64. A city owned public access is located on the south shore of the western basin of the lake. There is a culvert under Highway 64 between the two basins that is passable by smaller fishing boats to get from one basin to the other.

Eleventh Crow Wing has very good water clarity, so it can be difficult to fish, but it has an excellent walleye population. Walleye abundance has been pretty consistent since the early 1990s, well above other similar lakes and above the management goal during the last survey in 2016. There were a lot of 14 to 19 inch walleye in the 2016 survey, and fish up to 28 inches were sampled.

Northern pike abundance can provide another option if walleye are not cooperative. Pike abundance has been about normal compared to other similar lakes. Most northern pike sampled in 2016 were in the 18 to 26 inch size range, but individuals up to 40 inches have been sampled in the past. Eleventh Crow Wing also supports a good population of largemouth bass, with sizes well distributed up to 19 inches.

Walker

Ice out might not occur until early May this year, which would be later than the historical average of April 26. Walleye spawning should be winding down by the May 11 fishing opener but fish, especially males, could still be congregated and make for a very good shallow water bite on opening day.

Northern pike are abundant in most area lakes with smaller fish easy to find. Several lakes do have a protected slot limit of 24 to 36 inches, possession limit of three fish, for northern pike. In some cases, surveys have found an increase in the proportion of northern pike 30-plus inches long since the regulations were implemented in 2003. With exception to lakes with a 24 to 36 inch protected slot limit, all others in the area will fall under the regulation implemented in 2018 for pike in the north central zone, which is a 10 fish limit with only two longer than 26 inches; all pike 22-26 inches must be released. Panfish and bass action should be good in shallow water areas by Memorial Day.

A number of lakes in the Walker area have experimental or special regulations for certain species. These special rules are designed to maintain or improve fishery quality. A notice of these regulations are typically posted at each lake's public access. Anglers should consult their [2019 Minnesota fishing regulations](#) booklet for the most current information.

Woman (5,496 acres), Child (285 acres) and Girl (428 acres) lakes

Woman, Child and Girl lakes are located southeast of Longville in Cass County and connected by the Boy River, which is navigable by most boats between the three lakes. The main public accesses are on the south side of Child, the north side of Woman, and on the north side of Girl, all on County Road 5.

Woman Lake has the majority of the walleye habitat and supports an excellent population, with sizes sampled in the 2018 survey ranging from 7-25 inches long. There are very strong 2013 and 2016 year classes in the lake, with the 2013 year-class being harvestable sizes and the 2016 year class should be approaching harvestable sizes by fall. Similar to other walleye lakes in the area, anglers tend to do best until mid-June and again during September and October.

Woman Lake also has a population of quality-sized yellow perch and these are often targeted by anglers during fall and winter. Northern pike numbers are similar to other lakes of this type. The proportion of northern pike longer than 28 inches increased since a protected slot limit of 24 to 36 inches was put in place in 2003.

Smallmouth bass are also abundant in Woman Lake and size quality is exceptional; fish exceeding 20 inches are frequently caught by anglers. Child and Girl lakes have better habitat for largemouth bass, black crappie and bluegill, and are better options for catching preferred sizes of these species. Pike numbers also tend to be higher in Child and Girl lakes. All three lakes support a low-density muskellunge population with excellent sizes.

Little Boy (1,452 acres) and Wabedo (1,226 acres) lakes

Little Boy and Wabedo lakes are located south of Longville in Cass County and are connected via a navigable channel. Public accesses are located on the southwest shores of both lakes on County Road 54 (Little Boy) and County Road 120 (Wabedo).

Little Boy Lake has a strong walleye population, with sizes sampled in the 2018 survey ranging from 11 to 25 inches long. The 2016 year-class appears strong and should be of harvestable size in 2019. An experimental walleye regulation was implemented in 2018. A protected slot limit 18-26 inches, possession limit 4, with 1 over 26 inches allowed in possession aims to increase the natural reproduction capacity of the lake as well as increase population size structure.

Smallmouth bass were common with fish up to 21 inches sampled. Northern pike were abundant and the proportion of northern pike longer than 28 inches has increased since a protected slot limit of 24 to 36 inches was put in place in 2003. Wabedo Lake provides multi-species opportunities. Although walleye are not as prevalent, fish up to 28 inches were sampled. Northern pike are abundant with sizes sampled in the 2018 survey ranging from 14 to 38 inches long. Black crappie are present and fish exceeding 13 inches were sampled. Both Little Boy and Wabedo Lakes have the potential to produce large muskellunge with fish up to 50 inches sampled in the 2015 survey. Special regulations for northern pike and walleye are the same for both Little Boy and Wabedo lakes.

Ten Mile Lake (5,080 acres)

Ten Mile Lake is located northwest of Hackensack in Cass County. The public access is located on the southwest shore off of County Road 6.

