

Southern Region Fishing Outlook for 2022

Outlook by areas

April 26, 2022

Spring arrived late this year. Chilly and windy weather persisted during the entire month of April rolling back some highly anticipated panfishing plans and early boater recreation. Ice cover remained on many northern Minnesota lakes as of this writing and for southern Minnesota lakes, ice-out occurred during the first week of April. On our perennial last-to-go-out large, deeper lakes near Spicer — Green and Koronis lakes — huge winds broke ice open on April 22. Their average ice-out date is April 15. DNR walleye spawn-take crews at Windom and Spicer area offices toiled hard during days of high winds to set nets and collect eggs from their localized walleye population. These operations produce essential walleye stocking needs for maintaining a natural genetic strain within the local watersheds.

April rains and snow spilled across the state alleviating some thirsty soils from last year's drought; however, many lakes are well below spring normal water levels so anglers this year may want to check their access locations before heading out to launch. In addition, water clarity conditions on some lakes were a bit more roiled this spring because of the ongoing days of high winds.

Typically, lakes in the southern region of Minnesota offer very good fishing opportunities for a multitude of species each spring. Numerous shallow lakes warm up sooner, favoring an active fish bite by hungry fish. Fish populations in this part of the state 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 2 to 3 years. If you do not have a boat, shore fishing is popular as well. Spring and fall are great times to try for panfish along shoreline habitat or in channels between connected lakes, bridge areas and especially fishing toward the evening hours.

Visit the DNR website to locate [public water access](#) ramps and fishing piers. Also, plan ahead by using internet aerial mapping tools to view any location for understanding vehicle parking space and shore fish-ability. Public access is not just managed by the DNR. It can also be provided by county, city and other local units of government. If you have any questions about lake conditions, fish populations and depth maps you can search for your lake with the popular DNR online tool called [LakeFinder](#). You can get the same information but in a portable, mobile-friendly format that knows exactly where you are at with [LakeFinder mobile](#).

Often overlooked is the Minnesota River flowing through the heart of the southern region. This hidden gem makes for peaceful fishing floats in smaller boats or by canoe to catch walleye or catfish. Fishing near tree snags or deeper holes offers a chance to catch world-class flathead catfish. If quiet time angling from the river bank is your quarry, shore fishing 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.

Remember anglers and boaters, **Clean In Clean Out** when boating or fishing in Minnesota. Protect your waters by following state aquatic invasive species laws. Clean, drain, dispose and keep all plugs out while transporting. Another reminder is that water temperatures in the spring are still cold. Hypothermia can set in within minutes of falling overboard, so please wear your life jacket. If you need fish population assistance, contact the [local Fisheries area office](#) in that area of the state. Have a great fishing experience and take a kid fishing!

The following fishing information is highlighted below by each DNR area fisheries office in the southern region:

Hutchinson, Ortonville, Spicer, Waterville, Windom, and the Minnesota River crew. They provide a snapshot of the lake's fishery based on recent netting surveys that evaluate the fish population. The following list of waters represents some of the better walleye fishing prospects for the 2022 open water angling season:

- **Lake Shetek (Murray County)** – walleye from 15 to 17 inches in length and lots of 10-inch crappie.
- **Dead Coon Lake (Lincoln County)** – plentiful walleye in the 17-18 inch range.
- **Currant Lake (Murray County)** – loaded with walleye, having a catch rate of 33.3 per gill net in 2021.
- **Round Lake (Jackson County)** – many walleye sampled over 14 inches at a rate of 14.7 per gill net in 2021.
- **Big Kandiyohi, Carrie and Ringo lakes (Kandiyohi County)** – shallow lakes that offer early walleye bites.
- **Lake Marion (McLeod County)** – this lake south of Hutchinson is expected to produce good walleye fishing.
- **Belle Lake (Meeker County)** – this lake north of Hutchinson is coming off a hot bite this past winter.
- **Big Swan Lake (Meeker County)** – another great walleye resource in the Hutchinson area.
- **Artichoke Lake (Big Stone County)** – has a high population of all sized walleye, many 15 to 18 inches.
- **Long Tom (Big Stone County)** – has copious walleye ranging from 15 to 17 inches.
- **East Toqua Lake (Big Stone County)** – offers a very good walleye opportunity for fish over 20 inches.
- **Fountain and Albert Lea lakes (Freeborn County)** – both have good numbers of large walleye.
- **Lake Washington and Tetonka lake (Le Sueur County)** – traditional favorites for the walleye opener.
- **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.

