

Southern Region Fishing Outlook for 2020

April 24, 2020 – Lakes in the southern region of Minnesota offer very good fishing opportunities for a multitude of species. With a longer open-water season and generally warmer water temperatures in numerous shallow lakes, fish populations tend to grow faster and reach catchable size in fewer years. It is not uncommon to see a 15 inch Walleye or 7 inch Bluegill within two years. Northern pike growth is accelerated as well seeing 24 inch pike in about 3 years. If you enjoy active fishing by casting and moving your boat around the lake, Largemouth Bass are very common in many lakes near Spicer, Hutchinson, and Waterville. Spring and fall is a great time to go crappie fishing around the region finding them along shoreline habitat or in channels between connected lakes, especially towards evening. These slabs move off of sharp breaks or school suspended over deeper water in the summer. Big Stone and Traverse lakes along the South Dakota border near Ortonville offers some fabulous Walleye, Bluegill, and Yellow Perch fishing while occasional White Bass and Freshwater Drum bites will keep the rod bending.

Often overlooked is the Minnesota River flowing through the heart of the Southern Region. This hidden gem makes for peaceful fishing floats in smaller rigs or by canoe to catch Walleye or catfish. Fishing near snags or deeper holes offers a chance to catch world-class Flathead Catfish. If quiet time angling from the river bank is your quarry, shorefishing provides the ease to catch various species without needing boat. The upper section of the river near Montevideo can be great for catching limits of eater-size Channel Catfish.

Based on an average ice-out this year and waters warming quickly during April, our southern Minnesota lakes should be in great shape for catching quality Walleye this spring. Some lake levels are still higher than normal, so if Walleye do not cooperate for spring anglers, there is always the option to fish in shallow bays or flooded habitat along lake shore. As waters turn green from algae, many shallow lakes in this part of the state still provide a reasonable Walleye bite during the daylight hours with trolling or drifting in 4-6 feet of water as common tactics.

MN DNR public boat access ramps and fishing piers will be in place before the opener by our Parks & Trails staff. Some access restoration delays may be noticed at a few sites due to a backlog of work and contracts during the COVID-19 pandemic. If you have any questions about lake conditions, contact the local [Fisheries area office](#) in that area of the state.

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 in the spring 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 waters represents some of the better Walleye fishing prospects for the 2020 open water angling season:

- **Lake Marion (McLeod County)** south of Hutchinson and **Collinwood Lake (Meeker County)** north of Hutchinson are expected to produce good Walleye fishing the year.
- **Preston Lake (Renville County)** offers a numerous Walleye that averaged 17 inches last summer.
- **Tetonka Lake (Le Sueur County)** expect many Walleye around 14 inches with a few larger fish mixed in.

- **Upper Sakatah Lake and Lower Sakatah Lake** in the Cannon River chain are shallower and warm quickly so the Walleye bite could be a very good option during the month of May.
- **Minnetaga (Kandiyohi County)** located 5 miles southwest of Atwater, MN is a shallow, turbid, productive lake with limited structure sitting on a high population of 14-15 inch Walleyes
- **Big Kandiyohi Lake (Kandiyohi County)** is still a consistent target for Walleye in the 1-3 pound range and “Jumbo” Yellow Perch (12+ inches) have been a bonus catch in this lake the past few years.
- **Diamond Lake (Kandiyohi County)** Walleye sizes will be 14-20 inches in 2020. Other great fishing opportunities include moderate size (24 inch plus) Northern Pike, large Bluegill (8 inch plus) and Black Crappie with many over 10 inches.
- **Benton Lake (Lincoln County)** might prove to be a hot bite with Walleye in two length groups at 12 to 14 inches and 17 to 20 inches, with a chance to catch one over 27 inches not out of the question.
- **Round Lake (Jackson County)** bids a good Walleye population with many around 15 to 16 inches.
- **East and West Oliver Lakes (Swift County)** have had good Walleye fisheries for many years. Fish from a wide range of sizes were present during 2019, including a decent number of Walleyes over 20 inches.
- **Minnesota River** provides an outstanding option to catch Walleye with numerous fish over 6 pounds. This river is a destination to catch so many species of fish including Flathead Catfish over 50 pounds.