Ten Mile Lake has an abundant walleye population with sizes sampled in the 2018 survey ranging from 7 to 27 inches long. The 2015 and 2013 year classes appear strong and comprised the majority of the catch. Largemouth and smallmouth bass also provide additional quality fishing opportunities to anglers, with fish measuring 19 inches long for both species. Northern pike are abundant with sizes ranging from 10 to 31 inches long. A northern pike protected slot limit from 24-36 inches, possession limit 3, with 1 over 36 inches allowed in possession exists on Ten Mile Lake. Lake Whitefish are also present and provide a unique angling opportunity. Fish ranged from 15 to 20 inches long in the 2018 survey.

Northwest region large lake outlook

Lake of the Woods

Walleye and Sauger are the most important sport fish on Lake of the Woods, and as such those populations are monitored annually. This assessment has been conducted every September since 1981, so there is a lot of good population trend data available for these species.

There were strong walleye year classes produced in 2011 and 2013. These walleye range from 14 to 18 inches long, and should be very abundant on the opener. In addition to these keeper-size walleye, anglers should also notice good numbers of small walleye, in the 6 to 8-inch range. These walleye showed up in good numbers in our annual fall survey, as well as during the creel survey conducted last winter.

Lake of the Woods is well known for the trophy-size walleye that anglers catch every year, and walleye up to 32 inches are sampled every year during DNR fish sampling. Consider that these fish are quite old, and that it takes a long time for them to get to be of trophy size. Carefully consider what you will do with one of these fish before you harvest it, as it may have more value to the gene pool than it does as a fillet. Generally, a 25-inch long walleye is about 10 to 15 years old, and a 30-inch walleye is over 20 years old.

Overall sauger abundance increased to the highest level since 2010 due to strong year classes produced in 2011, 2014 and 2015. Sauger length ranged from 6-18 inches with good numbers in the 12-15 inch range.

Anglers should be aware of special fishing regulations on Lake of the Woods. These regulations are designed to maintain a quality fishery and fishing experience. The combined walleye-sauger limit is six, but no more than four of those fish may be walleye. All walleye between 19.5 and 28 inches in length must be immediately released, and only one walleye longer than 28 inches may be possessed.

Northern pike are frequently overlooked by many anglers on Lake of the Woods. Both Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River support populations of trophy pike, with individuals over 40 inches long. The northern pike season is open continuously on Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River.

The period immediately after ice-out is an excellent time to participate in this fishery. Anglers who would like to target northern pike should focus their efforts near spawning sites. Major spawning sites are Bostic Creek, Zippel Bay and the Warroad River in addition to the Rainy River proper. Northern pike are also managed by special regulation. The possession limit is three. All northern pike from 30 to 40 inches long must be released immediately. An angler may possess one northern pike over 40 inches long.

Lake sturgeon are another species that anglers may encounter, particularly if fishing the lower reaches of the Rainy River or Fourmile Bay. Sturgeon are highly vulnerable to over-harvest, so the regulations governing the harvest of these fish are fairly restrictive. Anglers that have purchased a lake sturgeon harvest tag may harvest one lake sturgeon per calendar year. The harvest season runs from April 24 to May 7, and from July 1 to Sept. 30. Anglers may catch and release fish for sturgeon from May 8 to May 15, and from Oct. 1 through the following April 23. The lake sturgeon season is closed from May 16 to June 30, so anglers *cannot fish* for sturgeon during this period. Only lake sturgeon from 45 to 50 inches long, or over 75 inches long, may be harvested.

Anglers should also be aware that lake sturgeon regulations are much more restrictive in Ontario. Sturgeon are classified as threatened and the fishing season is closed. You may not harvest, or fish for, sturgeon on the Ontario portions of Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River. If you are fishing for Lake Sturgeon, know which side of the border you are on.

Spiny water flea, an invasive species, was discovered in Lake of the Woods in 2007, so Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River have been designated as infested waters. With this infestation, anglers have

an obligation to prevent the spread of this invading species to other water bodies. Spiny water fleas are predators that will compete with young walleye, sauger and yellow perch for food resources. They are a highly undesirable species in any water body. Anglers must make sure they do not transport any lake water in their boats. Bilges, live wells and bait wells must all be drained at boat landings, and boat has to be trailered with all of the plugs out. Also, spiny water flea tends to wrap around fishing line and anchor rope, so anglers must clean their fishing equipment when leaving the lake or river. Check the DNR website for more specific information of how to prevent the spread of spiny water flea.

Cass Lake

Cass Lake, and connected waters, are typically a good choice for early season walleye fishing, particularly in years in years when ice out is later, like things are shaping up for this year. During these late years, fishing near the Mississippi or Turtle River mouths can be very productive – particularly in the early morning or evening.

The inlets and outlets of the connected waters are also popular. The walleye population is healthy and comprised of good numbers of fish distributed among many different size and age classes. Angler catch rates should be good, with an abundance of fish from the strong 2013 year-class that are in the 17- to 19-inch range. There are also a number of fish in the low- to mid-twenties. Although night fishing has been popular on Cass Lake for a number of years the water, which was already clear, has gotten even clearer from the recent zebra mussel invasion. As a result, fishing when there is a chop on the water or during low light periods tends to most productive.