The 2021 fishing season was more of a return to normal in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. Fishing license sales declined slightly but were still a bit higher than the 10-year average previous to 2020. Subsequently, fishing pressure did seem to ease a bit with not so many lakes as busy as in 2020. For the Hutchinson area, ice out should be about average with most lakes out by mid-April. The 2022 fishing opener will be later than normal due to the late timing of the first Saturday in May.

Despite breaking last fall, the drought from last year has had lasting effects into this spring as lake levels are still down 1-2 feet in many places. In the spring months of 2022, DNR crews will evaluate with test nets to determine what impacts if any to the fishery may have occurred from drought related influences or minor winterkills. Stocking plans would follow as necessary. Fishing prospects in 2022 should be good. No lakes stand out for that red-hot bite, but walleye fishing should be steady at a number of lakes. Bass fishing should be as good as always, but anglers should be advised that bass fishing has seen a rise in popularity in the past few years and subsequently many popular lakes can be very busy most weekends. This is a great opportunity to try a new lake, fish during the week, or fish for different species. The Minnesota River in the southern part of the Hutchinson DNR fisheries management area is always great for getting away from others and catching something unique.

Walleye

For anglers looking for walleye, two lakes come to mind: Lake Marion south of Hutchinson and Belle north of Hutchinson. Traditionally both have been top walleye lakes for years, and there's good reason for it. While Marion is the superstar with big year classes and impressive net catches, Belle is consistent with good year classes and fishing most years. This winter Belle had an excellent bite, and that bite should continue early in the season. Despite high net catches for few years now, the bite at Marion has been tough with a lot of forage for walleye to

eat. May however is a great time to take advantage of post-spawn walleye that are hungry. Stella and Manuella south of Darwin are also two lakes to try. Anglers continue to report a number of fish from both lakes and good fishing should continue. New this year will be tagged walleye in Collinwood Lake as part of new study looking at genetics and angler harvest. If you catch a tagged walleye in Collinwood, call or email the [Hutchinson DNR office](#) and report the catch. Big Swan Lake is another great walleye resource in the area. It's been a hot lake the last few years, and that should continue for a while. A final strong walleye candidate is Minnie-Belle Lake. Minnie-Belle is unique for the area and reminiscent of the northern woods with its clear waters and abundance of rooted aquatic plants. It can have some good walleye fishing, but anglers may need to mix up their strategies as Minnie-Belle is clearer than many other area lakes.

Bass

While Washington and Stella get most of the top press for Hutchinson area bass fishing, there are many other lakes in the area that are just as good. For numbers of bass, Minnie-Belle, Francis and Manuella can provide some high-number days. For those looking for a wall hanger, Jennie and Greenleaf both have the potential of 6 pound-plus fish. For a combination of both size and number Erie, Spring and Long by Dassel can all be good. To get away from the crowds Dunn's, Richardson and Stahl's are all good. Smallmouth bass are currently only in Stella, Manuella, Washington and Big Swan. All four lakes are great bets to hook up with a quality bronze-back. 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

For the first time in 20 years there is a new special regulation in the Hutchinson area. Both Minnie-Belle and Ripley had five-fish bag limit reductions enacted starting March 1, 2022. The hope for these is to increase the number of quality fish anglers catch. Naturally both these lakes are a good starting place for looking for quality fish. The top sunfish lake in the area however may be Francis by Kingston. There is a combination of both good size and numbers. Otherwise, Jennie and Washington 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 nettings in 2017 and 2019. Because of their direct connection, Stella is also a good option for big 'gills. Clear by Watkins is also another top sunfish lake in the area. Stahls is the best local option for numbers of small sunfish to keep the kids busy. In addition, several lakes in the area have good sunfish populations. Anglers are reminded that selective harvest is a great way to get a meal and preserve great panfishing by releasing large sunfish to spawn, and in particular males, because they are important for nest guarding and passing down parental male genetics. Releasing the biggest sunfish and keeping 7-8 inch fish can preserve large sunfish 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 lakes are traditional spots for many local anglers. Clear by Watkins also has been good for several years now. For anglers looking for true giants (13-plus inches), Minnie-Belle has the largest crappie in the area. Those anglers chasing big crappie on Minnie-Belle should be warned, they can be difficult to find. 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 historically good crappie lakes and should continue to offer good crappie fishing into the future. Anglers may also encounter white crappie at either Dunn's or Richardson. Finally, Clear Lake by New Ulm and Hanska are great options in the southern part of the Hutchinson DNR management area and may have some of the best crappie fishing for both size (9-11 inches) and numbers.