Hutchinson Area

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

General Outlook for Hutchinson Area: The 2020 fishing season in the Hutchinson area should be good. Winter fishing was generally light due to lack of solid ice until mid-January. Also the lack of any hot bites spread pressure over the whole Hutchinson area. 2020 will be an early ice out giving Crappie and Bluegill anglers plenty of opportunities in April. An early ice out will also mean lakes should be warmer by fishing opener. Cold water temperatures hampered fishing on the opener in 2019, 2020 should be better. As always the Hutchinson area has a wide range of opportunities for Walleye, Bass, Sunfish, Crappie, Pike, and even Catfish. Anglers should be encouraged as always to try a new lake, fish for something different, or try to get someone new out fishing. Winterkill was minimal, with the exception of a significant kill at Little Mud Lake in Meeker County and a less severe kill at Long Lake near Dassel. Little Mud has already been stocked with Rainbow Trout, which should provide fishing opportunities immediately.

Walleye: For anglers looking for Walleye, two lakes come to mind. Lake Marion south of Hutchinson and Collinwood north of Hutchinson. These twin Walleye powerhouses have consistently maintained high gill net catch rates of fish of all sizes. We’ve been tracking a great year class in Marion for a couple year now, and anglers this past winter started to find them. By this year they should be perfect for the frying pan. Stella and Manuella south of Darwin are also to lakes to try. Anglers reported a number of fish caught in both lakes last year, and good fishing should continue. If anyone catches a tagged Walleye in either Stella, Manuella, or Washington they should call the Hutchinson DNR office and report their catch. Otter Reservoir in Hutchison is a great place to try for Walleye and highly underrated fishery. Some locals regard it as the best place for Walleye in the Hutchinson area. Shorefishing spots are abundant around the reservoir giving shorefishing anglers the best chance to catch a Walleye in the area. Preston Lake in Renville county produced a nice spread of Walleye in last summer’s gillnet surveys. Walleyes averaged 17.2 inches in length and 14.3 Walleye were caught per gill net.

Bass: The secret is out that the Hutchinson area has some phenomenal Bass fishing. Stella and Washington near Darwin consistently had both permitted and club level bass tournaments most weekends in 2019. Some very large Smallmouth Bass were surveyed by field staff in both lakes last spring. For numbers of bass, Minnie-Belle and

Francis both can provide some high number days. For those looking for a wall hanger, Jennie and Greenleaf both have the potential of 6lb+ fish. Smallmouth Bass are currently only in Stella, Manuella, Washington, and Big Swan. Good numbers of smaller Smallmouth Bass were seen in Big Swan last fall during Walleye electrofishing. All four lakes are great bets to hook up with a bronzeback. The majority of lakes in the Hutchinson area offer great Bass fishing. Anglers should have their pick of both numbers and size with the wide variety of lakes.

Sunfish: With a growing focus on larger Bluegills, the Hutchinson area has some opportunities for anglers. Ripley and Clear Lake (Watkins) are both great lakes for anglers to take a shot at getting a true trophy 10 inch Bluegill. Historically Jennie has produced the most 10 inch Bluegill during surveys going back to 1993. Washington is also a great place to look for big Bluegill; many large Bluegill were seen during spring netting in 2019. Because of their direct connection, Stella is also a good option for big 'gills. For anglers looking for the biggest sunfish in the area, Minnie-Belle and Collinwood both put out giant hybrid sunfish. An 11.5" hybrid sunfish was sampled in Minnie-Belle in 2019. All the lakes mentioned are also great options for catching a meal also. Anglers are reminded that selective harvest is a great way to get a meal and preserve great panfishing. Releasing the biggest sunfish and keeping 7"-8" fish can preserve large Bluegill fishing opportunities for years to come.

Crappie: The Hutchinson area can offer some good Crappie fishing for people looking for something for the frying pan. Belle and Swan Lake both have had good fishing for the past few years and anglers should be able to find some quality fish. For anglers looking for true giants, Minnie-Belle has some huge crappie. Anglers chasing big Crappie on Minnie-Belle may find them difficult to locate them, which is one reason why they are getting so big. Washington and Stella are two lakes that can offer a little in between with both size and numbers. As always, Dunn's and Richardson lakes are historical good Crappie lakes and should continue. Anglers may also encounter White Crappie at either Dunn's or Richardson. Finally, Clear Lake by New Ulm and Hanska Lake are great options in the southern part of the Hutchinson DNR management area.

Northern Pike: The leadoff Northern Pike fishing opportunity in the Hutchinson area has to be Minnie-Belle Lake. Minnie-Belle Lake has had a protective slot limit of 24"-36" to provide fishing opportunities for medium and larger size Pike in the area and provide better size structure across the population. The regulation has met those stated goals, while still allowing harvest below the slot for those who want to take some fish home. There is potential for fish very near or slightly above the coveted 40 inch mark. Stella is another lake that anglers have the potential at a 40 inch fish. Anglers may not catch large numbers of fish, but the fish they do will likely be a quality size. Cedar Lake is a great option for Pike, especially around opener when the shallow lake is much warmer than many other lakes in the area. For numbers of Pike regardless of size, Clear Lake (Watkins) is full of small Pike. This is a great opportunity for kids to be introduced to fishing and just to catch something. Also consider giving Jennie, Star, Arvilla, Hook, and Sleepy Eye a try if Northern Pike are your fancy.