The northern pike population is at average levels of abundance with good numbers of fish between 22 and 30 inches. Cass Lake generally produces a few trophy northern pike each year as well. Cass is also well known as a premier native muskellunge lake and anglers catch a wide size range of fish, with some topping 50 inches. Anglers are reminded that the statewide muskellunge season opens on June 1 and the statewide minimum length limit is 54 inches.

Yellow perch numbers in Cass Lake are similar to the long-term average, and growth rates have improved. As a result, there is excellent opportunity to find some quality sized yellow perch. Fishing this past winter was above average and this is expected to continue into the open-water season.

The newly established zebra mussel population is expanding and it is now common to find them throughout the lake. Starry stonewort is also present. Remember to inspect your boat hull and anchor for unwanted hitchhikers and drain all of your water and keep your boat plugs out before leaving the access.

Upper Red Lake

The fishing outlook for Upper Red Lake is excellent. On waters under the jurisdiction of the state of Minnesota (the eastern 48,000 acres of Upper Red Lake), licensed anglers will be allowed a daily and possession limit of four walleye, with one fish larger than 20 inches allowed in possession. These regulations are intended to take advantage of the abundance of fish in the 17- to 20-inch range in the lake and reduce the mature female population to what we consider the “optimal” level. Given the prospects for a later-than-average spring, walleye catch rates during early season should be high. As

usual, there are good numbers of fish from 14 to 18 and a few more fish in the low twenties have been caught over the past year. Be prepared to accurately measure your catch by having the proper tools in your boat. The mouth of the Tamarac River is a very popular early season fishing location; however, early in the season there is good fishing around the entire shoreline break so consider spreading out to get away from the crowds.

Anglers interested in catching large northern pike are probably already familiar with Upper Red Lake. Northern pike size structure is impressive, and although angler catch rates may be low at times, the incentive is the potential to catch a trophy. Anglers should be aware of the special regulation for northern pike: all fish from 26 to 44 inches must be immediately released, and only one fish greater than 44 inches is allowed in possession. Anglers should be prepared to safely handle these large fish so they can survive the release process and live to fight another day. There are outstanding numbers of 36- to 40-inch fish in the population right now and the number of fish over 40 inches in the most recent assessment improved as well.

Anglers should be prepared to encounter a variety of DNR and Beltrami County staff while fishing or accessing Upper Red Lake. In addition to requests by fisheries creel survey clerks and conservation officers, staff from the various invasive species programs may be doing inspections and providing educational information. Red Lake was recently designated as an infested water as Zebra Mussel veligers (i.e., larvae) were recently discovered. No adults have been found at this point, but it is believed to be a reproducing population. Also, with spiny water fleas established in Rainy Lake, the Rainy River and Lake of the Woods, Upper Red Lake and other nearby waters are also at risk for direct transfer of this aquatic nuisance species by anglers. Anglers leaving any lake should remember that they are required by law to drain all water from boats, live wells, and bait wells and ensure the effective removal of all aquatic plants and/or other invasive species from their boat, trailer and other equipment.

Leech Lake

The 2019 fishing outlook on Leech Lake looks promising, similar to the past few years. Walleye numbers are above several current management goals. The 2018 catch rates of walleye (10.2 fish/net) was just above the management goal of 7 to 10 fish/net with fish ranging from 7 to 27 inches in the most recent fall survey. A new walleye regulation of 4 fish in possession, 1 over 20 inches allowed in possession will be effective on opening day. This regulation will continue to be evaluated and revised in the future if needed.

Northern pike catch rates were up from the previous survey with 4.2 fish/net in the fall sample. Catch rates have historically ranged from 4 to 6 fish per net and the lower management goal is at least 4.2 fish/net. New northern pike zone regulations (were put in place in 2018, and should benefit the northern pike population on Leech Lake.

Yellow perch numbers in the 2018 fall survey were lower than 2017 but higher than the all-time low in 2016. Sizes of yellow perch captured in the nets ranged from 5 to 13 inches with an average length of 8 inches. The yellow perch population in Leech Lake is showing a balanced population with approximately 40 percent of the perch sampled being 8 inches or larger.

A strong concern on Leech Lake is the impacts that zebra mussels will have in the future. Immature zebra mussel larvae, called veligers, were found in 2016. After an extensive search of the lake in 2017 and 2018 there was only one boat that was found to have any adult zebra mussels.

Once veligers are found it generally takes a few years before the adult zebra mussel population begins to dramatically increase. There are currently no known methods to control or reduce numbers of zebra mussels once they are found in natural systems. Aquatic invasive species (AIS) like zebra mussels are moved from infested to non-infested waters by anglers, boaters, and lake shore owners and can adversely impact lakes and fish populations. To avoid spreading AIS, lake users are required to remove all aquatic plants or animals from their watercraft and drain all water from their boat before leaving the access. Additional information on all of these topics can be found on the [DNR website](#) or by contacting the [Walker Area Fisheries office](#).