

Southern Region Outlook for 2018 Fishing Opener

April 25, 2018 – The winter of 2017-2018 will go down as the longest ice-cover on record for southern Minnesota lakes. Fortunately, most of the shallow lakes in this region went into the winter season with higher than normal water levels and the dissolved oxygen levels under the ice stayed relatively normal. Ice thickness was greater than normal ranging between 24-30” and snow accumulation on the ice varied to less than 6” on most lakes. Given these conditions, which often times can lead to stressed fish populations, the shallowest of southern Minnesota lakes were still able to make it through the long ice-cover period with only a handful of lakes experiencing winterkill.

Very late spring conditions was the buzz around the state, with everyone wondering if lakes will be ice-free before the walleye opener on May 12th. The 2018 Governor’s fishing opener will take place on the Willmar/Spicer lakes. The first northern pike spawn was taken by the Waterville Fisheries crew on April 24th, about 30 days later than usual. Walleye spawning operations at our Spicer and Windom offices were not underway at the time of this writing. This suggests that walleye and northern pike will presumably be hanging around shallow areas - post spawn – at the time of the fishing opener. If walleye don’t cooperate for spring anglers, there’s always the option to fish in shallow bays and along shore or try your luck on the Minnesota River. Many lakes in the southern and west-central part of the state also boast quality crappie and perch populations.

Spring 2018 water levels on lakes and rivers in southern Minnesota are currently at normal. MN DNR public boat access ramps and fishing piers will be in place well before the opener by our Parks & Trails staff. If you have questions about lake conditions, contact our local Fisheries Office in that area of the state

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/index.html>

Remember anglers and boaters, please adhere to the aquatic invasive species (AIS) laws. These are extremely important to prevent the spread of AIS. Clean, drain, dispose and keep all plugs out while transporting. Remember that water temperatures are still cold and hypothermia can set in within minutes of falling overboard, so please wear your life jacket. Have a great fishing experience and take a kid fishing!

Detailed fishing information is highlighted below by each Area Office in the southern region giving a snap-shot of the lake’s fishery based on recent netting surveys. The following list of lakes represents some of the better walleye fishing prospects for the 2018 open water angling season:

- **Washington Lake (Meeker County)** walleye net catch was 9.5 per gill net and most over 16 inches.
- **Wood Lake (Yellow Medicine County)** walleye catch rate was 29.0 per gillnet averaging 16-18 inches.
- **Tyson Lake (Yellow Medicine County)** walleye population is presently moderate at 10.0 per gillnet with fish in the 13-15 inch range.
- **Lakes Elizabeth, Wakanda, and Minnetaga (Kandiyohi County)** all have solid walleye populations and are shallow lakes with little structure.
- **School Grove (Lyon County)** has abundant numbers of walleye at 17.0 per gillnet with many fish in the 14-17 inch range.
- **Big Kandiyohi Lake (Kandiyohi County)** consistently provides walleye in the 1-2 pound range with “jumbo” perch 12+ inches occasionally targeted.
- **Elysian Lake (Waseca County)** walleye catch rate was 25.0 per gillnet averaging 16-18 inches.

- **Fox Lake (Rice County)** walleye were sampled at over 10.0 fish per gill net in 2017 with the majority of fish being between 14 inches and 20 inches.
- **Lake Benton (Lincoln County)** walleye population at 26.7 per gill net, well above average for this lake type. A wide range of sizes were present, as lengths ranged from 7 to 26 inches, with the majority of the fish being between 12 and 15 inches.
- **Currant Lake (Murray County)** is loaded with walleye, having a 2017 catch rate of 32.3 per gillnet.
- **Fox Lake (Martin County)** walleye population is doing well, as they were captured at a rate of 14.5 per gillnet in the 2017 survey with many between 12 and 15 inches.
- **Minnesota River** provides an outstanding option to catch walleye with numerous fish over 6 pounds and this river is a destination to catch flathead catfish over 50 pounds.

Minnesota River Fishing Outlook

Overview

The **Minnesota River** is a tremendous recreational resource stretching over 320 miles across Southern Minnesota and provides excellent angling opportunities for Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish, Sauger, Walleye, and White Bass with occasional opportunities to catch Crappie, Northern Pike, and Smallmouth Bass. Catching a 50lb Flathead Catfish, 20lb Channel Catfish, or 10lb Walleye from the Minnesota River is always a possibility. The Minnesota River is also one of the best locations for catching less targeted species such as Buffalo, Common Carp, Freshwater Drum (sheepshead), Gar, and Redhorse. It is also legal to catch and release Shovelnose Sturgeon from the Minnesota River. Although ice will have just recently melted on many area lakes, the Minnesota River has been ice-free since early April and has already provided plenty of open water fishing opportunities. Be sure to check river levels before heading out since conditions can change rapidly after large amounts of precipitation. Also, please review the 2018 fishing regulation handbook for specific rules and seasons.

Access

Shore fishing access can be found at numerous State Parks (Fort Snelling, Minneopa, Upper Sioux Agency), County Parks, City Parks, National Wildlife Refuges (Minnesota Valley, Big Stone), Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, and boat ramps situated along the banks of the Minnesota River. Boats and canoes can access the Minnesota River at over 50 state, county, and city owned boat ramps. Always use extreme caution when boating on the Minnesota River. Unfortunately, the popular Jordan boat ramp is currently closed. Consult the DNR's Recreation Compass to learn more about shore fishing and boat access locations on the Minnesota River <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/compass.html>.

General Fishing Tips

One of the most effective methods for catching a variety of fish species from the Minnesota River is using a simple 1/8th – 5/8th oz. jighead baited with a minnow, piece of nightcrawler, or plastic grub. This presentation will catch everything from Channel Catfish and Walleye to Common Carp and Shovelnose Sturgeon. When targeting large Flathead Catfish it is best to use large live bait such as Black Bullheads, Creek Chubs, or White Suckers. These live baits should be fished near the bottom on a large hook, and depending on the current, held in place by a 2-6 oz sinker. During the day it is best to target Flathead Catfish near deep holes and structure such as log jams. Flathead Catfish can be found in the same locations at night, but are also often caught roaming shallower habitats in search of an evening meal. When fishing the Minnesota River it is recommended that you use heavier line and

tackle so you can effectively fight fish against the current and keep fish away from log jams and sharp rocks that could cut your line.

Upstream of Granite Falls Dam

The Minnesota River from Granite Falls Dam upstream to Ortonville provides good Channel Catfish, Freshwater Drum, and Walleye fishing. In fact, some days catching a limit of eater size Channel Catfish can almost seem too easy. The most popular shore fishing locations are below Lac qui Parle Dam, Marsh Lake Dam, Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge Dam, and Big Stone Lake Dam. However, numerous other public shore fishing locations are present. Also, several boat ramps are found along this stretch of river but boating can be limited by shallow depths.

Granite Falls Dam to Mankato

This stretch of the Minnesota River provides outstanding fishing for Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish, and Walleye. In recent years, DNR fisheries surveys have captured several Flathead Catfish exceeding 45 lbs. and numerous Walleyes exceeding 6 lbs. from this particular stretch of river. Walleye fishing in this portion of the Minnesota River is typically best during spring and fall. Many anglers fish tributary mouths and rocky habitats during the spring and areas around deep holes during late fall. The New Ulm area is well known for several deep holes where anglers may find hungry walleyes. The portion of river between Granite Falls and Mankato is very complex with lots of log jams, bends, and deep holes for monster catfish to hide in. You'll likely be rewarded by a trophy catfish if you spend time fishing these areas during July and August. Some great shore fishing can be found at Memorial Park near Granite Falls, Renville County Parks, Minnecon Park in New Ulm, and Sibley Park in Mankato.

