

# Southern Region Fishing Outlook for 2023

## Outlook by areas

**April 24, 2023**

By all accounts, the winter of 2022-23 was a tough one for lake travel by ice anglers in southern Minnesota. Heavy early snowstorms dominated much of the region and it continued through January, just as the usual cold-snap settled in to create thicker ice conditions than normal. When all was said and done, the winter ranked in the top-5 for snowfall totals. It had created a blanket on our lakes that reduced sunlight penetration and oxygen production – essential for fish survival. Our DNR crews had recorded lower oxygen readings on many shallow lakes, setting up an anticipated higher degree of possible winter kill to watch for. The results would later pan out not as severe as we thought after ice-out observations during the middle of April 2023. While we did experience natural fish winter kill on several shallow lakes, various gamefish species still present after ice-out in suggested it was only a partial kill – remarkably most pronounced by loss of common carp and buffalo fish. When this scenario occurs in the southernmost part of Minnesota, lake communities and anglers come to expect it.

Both natural reproduction of the remaining gamefish species, along with strategic spring stocking where needed, will once again put these lakes back on track to support a viable and quality fishery within two years.

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

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 "top-10" walleye fishing prospects for the spring of 2023:

- **Big Swan Lake (Meeker County)** – a great walleye resource in the Hutchinson area.
- **Minnie-Belle Lake (Meeker County)** – continues to provide quality walleye near Hutchinson.
- **Traverse Lake (Traverse County)** – has been a walleye factory for years offering all sizes.
- **Cottonwood Lake (County)** – a shallow lake consistently providing walleye action each spring.
- **Eagle Lake (Kandiyohi County)** – has a fair number of 15–19-inch walleye right now.
- **Koronis Lake (Stearns County)** – one of the most popular Spicer area lakes with quality fish.
- **Norway Lake (Kandiyohi County)** – this lake offers a variety of walleye sizes and drum too!
- **Lake Washington (Le Sueur County)** – always a perennial favorite for walleye near Mankato.
- **Kansas Lake (Watonwan County)** – sleeper small shallow lake with lots of walleye.
- **Lake Shetek (Murray County)** – boasts as 2022 lake survey walleye catch of 33.8 per gill net.

## Minnesota River

### Overview

After entering the winter of 2022 with low water and drought conditions, a deep snowpack and rapid thaw had the Minnesota River spilling into its floodplain this spring. Hopefully, river levels will recede well before fishing opener, providing anglers with an abundance of shore fishing opportunities and easy boat launching at the various public water access sites situated along the banks of the Minnesota River. 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. Yet, recent surveys showed that roughly 80-percent of the fish caught, and 90-percent of the fish harvested from the Minnesota River include Channel Catfish, Freshwater Drum, and Walleye (and Sauger).

### Access

Shore fishing access is available at numerous State Parks, County Parks, City Parks, National Wildlife Refuges, Wildlife Management Areas, Aquatic Management Areas, and public water accesses. Watercrafts can launch 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 and use the [Cooperative Stream Gaging](#) to check water levels before heading to the river.

### Upstream of Granite Falls Dam

The Minnesota River from Granite Falls Dam upstream to Ortonville provides good channel catfish, freshwater drum, and walleye fishing. In fact, some days it may only take several minutes to catch a meal worth of fish. Popular shore fishing locations include below Lac qui Parle Dam and below Big Stone

National Wildlife Refuge Dam. Wegdahl County Park near Montevideo is one of the more popular boat accesses with amenities such as a concrete ramp, ample parking space, restrooms, and a dock.

### **Granite Falls Dam to Mankato**

This stretch of the Minnesota River provides outstanding fishing for channel catfish, flathead catfish, freshwater drum, and walleye. Catching a 45-pound flathead catfish or 28-inch Walleye is always a possibility. Walleye fishing 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. During summer months, fishing near log jams and current breaks provides the best chance at catching a monster flathead catfish, especially at night. Great shore fishing can be found downstream of Granite Falls Dam, at several Renville County Parks, and along the banks of Sibley Park and Land of Memories Park in Mankato.

