

Northwest Region Fishing Outlook for 2023

Outlook by Area and for Large Lakes

Baudette Area

The Baudette fisheries area, located in the far northwestern portion of Minnesota, offers a variety of fishing opportunities for anglers for a variety of species and waterbody types. Generally, it is looking like we are going to have another excellent season of fishing. Lake of the Woods is the most popular fishing destination in the Baudette fisheries area (see Northwest Region Large Lake profiles later in this report).

Walleye are the most popular fish with anglers in the area and there are a number of good options for targeting them. Rainy River offers excellent Walleye fishing. 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. 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. This can lead to some great fishing opportunities for anglers. Although thousands 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.

In the western portion of the Baudette fisheries area, Lake Bronson, Red Lake River Reservoir, and the Red River all offer opportunities to fish for Walleye. Based on recent monitoring conducted by area fisheries staff anglers can expect to find healthy Walleye populations in both Lake Bronson and Red Lake River Reservoir. Opportunities also exist to target other fish in the Baudette fisheries area including species such as Northern Pike, Lake Sturgeon, Channel Catfish, bass, and various panfish species. Northern Pike can be targeted in nearly every public waterbody in the Baudette fisheries area. The Rainy River offers an excellent opportunity to target large Northern Pike though large pike have been caught in other waterbodies in the Baudette fisheries area. Lake Sturgeon are most likely to be encountered by anglers fishing the Rainy River and fish exceeding 100 pounds have been observed in the river. The best options for anglers looking to target Channel Catfish in the Baudette fisheries area are the Red and Roseau Rivers. Hayes Lake and Lake Bronson are good places to target Largemouth Bass while the Rainy River provides opportunity to target Smallmouth Bass. Hayes Lake and Lake Bronson are both good options for anglers wishing to target various panfish.

There is good public access to all the fishing locations referenced above. There are several public boat ramps located along the Rainy River, a public fishing pier located on Baudette Bay in the City of Baudette, and shore fishing opportunities near most public boat ramps and in Franz Jevne State Park. On the Roseau River there are multiple concrete boat ramps. There is a fishing pier at Roseau City Park and bank fishing opportunities at the Stoies bridge access and at Roseau

City Park. There are also multiple boat accesses to the Red River in the Baudette fisheries area. Shore fishing opportunities on the Red River exist at the Frank Rose AMA. Access to Red Lake River Reservoir includes two public access points located on the reservoir in the city of Thief River Falls as well as fishing pier in located in the city park. Concrete boat ramps are located at both Lake Bronson and Hayes Lake and both have fishing piers. Only electric motors are allowed on Hayes Lake.

Hayes Lake and Lake Bronson are both located entirely within state parks and as such vehicle permits are required. As a reminder, the Rainy River and Red River both have special border water regulations. Also, Northern Pike now are managed according to zones and all water bodies that do not have special regulations fall into the northwest zone regulations. For more information on regulations pick up a regulation booklet or check the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources website.

Bemidji Area

With April snow, the arrival of spring seems to have slowed and staff at the Bemidji Area Fisheries office anticipate a slightly late ice-out time.

Anglers should have good luck targeting their favorite opener lakes. Shallower lakes such as Blackduck and Pike Bay are popular choices for area anglers around fishing opener because they are warmer and often have more active fish than deeper lakes. Deeper lakes such as Big Turtle, Turtle River, Plantagenet, Bemidji, Big Wolf, Big Lake and Lake Andrusia, may start slow but are excellent choices with their healthy walleye populations. Gull Lake and Grace Lake also present good opportunities for opener walleyes.

The tradition of the walleye opener often overshadows quality springtime fishing for a number of other fish species found in the area. The early catch and release bass season is May 13 - 26. Many lakes in the area offer great fishing opportunities for largemouth bass, which are often pre-spawn during this timeframe. Some of the more popular largemouth bass lakes in the area include Balm, Big Bass, and South Twin. Various lakes in the Turtle River chain of lakes present good opportunities for largemouth as well.