Mankato to the Mississippi

This stretch of the Minnesota River provides some of the best opportunities for catching Sauger and White Bass along with the usual trophy size Minnesota River Channel Catfish, Flathead Catfish, and Walleye. You can launch a boat at most towns situated along the river between Mankato and St. Paul (St. Peter, Le Sueur, Belle Plaine, Shakopee) and you won'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 50lbs in weight. Flathead Catfish fishing should be really good during late May and early June, and then again after the spawn (late June–early July) during late July through September. The lower 17 miles of the Minnesota River downstream of the Hwy 169-bridge are the most navigable by larger boats, but watch out for barge traffic. Toss a hook baited with a night crawler or minnow into the Minnesota River and you might be surprised by what you catch.

Hutchinson Fisheries Management Area

General Outlook for Hutchinson Area: The 2017-2018 winter was definitely extended in length, but with little snow until the second half of the season. No significant winterkill had been identified on area lakes as of 3/27/18, although a few lakes in Brown County did have dropping oxygen levels in early March. Lake and river water levels will likely be back to normal in 2018. As usual, the shallower and more turbid lakes should warm up quicker, providing some of the better early season Northern Pike and Walleye action. Remember, the bass season is catch and release only until May 26, in the Hutch area. Fishing is going to be great!

Belle Lake (863 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2016 and the Northern Pike population looked good. The gill net catch rate was 5.2/net with fish averaging an impressive 24.4 inches in length. Fair numbers of Walleye were gill netted (3.3/net) and they averaged 14.3 inches in length. Walleye fry were stocked every third year at Belle. Trap nets sampled good numbers of Black Crappie (19.3/net), but average size was small (4.7 inches in length). They should be a more acceptable size in a year or two (2018). Electrofishing sampling, in the fall of 2017, indicated a strong 2016 year class of Walleye, and those fish should be an acceptable size to anglers sometime in 2018. Piepenberg County Park is on the east side of the lake and a small fishing pier is available. The park also offers camping.

Betty Lake (153 acres) in northern Meeker County, was netted in 2017, and offered good fishing opportunities for multi-species. High numbers of Channel Catfish (17.7/net) were sampled with fish averaging 21.2 inches in length. Walleye fry were stocked every other year, and fair numbers were netted (4.0/net), with fish averaging 19.7 inches in length. Moderate numbers of Black Crappie were captured (12.2/net) with many ranging from 10-11 inches in length. Moderate numbers of Northern Pike were sampled, averaging 22.2 inches. Low numbers of Bluegill were netted, but fish measuring 9 inches were present. The public access for Betty is on the Clearwater River, approximately 0.3 miles upstream of the lake. Curlyleaf Pondweed, a non-native aquatic plant species, can be abundant in May and June, but usually dies back by early July.

Clear Lake (529 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2017 and the Walleye population looked good (8.0/net). Many (73%) of the fish sampled were between 17.0 and 20.9 inches in length. Walleye fingerlings were stocked every other year at Clear. The Northern Pike catch rate reached a record high (23.7/net) in 2017, with fish averaging 21.5 inches in length, and a maximum of 35.2 inches. Nets sampled moderate numbers of Black Crappie, but average size was a little small (7.7 inches). Fair numbers of 8-10 inch crappie were present. Bluegill were abundant (88.3/net) with good numbers of 7 inchers, and even some 8's and a few 9's. Yellow Perch were also abundant (51.2/net), but most were under 8 inches in length. A fishing pier and picnic shelter was available at the access on the south side of the lake. A second access was present on the lake's north end. Eurasian Watermilfoil and Curlyleaf Pondweed, non-native aquatic plants, can be abundant at Clear.

Collinwood Lake (635 acres) on the Meeker/Wright County border was netted in 2016 and the Walleye population looked good. The gill net catch rate was 9.8/net with fish averaging 15.0 inches in length. Strong Walleye year classes were produced in both 2013 and 2014. Walleye fry were stocked in 2013, 2014, and 2016. Fair numbers of Northern Pike were gill netted (4.1/net), averaging 21.1 inches in length with fish up to 30.8 inches being sampled. Fall electrofishing sampling in 2017 indicated a fairly strong 2016 year class of Walleye, and those fish should be of an acceptable size to anglers in 2018. A Wright County Park, with a fishing pier, is available for pier anglers and camping is offered. Public accesses were present on the north and southwest sides of the lake.

Greenleaf Lake (238 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2017 and the Walleye population looked fair. The gill net catch rate was 4.8/net, but all of the fish were over 13.0 inches in length, indicating a quality size structure. Walleye fry were stocked annually at Greenleaf. Nets sampled a moderate number of Northern Pike for a catch rate of 8.7/net, with a really impressive average length (25.8 inches). Pike up to 35.2 inches in length were captured. Nets captured moderate numbers of Black Crappie, but average size was small. However, fair numbers of 8-10 fish crappie were present, and the longest fish sampled was 14.5 inches. Spring night-time electrofishing was used to sample the Largemouth Bass population and the catch rate was good (57.0/hour), but the sizes were awesome. Bass averaged 14.9 inches in length and 24 fish were 18 inches or longer, with a maximum length of 20.4 inches. Bluegill were present, but average size was small (4.5 inches). Curlyleaf Pondweed, a non-native invasive aquatic plant species, can be abundant in May and June but usually dies back by early July. A fishing pier

is available at the access on the southwest side of the lake. A hiking trail is also available at the Greenleaf State Recreation Area.

Hanska Lake (1,794 acres) in Brown County was netted in 2017 and the Walleye population looked fair (4.4/net), with fish averaging 13.9 inches in length, and the longest fish being 26.2 inches. Walleye fry were stocked two out of three years at Hanska. Moderate numbers of Black Crappie (15.1/net) were sampled, with many fish in the 8.5-10.9 inch length range. Channel Catfish were abundant (8.4/net) with fish averaging 19.5 inches in length. Catfish up to 26.8 inches in length were captured. Low numbers of Yellow Perch were netted, but fish up to 10.5 inches in length were present. Low numbers of Bluegill were captured, but many of the fish were in the 7-9 inch size range. A Brown County Park, with a fishing pier, is located on the southeast end of the lake. Fishing piers were also available at the two accesses on the northwest end of the lake.

Little Mud Lake (37 acres) in Meeker County offers unique fishing opportunities for Rainbow Trout. Little Mud is not a “Designated Trout Lake”, but a trout stamp is required if you plan on fishing for or possessing trout. Every spring the lake is stocked with 3,000 fish, typically averaging 0.5 pounds apiece. Bluegill and Largemouth Bass are also present at Little Mud. Eurasian Watermilfoil, a non-native aquatic plant, is present in this lake.

