

Southern Region Fishing Outlook for 2025

Reminders for a great season

Welcome to the 2025 fishing season! These fishing outlooks contain a wide range of fisheries information compiled in April by local DNR Fisheries staff. You can find more information about the management, habitat and oversight work performed by area fisheries staff, and how to contact them, on the [DNR area fisheries pages](#). We hope you have a great fishing experience. And we'd also encourage you to take a kid fishing or [introduce someone new to fishing!](#)

Check the DNR fishing webpage

The DNR has a [fishing page](#) to help answer angler questions. The page links to [LakeFinder](#), which provides maps, special regulation information for individual lakes, other detailed information on lakes throughout the state, and the StreamFinder tool that provides a description, species list, regulations and access information for [trout streams throughout Minnesota](#). The fishing page includes the online versions of the Minnesota fishing regulations booklet in multiple languages. The regulations booklet is available in print anywhere [DNR licenses are sold](#).

Clean In Clean Out

Remember anglers and boaters, Clean In Clean Out when boating or fishing in Minnesota. Protect your waters by following state aquatic invasive species laws. Clean, drain, dispose and keep all plugs out while transporting boats. Find information on aquatic invasive species on the [DNR website](#).

Fish consumption guidance

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

Safety must be the priority around cold water

Cold water is dangerous and unexpected falls can quickly turn tragic. About 30% of fatal boating accidents each year happen during the cold-water period, and many involve victims who weren't wearing a life jacket. The most effective way to survive a fall into cold water is to wear a life jacket and make sure the jacket is buckled or zipped. For more information about staying safe on and around cold water, visit the [DNR cold water safety page](#).

Outlook by areas

Southern Minnesota lakes are often overlooked as a destination for great fishing in the spring, although the anglers who live nearby know of the excellent opportunities that await them. Anyone can experience good angling by boat or bank-angling given the numerous waters in this part of the state that host fast-growing fish, as opposed to slower-growing fish in deeper, cooler lakes in northern Minnesota. Sometimes the best kept secrets for fast-action keeper walleye are found in southern Minnesota. DNR Fisheries crews and supervisors have been able for years to be nimble and adaptive with shallow lake management to provide the best opportunities in a short period of time. Try your luck — you will return!

The 2025 season has started out dry with a second consecutive warmer and drier winter, late ice formation, and a slightly earlier than typical ice-out. No fish winterkill was observed in the winter of 2024-25, which is the second consecutive year with limited winterkill in southern Minnesota lakes. In winter 2023-24 there was significant winterkill and if you target those lakes that were restocked with walleye fry, the fish are likely approaching a

harvestable size, especially into fall and winter of 2025.

If you need fish population assistance, contact the [local Fisheries area office](#) in that area of the state. Have a great fishing experience and take a kid fishing or introduce someone new to shore fishing!

The following fishing information is highlighted below by each DNR area fisheries office in the southern region: Hutchinson, Minnesota River, Ortonville, Spicer, Waterville and Windom. They provide a snapshot of the lake's fishery based on recent netting surveys that evaluate fish populations. The following list of waters are viable options for spring of 2025:

- **Belle Lake (Meeker County)** – a lake with natural reproduction not stocked since 2018.
- **Lake Hanska (Brown County)** – a long and narrow lake that has been a walleye destination.
- **Big Swan Lake (Meeker County)** – a great walleye resource in the Hutchinson area.
- **Minnesota River (from Granite Falls to Mankato)** – the bite has been on since fall 2024!
- **Traverse Lake (Traverse County)** – a walleye factory for years of all sizes. Two lines on border lake.
- **Diamond Lake (Kandiyohi County)** – high net catch rates the past couple years of surveys.
- **Rice Lake (Kandiyohi County)** – providing good walleye action each spring.
- **Wakanda Lake (Kandiyohi County)** – shallow lake, high walleye population.
- **Koronis Lake (Stearns County)** – one of the most popular Spicer area lakes with quality walleye.
- **Fox Lake (Rice County)** – boasts high numbers of walleye for this lake which is often overlooked.
- **Fountain Lake (Freeborn County)** – a stable walleye population with chance for pike!
- **Lake Tetonka (Le Sueur County)** – the highest net catch rates ever, albeit fish on smaller side.
- **Lake Shetek (Murray County)** – big water, very high numbers of walleye from the 2023 year class.
- **Currant Lake (Murray County)** – Shallow lake with a solid population of walleye.
- **Round Lake (Jackson County)** – ever popular opener lake that kicks out many walleye.
- **Little Spirit Lake (Jackson County)** – MN/IA border water, three fish limit, a solid option!

Hutchinson area

Hutchinson Area Fisheries – covering Brown, McLeod, Meeker, Nicollet, Redwood, Renville and Sibley counties.

2025 followed a similar script as 2024 with a mild winter followed by an early ice off. Record flooding in the Hutchinson fisheries area in May and June of last year connected lakes and rivers and moved some fish around, but as fast as the water came, it stopped as abruptly and as of early spring in 2025, the area is abnormally dry following a winter with very little precipitation. Low water levels could impact boat launching and navigational hazards but should not have impacts on fish resources. The traditional fishing opener lands on May 10, 2025, and fishing prospects in the Hutchinson Area are strong. Walleye angling should continue to be good to excellent at Belle, Marion, Jennie, Allie and Preston, Big Swan, Washington, Minnie-Belle, Hanska, and the Minnesota River. Pike anglers will find large fish at Minnie-Belle, Stella, and Erie, with chances at eaters at Collinwood, Star, Round, Jennie, Ripley, and Betty. Bass anglers can put together big days at Washington and Stella, Manuella, Big Swan, Minnie-Belle, Francis, Jennie, Erie, Greenleaf, Dunns, Stahl's, and Sleepy Eye. Sunfish anglers will enjoy bigger fish at Ripley and Minnie-Belle, but will find some nice fish at Union, Clear, Francis, and Stahl's.