Other Species: Other options in the Hutchinson include Little Mud by Watkins for Rainbow Trout. Trout are stocked every spring and fall. Big Swan, Marion, and Swan Lake are all places anglers can target Channel Catfish. In addition, the Minnesota River is a great place for both Channel Catfish and Flathead Catfish. Otter Reservoir in Hutchinson is a great option for people catch almost anything, especially with an abundance of shorefishing opportunities. 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 7-mile which is only stocked with Brown Trout.

Ortonville 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 should 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. There is no closed season for Walleye, Northern Pike or bass on the MN/SD border waters.

Many Ortonville Area lakes and rivers provide good fishing for Freshwater Drum and White Bass. These species are 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 38 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 much 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. The current population boasts strong numbers of 11-15 inch fish but trophy Walleye angling opportunities exist as well. Numerous Walleyes in excess of 10 pounds have been caught in recent years. White Bass numbers declined during 2018 due a spring die-off, however some fish up to 15 inches are still 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. Walleye numbers have been moderate during recent years and fishing for them can be good but spotty. High numbers of young-of-year Walleyes have been noted for several years in a row and should boost the fishery. 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. 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. 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. 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 Freshwater Drum and Black Crappies, with some Channel Catfish, Yellow Perch 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.

Oliver Lake is located in western Swift County, approximately nine miles north of Appleton. The lake is split into an east basin (455 acres) and west basin (212 acres) by Swift County Highway 5. Although a culvert exists under the highway, the basins have somewhat different fish populations. Water levels substantially increased the lake volume during the late 1990's which made Oliver one of the deeper lakes in the area, reaching a maximum depth of more than 30 feet.

Both East and West Oliver Lakes have had good Walleye fisheries for many years. Fish from a wide range of sizes were present during 2019, including a decent number of Walleyes over 20 inches. East Oliver Lake warms slowly during spring due to its depth, and the Walleye bite usually doesn't occur until June.

Smallmouth Bass were first caught in survey nets in East Oliver in 2013 and they likely resulted from an illegal stocking around 2010. Smallmouth Bass have flourished and anglers have reported catching fish over 20 inches. Excellent habitat is present for Smallmouth Bass and their numbers are expected to remain high. During recent years, Smallmouth Bass have migrated downstream into West Oliver Lake and they are expected to become abundant there also.

In both basins, Yellow Perch were present in moderate numbers with fish measuring up to 11 inches. Bluegill numbers have typically been low, but they grow fast and can exceed seven inches after three summers. Black Crappie populations tend to fluctuate widely in prairie lakes, and Oliver Lake is no exception. Although Black Crappies have been abundant at times historically, their population appeared low in 2019.

Del Clark Lake is located one mile southwest of Canby. It is an impoundment of Canby Creek that has a surface area of 154 acres and a maximum depth of 30 feet. The Lac qui Parle-Yellow Bank Watershed District owns the property around the lake, including Stonehill Regional Park. The park provides shore angling locations, a boat launch, swimming beach, and camping and hiking.

Del Clark Lake offers fishing opportunities for Bluegills, Black Crappies, Largemouth Bass, Northern Pike, Walleyes and Yellow Perch. Walleyes were abundant in 2019 with fish averaging 16 inches and ranging from 9-26 inches. Walleyes have reproduced well and the population has primarily been maintained by natural reproduction. Additional Walleye fingerlings or yearlings have been stocked when needed.

Low to moderate numbers of Bluegills and Black Crappies were present, which has been typical for Del Clark Lake. Many of the crappies were larger than ten inches. Bluegills were relatively small, averaging five inches with the largest measuring just over six inches. However, anglers have reported catching larger Bluegills. Yellow Perch were abundant, but most were smaller than 8 inches. Anglers can expect to locate panfish on the edges of weed lines. Del Clark is known for producing large pike and fish over 40 inches and 20 pounds have been caught.