Minnie-Belle Lake (593 acres) in Meeker is the lake to go to for anglers seeking the chance to catch a big Northern Pike. Minnie-Belle has a special regulation (24-36” protected slot limit) on Northern Pike designed to produce more medium and large sized pike. All Northern Pike caught between 24 and 36 inches must be immediately released. The lake was netted in 2017 and Northern Pike were abundant (10.9/net) with fish averaging 24.3 inches in length. The longest pike captured in summer nets was 34.7 inches and the longest fish captured during ice-out trap netting was 36.2 inches, but anglers report that bigger fish are out there. Moderate numbers of Walleye were netted (5.3/net) with fish averaging 16.5 inches in length. Walleye fingerlings were stocked every other year at Minnie-Belle, but natural reproduction also contributes to the population. Good numbers of Bluegill were sampled with fish averaging 6.2 inches, and maximum length being 8.9 inches. Black Crappie were sampled in very low numbers. Good numbers of Largemouth Bass were captured (56.0/hour) with many in the 12-15 inch size range. Good numbers of Yellow Bullhead were sampled with fish averaging 12.8 inches in length. Eurasian Watermilfoil, a non-native invasive aquatic plant, is present. A fishing pier is available at the DNR Aquatic Management Area on the north end of the lake.

Star Lake (552 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2017 and record high numbers of Northern Pike were captured (16.5/net), with fish averaging 22.8 inches, and the longest fish sampled being 34.6 inches. Walleye abundance was moderate (5.7/net) with fish averaging 18.5 inches in length. Moderate numbers of Black Crappie were found, and some should be around the 8 inch mark in 2018. Bluegill and Largemouth Bass were present, but were still recovering (lower numbers and/or small sizes) following the 2014 winterkill. Black Bullhead were abundant (201.3/net) with fish averaging 8 inches in length, and some fish up to 14 inches being present.

Swan Lake (351 acres) in McLeod County was netted in 2016 and the Walleye population looked good (7.3/net), with fish averaging 12.8 inches in length. Walleye fingerlings were stocked every other year at Swan. The 2014 Walleye year class was strong. Channel Catfish were abundant (15.2/net), averaging 13.4 inches in length. Black Crappie were also present, with the longest fish sampled being 9.8 inches. A park is located on the north side of the lake and a fishing pier is present. A shore fishing area, with picnic tables, is also available on the southwest side of the lake. A smaller fishing dock is also present at the southeast access.

Washington Lake (2,433 acres) in Meeker County was netted in 2016 and the lake’s walleye population looked strong. Gill net catch rate for walleye was 9.5/net, and many (78%) of the fish were over 15.0 inches in length,

giving anglers good opportunities for eating-sized fish. Walleye fry are stocked into Washington on an every other year rotation. Gill nets also sampled a decent number of northern pike at 4.5/net, with an impressive average length (24.4 inches). The gill net catch rate for black crappie was the highest ever recorded at the lake, dating back to 1957. Black crappie averaged 8.5 inches, and fish up to 14.4 inches were captured. Winter anglers reported fair crappie action and black crappie growth was fast. Aquatic invasive species (zebra mussels and Eurasian watermilfoil) are in this lake, so be sure to clean, drain, and dry your boat, motor, and equipment to prevent their spread.

Other Lakes:

Union Lake (92 acres) was netted in 2017, and offered good angling opportunities for Bluegill and Black Crappie. Moderate numbers of Northern Pike and Largemouth Bass were also present. Union's access is very small, so plan on arriving early. Walleye angling last winter on **Round Grove Lake (295 acres)** near Stewart, was good. This lake was used by DNR for rearing fingerling Walleye for statewide stocking quotas and had not winterkilled since 2014, so there were a lot of carry over fish (14-18") to be had. There is a public boat ramp on the north end of the lake, but the lake is quite shallow, and submergent vegetation can be abundant. The **South Fork of the Crow River** widens into the **Otter/Campbell Reservoir (641 acres)**, at the City of Hutchinson, and anglers had some success catching Walleye (13-19 inches in length) there last winter. Fishing below the Hutchinson dam can be good in the spring. **Big Wolf (262 acres)**, **Jennie (1,064 acres)**, **Arvilla (137 acres)**, and **Hook Lake (329 acres)** in Meeker and McLeod Counties, are excellent choices for anglers seeking Northern Pike. **Winsted Lake (382 acres)** in McLeod County provided a good crappie bite last winter. Walleye, Channel Catfish, Bluegill, and Northern Pike were also present at Winsted, as is a fishing pier on the west side of the lake. Walleye fry were stocked every other year at Winsted.

Ortonville Fisheries Management Area

Ortonville Area Fisheries – covering Big Stone, western Chippewa, Lac qui Parle, northern Lincoln, western Swift, Traverse and western Yellow Medicine counties

The Ortonville Fisheries Management Area includes inland waters and Minnesota-South Dakota border waters. Anglers are reminded to review the fishing regulations booklet since different regulations apply to border waters. The border waters, including Big Stone, Hendricks, and Traverse Lakes, are co-managed with South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks. Anglers can fish the entire border waters, including from both shorelines, with a single license. If you are a resident of Minnesota or South Dakota you need a fishing license from your state. Anglers from other states can fish with a license from Minnesota or South Dakota. The Walleye, Northern Pike and bass seasons open April 21st on the border waters.

Many Ortonville Area lakes and rivers provide good fishing for Freshwater Drum and White Bass. These species are very good to eat and anglers have been routinely harvesting them during recent years. Their flavor can be further enhanced by bleeding them prior to cleaning (cut through their gills when on a stringer or in the live-well), being careful not to get slime on the meat during filleting, and by trimming away the reddish "mud-line" flesh from the outer edge of the fillets. Excellent recipes for preparing drum can be located on the internet by searching "drum recipes".

Big Stone Lake is located in western Minnesota adjacent to Ortonville. It is a narrow lake measuring 27 miles long and up to one mile wide. Big Stone has a surface area of 12,600 acres and a maximum depth of 16 feet. Walleye

are abundant from a wide range of sizes. Early season Walleye fishing is often very good. A popular approach is casting jigs along the shoreline. Yellow Perch fishing has been good in recent years and is expected to continue. Summer fishing for bluegills can be decent near rock reefs. White Bass and Freshwater Drum bite well during the open water season and can be found throughout the lake. Largemouth Bass numbers have increased substantially and fishing for them has been quite good in the lower lake around the islands. Fingerling Lake Sturgeon have been stocked annually since 2014 in order to reestablish the population, and catches of them have become increasingly common. Some fish are already 25 inches long. Lake Sturgeon catch and release fishing is allowed in the Minnesota portion of the lake. Consult the Minnesota fishing regulations for season dates. There is no open season for Lake Sturgeon in the South Dakota portion of the lake. Dense stands of curlyleaf pondweed are present in the northern half of the lake from spring through early summer, so anglers will have to be adaptable in their approach to fishing that area of the lake. Curlyleaf pondweed can easily spread so it's important to make sure boats, motors and trailers are clean when leaving the lake.

Hendricks Lake is located in southwest Minnesota adjacent to the small town of Hendricks. It is a highly productive, 1,600-acre lake that has a maximum depth of 12 feet. Moderate numbers of Walleyes, Northern Pike, and bullheads are present from a wide range of sizes. Quality-sized Yellow Perch and White Bass are abundant, similar to recent years. Hendricks Lake can warm quickly during spring due to its shallow nature, which can make the bite "turn on" sooner than in deeper, cooler lakes.