Crappie anglers should look to Belle, Marion, Swan, Big Swan, Dunns and Richardsons, Jennie, Clear by New Ulm, and Clear by Watkins. For trout, try out Ramsey, Seven Mile, Spring, or Fort Ridgely Creeks or Little Mud Lake. The Minnesota River is an incredible fishery that deserves more attention from anglers. If 2025 stays dry, bring family and friends down to the river for some shorefishing on exposed sandbars. If 2025 is wet, launch your boat, navigate carefully, and fish around for phenomenal walleye and sauger fishing, world class catfishing (channel and flathead catfish), or just toss out a gob of nightcrawlers and be amazed at the diversity and size of your catch.

Walleye

Belle Lake has been the area standard bearer for consistent walleye fishing. The lake has been boosted by an abundance of walleye natural reproduction over its history. Recent management has backed off stocking to see what would happen and the result to date has been a consistent and sustainable walleye fishery. Belle was last stocked with walleye fry in 2018. Marion has recent and long-term walleye history in its favor. In 2023 on Marion, 1,300 adult walleye were tagged and harvest was average and not excessive. Walleye are available on Marion but can be challenging to catch at times. A couple year classes (year a specific walleye cohort was produced) are carrying the fishery but a variety of size and age walleye are out there. Jennie has come online with strong walleye angling over the past couple years after a long run of low walleye abundance. The future looks bright with eaters present and some younger fish coming up. Allie looks poised for great walleye angling. A spring walleye tagging project at Allie and Preston showed two good walleye lakes with different size structuring. Allie has a run of 2 year olds that should produce strong fishing and a mix of other sizes. Preston is your bet for a chance at big walleye. Many 24-28 inch walleyes were captured during the pre-spawn netting and tagging project. Big Swan continues to churn out the walleyes. Two year olds are most abundant and are the perfect size for the frying pan. Washington's walleye have settled into a nice groove. The lake itself is ideal spawning habitat, and its connection to Manuella and Stella (upstream) helps link a mix of habitat types. Early ice reports from last winter on Washington were strong and should translate to good fishing in 2025. Minnie-Belle was the site of last year's Hutchinson area DNR walleye tagging study that helps estimate the population, examine adult spawning population genetic ancestry, and estimate angler harvest. Minnie-Belle showed off its abundant walleye population with a mix of large fish and some smaller eaters. Hanska has been a walleye producer in Brown County. Regular fry stocking has resulted in strong year classes almost routinely developing. Minnesota River walleye anglers enjoyed an excellent fall and winter bite in 2024-2025. Tagging work by biologists on the Minnesota River showed the significance of walleye catch and harvest; this component of the river fishery may be explored further in the future. Anglers wanting to get away from crowds can head to the river to find active walleye and sauger.

Northern pike

If you want a chance at the largest northern pike in the area, Minnie-Belle Lake is the easy choice. Minnie-Belle has two decades with a 24 to 36 inch protected slot limit that works to ensure that medium and large size pike are recycled in the lake. DNR Fisheries survey results have consistently shown more large pike in the lake as a result, including fish as large as a 38-inch female caught by DNR crews during ice out netting last year. The other place for big pike is Erie. Erie is not a very large lake but has deep water and a great mix of submerged vegetation that provide excellent habitat. If you catch a large pike on Erie or other lakes in the Hutchinson Area, consider releasing the fish to provide top-down predator control of smaller pike and to give another angler the opportunity to catch that same fish when it is larger. Big pike are too valuable to be caught only once!

While Collinwood Lake suffering a partial winterkill in 2023 was unfortunate, it had little impact on the low dissolved oxygen tolerant northern pike population. As a result, pike numbers are booming! Collinwood typically turns very turbid by mid-summer, so over time and in the long run, conditions are more likely to favor walleyes. For now, enjoy the abundant pike and consistent action. If you want more great pike action, try checking out Star, Round, Jennie, Ripley or Betty lakes.

Bass

Washington and Stella grab all the attention for bass fishing in the Hutchinson Area, but for good reason. This pair of connected lakes offers loads of docks, scattered rocks, bulrush beds, and submerged vegetation lines to catch both smallmouth and largemouth bass. Being within an hour's drive of St. Cloud and the Twin Cities, these lakes are popular with permitted fishing tournaments, local club level bass leagues, and for-fun fishing derbies. Smallmouth bass can also be caught in Manuella and Big Swan lakes. For numbers of largemouth bass, check out Minnie-Belle and Francis. Some real lunker largemouth can be found on Jennie, Erie, and Greenleaf lakes. To get away from the

crowds, check out some smaller lakes like Dunns, Stahl's, or Sleepy Eye lakes.

Sunfish

A pair of lakes in the Hutchinson area have historically supported some very nice sized sunfish, something of a rarity for the area as well as uncommon across the state. Minnie-Belle and Ripley have produced some plate-sized sunfish and now have a five sunfish bag limit in order to protect and increase the number of quality, large-sized sunfish anglers can catch on these lakes. Both lakes have green sunfish, bluegill sunfish, and pumpkinseed sunfish, as well as hybrids of two bluegill species, which can make for some giant sunfish. While the population dynamics are slightly different, both Washington and Jennie can kick out some huge sunfish. They can be hard to find, but these lakes are places to seek a needle in the haystack giant bluegill. Union, Clear by Watkins, and Francis are great places to find a mix of size and numbers. If action and keeping young or novice anglers busy is the goal, check out Stahl's.