Perch Lake is located in western Minnesota approximately four miles northwest of Ivanhoe in Lincoln County. It is a productive prairie lake that covers 224 acres and has a maximum depth of 18 feet. An unimproved gravel access is present along the lake's east border. Parking is restricted and anglers must park along the road some distance from the access location. Perch Lake has a diverse game fish community including Walleyes, Northern Pike, Yellow Perch, Bluegills, Largemouth Bass and Black Bullheads. Abundant native vegetation makes this lake unique in the area. Anglers typically have the best luck fishing “weed” edges or gaps in the vegetation in the main basin. Walleyes were moderately abundant during 2018 and from a wide range of sizes up to 31 inches. Many “keeper-sized” yellow perch were present, some up to 11 inches. Although Northern Pike numbers were low, they averaged 24 inches with the largest 33 inches. Pike grow fast in southern Minnesota and typically do not live beyond five years. Bluegill have generally been on the smaller side. Bass up to five pounds have been present.

Consult the [Ortonville Fisheries webpage](#) on the MNDNR website for additional information on the fishing resources in the area.

Spicer Area

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

Although ice out was about a week earlier than historical averages for Spicer area lakes, a cool spring counteracts the early ice out making things fairly normal as far as water temperatures, probable Walleye spawning activity and timing of the spring “hot bite” for fish seeking to be the first at the buffet line in those shallow warming bays and warmer water inlets. Unlike the 2018/19 winter, oxygen levels in Spicer area shallow fishing lakes and Walleye rearing ponds during the “high water/high flow” winter of 2019/2020 produced little to no expected winterkill. Walleye fingerlings left over from last years’ rearing ponds should be available to harvest and stock as high surviving 10-14 inch fall yearlings in 2020.

Lakes where ‘partial’ winterkill occurred during the winter of 2018/19 in the Spicer area were Lillian, Mud/Monongalia (above New London Dam), Wakanda, Lady Slipper and School Grove. Gamefish were still present, but numbers were reduced based on observations of dead fish and ice out test netting in the above mentioned lakes. On the good side, expect a surge in Bluegill sizes in partial winterkill lakes such as Mud/Monongalia where those Bluegill that are left often show excellent growth after the overly abundant population gets a partial winterkill “haircut”. These are the situations that Trophy Bluegill hunters seek out. Staying positive (but hopefully not testing positive), Lakes Wakanda and Lady Slipper produced excellent numbers of young-of-the-year ‘YOY’ Walleye (276 YOY per hour and 153 per hour of fall electrofishing, respectively) from the 2019 post-winterkill spring fry stockings which should produce Walleye worth harvesting by this winter or the

2021 fishing season at the latest in these types of shallow southern lakes that exhibit very fast Walleye growth rates.

To add to all the other oddities and changes in our behaviors we all have been experiencing lately, anglers harvesting Walleye on Green Lake, Kandiyohi County will now have to adhere to a bag limit of 3 starting with the May 9, 2020 opener. This regulation was approved and publicly accepted last fall and will hopefully help to “unflatten” the curve that the Green Lake Walleye population has been experiencing lately. In addition, the move to supplement the existing Walleye population by stocking larger Walleye (10-14 inches) from rearing ponds as opposed to 5-7 inch fingerlings will vastly improve survival rates and positively affect catch rates. So here goes.....Best bets for Walleye in 2020 would be **Big Kandiyohi, Diamond, Elizabeth, Koronis, Minnetaga, and Norway**. Instead of traveling this year, anglers between Granite Falls and Marshall may want to consider trying lakes like **Cottonwood, Tyson** and **Wood** on the opener, all of which have healthy Walleye populations.

Currently, Spicer Area lakes that have known infestations of Eurasian Watermilfoil are Andrew, Florida, Green, Calhoun, Norway, Games, Elkhorn, Henderson and Florida. Zebra Mussels were discovered in Green Lake in 2014. Since then, a total of 12 additional waters are designated as infested with Zebra Mussels; Nest, George, Norway, Games, Henchien, Swan, Andrew, Shakopee Creek from Norway to Andrew, Florida, Diamond, Elkhorn, Calhoun, and Eagle. Starry Stonewort, a submersed invasive algal aquatic plant, was found in Lake Koronis in 2015 and upstream Rice Lake in 2016. Remember “[Clean In Clean Out](#)”.

Big Kandiyohi Lake (34-0086-00; 2,683 acres; 18 feet maximum depth) 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 1-3 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.

Elizabeth (34-0022-02; 1,023 acres; 9 feet maximum depth) is located 3 miles southwest of Atwater, MN in Kandiyohi County. A public access is located on the north side. There are abundant Walleye numbers and variety of sizes due to fry stocking and natural reproduction based on the 2016 summer survey (18.7/gillnet) and annual ice out netting during Walleye egg take activities. Water clarity is turbid with the best fishing usually from opener to mid-June. Two smaller nearby lakes (Carrie and Ella) that connect also have good opportunities for Walleye, Northern Pike, Bass and Panfish.