Anglers targeting northern pike on the Turtle River chain of lakes should be aware of a number of changes to regulations. The special regulation on Three Island Lake and Turtle River Lake was dropped so the north-central zone regulation now applies. There is a new special regulation on the lake chain from Little Turtle Lake to Fox Lake so that includes Big Turtle, Movil, and Beltrami lakes as well and the connecting river. On these waters, all northern pike from 22-30 inches must be immediately released and the possession limit is 10 with only one over 30 inches allowed.

Many area lakes also have high quality populations of panfish such as bluegill and black crappie. Anglers should be aware of reduced bag limits for sunfish (5 fish daily) on a number area lakes and their connected waters: Andrusia, Beltrami, Big, Big Bass, Big Rice, Buck, Campbell, Cass, Deer, Fox, Gull, Julia, Kitchi, Little Rice, Little Turtle, Medicine, Minerva, Movil, Pike Bay, Pimushe, Three Island, Turtle, Turtle River, Windigo and Wolf Lakes.

Detroit Lakes Area

Ice-out dates for area lakes look to be slightly later than normal, with some lakes possibly still having some ice present on opening weekend. The later ice-out could prove challenging for Walleye anglers as they will be recovering from spawning activities. Northern Pike should be active and feeding as they spawn earlier than Walleye. Spring fishing for crappie or sunfish in shallow backwater bays of lakes may be a great substitute if the Walleye or pike fishing is slow.

Traditional Walleye lakes in the Detroit Lakes area that continue to have strong Walleye populations include Sallie, Detroit, Melissa, White Earth, and Island. Strawberry Lake could also be added to that list. The lake is located approximately six miles east of the town of White Earth and a survey in 2022 found a healthy Walleye population with good numbers of fish between 16 and 20 inches long.

Northern Pike are always active during the first month of the fishing season. Anglers are reminded of the statewide zone regulations for Northern Pike. In the North Central Zone, the bag limit is 10, all pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released, and no more than two pike over 26 inches long can be kept. Popular lakes that offer quality pike fishing are Big Cormorant, Acorn, Munson, and Sauer.

Black Crappie and Bluegill fishing are always good bets in the Detroit Lakes Area. Popular lakes such as Sallie, Melissa, Detroit, Buffalo, and Big Sugar Bush have Black Crappie populations with good numbers of harvestable fish. Bluegill anglers can find fish in almost all lakes within the Detroit Lakes Area, but common destinations include Little Sugar Bush, Big Floyd, Upper Cormorant, and Island lakes.

The catch and release angling season for Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass also begins on the May 13th opener, while the harvest season opens May 27th. Largemouth Bass are common across area lakes, while good Smallmouth Bass populations can be found in Big Cormorant, Island, White Earth, and Strawberry lakes.

Muskellunge were introduced into Detroit and Many Point lakes. A trophy fishery has developed in Detroit Lake and has become very popular among Muskie fishermen. The Muskie population in Many Point Lake is excellent though not yet known as a destination for trophy sized fish as stocking was only initiated in 2006. The Muskie angling season begins the first Saturday in June.

Additional angling opportunities exist for Rainbow Trout in the Detroit Lakes Area at Bad Medicine Lake and Hanson Lake. Catchable-sized fish have been stocked into both lakes, with periodic stocking of larger fish when they are available. The season for stream trout in lakes runs from May 13 to October 31 and requires the purchase of a trout stamp.