Bluegill sunfish are ubiquitous to most deep and stable fishing lakes in the Hutchinson Area but their size and abundance depends on habitat quality and fish community dynamics. One thing anglers can do to preserve large sunfish opportunities for future generations of anglers is to release large, male sunfish, best identified by prominent and elongate black ear tabs on their gill covers and bright orange breast colors. These large, parental male sunfish guard nests during the spawn and devote their energy to growth while delaying sexual maturity until later in life, enabling them to grow to large sizes and passing down that useful genetic life history. Removing these parental males results in smaller, earlier maturing males passing on their genetics instead. To keep large sunfish in our lakes, let the big males go and harvest smaller males and females.

Crappie

Crappie fishing in the Hutchinson area can be good on some lakes at certain times. Like many Minnesota lakes, crappie populations and subsequent angling opportunity can ebb and flow over time as crappies experience erratic recruitment to adult sizes. Traditionally, Belle has been a popular lake early in the year, but of late has not had high abundance of black crappie. Marion has a lot of black crappie between 10 and 14 inches which should provide some excellent angling. Swan Lake sees large natural population variability in its black crappie population. Presently at Swan, the population is fair but the size is very good. Big Swan has some large crappie, both black crappie, white crappie, and hybrids of the two. Despite a partial winterkill at Richardsons in 2023, there were plenty of surviving crappies and the partial kill may reduce some of the competition among crappie, temporarily boosting growth and growing larger sized crappie. Jennie has a nice mix of keeper and big slab crappies. Dunns and Richardsons are good for both numbers and size and contain both black, white, and hybrid crappie.

Washington and Stella have good numbers and size on black crappie. While Clear Lake by New Ulm took a partial winterkill in 2023, some of the crappie survived and those observed in nets this spring looked healthy with fish up to 13 inches present. Steadiness of crappie angling is no easy thing to hold onto, but Clear by Watkins has been a steady producer for a number of years now, both in the open water and ice angling periods.

Bullhead

While requests for bullhead fishing lake recommendations have dropped drastically from their height of popularity in the 1970s and 1980s, a few people still want to find bullheads for sentimental fish fries or even for bait for flathead catfish on the Minnesota River. If you want to catch a mess of bullheads, give Cedar, Long by Grove City, and Hoff Lakes a try. You can also do well on Otter and Campbell Reservoirs in the Hutchinson city limits.

Other species

Other options in the Hutchinson area include Little Mud Lake by Watkins for rainbow trout. Rainbows are stocked every spring and fall. Betty, Marion and Swan Lakes are all places anglers can target channel catfish. In addition, the Minnesota River is the place for world class fishing opportunities for channel catfish and flathead catfish. Fort Ridgley, Spring (Hindeman), Ramsey and Seven Mile creeks are all opportunities to catch stream trout in the Hutchinson area. All four streams are stocked in the spring with both rainbow and brown trout, except for Seven

Mile which is only stocked with brown trout.

Minnesota River

Overview

The Minnesota River is an important and unique fishery that flows over 300 miles across southern Minnesota. Minnesota River anglers primarily catch and harvest channel catfish, freshwater drum, and walleye (and sauger), but the Minnesota River is one of the most diverse fisheries in the state that also provides opportunities for catching trophy-sized flathead catfish and unique riverine species such as buffalo, gar, redhorse, and sturgeon. Moderate to low water levels and thick ice during the last year have provided some exceptional fishing, especially in the lower reaches of river.

Unique fishing regulations

Somewhat unique to the Minnesota River, anglers fishing from Granite Falls dam downstream to the Mississippi River may fish with two lines during the open water season. Additionally, with a permit, anglers may use a cast net to harvest gizzard shad for use as bait from the Minnesota River downstream of Granite Falls dam. View the [cast net permit application](#) for additional details.

Access

Shore fishing access is available at numerous parks, public lands and water accesses. Watercrafts can launch at over 50 state, county and city owned public water accesses. Always use extreme caution when boating on the Minnesota River and remember to wear a life jacket. Consult the [DNR Recreation Compass](#) to learn more about shore fishing and boat access locations and use the [Cooperative Stream Gaging](#) to check water levels before heading to the river.

Upstream of Granite Falls dam

The Minnesota River from Granite Falls dam upstream to Ortonville provides good channel catfish, freshwater drum, white bass and walleye fishing. Recently, an increasing number of anglers are also reporting catches of smallmouth bass from this reach. Popular shore fishing locations include below Lac qui Parle dam and below Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge dam. Granite Falls dam is a significant barrier to fish passage and therefore many large river fish species such as flathead catfish, sauger and shovelnose sturgeon are not found in this stretch of river.

Granite Falls dam to Mankato

This stretch of the Minnesota River provides outstanding fishing for channel catfish, flathead catfish, freshwater drum and walleye. Catching a 45-pound flathead catfish or 28-inch walleye is always a possibility. Walleye fishing is typically best during spring and fall with anglers commonly fishing around tributary mouths and rocky habitats during the spring and around deep holes during late fall. During summer months, fishing near log jams and current breaks provides the best chance at catching a monster flathead catfish, especially at night. Great shore fishing can be found downstream of Granite Falls dam, at several Renville County parks, and along the banks of several city parks in New Ulm and Mankato.