Traverse Lake is located in western Minnesota just north of Browns Valley. It is a narrow lake that is 16 miles long and up to two miles wide. Traverse has a surface area of 11,500 acres and a maximum depth of 12 feet. Anglers should study the lake's contour map before boating as shallow non-marked reef areas exist, especially near the islands and in the northwest portion of the lake. Anglers will find a high number of Walleyes from a wide range of sizes present. Trophy Walleye angling opportunities exist and numerous Walleyes in excess of 10 pounds have been caught in recent years. Anglers will also find an exceptional White Bass fishery with high numbers of 15-inch fish present. The daily and possession limit of White Bass on the Minnesota-South Dakota boundary waters is unlimited. If you're looking to catch a trophy Channel Catfish, look no further. Channel Catfish numbers are high and trophy-sized fish are present in good numbers, and you'll find little competition from other anglers.

Lac qui Parle Lake is located in western Minnesota, three miles southwest of Milan. It is 12 miles long, approximately ½ mile wide and 5,600 acres. It is an impoundment of the Minnesota River and water levels are regulated by the Army Corps of Engineers for flood control. Anglers have experienced very good crappie fishing during recent years. Crappies can be caught in the shallow bay areas of the lower lake during spring. Channel Catfish are abundant from a wide range of sizes. Good catches can come by fishing the rock reef areas. Freshwater Drum are abundant and fishing for them has been very good. Northern Pike are abundant, including fish in excess of 35 inches. Anglers frequently have good success for pike around the Highway 40 Bridge, particularly near Emily Creek. Walleye numbers have been moderate during recent years and fishing for them has been spotty. A high number of young-of-year Walleyes were noted in 2017. Zebra mussels are present in the lake. Anglers are reminded to drain all water from their boat, ballast tanks, bait containers, motor, bilge, livewell and baitwell before leaving the lake. Keep drain plugs out and water-draining devices open while transporting watercraft.

Artichoke Lake is located approximately 15 miles northeast of Ortonville in Big Stone County. It is 6 miles long, approximately ½ mile wide and 1,900 acres. Several shallow non-marked reef areas exist on the lake and anglers should study the lake's contour map prior to boating. Anglers can expect to find good numbers of Black Crappies, Freshwater Drum and Walleyes. Artichoke is a highly recommended destination for anglers with kids who are

looking for action since high numbers of drum are present. Night crawlers on slip bobbers or spinners are good methods to use. The fishing pier located near the southeast corner of the lake is popular shore fishing location.

Long Tom Lake is a 133-acre reservoir located three miles east and two miles north of Ortonville in Big Stone County. Long Tom is a quiet lake that can be a good choice on windy days as its bays provide some protection. The fish community in Long Tom has rebounded well from a winterkill that occurred in 2012-13. Both Walleyes and Black Crappies are abundant. Many Walleyes are 12-15-inches and crappies are near ten inches. Some “keeper-sized” Yellow Perch are also present. A boat ramp and fishing pier are located on the north side of the lake. A county road separates Long Tom Lake from North Long Tom Lake, though a culvert allows fish passage. North Long Tom also has good numbers of Walleyes and crappies present. The majority of North Long Tom is in a State Wildlife Management Area (WMA). The lake can only be accessed by foot and WMA rules apply.

East Toqua Lake is located adjacent to Graceville in west-central Minnesota. This bowl-shaped lake is 428 acres and has a maximum depth of 9 feet. The lake is highly productive and water clarity is often low. Toqua County Park along the south shoreline has a boat launch, convenient shore angling, picnicking and camping. Walleye and Yellow Perch are abundant, and limited numbers of large Northern Pike are present. Black Crappies are also present, but in lower numbers.

Spicer Fisheries Management Area

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

General outlook for Spicer Area: After two prior consecutive early ice-out years, a possible record late ice out may affect the upcoming Governor’s 2018 Fishing Opener during May 12th on Green Lake in Kandiyohi County. The record ice out last occurred on May 8th 2013 for Green Lake. Generally, anglers are more successful during late springs on our shallow (< 15 feet maximum) and productive lakes which warms faster than the deeper/clearer lakes. These shallow lakes have good Walleye, Yellow Perch and sometimes Black Crappie populations. They are found mostly south of the Spicer/Willmar area in southern Kandiyohi County, Lyon County and Yellow Medicine County. Walleye anglers are most successful targeting shallow bars, near shoreline, or areas where flowing water occurs in the deeper/clearer lakes like Green, Koronis, Rice, Eagle, Nest, Norway, Andrew and Diamond. Other Walleye angling options include fishing from shore near bridge heads of the Minnesota, Chippewa, Yellow Medicine, North Fork and Middle Fork of Crow Rivers. In addition to excellent Walleye opportunities available, Spicer Fisheries Area lakes contain a diversity of lake types and habitats that support large Northern Pike, “Jumbo” Perch, “Slab” Crappies, “Fat and Sassy” Sunfish and “Leaping” Bass. Anglers may have better success targeting actively feeding Black Crappie and Bluegill in shallow warm bay areas than for other species like Walleye or Northern Pike during a late spring opener. Something should be biting for the versatile angler, whether by boat or shore.

Currently, Spicer Area lakes that have known infestations of Eurasian Watermilfoil are Green, Calhoun, Norway, Games, Elkhorn and Florida. Zebra Mussels were discovered in Green Lake in 2014, Lake Florida in 2016 and George Lake in 2017. Nest Lake is also considered infested with Zebra Mussels due to the connection to George Lake. Starry Stonewort, a submersed invasive algal aquatic plant, was found in Lake Koronis in 2015 and upstream Rice Lake in 2016. Remember as a minimum, clean all visible plants and animals and drain all water from your

water related equipment before leaving the public access

http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/preventspread_watercraft.html).

The shallower fishing lakes in the Spicer Fisheries Area once again experienced very little to no winterkill. We conducted fisheries assessments on shallow fisheries lakes (Wood, Tyson, School Grove, Lady Slipper and Cottonwood) near Granite Falls, MN and several larger deeper lakes (Rice, Koronis and Green) in 2017. The shallow lakes in southern Kandiyohi County (i.e. Elizabeth, Wakanda, Big Kandiyohi, Lillian, etc.) were recently surveyed in 2016. Based on this most recent information, many of these lakes look like fantastic Walleye choices for the 2018 Fishing Opener. Successful Walleye anglers often try casting a yellow/green/pink jig and minnow near shore, slowly trolling bottom bouncers with night crawlers, slip bobbers with leeches or casting/trolling shallow crank baits with the color (black or gold) matching the primary forage (e.g. Bullhead and Perch) in these shallow lakes.

Wood Lake (87-0030-00; 485 acres, 9 feet deep) is located 8 miles southeast of Granite Falls, MN in Yellow Medicine County and outflows into the Minnesota River. A public access and County Park is located along the north shore. Wood Lake is a shallow, productive and brown stained lake with limited submergent vegetation, but abundant downed trees, undeveloped shoreline and some stands of emergent vegetation. Walleye fry are generally stocked every other year. There are presently abundant numbers of 16-18 inches (1.5 pounds average) Walleye from a 2014 fry stocking. The 2017 Walleye catch rate was 29 fish/gillnet. There are also abundant numbers of small sized Black Crappie and occasionally a few over 12 inches. There are also many large (18-25 inches, 2-10 pounds) Channel Catfish in Wood.