Northern pike

The top northern pike fishing opportunity in the Hutchinson area for large sized fish would be Minnie-Belle Lake. Minnie-Belle Lake has had a protective slot limit of 24-36 inches for over 20 years now and as a result the size

structure in Minnie-Belle is tremendous for a large fish opportunity. There is potential for fish over 40 inches at Minnie-Belle. 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. Jennie and Collinwood also have some very nice fish, but also enough to keep you busy. For numbers of pike regardless of size, Francis and Round by Litchfield are both safe bets.

Other species

Other options in the Hutchinson area include Little Mud Lake by Watkins for rainbow trout. Rainbows are stocked every spring and fall. Betty, Marion and Swan Lake are all waters 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 to catch almost anything, especially with an abundance of public shore fishing 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 Seven Mile which is only stocked with brown trout.

Ortonville area

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

Popular lakes include Big Stone, Lac qui Parle and Traverse. The Minnesota River and many smaller lakes and streams also provide numerous additional angling opportunities. Due to the shallow, productive nature of these lakes and streams, fish grow fast and quality populations of yellow perch, walleyes, crappies, freshwater drum and white bass are common.

Fisheries staff routinely evaluate fish populations in these lakes and streams using gill nets, trap nets, seines and electrofishing. The data are used to make management decisions and are also available to anglers in survey reports which are useful for deciding where to fish. The data presented here are from the most recent surveys from 2019, 2020 and 2021 and should provide insight into the current status of these fisheries.

Walleye

Most area lakes are routinely stocked with walleyes; however good natural reproduction does occur in several lakes and streams. Walleye are most abundant in Long Tom, Artichoke, Traverse, Long and East Toqua. Big Stone, Hendricks, Oliver and Lac qui Parle also have quality populations. Although “eater-sized” walleyes (13-17 inches) are most common, plenty of larger walleyes can be found throughout the area’s lakes. Walleyes are also present in the Minnesota and Pomme de Terre rivers and fishing for them can be very good, especially during spring and fall.

Yellow perch

Yellow perch angling is very popular locally and there are numerous options. Big Stone is a perennial favorite with high numbers of perch, many from 8-10 inches. Hendricks also has a very good perch fishery and good numbers of large perch have been present during recent years. If smaller lakes are preferred, try your luck in East Toqua, Steep Bank or Perch. Yellow perch grow fast in these lakes and many have good numbers of 9-10 inch fish.

Crappie

While walleyes and yellow perch are common in the area, fishable populations of crappies are not. An exception is Lac qui Parle which has produced a quality crappie population for many years. When the bite is on, good catches of 12- and 13-inch crappies can be common. Artichoke has a high number of crappies and during the last survey most were 7-9 inches. Larger crappies are present, and at times anglers find them in good numbers. Big Stone and Traverse have lower numbers of crappies, but angling for them can be good, especially in the spring.

Bluegill

Lakes with bluegill populations are somewhat limited in the area, though their numbers in these lakes are

increasing. Improved water clarity has led to increased vegetation in Big Stone and Traverse, which has provided better bluegill habitat. In the last several years bluegill have become an important species in the Big Stone fishery. In Traverse, bluegills can be locally abundant. In both lakes anglers have a chance to catch a trophy.

Bass

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

Northern pike

Although northern pike are not abundant in area lakes, those present grow very fast. Perch, Hendricks, Traverse and Del Clark have the most pike with decent numbers over 30 inches. Lac qui Parle, Artichoke and Big Stone have lower pike numbers, but catches over 40 inches are reported every year.

Catfish and bullhead

Lac qui Parle, Traverse and the Minnesota River all have high numbers of channel catfish. Catfish grow fast and fish longer than 30 inches are sampled every year. Most lakes have low numbers of bullheads but Hendricks, Big Stone and Lac qui Parle have decent numbers of large bullheads. Black, Yellow and brown bullheads are all present in the area.