Fergus Falls Area

The Fergus Falls Area encompasses all of Otter Tail County and the Red River of the North along the Wilken County border with North Dakota. As of mid-April, area lakes are still ice-covered and the long-term weather forecast is for below average to average temperatures. Unless weather conditions change, ice-out appears as if it is going to be late this year, especially for the

large, deep lakes; therefore, Walleye spawning activities will occur later than normal. Spawning activities will likely occur during late April and could stretch into the middle of May. Anglers can expect to find Walleyes in spawn to post-spawn phases on the May 13th opener. Late spawning seasons generally make for slower Walleye angling on the opener as fish are either still spawning or recovering from the spawn. Generally speaking though, as the season progresses and water temperatures warm, anglers should expect good Walleye fishing on area lakes during the 2023 season as several strong natural year classes and supplemental stockings have established abundant Walleye populations. Small, shallow lakes are usually popular for the opener because the water temperatures will be warmer and the fish more active. Some traditional favorites for the opener include Walker, Anna, South Ten Mile, Orwell, and Fish Lakes. Some larger, deeper lakes that presently have strong year classes of harvestable Walleyes include Pelican, Star, Dead, and the Pine Lakes. Anglers should be aware that there is an 18.0 to 26.0 inch protected slot size limit for Walleye on Big and Little Pine Lakes. Some small to medium sized lakes with moderate mean depths that also have strong year classes of harvestable Walleyes include Silver, Jewett, Eagle, West Leaf, and Portage.

Northern Pike should be feeding actively as they spawn earlier than Walleyes. Most of the large lakes in the area consistently produce above-average sized pike. Some smaller lakes that anglers may want to check-out for nice Northern Pike include Stalker, Swan, Middle Leaf, East Leaf, and Jolly Ann. Anglers are reminded of the Northern Pike slot length limit. The bag limit is 10 with not more than two over 26.0 inches. All pike from 22.0 to 26.0 inches must be released. Anglers looking to take advantage of the 10 fish bag can look to lakes like Leek, Rose, East Battle, Heilberger, Loon, and Long north of Fergus Falls. These lakes have an abundance of small pike less than 22.0 inches in length.

Panfish opportunities may be a viable option if the Walleye and Northern Pike are not cooperating. Many area lakes presently support abundant populations of Sunfish and Black Crappie with good size structures. Several of these lakes include Rush, Donalds, Fiske, Schwartz, and the Leaf Lakes. Anglers targeting Sunfish need to be aware of twenty-three lakes in the area with reduced daily bag limits. The intent of the reduced bag limits is to maintain or improve the size structures of Sunfish in lakes that have historically produced quality populations. Lakes with a five Sunfish daily bag limit include West Silent, Franklin, Bass, Middle, Annie Battle, Norway, Fish by Weetown, and Fish by Parkers Prairie. Lakes with a ten sunfish daily bag limit include East Lost, West Lost, Crystal, Deer, Wall, Red River, Prairie, Stuart, Star, Big Pine, South Lida, North Lida, Twenty-One, Fladmark, and Long by Vergas.

The Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass angling seasons also begin on the May 13th opener; however, it is catch and release only until May 27th. Most area lakes consistently produce abundant Largemouth Bass populations. Anglers interested in Smallmouth Bass should look to East Silent, Pickerel, South Ten Mile, North Lida, and Lizzie Lakes. Anglers interested in a float fishing trip should consider the Otter Tail River, as it has a renowned catch and release only Smallmouth Bass fishery.

Many shore fishing opportunities exist in Otter Tail County for anglers without access to a fishing vessel. Public fishing piers are located on Pebble and Hoot Lakes in Fergus Falls, Long Lake in Vergas, Beers Lake in Maplewood State Park, Molly Stark Lake in Glendalough State Park, Pelican Bay of Otter Tail Lake, the Otter Tail Lake outlet dam, and on the Red River in Breckinridge. The Orwell Dam Recreation Area on the Otter Tail River south of Fergus Falls is a very popular shore fishing location as well.

For anglers wanting to try something unique in the area for the opener, Bass Lake in Maplewood State Park is an option for trout fishing. Bass Lake is stocked annually with Rainbow Trout. Anglers are reminded that a state park permit and a trout stamp are required to fish Bass Lake. The use of live minnows for bait is prohibited and the bag limit is five with not more than three over 16.0 inches in length.

Another unique experience would be to give catfishing a try. The Red River along the Wilkin County border is home to a world class Channel Catfish fishery. The Red River supports an incredible abundance of these whiskered fish with opportunities to catch trophy fish as well. There are a number of public watercraft accesses and shore fishing areas located along this stretch of the river. The season is open year-round with a daily bag limit of five catfish with only one fish allowed over 24.0 inches.