Diamond (34-0044-00; 1,607 acres; 27 feet maximum depth) is located 4 miles northwest of Atwater, MN in Kandiyohi County. It has moderate water clarity, abundant bulrush stands and abundant sand/gravel/rubble substrates. The Walleye population is on the upswing based on the 2018 survey (27.5/gillnet). Most walleye will be 14-20 inches by 2020. Other great fishing opportunities include moderate size (24 inch plus) Northern Pike, large Bluegill (8 inch plus) and Black Crappie with many over 10 inches. There is a large County Park/Campground and public access along the northwest side of the lake. A small public access is also on the east side.

Koronis (73-0200-02; 2,968 acres; 132 feet maximum depth) is a large, deep and productive lake located in Stearns and Meeker counties near Paynesville, MN. The North Fork of Crow River flows through upstream Rice Lake and eventually into Koronis. Water clarity is moderate. A variety of habitats exist consisting of boulder/rubble reefs and points, three large islands, shallow bars and bays, moderate stands of submergent vegetation and deep drop-offs. Fish species such as Smallmouth Bass and Tullibee are present in Koronis unlike

most other area lakes. Trophy sized Northern Pike, Walleye, Bass and Walleye are caught in Koronis due to adequate numbers of Sucker, Redhorse, or Tullibee forage species. The 2019 summer survey recorded abundant Walleye (17/gillnet, 15 inch average), Northern Pike (5.8/gillnet, 25 inch average) and Smallmouth Bass. Other excellent fishing opportunities include Bluegill, Black Crappie and Largemouth Bass.

Minnetaga (34-0076-00; 791 acres; 9 feet maximum depth) is located about 5 miles southwest of Atwater, MN in Kandiyohi County. Minnetaga is a productive, turbid, shallow, and bowl-type lake. Submergent vegetation is limited to no more than light stands of sago pondweed. Varied habitat is lacking so drifting and trolling are best options to cover lots of water. Best Walleye fishing occurs in May to early June, late fall and early ice. The 2016 survey resulted in 39.5 Walleye/gillnet. Several strong year classes are present with both eater (12-15 inch plus) and large (20 inch plus) Walleye present in the lake. A bonus of large sized Yellow Perch are also present. A small public access is located along the southwest shore. A good shore fishing spot is located along the Minnetaga west side off of the gravel road right away.

Norway (34-0251; 2,339 acres; 33 feet maximum depth) is located about 5 miles east of Sunburg, MN in Kandiyohi County. It is a productive, varied habitat and multi-basin lake. West Norway is shallow, windswept and turbid with several large inlets, points and undeveloped rocky shoreline/shoalwater areas. Main Norway is deeper with moderate clarity, abundant submergent and emergent vegetation, point and rocky shoal areas. Little Norway is shallow, moderate aquatic vegetation, protected basin and connects via a navigable channel to Games Lake. The fishery is diverse with good Walleye, Largemouth Bass, Northern Pike, Bluegill and Black Crappie. Latest 2019 survey results had good Walleye numbers (12.7 fish/gillnet, 15 inches average). There are two public accesses on the south shores of West and main basins. Walleye fishing is best along the rocky shoals and point areas on the northwest portion of main Norway and along the northeast peninsula of West Norway.

Other Large and Deeper Lakes like Andrew, Rice, Nest, Green and Eagle consistently provide good fishing especially for large sized Walleye, Northern Pike and Bass. Walleye year classes from 2013-2017 (13-20 inch size range) are prevalent due to stocking and natural reproduction. Recent 2019 survey catches were good for Andrew (8/gillnet), Green (5 fish/gillnet) and Rice (9 fish/gillnet).

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 9th, 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; **Nest** (34-0154-00; 1,008 acres); and **Green** (34-0079-00; 5,561 acres) 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 Elizabeth, Long by Willmar, East Solomon and Ringo can produce Largemouth Bass over 20+ inches.

Shore Fishing Spots: Ringo Lake has a great car friendly path for fishing Walleye and Northern Pike along the east side of lake off U.S. Hwy 71 near Spicer, MN. Try east side of Green Lake outlet fishing piers for panfish. Foot and Willmar lakes along Robbins Island, fishing piers and boat access are good for variety of fish. Good panfishing is

present at Koronis Hwy 55 access site, Veterans Park and west access pier. Other fishing piers are located at Monson & Sibley State parks, Tadd & Upper Lake and Lake Florida outlet.

Sleeper Lakes: Enjoy quiet and relaxed fishing with great views on these lakes: Camp, Carrie, East Solomon and Monson.

