

Northwest 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 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.

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, Roseau, Red Lake and South Branch Two 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 bank fishing opportunities on the Red Lake River in the City of Thief River Falls and the South Branch Two Rivers in the city of Hallock. 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 Aquatic Management Area. 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 a 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 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 north central zone regulations. For more information on regulations pick up a regulation booklet or check the [Minnesota DNR website](#).

Bemidji Area

Anglers should have good luck targeting their favorite opener lakes. Shallower lakes such as Blackduck Lake and Pike Bay Lake 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 and Lake Andrusia may start slow but are excellent choices with their healthy walleye populations. Gull and Grace lakes 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 11-24. 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.

Many area lakes also have high quality populations of panfish such as sunfish 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

Traditional walleye lakes in the Detroit Lakes area that continue to have strong walleye populations include Sallie, Detroit, Melissa, White Earth and Island. 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. A reminder to be on the lookout for reduced bag limits of sunfish. There are now 13 lakes within the Detroit Lakes Management area that have such regulations.

The catch and release angling season for largemouth and smallmouth bass also begins on the May 11 opener, while the harvest season opens May 25. 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 anglers. 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 Saturday, June 1.

Additional angling opportunities exist for rainbow trout in the Detroit Lakes area at Bad Medicine and Hanson lakes. Catchable-sized fish have been stocked into both lakes, with periodic stocking of larger fish when they are available. Anglers traditionally have very good success fishing Bad Medicine in May before surface waters warm past 60 degrees. The season for stream trout in lakes this year runs from May 11 to Oct. 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. Anglers can expect to find walleyes in a post-spawn phase on most lakes for the May 11 opener, with fish recovered from the spawn and feeding actively. As the season progresses and water temperatures continue to warm, anglers should expect good walleye fishing on area lakes during the 2024 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, Wall and Fish lakes. Some larger, deeper lakes that presently have strong year classes of harvestable walleyes include Pelican, Star, Dead, Pickerel, Otter Tail and the Pine Lakes. Anglers should be aware that there is an 18 to 26-inch protected slot size limit for walleye on Big and Little Pine lakes. Some small to medium sized lakes with moderate depths that also have strong year classes of harvestable walleyes include Big McDonald, Silver, Jewett, Long (north of Jewett), Crystal, Eagle and Portage.

Northern pike should be feeding aggressively 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, Pebble and Jolly Ann. Anglers are reminded of the northern pike North Central Zone regulation. The bag limit is 10 with not more than two over 26 inches. All pike from 22 to 26 inches must be released. Anglers looking to take advantage of the 10 fish bag can look to lakes like Leek, Rose, East Battle, Heilberger, East Twin, Loon and Crystal. These lakes have an abundance of small pike less than 22 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, Anderson and 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.

The largemouth and smallmouth bass angling seasons also begin on the May 11 opener; however, it is catch and release only until May 25. 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, Hoot 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 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. There are several 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 inches.

Glenwood area

Typically, our shallow, turbid lakes are the 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 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 that include 10-sunfish bag limits.

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 Minnesota DNR. Shore fishing is available in Spruce Hill County Park. In 2023, more than 3,000 trout were stocked into Spruce Creek.

Park Rapids area

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 Fish Hook and Eagle Island and the Potato chain of lakes. As the season progresses, other lakes such as Big Sand, Eleventh Crow Wing, Kabekona, Long and Upper and Lower Bottles 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. 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 north central 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 zone regulated lakes can take advantage of the increased possession limit of 10, 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, black crappie or walleye.

If you aren't targeting one 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 black crappie.

Walker area

Anglers can anticipate finding walleye in post-spawn conditions by the May 11 fishing opener. Lakes in the Walker fisheries management area provide excellent multispecies angling opportunity. Quality populations of walleye can be found in Woman, Pine Mountain, Ten Mile, Six Mile, Leech, Pleasant and Boy Lakes. Based on fisheries assessments completed in 2023, Pleasant and Lower Trelipe lakes produced decent catches of walleye ranging from 8 to 27 inches with quality size structure and ample fish measuring between 16 and 18 inches.

Quality angling opportunities for largemouth and/or smallmouth bass exist on Pleasant, Blackwater, Mule, Little Boy, 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 11-24 and opens for harvest on May 25.

In addition to Leech Lake, muskie 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. Muskie opener is Saturday, June 1.

Northern pike are abundant in walker area lakes. Anglers are reminded of the 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 2023 found abundant pike populations in Mule, Pleasant, Stony, Birch and Blackwater lakes. Pike exceeding 29 inches were found in all these waters and the largest pike sampled was 38 inches.