Freshwater drum and white bass

Many area lakes and rivers provide good fishing for freshwater drum and white bass. Freshwater drum are commonly known as “sheepshead.” Sheepshead can be caught in Artichoke, Lac qui Parle and Big Stone, whereas the best bets for white bass are Traverse, Big Stone and Hendricks. Both species can routinely be caught from many reaches of the Minnesota River as well. They are very good to eat and are becoming more popular with anglers. Their flavor can be improved by bleeding them prior to cleaning (cut through their gills when on a stringer or in the live-well), by keeping the slime from getting on the meat during filleting and by trimming away the reddish “mud-line” from the fillets. Excellent recipes for preparing drum can be found on the internet.

Lake sturgeon

Lake sturgeon were historically present in Big Stone Lake but had disappeared around 1950 likely due to winterkill, summerkill and barriers to spawning migration. Habitat improvements led to their reintroduction in 2014 and 4,000 fingerlings have been stocked annually since then, except for 2020. The stockings have been successful and sturgeon are frequently being caught by anglers and in DNR sampling. Lake sturgeon stockings will continue until a self-sustaining population has been reestablished.

Consult the [Ortonville Fisheries webpage](#) on the DNR 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.

Quality angling opportunities for panfish, walleye, northern pike and bass for shore based and boat anglers alike are numerous in the Spicer fisheries area. The majority of lakes (30) in this area are found in Kandiyohi County within just a few gallons of “liquid gold” from the towns of Willmar and New London-Spicer. This area also includes lakes near Paynesville (Rice and Koronis), Benson (Camp and Monson) and south of Granite Falls (Wood, Cottonwood, Schoolgrove, Lady Slipper and Tyson).

As of this writing (April 14, 2022), the windy weather without a whole lot of help from the sun is the main reason

why many area lakes are ice free, especially the shallower lakes (e.g., Elizabeth, Lillian, Minnetaga, Big Kandiyohi, Cottonwood, etc.). Ice-out dates on the deeper lakes such as Green and Koronis are expected to be a little later than the mid-April average this year.

When spring weather finally warms up the shallow bays and inlet flows, shore anglers near Willmar can expect some great crappie angling on Foot Lake, especially between the fairgrounds and the radio station. Other shore based potential spring warmup hot spots for panfish would include the northeast bay on Elkhorn, under the east bridge/bay on Nest, the south inlet on West Norway and the outlet of Lake Florida. You could maybe even give Gina between the towns of Kandiyohi and Spicer off the north gravel road a try for some nice sunnies.

On Lake Koronis, try the Highway 55 bridge area and at the far west access. An accessible shorefishing spot to try for toothy fish on the walleye and northern pike opener would be Ringo Lake (Highway 71) and possibly between Minnetaga and Kasota lakes depending on extent of winterkill. Of course, anywhere where there is flow coming into a lake, especially warmer water flow, could be worth the effort to find hungry fish. After a heavy rainfall, the storm drainage at the stoplight of Civic Center Drive and Highway 23 on the east side of Willmar Lake can be a great spot.

Given the relatively long winter and below normal water levels, some partial winterkill on a few shallow waterbodies has occurred. There has been a handful of dead fish reports thus far (e.g., Mud/Monongalia near New London, Minnetaga, Elizabeth, Wood, etc.). "Not so fast" though on ruling these lakes out this year. Our field crew will set some test nets prior to the opener in these lakes and if it goes like it usually does, there will be plenty of fish left. Give the Spicer office a call in early May at 320-409-2044 for winterkill/testnet updates. Lake Wakanda water levels because of a planned partial drawdown the previous two summers are expected to be too low to easily launch trailered boats until sometime after May 14 when water levels are expected to gradually come back to normal.

Each year, aquatic invasive species are being spread to more and more area and statewide lakes causing harm to economies, environments and human health. **Clean** your watercraft, **drain** all water, **dispose** of unused bait. Protect your waters by following all Minnesota aquatic invasive species laws, found on the [DNR website](#), or refer to the [2022 Minnesota Fishing Regulations booklet](#) now in multiple languages. The current Minnesota Infested Waters List selected just for Kandiyohi County lakes with zebra mussels and/or Eurasian watermilfoil (lakes in bold with an asterisk have both zebra mussels and Eurasian watermilfoil, not-bolded lakes only have zebra mussels) now includes **Andrew***, **Calhoun***, Diamond, Eagle, **Elkhorn***, **Florida***, **Games***, George, **Green***, **Henderson***, Nest and **Norway***. Starry stonewort is now found in 18 lakes statewide, first occurring in Lake Koronis (identified in 2015) where it reaches nuisance levels outcompeting native vegetation in several areas of the lake despite widespread control efforts.