School Grove (42-0002-00; 349 acres, 11 feet deep) is located about 16 miles south of Granite Falls, MN in Lyon County. It has a public access with shore fishing opportunities on the northwest side of the lake. There are currently abundant numbers of Walleye (17 fish/gillnet) with many fish in the 14-17 inch range. These fish are from a 2014 Walleye fry stocking. In addition to Walleye, there are good chances to catch large (11-14 inches) Black Crappie and large (8-11 inches) Yellow Perch in School Grove.

Tyson (87-0019-00; 166 acres) is located 12 miles southeast of Granite Falls, MN in Yellow Medicine County. It is a small, shallow, and turbid lake with moderate sago pondweed and emergent vegetation present. The Walleye population is presently moderate (10 fish/gillnet) with fish in the 13-15 inch range. There are good numbers of jumbo size (10-12 inches) Yellow Perch in Tyson. A public access is located on the northeast side and a popular shore fishing spot is located adjacent to County Road #6.

Cottonwood (42-0014-00; 379 acres 7 feet deep) and **Lady Slipper** (42-0020-00; 286 acres, 11 feet deep) are located about 15 miles south of Granite Falls, MN in Lyon County. These are small and productive waters with decent Walleye fishing and good jumbo size Yellow Perch fishing opportunities. Public access sites are located on the east side of Lady Slipper, east and south sides of Cottonwood.

Lake Elizabeth (34-0022-00; 1,054 acres) is located approximately 12 miles southeast of Willmar, MN in Kandiyohi County and is part of a trio of connected fishing lakes which include **Ella** (34-0033-00; 153 acres) and **Carrie** (34-0032-00; 89 acres). Ella and Carrie are good panfish lakes with moderate numbers of 18+ inch Walleye. Elizabeth is a productive, shallow lake has a nice mix of vegetation and classic rocky substrates. A series of successful fry stockings in recent years along with some natural reproduction has built up a solid Walleye population (19 per gillnet in 2016 fish assessment, 10 per gillnet is the historical lake average). Expect most Walleye to be in that 1-4 pound range. Elizabeth also contains excellent Northern Pike and Crappie opportunities in addition to Bluegill up

to 10 inches and Yellow Perch that reach table fare sizes. The public access is located on the north side of the lake.

Lake Wakanda (34-0169-00; 1,754 acres) is located approximately 5 miles southeast of Willmar, MN in Kandiyohi County with public accesses on the north and southeast shores. Periodically in Lake Wakanda, fry stocking produces tremendous Walleye populations, especially after winterkill events. The 2016 fish assessment yielded 39 Walleye per gillnet with most fish in the 12-17 inch range. Larger Northern Pike (e.g. 30+ inches) are also prevalent in Wakanda as is Yellow Perch 10+ inches. Connected to Lake Wakanda via a couple shallow wildlife basins is **Lake Minnetaga** (34-0076-00; 791 acres) with a recently developed public access on the east shoreline. Recent successful fry stockings yielded a 2016 fish assessment of 40 Walleye per gillnet. Walleye were all sizes, but expect a lot in that 1 pound category. Yellow Perch up to 10+ inches may also be of interest.

Big Kandiyohi Lake (34-0086-00; 2,683 acres) is located approximately 10 miles southeast of Willmar, MN in Kandiyohi County with public accesses on the northeast and southwest shorelines each associated with a county park (Kandiyohi County Parks #1 and #2). Not only are Walleye a viable option because of biennial fry stockings in this popular 'opener' lake (11 per gillnet in the 2016 fish assessment, expect most Walleye to be in the 1-2 pound range), but "Jumbo" Yellow Perch (12+ inches) have been a very popular fish to target in 'Big Kandi' recently in addition to Black Crappie, large Bluegill (10+ inches, if you know where to find them) and even an occasional hard fighting Smallmouth Bass or Channel Catfish. Just SE and downstream of Big Kandiyohi Lake is **Lake Lillian** (34-0072-00; 1,151 acres; public access on N shore) which provided some 'hot' fishing last 2017 fall and 2017-2018 winter for Walleye and 'Jumbo' Yellow Perch.

Large and Deeper Lakes like Koronis, Rice, Green, Eagle, Diamond and Norway consistently provide good fishing especially for large sized Walleye, Northern Pike and Bass. Walleye year classes from 2014 and 2013 (13-17 inch size range) are prevalent due to stocking and natural reproduction. Recent 2017 survey catches were good for both Koronis (13 fish/gillnet) and Rice (9 fish/gillnet). Trophy (36+ inches) Northern Pike are possible in these lakes due to adequate numbers of Sucker, Redhorse, or Tullibee forage species present in most of these lakes.

Other shallow area lakes for good Walleye angling near Willmar, MN include Long, Ringo, East Solomon, Swenson, Willmar and Foot. Walleye populations are maintained by regular fry stockings. These lakes also provide good fishing for numbers and sizes of Black Crappie, Northern Pike, Bluegill and Yellow Perch.

Lakes with Quality Size Panfish are numerous in the Spicer Area. Good Bluegill and Black Crappie lakes include George, Henderson, Nest, Bass, Elkhorn, Long by Hawick, Diamond, Andrew, Florida, Carrie, Ella, Elizabeth, Green, Calhoun, Swenson, Camp, Games, West Sunburg and the Middle Fork Crow Reservoir.

If you are a **Bass** fishermen looking for some catch and release action starting this May 12th, several Spicer Area lakes offer fantastic action for both Smallmouth and Largemouth. Top Smallmouth lakes are **Koronis** (73-0200-00; 2,968 acres) near Paynesville, MN and **Nest** (34-0154-00; 1,008 acres) and **Green** (34-0079-00; 5,561 acres) lakes near Spicer, MN. These lakes are also excellent for Largemouth Bass. Many area panfish lakes offer fantastic Largemouth Bass angling. Even some of our shallower aerated lakes like Long, East Solomon, Ringo and Elizabeth can produce Largemouth Bass over 20+ inches.

Waterville Fisheries Management Area

General outlook for the Waterville area:

The winter of 2017-2018 was a cold shot of reality compared to the previous two winters (and might still be going when you read this). Area lakes iced up early and ice-out was later than average. Winterkills have already been documented on some area lakes and the possibility of finding more kills after ice-out exits. Winterkill often comes as a blessing in disguise when a fish community is loaded with undesirable fish like common carp or black bullheads. The resulting vacancy gives fisheries managers a chance to restock lakes with game fish species and build a strong foundation for a lake's immediate future. Any lakes managed for gamefish that experienced a winterkill will re-stocked this spring and quality fishing should return shortly. For those lakes that did not experience a winter kill (the majority of Waterville area lakes should not), fishing should be strong come opening day. Good walleye and northern pike bites were reported across south-central Minnesota throughout the winter. Those bites should carry forward to the spring and provide ample opportunity and excitement for open water anglers.

Waterville area anglers are reminded about new northern pike regulations in effect for opening day. All Waterville Area lakes are located within the new Southern Zone. Anglers will be allowed 2 northern pike per day and all northern pike harvested must be at least 24 inches long. Other areas of the state have different regulations so, if you will be angling for northern pike this summer be sure to know which zone you are in and what the regulations are for that zone. For more information on northern pike regulations visit (mndnr.gov/pike).

The following list of lakes represents some of the better fishing prospects for open water angling in 2018 for walleye and northern pike. For additional information about Waterville area lakes, please use the MN Department of Natural Resources LakeFinder (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html>) or visit the Waterville Area Fisheries webpage at (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/waterville/index.html>).