Good luck to all anglers going out on the opener in the Fergus Falls Area this year. Please show respect for fellow anglers on the water and at the public accesses. Also, please dispose of your litter properly and most importantly, remember to wear your life jackets.

Glenwood Area

With two feet of ice still covering most lakes in mid-April, it is going to be a later than average ice-out this year. Warmer temperatures in the extended forecast should start to speed things up but water temperature will still be cool by fishing opener. Anglers may want to focus on shallower lakes for this year's opener. Typically, our shallow, turbid lakes are your best bet early in the season because they warm faster and fish become more active. These productive lakes also tend to have greater Walleye numbers. Shallow prairie lakes in the western and southern part of the four county work area would be good options. In addition, strong Walleye numbers are present in the lakes along the Pomme de Terre River system. Bass and Northern Pike are most abundant in clear, vegetated lakes, which tend to be in Pope and Douglas Counties, especially in the north and eastern parts of the work area.

While many anglers target larger gamefish species during opener, don't forget about the excellent panfish opportunities during this time of year. Most lakes in the area support good populations of Black Crappie and Bluegill. Anglers have plenty of lakes to choose from, including 17 lakes that were included in the Quality Sunfish Initiative. These include 10-sunfish bag limits on lakes Amelia, Andrew, Blackwell, Gilchrist, Grove, Irene, Leven, Mill, Minnewaska, Osakis (including Little Osakis), Red Rock, Reno, Vermont, and Villard, and 5-sunfish bag limits on Moon, Round, and Whiskey.

For a unique opportunity in the Glenwood Area, head to the West Branch of the Chippewa River or Lake Emily for Channel Catfish. First sampled in 1995, catfish are now abundant. During the 2022 survey catfish averaged 23 inches, with the largest being 29 inches.

A recent addition to the Glenwood Area is the opportunity to fish for trout in Spruce Creek, northeast of Alexandria. Since 2019, catchable-size Brown and Rainbow Trout have been stocked annually into Spruce Creek by the Viking Sportsmen and DNR. Shore fishing is available in Spruce Hill County Park. In 2022, over 3,000 trout were stocked into Spruce Creek. The stream trout opener was on April 15.

Park Rapids Area

As this outlook is being written, area lake ice is diminishing but a fresh new layer of snow has fallen. However, the extended forecast predicts milder weather with nightly temperatures hovering above the freezing mark. These temperatures should provide us with enough warmth to have a majority of the lakes in the Park Rapids area ice-free by early-May. As water temperatures slowly begin to trend upwards Northern Pike and Walleye will begin spawning later this month and should be completed fishing opener. Northern Pike and Walleye should be in post spawn patterns by the May 13th fishing opener. As for other fish species, the timing of water warmup and photoperiod lengths will dictate where and when each particular species will begin actively spawning.

Barring any drastic changes in the weather pattern, Walleye fishing should provide anglers in the Park Rapids area with a chance to hook into some excellent fish. Post spawn Adult male Walleye should be ready to feed and actively target baits and lures. Early season lakes in the Park Rapids area to target Walleye include Eagle, Fish Hook, Island, and Potato chain. As the season progresses, other lakes such as Big Sand, Eleventh Crow Wing, Kabekona, Long, and Upper and Lower Bottle are the go-to lakes for anglers.

In typical fashion, Black Crappie and Sunfish action should start ramping up around Memorial Day weekend. Anglers looking to target lakes that will provide ample angling opportunities in the Park Rapids area should target Big Mantrap, Belle Taine, and any of the lakes in the Crow Wing chain. Some of the better lakes in the area for Largemouth Bass are Belle Taine, East and West Crooked, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Crow Wing, and Little Mantrap. Duck, Hinds, and Lake George also have abundant bass populations but not many large bass. Smallmouth Bass fishing should be getting good as the season progresses, lakes to target in the Park Rapids area are Belle Taine, Big Sand, Boulder, East Crooked, and Potato.