Waterbodies in the Spicer fisheries area that are managed with regulations differing from statewide regulations include: sunfish daily possession limit of 10 on Long (near Hawick), Nest and Florida and five on Diamond and George; Crappie daily possession limit of five on George; walleye daily possession limit of three on Green; bass on Long (near Hawick) between 14-20 inches must be immediately released.

Walleye

Lakes where recent fisheries surveys show excellent populations of adults include shallow lakes Big Kandiyohi, Minnetaga, Carrie, Ringo, Wakanda (when water levels come back up), and deeper lakes Diamond, Green, Koronis, and Point. Lakes not on the previous list that may have excellent walleye populations based on fall electrofishing samples of young walleye 3-5 years ago include Andrew and Eagle and shallower lakes like Cottonwood, Swenson, Lady Slipper and Long (by Willmar).

Bass

Just about every lake starting a few miles north of Willmar in Kandiyohi County is worth angling for largemouth bass with East Solomon, Long (by Willmar), Florida and Koronis being particularly good right now. Smaller lakes with good bass populations include Monson, Camp and Bass. Weekend bass tournaments are very popular on Green

and Koronis. Lakes with excellent smallmouth and largemouth bass angling are Koronis, Nest, Eagle and Green.

Sunfish

Lakes where recent fisheries surveys show excellent populations of quality sized Bluegill include Florida, Long (near Hawick), Nest, Mud/Monongalia (partial winterkill), George, Elkhorn, Diamond, Camp and Bass.

Crappie

Look to Foot, Long (near Willmar), Rice (near Paynesville) and Ringo lakes for some of the better populations of crappie recently sampled in Spicer area lakes. If searching for a trophy, look to fish Nest Lake, as there is a decent group of 14-16 inch fish.

Northern pike

Look to East Solomon, Koronis and Rice, Mud/Monongalia (partial winterkill possible), Diamond, Camp and Green for the best combination of numbers and size right now.

Yellow perch

Cottonwood Lake may be the place to be for larger yellow perch in addition to Big Kandiyohi and Wakanda (when water levels come back up). Also, potentially Lady Slipper, Lillian, School Grove and Tyson.

Waterville area

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

The “A” topic among anglers this past winter was the wind. Had snow been the main discussion we likely would have been looking at widespread winterkill, given low water levels at most lakes. However, most lakes were spared. Oxygen dipped in some lakes, but winterkill appears limited to a few shallow lakes. Walleye fishing was strong on many area lakes during early ice and hopefully, that translates to a strong opener and open water season. For more information visit [LakeFinder](#) on the DNR website or the [Waterville 2022 Area Outlook](#).

Walleye

Good natural reproduction over the past 3-4 years has walleye populations looking strong in many area lakes. Fountain Lake and Albert Lea Lake both had good numbers of large fish. Elysian Lake has seen excellent walleye action the past few years and shows no sign of slowing down. Lakes connected to the Cannon River also have excellent numbers. Area rearing ponds like Loon Lake (Blue Earth County) and Eagle Lake may also provide good action. Traditional favorites such as Madison Lake, Lake Washington and Tetonka Lake should also provide good action. Walleye anglers have many options.

Don't overlook area rivers such as the Minnesota, Blue Earth, Le Sueur, Cannon or Watonwan this spring. River levels have improved from last summer, but conditions vary across the region. Check [river levels](#) on the DNR website or visit the river you plan to fish before heading out. Shore angling spots exist on most area rivers and provide the boat-less angler a great opportunity to land walleye.

Northern pike

Northern pike have benefited from years of high water (2021 excluded) and good natural reproduction on top of stocking. Northern pike numbers in most lakes are in the range considered desirable by anglers and managers alike. Few lakes in the area suffer from the “hammer handle” problem common in other parts of the state. Northern pike over 24 inches can be found at many lakes including Madison Lake, Ballantyne Lake and the German/Jefferson Chain. Lura Lake and Reeds Lake will be hard to beat for numbers, but the northern pike will likely run small.

A few lakes in the Waterville area are managed specifically for northern pike and yellow perch. These lakes include Pickerel Lake, Freeborn Lake and Geneva Lake. Pickerel Lake and Geneva Lake each experienced some winterkill

during 2020-2021 but netting shortly after ice-out showed that many northern pike (and yellow perch) survived. Netting also showed an abundance of northern pike measuring up to 25 inches in Freeborn Lake.