Madison Lake (1,439 acres): Located in the City of Madison Lake in Blue Earth County, Madison Lake has been a perennial Walleye hotspot. Fry stocking and strong natural reproduction have been the ticket to maintaining an abundant walleye population. Walleye abundance rebounded from 4.6 per gill net in 2014 to 8.3 per gill net in 2016. The historical average for Madison Lake (1955-present) has been over 7 walleye per net. Expect nice sized walleyes as gill netted fish averaged 17 inches and 70% of walleye sampled were over 15 inches. Respectable black crappie and bluegill populations may provide additional angling opportunities. Also, northern pike numbers were above the long-term average and fish up to 39 inches were sampled. Madison Lake will be busy on the opener so plan ahead. Boat accesses are located in the City of Madison Lake, in Bray County Park, and north of Bray County Park. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in this waterbody. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

Elysian Lake (2,215 acres): Elysian lake experienced a severe winterkill during the winter of 2013-2014 and was restocked with walleye during the spring of 2014. Walleye growth was slow initially, but those fish reached "keeper" size last summer. Elysian was the epicenter of early-ice walleye fishing in the Waterville area during 2017-2018, and for good reason – gill nets set in the fall of 2017 caught walleye at a rate of almost 25 per net. Nearly half of those fish were greater than 14 inches and some were over 20 inches. The ice crowds were big, but there should be plenty of walleyes in Elysian come opening day. Public accesses are located on the north end of the lake off Highway 60 and on the south end of the lake in Janesville.

Fox Lake (312 acres): Fox Lake is located just north of Faribault. This small lake can be overlooked at times compared to the larger lakes in the area. However, the lake is stocked with walleye fry in even years and those stockings have been very successful recently. Walleye were sampled at over 10 fish per gill net in 2017 with the majority of fish being between 14 inches and 20 inches. A public access with fishing pier is located on the south

side of the lake just off 140th street. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in Fox Lake. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

Cedar Lake (902 acres): Cedar Lake is a popular Rice County lake known mainly for its large bluegill and crappie populations. However, recent walleye fry stockings have been very successful and gill netting in 2017 revealed a good population of adult fish, all of which were greater than 14 inches. Cedar Lake also contains a fair population of northern pike – many of which exceed the new Southern Zone minimum length limit of 24 inches. A public access is located on the north side of the lake, just off County Road 38. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in Cedar Lake. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

Reeds Lake (193 acres): Reeds Lake is a small, clear lake located in Le Sueur County between the cities of Waterville and Elysian. While there are no walleye in Reeds Lake, there are plenty of northern pike. Record numbers of northern pike were sampled in 2016 and while many of those fish were under the 24 inch minimum length limit there were enough keepers to go around. Reeds Lake is also a popular lake for largemouth bass and panfish anglers. Reeds is one of the clearest lakes in the Waterville area, and is loaded with quality emergent and submersed vegetation. A public access is located on the south side of the lake just off Reeds Lake Road. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in Reeds Lake. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

Tetonka Lake (1,358 acres) and Upper Sakatah Lake (892 acres): Tetonka Lake and Upper Sakatah Lake are part of the Cannon River Chain of Lakes and are located in and around the city of Waterville. A public access located on the Cannon River in Waterville, underneath the water tower, provides access to both lakes (and possibly a few fish). Additional accesses are located on the south side of Tetonka Lake and on Upper Sakatah Lake inside Sakatah State Park. Both lakes contain walleye, although Tetonka may be the more popular choice on opening day. Both lakes also have good populations of northern pike with reports of fast fishing last fall and continuing through the winter on Upper Sakatah. Both lakes have plenty of fish longer than 24 inches for the angler looking to have a fish fry opening weekend. Also, many campgrounds and resorts are located on both lakes for those looking to make opener a family getaway weekend. The presence of Eurasian water milfoil has been confirmed in Lake Tetonka. Anglers can help stop the spread of aquatic invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the boat access.

Geneva Lake (1,875 acres): Geneva Lake is a large, shallow lake located south of the city of Geneva in Freeborn County. Geneva is one of a handful of shallow lakes in the area that is managed with new strategy focusing on northern pike and yellow perch (and waterfowl). Northern pike and yellow perch are stocked after winterkill events and exhibit extremely fast growth. Northern pike stocked as fry in Geneva Lake in the spring of 2014 ranged up to 24 inches long in the fall of 2014. Northern Pike abundance is high in Geneva Lake and fishing should be excellent before vegetation takes hold in the summer. Anglers should have no trouble finding northern pike longer than 24 inches. Fishing for yellow perch should also be at Geneva – with fish up to 13 inches present. A state-owned access is located on the west side of the lake.

Minnesota River (Courtland to Henderson): The Minnesota River, managed amongst a handful of Minnesota DNR Area Fisheries offices, offers some of the best and most underused walleye fishing in the state. The stretch of river from Courtland to Henderson offers a variety of river habitat types unique to the middle Minnesota River. Sauger, white bass, northern pike, channel catfish, and flathead catfish provide additional sport fishing opportunities and

numerous other species (gar, suckers, buffalo, sturgeon, mooneye, carp) make for fun fishing. For a list of accesses, consult an atlas or check out these maps:

http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/canoe_routes/minnesota3.pdf,

http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/maps/canoe_routes/minnesota4.pdf. Walleye opener is usually a time of high stage and moderate flows on the river with less chance of collision hazards like snags, boulders, or exposed sandbars. Always travel the river with caution and observe USGS gaging station online reports before your trip for stage and flow predictions. Anglers looking for walleye and sauger should try fishing tributary mouths, boulder or rip-rapped banks, gravel bars, rapids, and the front, middle, and back ends of deep pools.

Other waters: Bass Lake and Lura Lake along the Faribault/Blue Earth County line will be worth trying for walleye this spring. Bass Lake will be the lake to look for keeper sized fish while Lura offers a small population of large walleye. Loon Lake and Crystal Lake are two other Blue Earth County lakes to consider. Both lakes offer walleye and quality crappie fishing. The Cannon River and Cannon River chain of lakes offer shore fishing opportunities including a fishing pier at the Waterville Area Fisheries Headquarters on Lake Tetonka; the bridge between Upper and Lower Sakatah; a park area in the City of Morristown; and the bridge between Cannon and Wells lakes. Also, approximately 4 miles of the Cannon River between Morristown and Warsaw flow through the Cannon River AMA and WMA. The Blue Earth River could be worth a try when flows are moderate. For other shore fishing opportunities, search for the aforementioned lakes and rivers on the [Fishing piers & shore fishing sites](#) page.