Black crappie and sunfish can be caught throughout area waters with many lakes producing quality sized fish. Lakes sampled in 2023 with relatively high catch rates of quality sized crappie included Inguadona, Blackwater, Lower Trelipe, Stony, Upper Trelipe and Big Portage lakes. Large sunfish (greater than 9 inches) were sampled in

Inguadona, Birch, Blackwater, Lower Trelipe, Mule, Pleasant and Stony lakes. Anglers targeting panfish should be aware of the newly implemented special regulations in the form of reduced bag limits..

Anglers looking for unique angling opportunities note that 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 2024

Lake of the Woods

Walleye and sauger are the most important fish for anglers in Lake of the Woods, and as such the DNR has monitored those populations annually since 1981.

Walleye 14 to 19 inches long were at the historic average last September during the annual fall survey. Catch rates of 14 to 19 inch walleye were the highest observed in recent years. The strong 2018 year class will be contributing to the desired harvest range during the summer of 2024, as will the 2021 year class. 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 14 to up to 17 inches were 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 was near the long-term average last September due to multiple strong year-classes from 2014 to 2017 and 2019. Sauger 12 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. 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 restrictive. Anglers who 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 must do their part 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 website](#) 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. Although these spots will undoubtedly produce some fish this year, the earlier than usual ice-out will likely see fewer fish concentrated in these areas than recent years. 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 12 and 19 inches due to the strong 2021 and 2018 year classes. 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 fading from the population but there remains good numbers of fish in the low to mid-20-inch range. Night fishing has been popular on Cass Lake for a number of years as the clear water makes this the prime time to fish walleye. Daytime fishing seems to be most productive on windier days 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 muskie lake and anglers catch a wide size range of fish, with some topping 50 inches. Anglers are reminded that the statewide muskie season opens on Saturday, June 1 and the statewide minimum length limit is 54 inches.

Yellow perch numbers in Cass Lake are average, but abundance of fish over 9 inches is well above average. Fish are growing rapidly which has resulted in anglers finding more keeper sized fish as well as fish up well over 12 inches. Anglers pursuing sunfish should remember there is a chain-wide five fish daily bag limit for sunfish. The possession limit for sunfish remains at 20 fish.

Anglers should be prepared to encounter a variety of natural resources staff while fishing Cass Lake. An angler creel survey is being conducted by DNR Fisheries clerks and conservation officers, staff from the various DNR and Beltrami County invasive species programs may be doing inspections and providing educational information. Zebra mussels and starry stonewort are present in the lake. Remember to inspect your boat hull and anchor for unwanted hitchhikers and drain all 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 three walleye from the May 11 fishing opener through June 14. Beginning on June 15, the bag limit will increase to four fish with one fish larger than 17 inches allowed in possession. This regulation is necessary to keep annual walleye harvest within the target range following a winter with record-high harvest and high angler catch rates. Given the early spring, Red Lake traditional fishing spots like the mouth of the Tamarac River may be a little slower than usual. However, anglers who spread out and find active fish should have no trouble finding plenty of keeper fish as abundance of these fish is excellent. Be prepared to accurately measure your catch by having the proper tools in

your boat as you be able to keep 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 2024 fishing outlook on Leech Lake is promising especially considering Leech Lake is a destination for multiple species. Current Walleye numbers were within or above various management objectives and a number of year classes will be available for harvest for the opener. Walleye captured in the 2023 sample ranged in length from 7 to 28 inches, with strong year classes from 2019 that are averaging 17 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 looks to be having the desired effect on the walleye population so it will continue for another season.

As of March 1, 2021, the DNR implemented reduced daily limits for sunfish and black crappie on Leech Lake. Specifically, anglers can harvest five sunfish and five crappie daily; statewide possession limits of 20 sunfish and 10 crappie remain unchanged. The purpose of the reduced bag limits is to ensure Leech Lake continues to have large panfish. Anglers often target panfish in the shallower bays of the lake.

Northern pike catch rates were lower in the 2023 fisheries sample.

Yellow perch numbers are below management objectives but larger fish remain present and many anglers reported successful fishing this past winter. Perch in the sample ranged from 4 to 12 inches with a very strong year class of fish produced in 2023. If these fish persist it could mean very strong perch fishing in the coming years.

Anglers are targeting bass on Leech Lake with an increased interest in the smallmouth fishing. Main lake rock reefs and humps are areas anglers look for smallmouth with largemouth being found most often in the shallower bays along with panfish. This summer Leech Lake will host numerous bass tournaments including a national open tournament in August.

Muskie fishing is also popular with the chance for a trophy fish on Leech Lake. Leech Lake is the genetic source for all muskellunge stocking in Minnesota and fish over 50 inches are caught every year.

Aquatic invasive species like zebra mussels and starry stonewort are present in Leech Lake and 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.