Mankato to the Mississippi

This stretch of the Minnesota River provides some of the best opportunities for fishing the river from a boat and you don't have to motor far to find big fish. With the help of catch-and-release angling, flathead catfish live a long time in the Minnesota River allowing some to exceed 50 pounds. Walleye and sauger are both abundant in this portion of the river and the fall fishing can be great depending on water levels. The lower 17 miles of the Minnesota River downstream of the Highway 169 bridge are the most navigable by larger boats but watch out for barge traffic.

Ortonville area

The Ortonville Area Fisheries staff oversees fisheries and habitat management in Traverse, Big Stone, western Lac qui Parle, western Swift, western Yellow Medicine and northern Lincoln counties.

Popular lakes include Artichoke, Big Stone, Hendricks, Lac qui Parle and Traverse. The Minnesota River and many smaller lakes and rivers provide numerous additional angling opportunities. Due to the shallow, productive

nature of these water bodies, fish grow fast and quality populations of yellow perch, walleye, crappies, freshwater drum and white bass are common.

Fisheries staff routinely evaluate fish populations in lakes and streams using gill nets, trap nets, seines and electrofishing. These data are used to make management decisions and are also available to anglers in reports which are useful for deciding where to fish. The data presented here are from the most recent surveys conducted.

Walleye

Most lakes are regularly stocked with walleyes; however, good natural reproduction does occur in several lakes and rivers. Walleye are most abundant in Traverse, Hendricks, Steep Bank and the Oliver lakes. Big Stone, Hendricks, Artichoke and Lac qui Parle also have decent populations. Although “eater-sized” walleye (13 to 18 inches) are most common, plenty of larger walleye are also present in most lakes. Walleye fishing can also be good in the Minnesota and Pomme de Terre rivers especially during spring and fall.

Yellow perch

Yellow perch fishing is very popular and there are numerous options in the area. Big Stone is a perennial favorite with high numbers of perch, many from 8-10 inches. Hendricks and Traverse lakes are also worth giving a try. Yellow perch grow fast in these lakes and reach 10 inches after three or four summers.

Crappie

Several lakes in the area can provide decent crappie fishing. Lac qui Parle Lake has provided a quality crappie population for many years. When the bite is on, good catches of 10- to 13-inch crappie are common. Crappie numbers have been increasing in Big Stone and Traverse lakes and angling for them can be good, especially in the spring.

Bluegill

Only a few lakes in the area provide decent bluegill fishing. Improved water clarity has led to increased vegetation in Big Stone and Traverse lakes. This has created better bluegill habitat. During the past several years bluegill fishing has been very good on Big Stone. Traverse can also provide good fishing at times. Anglers have a chance to catch a trophy in both lakes. West Oliver and Del Clark both have decent numbers of bluegills, but they tend to be smaller in size.

Bass

Largemouth and smallmouth bass numbers have increased substantially in the area during recent years. Big Stone is becoming known for its quality largemouth bass fishing. Increased vegetation has led to better survival and recruitment of bass. Growth is fast and many bass over five pounds are caught. Smallmouth bass are present in Traverse and Oliver lakes. Traverse has a substantial amount of rocky habitat and Oliver has abundant flooded timber, cover types that commonly hold bass.

Northern pike

Numbers of northern pike have been increasing in area lakes. Del Clark, Traverse, Lac qui Parle and Perch lakes provide the best opportunities for catching pike. Most of these lakes have decent numbers over 30 inches. Big Stone has lower pike numbers, but anglers have reported catching pike over 40 inches.

Catfish and bullhead

The Minnesota River and Lac qui Parle and Traverse lakes have high numbers of channel catfish. Catfish grow fast and fish over 30 inches are present. Big Stone and Lac qui Parle lakes have decent numbers of large bullheads. Black, yellow and brown bullheads are all present in the area.

Freshwater drum and white bass

Many area lakes and rivers provide good fishing for freshwater drum and white bass. Freshwater drum are commonly known as “sheepshead.” Drum can be caught in Lac qui Parle and Big Stone lakes, whereas the best bets for white bass are Traverse, Big Stone and Hendricks lakes. Both species can be caught from the Minnesota River as well. These species are good to eat and they continue to become more popular with anglers. Excellent recipes for preparing drum can be located on the internet by searching “drum recipes.”

Lake sturgeon

Lake sturgeon were historically present in Big Stone Lake but had disappeared by around 1950 likely due to winterkill, summerkill and barriers to migrations. Lake sturgeon were reintroduced in 2014 by stocking fingerlings and they have been stocked most years since then. The stockings have been successful and sturgeon are frequently caught by anglers and in DNR sampling. They have been growing fast and some over 50 inches have been caught! Lake sturgeon will continue to be stocked until a self-sustaining population has been reestablished.

Other lakes

Artichoke, Long and East Toqua lakes experienced severe winterkill during 2022-2023. These lakes have been restocked and should provide good fishing for walleye, yellow perch and other species soon, if not already.

Please contact the [local Fisheries area office](#) with questions about any other lakes of interest. The larger lakes in the Ortonville management area are surveyed annually, while smaller lakes are surveyed every third year or more. More detailed survey reports are available upon request or can be found on the Minnesota DNR website on the [Lakefinder page](#).

Spicer area

Spicer Area Fisheries – covering Kandiyohi County and portions of Stearns, Lyon, Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine counties.

As of this writing, the spring of 2025 can be summed up in one word: “stubborn.” With just a smattering of sunshine thus far and ever so slowly warming waters, only the most eager shore and boat anglers have put their 2025 fishing licenses to good use so far pursuing “year-round” species such as bluegill, crappie and yellow perch. Although the busy season won’t arrive on area lakes until the May 10 walleye, northern pike and early season bass catch-and-release) opener, the Spicer Area Fisheries crew has been busy for weeks now with the northern pike and walleye spawning runs. Big Kandiyohi and Norway and Games lakes are prioritized to try and increase northern pike abundance, so northern pike spawning areas on those lakes have been flooded and stocked with spawning adults at a 2:1 male to female ratio with assistance from the Blomkest Sportsman’s Club and West Central Darkhouse Anglers Association.