Remember, Waterville area lakes are included in the northern pike management Southern Zone. Anglers are limited to two northern pike daily. Northern pike must also be at least 24 inches long to be kept. These regulations have been in place since 2018 but we still see many northern pike less than 24 inches kept. St. Olaf Lake has a 30-inch minimum length limit and a possession limit of one fish.

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.

Windom area

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

The Windom fisheries management area 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 2021-2022 proved to be somewhat mild, as snowfall was minimal, and ice duration and thickness typical. Oxygen monitoring was conducted periodically during this last winter and that information can be viewed [here](#). Overall, ice anglers reported a good ice fishing season. Most ice fishing activity ended in early March because of unseasonably warm temperatures that deteriorated ice conditions and public accesses. Anglers should expect good fishing during the open water season, as walleye and northern pike populations are in good shape in many Windom area lakes. For additional information regarding stocking, fish surveys, oxygen monitoring, contour maps and other fish management activities, visit the [Windom area fisheries page](#).

Walleye

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 2022 walleye opener should be a good one, as the gill net catch rate in the 2020 survey was 14.8 per gill net, which is near the upper end of expected catch rates for lakes like Shetek. The 2021-2022 ice fishing season was good on Lake Shetek and that should continue into the open water season. Lengths of walleye averaged around 14 inches, with good numbers of harvestable fish available. 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 panfish. Black 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 black 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 2021 was 38.0 per gill net, which should provide some phenomenal fishing in 2022. 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. We have such a good population of walleye on Lake Sarah that we conducted a walleye egg take. During egg take operations during the spring of 2021, many 25-plus 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. Historically, the best walleye fishing to be from mid-May to mid-June, and then again in the fall. 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.

Kansas Lake (398 acre) Watonwan County

Kansas Lake provides the potential to get a limit of walleye in short order, as this lake is absolutely loaded with walleye. In the 2021 survey, walleye were sampled at a rate of 53.5 per gill net, which is off the charts! Not only are they very abundant, nearly all of the sampled walleye were longer than 14 inches. The walleye population currently in Kansas Lake has the potential to create memories that will last a lifetime! A good winter bite during the winter of 2021-2022 likely has this lake “on the map” of many anglers, so plan ahead.

Clear Lake (68 acres) Lyon County

Clear Lake in the city of Russell is overflowing with walleye. In 2021, the gill net catch rate was 61.0 per gill net. While it is an incredible catch rate, it makes it that much more impressive given the small size of the lake. Many of the walleye sampled were 14-15 inches in length. Great option to consider if our southwest Minnesota weather decides to blow 30-plus mph at opener.

Dead Coon Lake (547 acres) Lincoln County

Dead Coon Lake should be your destination for an action-packed 2022 opener. The 2021 walleye catch rate on Dead Coon was 17.3 per gill net. Walleye that were in that 17-18 inch range dominated the 2021 catch. Dead Coon Lake should be a destination that isn't terribly 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 33.3 per gill net in 2021. 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 2022 opener.

East Stay Lake (221 acres) Lincoln County

One thing is for certain, anglers will not be able to STAY away from East Stay Lake if they give it a try this spring. The waters of East Stay Lake are literally crawling with walleye. The survey conducted in 2020 netted 26 walleye per gill net. Not only are there a lot of walleye, they are large as lengths ranged from 7.6 to 26.4 inches and averaged 18.8 inches. The only problem you may have at this gem is that you will catch too many big walleye, as many of them exceeded 20 inches in length. Additionally, this lake does have Curlyleaf Pondweed (non-native aquatic vegetation) that can alter your normal angling strategies for walleye.

Round Lake (929 acres) Jackson County

This ever-popular walleye lake may be poised to give up some fish on the 2022 opener. In the 2021 survey, walleye were captured at a rate of 14.7 per gill net. Many of the walleye sampled were larger than 14 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 winter of 2021-2022 again produced a great walleye bite. The excellent bite was not a surprise, as the 2020 survey indicated an abundant walleye population, as the gill net catch rate was 25.0 per gill net. Lengths of walleye were nice averaging 15.6 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 2020 indicated an abundant population as the gill net catch

of 24.3 was the second highest catch ever recorded on Loon Lake. Lengths of walleye ranged from 9 to 24 inches and averaged 15.6 inches, with the majority of walleye being between 13 and 17 inches. The good fishing should continue into 2022, 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 shore fishing. 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 2021. 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, especially at opener. 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 is typically high on Clear Lake; 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 2021. Plan ahead, as it is likely that Clear Lake will be busy on the opener.