Northern Pike are abundant in the Park Rapids Fisheries Management Area. Lakes that have a better overall size structure are lakes that have the special regulation of 24 to 36-inch protected slot such as Big Mantrap, George, and Fifth and Sixth Crow Wing. In comparison lakes in the zone regulation such as Garfield, Portage, Potato, and Straight have high abundances of pike but these fish tend to be smaller in size. In turn anglers targeting these zone regulated lakes can take advantage of the increased possession limit of ten, of which no more than 2 can be above 26 inches, and all fish between 22 to 26 inches must be released.

Anglers targeting Northern Pike are reminded that there is a difference between the Northern Pike central zone regulation and the special regulation for Northern Pike. In Park Rapids, we have eight lakes with special northern pike regulations and several others for Bass, Crappie or Walleye. These lakes include:

- Northern Pike: Fifth, Sixth, Eighth, Ninth and Tenth Crow Wing, George, Big Mantrap and Blueberry
- Bass: Little Mantrap and George.
- Crappie: Big Mantrap and Spider
- Sunfish - First, Second, Third, and Fourth Crow Wing and Garfield
- Walleye: Big Sand and Kabekona

- All Species: Lester and LaSalle

If you aren't targeting one particular species and are willing to try different techniques, consider fishing Fish Hook or Potato lakes, with a goal of catching multiple species of fish. These two lakes are some of the better all-around lakes as you will find Walleye, Northern Pike, Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass, Bluegill, and Crappie.

Angles can help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (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. Park Rapids Area Fisheries has been extremely fortunate to not have many lakes with AIS in them. So far, we have three lakes with zebra mussels (Benedict, Garfield, and Long Lakes) and two lakes with Eurasian water milfoil (Bad Axe and Big Mantrap).

Walker Area

Anglers can anticipate finding Walleye in post-spawn conditions by the May 13th fishing opener. Surveys completed in 2022 found abundant Walleye populations in Pine Mountain, Woman, and Six Mile Lakes. Walleye ranged in length from roughly 8 to 28 inches with quality size structure and ample fish measuring between 14 and 16 inches. In addition, Boy Lake also provides an excellent Walleye population for harvest opportunity.

Quality angling opportunities for Largemouth and/or Smallmouth Bass exist on Lake Thirteen, Little Boy, Pleasant, Portage, Stony, Ten Mile, Wabedo, and Woman lakes. Smallmouth Bass appear to be increasing in Leech Lake. A reminder to anglers that Bass angling in Minnesota (excluding the Northeast) is catch and release only from May 13th-26th and opens for harvest on May 27th.

In addition to Leech Lake, Muskellunge can be targeted on Baby, Boy, Man, Little Boy, Wabedo, Inguadona, and Woman Lakes and their connecting waters with the opportunity for trophy-sized fish. A reminder to anglers that Muskie opener is June 3rd, 2023.

Northern Pike are abundant within Walker Management Area lakes. Anglers are reminded of the statewide zone regulations for Northern Pike. In the North Central Zone, the bag limit is 10, all pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released, and no more than two pike over 26 inches long can be harvested. Surveys completed in 2022 found abundant pike populations in Ada, Little Webb, Pine, Pine Mountain, and Three Island Lakes. Pike exceeding 30 inches were sampled in all these waters.

Black Crappie and sunfish can be caught throughout area waters with many lakes producing quality sized fish. Lakes sampled in 2022 with relatively high catch rates of quality sized crappie included Beuber, Ox Yoke, Lower Sand, and Sanborn Lakes. Large Sunfish (>9 inches) were sampled in Beuber, Island, Lind, Little Webb, Lower Sand, Pine Mountain, Sanborn, and Woman Lakes. Anglers targeting panfish should be aware of the newly implemented special regulations in the form of reduced bag limits. Lakes with new (implemented after 2020) Sunfish regulations include Beuber, Boy, Big Portage, Crooked, Deep Portage, Leech, Lower Sucker, Lower Trelipe, Middle Sucker, Ox Yoke, Sanborn, Sugar, Upper Sucker, Upper Trelipe, Vermillion, and Welsh Lakes.