Waterville Area

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

The winter of 2019-2020 was fairly uneventful (as far as weather goes) and most area lakes experienced ice-out near their average date. Some small, shallow lakes may have experienced winterkill, but larger, more stable lakes had no issues. Winter angling was good to excellent on many area lakes for a variety of species. Strong bites should continue through the spring and expectations for Opening Day 2020 should be high. For more information visit [LakeFinder](#) on the MN DNR website, the [2020 Waterville Area Fishing Outlook](#), and the [Waterville Area Newsletter](#).

Waterville area anglers are reminded about new Northern Pike zone regulations in effect since 2018. All Waterville Area lakes are located within the 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 visit [Northern Pike zones](#).

Walleye

The theme for the 2020 Opener in Waterville might be rivers, more specifically the Cannon River. Lakes along the Cannon River were sampled in 2019 and most showed healthy populations of Walleye of all sizes. Natural reproduction has been good to excellent in many of the Cannon River lakes and Walleye fishing should be good for years to come.

One of the best early ice bites in the Waterville area this winter was at Lake Tetonka. Natural reproduction has been excellent the last two springs and many of those fish have already grown to a desirable size. Expect many fish around 14 inches at Opener time, with a few larger fish mixed in. Also, don't overlook connected Upper Sakatah Lake and Lower Sakatah Lake. Both Upper and Lower Sakatah are shallower and warm faster than Tetonka and could be excellent opening day options. A creel survey is currently being conducted on Lake Tetonka. If you are approached by the creel clerk please take the time to answer questions - it won't take long and is very important information.

A few miles downstream from Lake Tetonka on the Cannon River is Cannon Lake. Natural reproduction has also been very good at Cannon Lake. Walleye around 16 inches are common in Cannon Lake and gill netting in the fall of 2019 showed a large population of big Walleye. Cannon Lake is also full of prey fish like shiners, so getting fish to eat may be difficult but definitely worth a try!

Upstream from Lake Tetonka on the Cannon River is Gorman Lake in the town of Cordova. Netting in the summer of 2019 showed good numbers of Walleye in Gorman Lake. Most Walleye sampled in Gorman Lake were over 14 inches and many were over 20".

Northern Pike

The Waterville area has something for everyone looking for Northern Pike in 2020. Lakes in the area generally do not have problems with overpopulation but there are lakes with high numbers of Northern Pike. There are also lakes with quality sized Northern Pike.

If you are looking for numbers of Northern Pike then you would do well to make the town of Elysian your base for Opening Day. At Reeds Lake over 25 Northern Pike per gill net were sampled in 2016. As expected, lots of Northern Pike usually means small Northern Pike and that was the case at Reeds Lake. The average Northern Pike sampled was 21 inches but Northern Pike up to 30 inches were also sampled and about 10% of Northern Pike were greater than the 24 inch minimum length limit.

Frances Lake, which borders the city of Elysian, also has high numbers of Northern Pike, although the average size in 2019 was only about 19 inches. Fish over 24 inches can be found at Frances, but it's more of a numbers game.

Just north of Elysian is Steele Lake. Steele Lake is a small, turbid lake that is prone to winterkill. Northern Pike were stocked after the winterkill of 2013-2014 and those fish have flourished. Steele is the rare lake that holds both numbers of Northern Pike and big Northern Pike. All Northern Pike sampled in 2019 were greater than 24 inches and averaged over 28 inches. Northern Pike up to 36 inches were sampled.

A few lakes in the Waterville area are managed specifically for Northern Pike and Yellow Perch. These lakes include Pickerel Lake, near Albert Lea, and Geneva Lake, near Geneva. Both lakes have good populations of Northern Pike but Pickerel's fish tend to run a little bit bigger while Geneva is more known for numbers of Northern Pike.

Duck Lake, German Lake, and Clear Lake in Waseca are other lakes with the potential to catch Northern Pike over 30 inches.

St. Olaf Lake has a 30 inch minimum length limit and a possession limit of 1 fish.

Largemouth Bass

Angling for Largemouth Bass can be fantastic in the Waterville area and many anglers are catching on to that fact. The best bass lakes are generally the lakes with the best habitat like clear water, vegetation, and wood. Reeds Lake and Frances Lake near Elysian have all three of those and they have abundant Largemouth Bass populations. Ballantyne Lake near Madison Lake has a good population of Largemouth Bass over 15 inches. Rice County lakes such as Mazaska, Cedar Lake, and Shields Lake are consistent producers of quality Largemouth Bass. Other popular Largemouth Bass lakes include Tetonka Lake near Waterville, Lura Lake near Winnebago, and the German/Jefferson chain of lakes in Le Sueur County.