Secondary options for walleye

Imogene Lake (185 acres) Martin County

16.0 per gill net in 2021; average length was 17.2 inches. Another "smaller" lake to consider when weather is tough.

Little Spirit Lake (572 acres) Jackson County

Walleye angling is open year-round on this Iowa-Minnesota border water! Although open year-round it does have a three-fish limit. Indeed, this IA/MN border water does have more to offer than world class Bullhead fishing cherished by our neighbors to the south, it currently boasts a top-notch Walleye population. The 2020 gill net catch rate was 19.0 per gill net with fish ranging from 10 to 26 inches and averaging 15.8 inches.

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 Black and White Crappie population with harvestable size fish!

Bingham Lake (269 acres) Cottonwood County

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

Bean Lake (162 acres) Cottonwood County

17.5 per gill net in 2020; average length of 18.6 inches.

Wood Lake (373 acres) Lyon County

24 per gill net in 2020; average length of 11 inches.

Northern pike

Don't forget about the [northern pike regulations](#) that were new in 2018! A zone 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). Find more information in the [2022 Minnesota Fishing Regulations](#).

Lake Shaokotan (996 acres) Lincoln County

Lake Shaokotan will be a popular destination when the Minnesota fishing opener rolls around in 2022. If you're looking for steady action with the chance to catch a limit of northern pike, Shaokotan is the place to do it. Pike are everywhere in Lake Shaokotan with a 2021 catch rate of 7 per gill net. Northern pike sampled in 2021 ranged in length from 20.3 to 31.5 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 8.3 per gill net in 2021 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 (12.5 per gill net in 2021), making it an ideal destination if you are looking for steady pike action. Strong natural reproduction in this lake sustains this robust pike population. Lengths of pike ranged from 16 to 30 inches and averaged 24.8 inches. Pike fishing in St. James Lake has the potential to be fast and furious when the Minnesota opener rolls around.

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. Lime Lake is used as a source for northern pike broodstock, which are used for raising northern pike fingerlings for stocking in the Windom area. Each spring, pre-spawn adult broodstock 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.

Buffalo Lake (124 acres) Murray County

Buffalo Lake had a robust population of northern pike as the 2021 catch rate was 15.5 per gill net. Multiple year classes are present with lengths of pike ranging from 15 to 35 inches and averaging 24.3 inches. Many of the fish are above the 24-inch minimum size limit.

Additional opportunities for northern pike

Mountain Lake (230 acres) Cottonwood County

6 per gill net in 2018, averaged 28 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.

Cedar Lake (710 acres) Martin County

4 per gill net in 2018, averaged 25.4 inches.

East Stay Lake (221 acres) Lincoln County

7 per gill net in 2020, 20 to 30 inches with an average of 26 inches.

2022 Minnesota River Fishing Outlook

Overview

After low water conditions during much of 2021, Minnesota River anglers are excited to enjoy the typically higher

spring flows during the early 2022 fishing season. Prior to fishing opener, and even before many area lakes are void of ice, anglers will head to the Minnesota River in search of abundant channel catfish, trophy-sized flathead catfish (season opened April 1), hard fighting white bass, and other species like common carp and freshwater drum. After fishing opener, some Minnesota River anglers will switch gears and start targeting walleye, sauger and northern pike. Creek mouths are popular fishing spots during May. The Minnesota River is one of the most diverse fisheries in the state and is a great destination for catching unique species such as buffalo, gar, redhorse and shovelnose sturgeon. Be sure to check river levels before heading out to the Minnesota River since conditions can change rapidly after large amounts of precipitation ([USGS River Gages](#)).

Access

Shore fishing access is available 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. Consult the [DNR Recreation Compass](#) to learn more about shore fishing and boat access locations on the Minnesota River.

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. Popular shore fishing locations include below Lac qui Parle Dam and below Big Stone National Wildlife Refuge Dam. However, numerous other public shore fishing locations and boat ramps are present along this stretch of river. For instance, there is a concrete boat ramp, ample parking space, and a dock at Wegdahl County Park near Montevideo.

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 pounds and walleyes up to 28 inches from this 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 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, several 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 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 50 pounds. Flathead catfish fishing is typically best during late May and early June, and then again after the spawn during late July into September. The lower 17 miles of the Minnesota River downstream of the Highway 169 bridge are the most navigable by larger boats, but watch out for barge traffic.