Anglers looking for unique angling opportunities the Walker area manages five Rainbow Trout lakes. Lakes which provide trout in remote settings include Perch, Hazel, Teepee, and Diamond lakes. Long Lake near Longville has a more developed public water access.

Northwest region large lake outlook for 2023

Lake of the Woods

Walleye and Sauger are the most important sport fish in Lake of the Woods, and as such those populations are monitored annually. Annual assessments have been conducted in early September since 1981.

Walleye 14 to 19 inches long were either at or below the historic average last September during the annual fall survey. Catch rates of 14 to 19 inch Walleye were lower than observed in recent years; although the strong 2018 year class will be contributing to the desired harvest range during the summer of 2023. In addition to these keeper-size Walleye, anglers should also notice good numbers of small Walleye, in the 8 to 10-inch range. These Walleye showed up in good numbers in our annual fall survey. Walleye 11 to up to 14 inches are well below the historic average due to below average year-classes produced in 2019 and 2020.

Lake of the Woods is well known for the trophy-size Walleye. Fish up to 30 inches are sampled every year during DNR sampling. The abundance of Walleye greater than 25 inches remains high and should provide anglers plenty of opportunity to catch large fish. Consider that these fish can be 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 population than as table fare. Generally, a 25-inch long Walleye is about 10 to 15 years old, and a 30-inch Walleye is over 20 years old.

Sauger abundance has remained above since 2016 due to multiple strong year-classes in 2011 and from 2014 to 2017. Sauger 11 inches and above were abundant during fall gill netting and last winter's creel survey.

Anglers should be aware of special fishing regulations on Lake of the Woods. These regulations are designed to maintain a quality fishery and fishing experiences. 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. Northern Pike season is open continuously on Lake of the Woods and 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 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 September 30. Anglers may catch and release fish for sturgeon from May 8 to May 15, and from October 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, Lake Sturgeon on the Ontario portions of Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River. If you are fishing for Lake Sturgeon, it is very important to know which side of the border you are fishing.

Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River have been designated as infested waters due to the presence of spiny water flea, and most recently zebra mussel within Lake of the Woods. With this designation, anglers have an obligation to prevent the spread of these invasive species to other water bodies. 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. Check the DNR web site for more specific information of how to prevent the spread of spiny water flea and zebra mussels.

Cass Lake

Cass Lake and its connected waters are typically a good choice for early season walleye fishing with the inlets and outlets of the connected waters being popular early season spots. The walleye population of Cass Lake is healthy and is comprised of good numbers of fish distributed among numerous size and age classes. Much of the population is between 14 and 17 inches due to the strong 2018 year class. These fish will provide good catch rates and fish for the frying pan for the next several years. The record-strong 2013 year class is still prominent in the population and providing anglers with quality-sized fish in the mid-20-inch range. There are also some younger fish in the population that will be too small to keep that will provide some additional action. Night fishing has been popular on Cass Lake for a number of years and as the water has gotten even clearer from zebra mussels, it has become the prime time to fish walleye. Day fishing seems to be most productive when there is a chop on the water or during low light periods.

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 3rd and the statewide minimum length limit is 54 inches.

Yellow perch numbers in Cass Lake are good especially for fish over 8 inches. Fish are growing rapidly which has resulted in anglers finding more keeper sized fish. Anglers should remember

there is a chain-wide five fish daily bag limit for sunfish. The possession limit for sunfish remains at 20 fish.

Zebra mussels and starry stonewort are present in the lake. 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 landing area.

Upper Red

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 five walleye, with one fish larger than 17 inches allowed in possession for the open water season. This regulation is more relaxed than last winter and will focus harvest on the abundant 2019 year class that is mostly under 17 inches. Given the prospects for an average to late spring, Red Lake should be a great destination for opener. 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 where you are likely to find those smaller eaters as well. Be prepared to accurately measure your catch by having the proper tools in your boat as you will want to keep to just one walleye over 17 inches.