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: [State Water Trail Guide to the Minnesota River - Fort Ridgely to Le Sueur](#). [State Water Trail Guide to the Minnesota River - Le Sueur to Fort Snelling](#).

The fishing 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 deep pools.

Shore 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 Tetonka Lake; the bridge between Upper and Lower Sakatah lakes; 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 is 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.

Other Species

For those seeking something off the beaten track, the Waterville area offers a host of “other” fish. Lakes like German and Mazaska offer Longnose Gar. 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. Tetonka Lake, along with the Cannon River, Straight River, and the Minnesota River offer an opportunity to catch a Smallmouth Bass or two. Options are nearly endless for anglers or those looking to arrow a carp.

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 (Rock, Nobles, Jackson, Martin, Pipestone, Murray, Cottonwood, Watonwan, southern half of both Lincoln and 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 2019-2020 proved to be mild as no winterkill has been observed or reported to date. Oxygen monitoring was limited in 2019-2020, but this winter’s readings can be viewed at [Windom area lake aeration and dissolved oxygen](#). Angling activity was high for most of the ice fishing season, with good fishing reported area-wide. Most ice fishing activity ended in early March because of a week of unseasonably warm temperatures that deteriorated ice conditions and public accesses. The excellent fishing that occurred during the ice season should continue into the open water season during the spring, summer and fall of 2020. For additional information regarding stocking, fish surveys, oxygen monitoring, contour maps, and other fish management activities, visit the [Windom area fisheries webpage](#).

Walleye

Lake Benton (2,857 acres) Lincoln County

One of the bigger waters in the Windom fisheries management area, Walleye angling should be hot at Lake Benton in 2020. The 2019 fish survey indicated a highly abundant Walleye population at 27.6 per gill net, well above average for this lake type. A wide range of sizes were present, as lengths ranged from 12 to 27 inches, with the majority of the fish being between 12 to 14 inches and 17 to 20 inches. The opportunity for hooking into a trophy is not out of the question as Walleye up to 27 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 public water 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 2020 Walleye opener could be "one for the ages" as the gill net catch rate in the 2018 survey was 24.8 per gill net, the highest catch rate observed in the last two decades in Lake Shetek. The 2019-2020 ice fishing season was phenomenal on Lake Shetek and that should continue into the open water season. Lengths of Walleye averaged around 12 inches; however, Walleye larger than 14 inches were present with fish up to 24 inches. With an additional summer of growth, many of these Walleye should be around 15 to 17 inches in length. If Walleye action is slow, anglers can try their luck in catching Crappie. Black and White Crappie are also present in Lake Shetek, in good numbers so action could be fast if you locate a downed tree that they are hanging around. Decent numbers of Crappie over 10 inches are present. 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 the only lakes in the Windom area that has a self-sustaining Walleye population. The catch rate of Walleye in 2018 was 21.0 per gill net, which should provide some phenomenal fishing in 2020. Lake Sarah still boasts one of the best Walleye populations in the area. Multiple strong year classes of Walleye are present, which should provide good angling opportunity. During egg take operations during the spring of 2019, 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 most 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 should be large. Zebra Mussels were detected in Lake Sarah during the fall of 2018, so it is very important to clean your gear and not transport water from Lake Sarah to other waterbodies. Make sure to plan ahead, as this Walleye "factory" will likely be busy on the opener.

Dead Coon Lake (547 acres) Lincoln County

Dead Coon Lake should be your destination for an action packed 2020 opener. The 2017 Walleye catch rate on Dead Coon was 23.0 per gill net. 13-15 inch Walleye dominated the 2017 catch rates, so with additional growing seasons gone by, these fish should be around the 17 to 19 inch mark. 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. A good lake to consider if opener weather is troubling given the size of the lake along with the fish population.

Currant Lake (394 acres) Murray County

Currant Lake is loaded with Walleye, having a catch rate of 32.3 per gill net in 2017. With a couple of year's growth, there should be a good number of Walleye of harvestable length, 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 2020 opener.

Round Lake (929 acres) Jackson County

This ever popular Walleye lake may be poised to give up some fish on the 2020 opener. In the 2019 survey, Walleye were captured at a rate of 10.6 per gill net. Many of the Walleye sampled were 15 to 16 inches, so there should be good opportunity to harvest some fish. If Walleye aren't biting, Round Lake also boasts a good Crappie population which 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.

Talcot Lake (678 acres) Cottonwood County

Talcot Lake has given up a lot of Walleye in the last couple of years, 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.

Loon Lake (679 acres) Jackson County

Extensive stocking efforts in Loon Lake have the Walleye population in great shape, with good Walleye fishing being reported several years in a row. 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 2020, thus, expect the lake to be busy when the opener rolls around.