As far as the Spicer Fisheries’ annual walleye egg-take goes, to quote Bon Jovi, we are about “half-way there” to our 300-quart quota (at 115,000 walleye per quart, you do the math)! Those eggs are incubated and hatched out of the New London State Fish Hatchery and stocked according to individual lake management plan strategies within the seven-county Spicer Fisheries Management Area. The area includes the numerous lakes of Kandiyohi County such as Green, Diamond, Norway and Big Kandiyohi; Rice and Koronis lakes near Paynesville; Camp and Monson lakes near Benson; and Wood, Cottonwood, School Gove, Lady Slipper and Tyson lakes south of Granite Falls. Within the fisheries area, there are ample shore-fishing opportunities and river fishing opportunities as well in warm water rivers such as the Minnesota, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, North and Middle Fork of the Crow and in tributary creeks such as Shakopee, Hawk, Hazel and Spring.

Although the majority of waters within the fisheries area are under statewide harvest regulations, these are the exceptions: Green Lake (three walleye possession); Nest, Florida and Long near Hawick (daily limit of 10 sunfish); George and Diamond (daily limit of five sunfish); George (daily limit of five crappie); Long near Hawick (all

largemouth bass between 14-20 inches must be released, 1 over 20 inches allowed in possession).

Spicer area best bets for 2025 (includes shore fishing summaries)

Walleye

Lakes where recent (i.e., within two years) fisheries surveys show current excellent populations include Diamond (30 per gillnet), Florida (13 per gillnet), Green (10 per gillnet), Koronis (27 per gillnet), Norway (9 per gillnet) and Rice (14 per gillnet). Popular early season shallow and warmer lakes such as Big Kandiyohi, Ringo, Willmar/Foot, Long (near Willmar), Minnetaga and Wakanda all have quality walleye populations supported by annual fry stocking (exception — Long near Willmar has had excellent natural reproduction recently). Lakes to currently avoid for walleye would be Andrew, Nest and Point.

Shore fishing for walleye—

Ringo, Nest, Koronis, Little Kandiyohi, Willmar, Swenson and Monson should kick out walleye from shore fishing areas and public accesses. Early summer is best time to hit Ringo and Nest for walleye when the golden shiners are spawning in shallows. The Monson Lake 2024 spring electro-fishing survey showed a good number of small walleyes which should be perfect “eating-sized” this year and can be caught with a slip bobber and minnow. Little Kandiyohi is another good bet if looking for some eating-sized walleye. Wood Lake also has a good abundance of walleye between 13-15 inches.

Bass

Just about every lake starting a few miles north of Willmar in Kandiyohi County is worth angling for largemouth bass with East Solomon, Long (by Willmar), Florida, Andrew and Norway being particularly good. Smaller lakes with quality bass populations include Monson, Camp and Bass. Lakes with excellent smallmouth and largemouth bass angling are Koronis, Rice, Nest, Eagle and Green. Smallmouth bass angling on Big Kandiyohi Lake has recently become popular and you can add upstream Lake Wakanda to the list as well.

Shore fishing for bass

Florida, Long (near Willmar), Norway, East Solomon, Eagle and Green lakes all have quality largemouth bass fisheries accessible by shore-anglers. In addition, spring electrofishing surveys in 2024 revealed Monson, Games, Camp and Andrew lakes all have good numbers of largemouth bass.

Lake Wakanda has not historically been known as a bass fishery but during 2024, huge numbers of largemouth bass were caught by shore anglers. Occasionally you can catch a “trophy” sized smallmouth bass while fishing for largemouth bass on Wakanda. If you want to chase some giant smallmouth, start with Big Kandiyohi Lake which has recently turned into a popular smallmouth bass lake. Koronis and Rice lakes also have both species in good numbers as does Eagle and Green. Currently, Point Lake is more of a quantity rather than quality lake for largemouth bass as Point Lake is still in recovery mode from the extensive winterkill in 2022-23, however, Point is still a good lake for young shore anglers who just want to catch some bass.

Crappie

Diamond Lake keeps pumping out good crappie year classes with good numbers for all sizes once again available. Also look to Norway, Foot, Rice/Koronis lakes (near Paynesville), Long (near Willmar) and Ringo lakes for some of the best area current crappie populations. If searching for a trophy, look to Nest and Green lakes where 14-16 inch “slabs” currently reside.

Shore fishing for crappie

Calhoun, Ringo, Koronis, Florida, Foot and Little Kandiyohi have a fair number of eating- sized crappies. If you want “trophy” crappies (14-16 inches) then Nest and Green Lake are your best bet. Use white soft plastics or small spinners to catch them. During the spring, crappies will be in shallow bays (especially muck areas) and during the summer, they will move in around the docks so use a white soft plastic to catch them. Swenson Lake will kick out

some occasional “slabs” while fishing for walleye.

Sunfish

Lakes where recent fisheries surveys show excellent populations of quality sized bluegill include Florida, Long (near Hawick), Nest, Eagle, Elkhorn, Diamond, Bass, Andrew and Willmar/Foot lakes.