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 30 to 40 inches must be immediately released, and only one fish greater than 40 inches is allowed in possession. Be sure to examine all northern pike caught for a small tag on the left side of their top (dorsal) fin. These yellow tags have unique numbers and can be reported to the creel clerk, on the MNDNR website, or by contacting the Bemidji Area Fisheries Office. Tagged fish of the appropriate size may be harvested if you choose; however, if you release a tagged fish, please do not remove the tag from the fish.

Black crappie are showing up in angler catches in greater numbers than they have in several years. These fish are nearly all from the 2018 year class and average around 12 inches. However, there are a few fish from some older year classes still out there that provide an opportunity to catch an impressive 14 or 15 incher that may invoke memories of the "crappie boom" that occurred in the early 2000s. However, the current bump in crappie fishing success should not be misinterpreted as a new crappie boom, but rather increased opportunity for a few bonus fish as the 2018 year class is not nearly as large as the historic 1995 year class. Anglers targeting black crappie will be most successful in late May and early June looking for fish in and adjacent to likely spawning areas.

Anglers should be prepared to encounter a variety of natural resources staff while fishing or accessing Upper Red Lake. In addition to requests by DNR creel survey clerks and conservation officers, staff from the various DNR and Beltrami County invasive species programs may be doing inspections and providing educational information. Red Lake is designated as an infested water with both zebra mussels and starry stonewort present. With spiny water fleas established in Rainy Lake, the Rainy River, and Lake of the Woods, Upper Red Lake and other nearby waters are at risk for direct transfer of this aquatic nuisance species by boaters. 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 2023 fishing outlook on Leech Lake is good. Current Walleye numbers were within or above various management objectives with considerable young Walleye that should be available for harvest for the opener and were being caught this past winter. Walleye in the sample ranged in length from 6 to 27 inches, with strong year classes from 2019 that are averaging 15 inches and 2017 averaging 19 inches. The walleye regulation of 4 fish with only 1 over 20.0 inches allowed in possession was implemented in 2019 and will continue for another season.

New as of March 1, 2021 was the implementation of sunfish and Black Crappie reduced daily limits on Leech Lake. Specifically, anglers can harvest 5 sunfish and 5 crappie daily; statewide possession limits of 20 sunfish and 10 crappie remain unchanged. The purpose of the reduced bag limits is to ensure the high size quality of panfish in Leech Lake is maintained. There is the potential there was some partial winterkill in the shallower bays with the heavy snow load; this has happened in the past and the fishery recovers quickly.

Northern Pike catch rate was 3.3 fish per net in the 2022 sample. Catch rates have historically ranged from 4 to 6 fish per net. Northern Pike on Leech Lake fall under the North Central Zone regulation which includes a ten fish bag limit with not more than 2 over 26 inches and all from 22-26 inches must be immediately released.

Yellow Perch numbers are below management objectives but larger fish remain present and many anglers reported successful fishing this past winter. Perch sampled ranged from 5 to 12 inches with nearly 40 percent of fish longer than 8.0 inches.

A continued focus on Leech Lake is the impact zebra mussels will have in the future. Immature zebra mussel larvae, called veligers, were found in 2016 and adults were reported throughout the lake by fall 2021. There are currently no known methods to control or reduce numbers of zebra mussels once they are found in natural systems. Starry stonewort, which is an invasive algae, was found in Steamboat Bay during 2021. Aquatic invasive species (AIS) like zebra mussels and starry stonewort are moved from infested to non-infested waters by anglers, boaters, and lake shore owners and can adversely impact lakes and fish populations. Other invasive species in Leech Lake include Eurasian water milfoil, rusty crayfish and curly-leaf pondweed. 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 these topics can be found on the DNR website (www.dnr.state.mn.us) or by contacting the Walker Area Fisheries office.