Windom Fisheries Management Area

General Outlook for the Windom Area: The Windom fisheries management area (Rock, Nobles, Jackson, Martin, Pipestone, Murray, Cottonwood, Watonwan, part of Lincoln, and part of Lyon counties) is located within the prairie pothole region, which is characterized by very productive and shallow lakes. Many of the lakes and wetlands located in this region are susceptible to winterkill, especially when water levels are low and ice remains snow covered for long periods of time. The winter of 2017-2018 started off slow, as many lakes weren't fully ice covered until late December, but turned cold and put on 20-25 inches of ice on most lakes by the end of the season. Snowfall was limited early in the winter, but increased dramatically towards the end of January and into February, resulting in some of the less windswept, shallow lakes having low dissolved oxygen levels. In general though, the snow fell late enough that most lakes were likely "out of the woods" because days were getting longer (more sunshine) and occasional warm days were melting snow resulting in fresh runoff into lakes. Many of the lakes in Murray, Lincoln and Lyon Counties were snow free until the middle of February, thus many aeration systems in those counties were not operated. Dissolved oxygen readings for area lakes can be viewed at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/lakes/aeration.html>. With four growing seasons gone by since the harsh winter of 2013-2014 during which extensive winterkill occurred in many area lakes, Walleye populations have stabilized and have provided good angling for the majority of the 2017-2018 winter, per angler reports. A list of lakes that were stocked in 2017 is located at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/stocking.html>. The good fishing should continue when the Walleye and Northern Pike season opens on May 12, 2018, as 2015, 2016, and 2017 lake surveys indicated that there good numbers of harvestable sized Walleye in many of our area lakes. For additional information regarding stocking, fish surveys, oxygen monitoring, contour maps, and other fish management activities, visit the Windom fisheries webpage at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/windom/index.html>.

Walleye

Lake Benton (2,857 acres) Lincoln County: One of the bigger waters in the Windom fisheries management area, Lake Benton is poised to provide quality Walleye fishing this season. The 2017 population assessment indicated an abundant Walleye population at 26.7 per gill net, well above average for this lake type. A wide range of sizes were present, as lengths ranged from 7 to 26 inches, with the majority of the fish being between 12 and 15 inches. With another growing season completed, this abundant year class should be reaching a size acceptable to anglers. The opportunity for hooking into a trophy is not out of the question as Walleye up to 26 inches were sampled, with larger ones likely present. It is likely that many of the locals won't have to travel far to find good Walleye fishing with Lake Benton in their backyard. A slip bobber with a leech off rocky points and shorelines early in the season should put a few Walleyes on the stringer. Expect accesses to be busy, but the size of the lake should give anglers plenty of room to pursue the wily Walleye. Curly-leaf pondweed, an invasive species, is present in low abundance Lake Benton. Anglers can help stop the spread of invasive species by draining water and cleaning all vegetation off of the boat and trailer before leaving the access.

Lake Shetek (3,462 acres) Murray County: Lake Shetek is one of the largest water bodies in the Windom area, consistently producing quality Walleye fishing. The trend should continue into the spring as Shetek has a decent Walleye population as indicated by a catch rate of 7.3 per gill net in 2016. Lengths of Walleye averaged 13 inches; however, Walleye larger than 15 inches were present with fish up to 26 inches. A good Walleye bite was reported on Lake Shetek this past winter, with anglers catching good numbers of 15 inch fish. Prey fish abundance (Yellow Perch and Bullhead) is relatively low in Lake Shetek, so Walleyes should be actively searching for their next meal. If Walleye action is slow, anglers can try their luck in catching Northern Pike. The size of Northern Pike may not be large, but reports suggest that the Northern Pike population is on the upswing in Lake Shetek, likely the result of stocking and recent efforts to reestablish historic spawning runs. Black and White Crappies are also present in Lake Shetek, albeit in average abundance, but action could be fast if you locate a downed tree that they are hanging around. Although fishing pressure may be high on the opener, Shetek's vast surface area should provide plenty of options.

Lake Sarah (1,176 acres) Murray County: Lake Sarah is a perennial Walleye hotspot, being one of two lakes in the Windom area that has a self-sustaining Walleye population. Although the 2014 Walleye catch rate of 10.3 per gill net was much lower than catch rates in two previous surveys (60.5 and 45.5 per gill net in 2006 and 2010, respectively), Lake Sarah still boasts one of the best Walleye populations in the area. A strong year class of 3 year old fish are present, and should provide anglers with some steady action, as they did during this past fall and winter. During egg take operations during the spring of 2017, many 25+ inch Walleye were observed, with fish up to 14 pounds being captured. Natural reproduction checks have indicated that the population will continue to be strong, as the electrofishing catch rate of young-of-year Walleyes has exceeded 149.5 per hour in 7 out of 8 years since 2010. Expect the best Walleye fishing to be from mid-May to mid-June, and then again in the fall. If the Walleye don't cooperate you can try catching Yellow Perch, which are somewhat abundant and large. Make sure to plan ahead, as this Walleye "factory" will likely be busy on the opener.

Fox Lake (1041 acres) Martin County: Fox Lake should be one of the better options for Walleye angling in Martin County when the 2018 opener rolls around. The Walleye population is doing well, as they were captured at a rate of 14.5 per gill net in the 2017 survey. Many of the Walleye sampled were between 12 and 15 inches, with Walleye up to 28 inches being sampled. The chance to bring some fish home for the frying pan is a reality on Fox Lake! If Walleyes aren't cooperating, Fox Lake also boasts an abundant Crappie population (56.2 per trap net),

although size was relatively small (5 to 13 inches with most of them less than 9.0 inches in length). Nonetheless, the action should be at a blistering pace on Fox Lake!

Lake Okabena (785 acres) Nobles County: Located in Worthington city limits, Lake Okabena provides ample recreational opportunity for area residents. Lake Okabena could provide good Walleye fishing this spring as the gill net catch rate was 12.3 and the trap net catch rate was 3.6 during the 2014 survey. A lot of the Walleye sampled were small (less than 10 inches), but good numbers of Walleye over 17 inches were sampled (21 %). With a couple of years gone by, the small Walleye observed in 2014 should be approaching a harvestable size in 2017. The possibility for a trophy exists with the largest Walleye sampled being 28.4 inches. The Black Crappie population is also abundant (36.7 per trap net) if Walleye fishing is slow, but Crappies were small (6 to 8 inches) in 2014, but should be larger this year. With all of the small game fish in this lake, harvest opportunities should be excellent this year or next year.

Dead Coon Lake (547 acres) Lincoln County: If you are looking for high numbers of 13 – 15 inch Walleye, with a few 17-21 inch fish then Dead Coon Lake should be your destination for an action packed 2018 opener. The 2017 Walleye catch rate on Dead Coon was 23.0 per gill net, which is a respectable number that should provide good action. In addition to the Walleyes, Dead Coon Lake has large Yellow Perch that were caught at a rate of 23.0 per gill net, with many of them over 10 inches. Dead Coon Lake should be a destination that isn't terrible overrun by fellow anglers on the opener.

Currant Lake (394 acres) Murray County: Currant Lake is loaded with Walleye, having a 2017 catch rate of 32.3 per gill net in 2017. While many of the Walleye are small (less than 11 inches), there are a good number of Walleye in the 13 to 17 inch range, with Walleye up to 24 inches being sampled. If you are looking to get away from the crowd, Currant Lake may be a good option for the 2018 opener.

Round Lake (929 acres) Jackson County: This ever popular Walleye lake may be poised to give up some fish on the 2018 opener. In the 2017 survey, Walleye were captured at a rate of 10.3 per gill net. Many of the Walleye sampled were 14 to 18 inches, so there should be good opportunity to harvest some fish. If Walleye aren't biting, the Crappie population has really exploded in Round Lake, and should provide another angling opportunity. If you like a good fight, try catching some White Bass that have also taken off in Round Lake (30 per day bag limit). White Bass (some are approaching 16 inches) are feisty fighters and are good to eat.