Shore-fishing for sunfish

Games, Long (near Hawick), Bass and Nest lakes have good numbers of decent sized bluegill. But if you want some monster bluegills, then Florida, Diamond and Green lakes are good spots, just pay attention to the special regulations for sunfish on Diamond and Florida. Willmar Lake also produces some big bluegills especially by the channel connected to Foot Lake. Elkhorn Lake bay is known for good early spring fishing especially when the muck areas are warming up which attracts sunfish in the shallows. Koronis and Green lakes have been producing good numbers of hybrid sunfish (the state record hybrid sunfish came from Green Lake in 2022). Decent sized hybrid sunfish can also be caught by the Calhoun Lake outlet and diversion dams.

Northern pike

Look to East Solomon, Koronis, Rice, Diamond, Ringo, Florida and Nest for the best combination of numbers and sizes right now according to recent surveys.

Shore-fishing for pike

Northern pike are abundant in Ringo and can be readily caught at the public shore-fishing area (along State Highway 71) where they will be feasting on golden shiners in late spring and early summer. A gold colored Rapala works great. Pike in Ringo are the perfect size for frying. Since Ringo is located in the north-central pike regulations zone, you can keep 10 as long as they're under 22 inches. Another north-central zone lake with abundant small pike and lots of shore-fishing access is Lake Mononogalia down to the New London Mill Pond. If you want some bigger northern pike, Willmar and Foot lakes is a good place right now, as the 2024 netting survey revealed a good number of northern pike over 26 inches. Lake Koronis also has a fair number of northern pike that can be caught from various shoreline locations and the outlet. Cottonwood Lake has a very high abundance of small pike right now; however, being in the southern northern pike regulations zone, they have to be at least 24 inches long with the possession limit being two.

Yellow perch shore fishing

Big Kandiyohi, Wakanda, Little Kandiyohi and Kasota lakes have been producing decent sized perch (8 to 12 inches) in good numbers this spring for “jumbos” near inlets or in shallow bays before their spawning runs. In summer months, yellow perch will be in ditches and channels connected to Wakanda, Big Kandiyohi and/or Kasota and in the South Fork Crow River, feasting on small crayfish and invertebrates. Look to Cottonwood and Tyson lakes for yellow perch south of Granite Falls.

Bullhead shore-fishing

While they aren't pretty to look at, they can be excellent table fare especially if you put them on ice immediately. The fillets will be white and firm. If you want some larger bullhead (12-16 inches), Monson and Diamond Lake are your best bet. Yellow bullhead in Diamond are close to state record length (i.e., 17 7/8 inches). You can also catch bullhead in Big Kandiyohi tributary channels while fishing for either yellow perch or channel catfish. Use either nightcrawlers, cut-bait or chicken liver.

Channel catfish shore fishing

The 2024 survey on Big Kandiyohi Lake showed fair numbers of big channel catfish. A 19 pound (38 inches) channel catfish was caught and released last summer in Big Kandiyohi and catfish 12-15 pounds are not uncommon. Chicken livers or cut suckers work just fine but remember you can keep only one channel catfish over 24 inches, so it's a good idea to bring a tape measure with you if you're planning to go catfishing in Big Kandiyohi ditches or the lake itself. Channel catfish can also be caught in Wakanda and Koronis lakes, but are lower in numbers.

Carp and buffalo shore fishing

Common carp in high numbers can be detrimental to water quality and fish habitat. There are several area locations that are legally accessible for angling and bowfishing.

Outlet and inlet areas are best bets on Eagle, Games (outlet), Koronis, Norway (inlets), Florida (outlet), Wakanda, Green (outlet) and Calhoun (outlet) to name a few. Please do not litter the public shore fishing areas and leaving dead fish on the bank is illegal. Bigmouth buffalo can also be found on Green, Koronis and Norway lakes in fair numbers and unlike common carp, the buffaloes are filter feeders, therefore their meat is white and do not have that “muddy” flavor. You can fry buffalo just like other fish (e.g., fried buffalo ribs are a popular dish in southern states).

Freshwater drum shore fishing

Norway, Games, Andrew, Florida and Willmar and Foot lakes are best bets. “Sheepshead” are excellent eating and are also great fighters! I recommend spicy drum tacos.

Rock Bass shore fishing

Rock Bass are often overlooked by anglers chasing sunfish and crappie but make a good panfish for young anglers. Green and Koronis lakes are best bets for large rock bass up to 14 inches in decent numbers. They make great table fare as you can fry them just like sunfish and crappie and they have exactly the same flavor.

Waterville area

Waterville Area Fisheries – covering Blue Earth, Dodge, Faribault, Freeborn, Le Sueur, Mower, Rice, Steele and Waseca counties

Ice-out came early again in 2025. What the lack of snow and an early ice-out means for anglers is anybody’s guess. Anglers may encounter anything from typical early season conditions to conditions that more closely resemble early summer. Anglers may be well-served to keep an open mind and abandon those early-season haunts and techniques if the fish aren’t cooperating. Prepare for Plan A but have Plan B and C ready to go.

Here we provide a brief snapshot to get anglers ready for Opening Day 2025 breaking down popular lakes in the Waterville area by species.

Walleye

Traditional Mankato area favorites Madison Lake and Lake Washington have healthy walleye populations along with Lake Tetonka and Fox Lake. Overlooked options may include Fountain Lake or Clear Lake in Waseca County. Be aware that many small, shallow lakes used as walleye rearing ponds suffered winter kill in 2022-2023 and may not provide fishing until fall or winter in 2025. Lakes that had winterkill include Lake Henry, Lake Elysian, Eagle Lake Cody Lake and potentially others.

Natural reproduction of walleye has recently been high in lakes which the Cannon River flows through. Lakes like Gorman Lake, Sabre Lake, Tetonka Lake and Cannon Lake all have excellent numbers of walleye and are popular early-season destinations.