Lake Okabena (785 acres) Nobles County

Located in Worthington city limits, Lake Okabena provides ample recreational opportunity for area residents if they don't have a boat or prefer shorefishing. Lake Okabena should provide good Walleye fishing this spring as the gill net catch rate was 10.0 during the 2018 survey. Additionally, many adult Walleye were observed while nighttime electrofishing for fingerlings during the fall of 2019. Average length of Walleye in the 2018 survey was 14.1 inches with 50% of the sample being 15 inches or greater.

Clear Lake (415 acres) Jackson County

Throughout the years, Clear Lake has been local Walleye angler's go to lake. Walleyes were captured at a rate of 17.3/gill net in 2019. Lengths ranged from 7 to 28 inches and averaged 14.4 inches. Angling pressure was high during the spring of 2019; however, given Clear Lake's record of producing a quality walleye fishery, it is likely that some fish will be caught when the season opens in 2020. Plan ahead, as it is likely that Clear Lake will be busy on the opener.

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! Although open year round it does have a 3 fish limit. 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 during the survey. Big Twin has been a good Walleye destination for the last couple of years and should continue to be good in 2018. Big Twin also boasts a robust Crappie population that could provide an alternative if Walleye don't cooperate.

West Graham Lake (519 acres) Nobles County

13.3 Walleye per gill net; average length of 15.1 inches in 2018.

Indian Lake (204 acres) Nobles County

9.7 per gill net in 2018; average length of 17.8 inches. Abundant Crappie population with large fish!

Bingham Lake (269 acres) Cottonwood County

14.5 per gill net in 2018; average length of 18.2 inches.

Double Lake (246 acres) Cottonwood County

13.0 per gill net in 2019; average length of 15.1 inches.

Northern Pike

Don't forget about the Northern pike regulations that were 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 2020 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 2020. If you're looking for steady action with the chance to catch a limit of Pike, Shaokotan is the place to do it. Pike are everywhere in Lake Shaokotan with a 2018 catch rate of 22.3 per gill net. Northern Pike sampled in 2018 ranged in length from 14 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 7.3 per gill net in 2018 and were large, with many of the Walleye exceeding 20 inches in length. Additionally there should be another year class of smaller sized walleyes showing up this year as well.

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 sustains 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 2019 fish survey, it is believed that a quality Northern Pike population exists in 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. 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 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. The 2018 catch rate was 4.0 per gill net. Anglers have reported good Pike fishing during the 2019-2020 winter, and the commercial seiner reported seeing hundreds of Pike in a seine haul during the winter of 2016-2017. Additionally Walleye were stocked after 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

Mountain Lake (230 acres) Cottonwood County

6.0 per gill net in 2018, averaged 28.0 inches.

First Fulda Lake (122 acres) Murray County

1.5 per gill net in 2019, 680 adult pike stocked during the winter of 2019-2020.

Imogene (185 acres) Martin County

7.5 Pike per gill net in 2015, averaged 20 inches.

Minnesota River Fishing Outlook

Overview

The Minnesota River flows more than 320 miles across Southern Minnesota and provides excellent fishing 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, Redhorse, and Shovelnose Sturgeon. Although the Minnesota River experienced major flooding during late-March and early-April, the early ice-out and open water have already provided plenty of fishing opportunities for Catfish, Freshwater Drum, and White Bass. Be sure to check river levels before heading out since conditions can change rapidly after large amounts of precipitation ([USGS River Gages](#)). Also, please review the 2019 fishing regulation handbook for specific rules and seasons.

Access

Shore fishing access can be found at numerous State Parks, County Parks, City Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, and boat ramps situated along the banks of the Minnesota River. Watercrafts 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 and remember to wear a life jacket. 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 ([DNR Recreation Compass](#)).

General Fishing Tips

In addition to a basic jighead with live-bait or plastic, the classic slip-sinker rig is one of the best methods for catching a variety of fish species from the Minnesota River. Bass anglers call this the "Carolina Rig" while Walleye anglers refer to it as a "Lindy Rig", but most river fishermen simply call it a "Bottom Fishing Rig". In order from the tip of your rod to the hook, this rig typically consists of a 1/2–3 oz. sliding sinker, a barrel swivel, an 8–24" leader, followed by a hook of your choice. Bait the hook with a night crawler, leech, minnow, stink bait, or artificial and cast it down current. Then, either let the bait sit or slowly drag and hop the bait back to you making sure you keep slack out of the line so you can detect a bite. This presentation will catch everything from Channel Catfish and Walleye to Common Carp and Shovelnose Sturgeon. When fishing the Minnesota River you may want to 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 during low flows.

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.