Double Lake (246 acres) Cottonwood County: Double Lake could be busy on the 2018 Walleye opener, as anglers had pretty good success out there last spring. The 2015 fish population assessment provided further evidence that Double Lake may be a good destination for Walleye anglers, as Walleye were captured at a rate of 20.0 per gill net. The majority of the Walleyes present were between 12 and 15 inches during summer of 2015, so a couple of years of growth should make them a quality size. This lake should definitely be on your radar for the 2018 opener.

Talcot Lake (678 acres) Cottonwood County: Talcot Lake has given up a lot of Walleye in the last year, with good bites being reported several times over the last couple of years. The 2016 survey indicated an abundant Walleye population, as the gill net catch rate was 20.7 per gill net. Lengths of Walleye were nice averaging 16 inches. Talcot Lake could be busy on the opener given the recent success that anglers have had out there.

Clear Lake (68 acres) Lyon County: Although an extremely small lake, Clear Lake has a highly abundant Walleye population (94 per gill net in 2016) that should provide good angling this spring. In 2016 Walleyes ranged from 10

to 23 inches in length and averaged 15 inches. There are a lot of Walleye in this small lake; however, the trick may be getting the Walleyes to bite, as evidence suggests that the lake has an extremely abundant Fathead Minnow population, which is likely keeping the Walleyes appetite satisfied. Additionally, ice anglers tried their luck out there this last winter, and had limited success. Eventually the bite has to turn on at Clear Lake, and when it does, you better be holding on to your rod and reel!

Loon Lake (679 acres) Jackson County: Over four years removed from a partial winterkill that occurred in Loon Lake, the Walleye fishing is the best it has been in decades. Anglers reported excellent Walleye fishing throughout the 2016 and 2017 fishing seasons, as the abundant post winterkill year class (2014) grew to a length that was harvestable for many anglers. Likewise the survey in 2016 indicated a very abundant year class as the gill net catch of 30.3 was the highest catch ever recorded on Loon Lake. Lengths of Walleye ranged from 8 to 27 inches and averaged 14 inches, with the majority of Walleye being between 13 and 17 inches. The good fishing should continue into 2018, thus, expect the lake to be busy when the 2018 opener rolls around. Nearly 500 adult Northern Pike were stocked in Loon Lake during the winter of 2016-2017, so they should provide an additional angling opportunity if the Walleye aren't cooperating.

East Stay Lake (224 acres) Lincoln County: Walleye are abundant in East Stay Lake as they were captured at a rate of 43.0 per gill net. In addition to the Walleye being very abundant, the fish were an excellent size, with most of them being between 16 to 21 inches, and averaging 18 inches. Anglers reported a tough bite on Stay Lake this last winter, which could be a result of the abundant Perch and Bullhead populations, which likely keep the Walleye well fed. Nonetheless, Stay Lake is worth a try simply because it is loaded with nice Walleye!

Secondary Options for Walleye

Kansas Lake (398 acre) Watonwan County: 12.3 per gill net; 9 to 27 inches with an average of 15 inches, good numbers of fish over 16 inches.

Little Spirit Lake (572 acres) Jackson County: Walleye angling is open year around on this Iowa- Minnesota border water! The 2016 gill net catch rate was 11.0 per gill net with fish ranging from 8 to 26 inches and averaging 16 inches.

Big Twin Lake (444 acres) Martin County: Walleye abundance in 2016 (5.0 per gill net) was likely underestimated due to Catfish tangling the net. Big Twin has been a good Walleye destination for the last couple of years and should continue to be good in 2018.

West Graham Lake (519 acres) Nobles County: 8.3 Walleye per gill net; average length of 16 inches in 2014.

Independence Lake (112 acres) Jackson County: 8.0 Walleye per gill net, average length of 16 inches. Good bite this last winter. Bonus Yellow Perch population.

Northern Pike

Northern Pike regulations are NEW in 2018! A zonal management approach was adapted which divided the state into three zones: Southern, North-Central, and Northeast. The Southern Zone limit has a possession/daily limit of two and a minimum size limit of 24 inches (Pike under 24 inches must be released). See the 2018 Minnesota Fishing Regulations for more information.

Lake Shaokotan (996 acres) Lincoln County: Lake Shaokotan will be a popular destination when the Minnesota fishing opener rolls around in 2018. If you're looking for steady action with the chance to catch a limit of Pike,

Shaokotan is the place to do it. According to the 2015 population assessment, the Lake Shaokotan Pike population was healthy, with a catch rate of 4.0 per gill net. Northern Pike sampled in 2015 ranged in length from 9 to 36 inches, with good numbers of Pike over 24 inches available. If Pike aren't cooperating, you might want to try your luck at catching some of Shaokotan's Walleye, which were sampled at a rate of 10.3 per gill net in 2015 and were large, with many of the Walleye exceeding 20 inches in length.

St. James Lake (252 acres) Watonwan County: There is no shortage of Pike in St. James Lake (18.5 per gill net in 2017), making it an ideal destination if you are looking for steady Pike action. Strong natural reproduction in this lake sustain this robust Pike population. While the majority of the Pike were in the 21 to 26 inch range, Pike up to 30 inches were sampled. The Pike should be a little bit larger with another growing season complete. Pike fishing in St. James Lake has the potential to be fast and furious when the Minnesota opener rolls around. Harvest of Northern Pike will do this lake some good to thin the population and increase growth of remaining fish!

Lime Lake (316 acres) Murray County: Lime Lake is one of the more consistent Northern Pike fisheries in the Windom fisheries management area. Although not sampled well in the 2013 population assessment (0.9 per trap net), it is believed that a quality Northern Pike population exists in Lime Lake. Lime Lake is used as a source for Northern Pike brood stock which are used for rearing fingerlings in the Windom area. Each spring, 150 to 300 adult Northern Pike are collected from Lime Lake and stocked into rearing ponds. Lime Lake could provide some good Pike action early in the season before water temperatures rise because of summer heat.

Island Lake (163 acres) Lyon County: Northern Pike are on the prowl in Island Lake! In 2017, Northern Pike were captured at a rate of 4.1 per trap net. In 2017, the majority of the Pike sampled were between 18 and 30 inches. After four summers of growth, it is safe to assume that there are some dandies swimming around in this body of water. A decent Yellow Perch population also exists which could add some more fish to your bag.

East Graham Lake (604 acres) Nobles County: East Graham Lake could be good if you are looking for Northern Pike, as they were caught at a rate of 8.3 per gill net in the 2015 survey. While the sampled Pike only averaged 21 inches, they should grow fast in this fertile prairie lake.

Cedar Lake (710 acres) Martin County: Cedar Lake has historically been a good Pike lake, and should continue to be following restocking efforts after the winterkill of 2013-2014. Anglers have reported good Pike fishing, and the commercial seiner reported seeing hundreds of Pike in a seine haul during the winter of 2016-2017. Additionally Walleye were stocked following the winterkill, and excellent Walleye fishing was reported during the 2016 - 2017 seasons. Cedar Lake could be a good option when the opener rolls around in May.

Additional Opportunities for Northern Pike

Temperance Lake (176 acres) Martin County: 5.0 per gill net in 2013.

First Fulda Lake (122 acres) Murray County: 7.0 per gill net, averaged 24 inches.

Bright Lake (645 acres) Martin County: 3.6 Pike per trap net; 61.2 White Crappie per trap net and Crappie up to 12 inches.

Imogene (185 acres) Martin County: 7.5 Pike per gill net in 2015, averaged 20 inches.