Northern pike

Northern pike numbers in most lakes are in the range considered desirable by anglers and managers alike. Few lakes in the area suffer from the “hammer handle” problem common in other parts of the state. Northern pike over 24 inches can be found at many lakes including Madison Lake, Duck Lake, Fountain Lake and Clear Lake in Le Sueur County. Lakes such as Reeds Lake, Lura Lake and Rays Lake have large populations of northern pike which will keep anglers busy while also providing a few fish of legal size.

Waterville area lakes fall under the Southern Zone Northern Pike regulations of two fish per day and a 24- inch minimum length limit. St. Olaf Lake near New Richland has a 30-inch minimum length limit.

Largemouth bass

For fast action, anglers should check out lakes with high bass numbers such as Lake Frances or Clear Lake in Waseca County. Lakes with low to medium densities of bass such as Cannon Lake, Cedar Lake and Lake Tetonka often offer the best crack at fish topping the 20-inch mark. Clear Lake in Waseca has a no kill regulation for Largemouth bass.

Rivers such as the Cannon River, Cedar River, Straight River and the Minnesota River provide an opportunity for anglers to catch smallmouth bass. Smallmouth bass are also present in Lake Tetonka although in low numbers.

Crappies and bluegill

Many small lakes in the area hold large numbers of mid-sized bluegills. Anglers looking for numbers should check out lakes such as St. Olaf or Clear Lake in Le Sueur County. Anglers looking for larger fish should head to lakes with lower bluegill numbers such as Roberds Lake, Lake Washington or German Lake.

The daily limit for sunfish at Lake Mazaska is five and the daily limit at Lake Washington and Shields Lake is 10.

Please release big bluegills (greater than 9 inches), they ensure quality size and take many years to replace.

Almost all area lakes offer decent crappie fishing. For numbers of crappie try West Jefferson, East Jefferson, or Clear Lake in Waseca County. Quality crappies can be found in good numbers at lakes such as Lake Washington, Madison Lake or German Lake. For a true giant try your luck at a shallow, fertile lake like Duck, Lura or Hunt. Cedar Lake near Faribault now claims the state record black crappie.

Catfish

The Minnesota River is the best bet for channel catfish and flathead catfish in the Waterville area. The stretch from Courtland to Henderson holds a variety of catfish habitat, especially woody snags. The Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers are also excellent choices for channel catfish. If you prefer to chase channel catfish in lakes try Roberds Lake, Tetonka Lake or Cannon Lake.

Trout

A few options exist for those seeking trout in the Waterville area. Rainbow trout are stocked every spring at St. Peter Aquatic Management Area and in Wolf Creek within the city of Austin. There may also be some trout leftover from the winter stocking at Hiniker Pond in Mankato.

If you prefer to fish moving water, check out Rice Creek, near Dundas, for brook trout. Rice Creek is loaded with small to medium sized brook trout and some large fish. Rice Creek is accessible to anglers via an angling easement. To learn more about angling easements and trout fishing in general, see the [DNR trout webpage](#).

Other species

For those seeking something off the beaten track, the Waterville area offers a host of “other” fish. Lakes like German Lake and Lake Mazaska offer Longnose Gar. Lake Mazaska also sports a healthy population of big, hard fighting white bass. The Minnesota, Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers (as well as other, smaller rivers) are a bonanza for anglers looking for less sought-after species like various redhorse, white suckers, shovelnose sturgeon (catch and release only!), and gar. Options are nearly endless for anglers or those looking to arrow a common carp. For more information, visit the [DNR LakeFinder](#).

Windom area

Windom Area Fisheries – covering Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Martin, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Rock and Watonwan counties

General outlook for the Windom area

The Windom fisheries management area is located within the prairie pothole region, which is characterized by shallow lakes with high ability to support plant and animal life. During the winter of 2024-2025, anglers reported good fishing, but the amount of time to fish was somewhat limited because of spotty ice conditions and a relatively short and mild winter. Fishing should be good this upcoming open water period potentially because winter angling was somewhat limited and almost no winterkill at time of writing this report. For additional information regarding stocking, fish surveys, oxygen monitoring, contour maps, and other fish management activities, please visit the [Windom area fisheries webpage](#).

Walleye (six fish limit with only one over 20 inches)

The premiere lake for walleye in the Windom area is Lake Sarah. Angling should be very good for young walleye less than 16 inches and mid-sized older walleye in the 20–25-inch range. A very strong 2023 year-class of walleye currently dominates the fishery with many 13- to 15-inch fish present. Regionally, the 2023 year-class of walleye was excellent with many fish in Lake Shetek, Lake Benton, Okabena Lake, Talcot Lake, Big Twin Lake and other lakes throughout southwest Minnesota. Several other lakes that should also be high on anglers list of places to try are Currant Lake, Lake Wilson, Loon Lake, Dead Coon Lake and Round Lake. Each of those lakes has had consistent production of year-classes since at least 2018 with an opportunity to keep a wide range of sizes of walleye. There is no shortage of good walleye fishing in the Windom area, especially during May and June, with Lower Mississippi Strain walleye from the Lake Sarah, Tetonka Lake and Knife Lake egg take operations establishing in many lakes after stocking since 2015. Additionally, border water lakes with Iowa are open year-round with a three-bag limit (no size limit). Lake Okamanpeedan (Tuttle Lake if you are from Iowa) and Little Spirit Lake can be very underrated options and a great way to start scratching the open water angling itch in 2025.

Northern pike (Southern Zone-two fish limit with 24 inch minimum size limit)

Northern pike angling is heating up in southern Minnesota. Since [zone regulations for northern pike](#) were implemented in 2018, southern Minnesota northern pike fishing has been limited to a two-fish daily bag limit with a minimum size restriction of 24 inches. Additionally, a propagation program started in 2021 in the Windom area has allowed for over 40,000 northern pike fall fingerlings ranging from 10-17 inches to be stocked into area lakes. Lakes that appear to be reacting well to the zonal regulations and stocking are Lake Shetek (not stocked, only regulation), Lake Shaokotan (not stocked, only regulation), St. James Lake, Island Lake, Bingham Lake, Cedar Lake, Independence Lake and Loon Lake. Opportunity for northern pike angling with fish over 24 inches is becoming more common. Look to the [Windom Fisheries Management Area website](#) for up to date information on numbers and sizes of northern pike caught since 2021.

Largemouth bass (catch and release season May 10-23 and harvest season May 24-Feb 22)

Largemouth bass are somewhat limited in the Windom Fisheries Management Area due to turbid water. Catch and release season runs from May 10-23. May 24-Feb 22 you can harvest a six fish combination with smallmouth bass when smallmouth season is open. Largemouth bass are more prevalent in clear water with submergent aquatic vegetation. However, several good options exist in southwest Minnesota. West Twin, Fulda Lakes, the Fairmont Chain of Lakes (Amber Lake, Hall Lake, Budd Lake, Sisseton Lake and George Lake), St. James Lake, and Mountain Lake are excellent options. Typically, largemouth bass in these lakes range from 8 to 17 inches with most in the 12-15-inch range. The Fairmont Chain of Lakes could be a very underrated option with many largemouth bass observed during electrofishing in the spring of 2024.

Crappies and sunfish

Crappies are very popular in southwest Minnesota and several many options exists for crappie over 12 inches. The

Fairmont Chain of Lakes and Cedar Lake in Martin County, Little Spirit Lake, Round Lake and Loon Lake in Jackson County, East Graham Lake in Nobles County, Lake Benton in Lincoln County, and Goose Lake in Lyon County are all great options. Spring is the best time to target crappie nearshore, up to water temperatures of 70 degrees. The crappie limit is 10 per person.

Bluegill are like largemouth bass, hit-or-miss with lack of clear water and submergent vegetation required for long-term stable populations. However, several good options exist in the area for good bluegill fishing with Bingham Lake, Mountain Lake, Fulda Lakes, St. James, and The Fairmont Chain of Lakes. Most bluegill are five to eight inches, but some nine-inch bluegill might even be possible in the lakes listed. Another sleeper lake for near trophy sized bluegill to consider is Big Twin Lake in Martin County.

Although not numerous, there are some real nice slabs. The sunfish limit is 20.

Muskellunge (June 7-Dec. 1; 1 fish limit with 54 inch minimum size limit)

Two muskie lakes are located in the Windom Fisheries area: Fox Lake and the Fairmont Chain of Lakes, all in Martin County. Fox Lake has been a historically good lake for muskie fishing, but the population is down recently due to poor water clarity and quality in Fox Lake. However, large muskie over 40 inches should still be present and could result in excellent angling if the water clarity increases. The Fairmont Chain of Lakes was first stocked in 2016 and now has muskie over 40 inches. During spring electrofishing in 2024, muskie ranged from 35 to 41 inches. Angling should be good in the Fairmont Chain of Lakes due to good water clarity during June when the season opens June 7.

Trout

Brown trout are stocked into two Windom area trout streams: Scheldorf Creek in Cottonwood County, which is 7 miles northwest of Windom. The other trout stream stocked is the Redwood River within Camden State Park in Lyon County. If navigating stream shorelines is a difficult endeavor, Brawner Lake, also within Camden State Park, is stocked with brown trout at the same time as the Redwood River. The stocked brown trout are typically 12-14 inches in length and average 0.75-1.0 pound each. Angling conditions in the streams are dependent on flow and typically remain good for several weeks after stocking. Brawner Lake was sampled in the fall of 2024 and still had brown trout present, indicating survival to larger size is possible with some potential for fish over 16 inches, of which only one can be kept as part of the daily five-bag limit. Don't forget to purchase your trout stamp before fishing these options.

Other species

The Windom area is home to many species, but several others stand out and are targeted frequently by anglers. Yellow perch, yellow bass and channel catfish are three of those. Yellow perch abundance is sporadic in area lakes, but some decent numbers are currently found in Round Lake in Jackson County, Lake Benton and Lake Shaokotan in Lincoln County, and Dead Coon Lake in Lyon County. Iron Lake in Murray County was very popular during ice angling in 2024-2025 with many 8 inch or larger fish harvested. The yellow perch daily bag limit is 20. Yellow bass are a relatively new species in the Windom Fisheries area and have been present in the Fairmont Chain of Lakes, most likely via illegal introduction, since 2013. As of March 1, 2025, yellow bass are now a managed species with a 30 per day bag limit. During sampling in 2024, yellow bass ranged in length from 6 to 10 inches with many over 8 inches. Yellow bass are a very palatable fish and have been described as tasting like yellow perch or black crappie.

Finally, channel catfish are abundant in Okabena Lake in Nobles County, Big Twin Lake in Martin County, and in the West Fork of the Des Moines River. They typically range in length from 14 to 18 inches and have a continuous season with a daily bag limit of five with only one over 24 inches each day. Channel catfish are typically underutilized and under harvested in the Windom Area so opportunities exist to have excellent angling, especially during July and August when water is warm and other species have stopped biting.