### **Mankato to the Mississippi**

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

## **Hutchinson area**

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

By all accounts the 2022 fishing season was a very good one in the Hutchinson area. With good reports from many area lakes, 2022 will be a tough year to top. For 2023, there will be some uncertainty how the drought and extensive snow cover may have affected lakes. It is likely that smaller ponds will have some winterkill, but most larger lakes should be fine. Fishing prospects in 2023 should be good for the Hutchinson area. Collinwood has the potential to be the top lake in the area based on a nice Walleye year class coming of age and great fishing last year. Otherwise, Walleye fishing should be steady at several lakes. Bass fishing should be good as always, but anglers should be advised that bass fishing has seen a rise in popularity during 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.

**Walleye:** Last year Belle and Collinwood were the top lakes in the area for Walleye. Both had good bites all year. This good fishing should continue with new crops of fish coming up. Last year was also excellent on both lakes for young of year production so the future is bright. Marion last year was its typical self where there's a ton of fish, but there's lots to eat. The bite can be tough at times. Like Collinwood Lake last year, The Hutchinson DNR Fisheries office will be tagging Walleye in Lake Marion as part of a new study looking at genetics and angler harvest. If you catch a tagged Walleye in Marion, 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 into 2023. One lake that bounced

back recently was Washington. Net catches have been down for a while, but they have rebounded and people should be able to find some fish to catch. Fishing next door at Stella and Manuella should also be good. A final strong Walleye candidate is Lake Minnie-Belle. 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 at 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 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 variety of lakes.

**Sunfish:** Two of the top sunfish lakes in the area recently acquired special regulations. Minnie-Belle and Ripley both have 5 sunfish bag limits in order to increase the number of quality sunfish anglers catch. Naturally both these lakes are a good starting place for looking for larger sunfish. The top sunfish lake in the area however may be Francis by Kingston. There is a combination of both good size and numbers. 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 although they can be notoriously difficult to find. Because of their direct connection, Stella is also a good option for big 'gills. Clear by Watkins is another top sunfish lake in the area while 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 that are important for nest guarding and passing down parental male genetics. Releasing the biggest sunfish and keeping 7-inch and under sunfish can preserve large sunfish opportunities for years to come.

**Crappie:** The Hutchinson area offers good Crappie fishing for people looking for something for the frying pan. Belle and Swan Lake are traditional spots for many local anglers. Clear by Watkins also has been good for several years now for both open water and ice angling for Crappie. For anglers looking for true giants, Minnie-Belle has the largest Crappies in the area. Those anglers chasing big Crappies 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.

**Northern Pike:** The top Northern Pike fishing opportunity in the Hutchinson area for large sized fish is Minnie-Belle Lake. Minnie-Belle Lake has had a protective slot limit of 24 inch to 36 inch for more than 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 of 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 is a safe bet.

**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 places anglers can target Channel Catfish. In addition, the Minnesota River is the 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 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.

Low oxygen levels in the winter of 2022/2023 may have caused some degree of fish kill in several popular lakes. Ortonville fisheries staff will conduct spring netting in Artichoke, East Toqua, Long Tom, Long, Steep Bank, John and Porter Lakes to determine the status of these fisheries. Therefore, the following discussion will not include these lakes. Please contact the fisheries office for updates. Lakes will be restocked with gamefish when necessary.

**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 Traverse, Big Stone and Lac qui Parle lakes. Oliver, Del Clark and Hendricks 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 several options. Big Stone is a perennial favorite with high numbers of perch, many from 8-10 inches. Hendricks has large perch, but numbers have declined recently. Perch and Del Clark lakes have good numbers of perch but most were less than 8 inches.

**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. 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. Del Clark is the best prospect for numbers of pike, with the potential for a trophy. Perch, Traverse, Hendricks, and Lac qui Parle also have decent numbers with some over 30 inches. Big Stone has a lower abundance of pike but the population has been relatively stable and large fish are also present.

**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 except Big Stone and Lac qui Parle which have decent numbers of large bullheads, and Hendricks that has very high numbers of 6-8 inch 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 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 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. A catch and release only sturgeon season is present in the MN portion of Big Stone Lake that opens June 16.

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.***

As of this writing (4/19/2023), the shallower (<15 feet max depth) Spicer Fisheries Management Area (SFMA) lakes are either ice free or nearly ice free; however, the deeper lakes are still mostly ice covered destined for a late ice out date. The majority of lakes managed as fishing lakes in the 7-county SFMA are found in Kandiyohi County. Outside of Kandiyohi County, the SFMA also manages lakes near Paynesville (Rice and Koronis), Benson (Camp and Monson) and south of Granite Falls (Wood, Cottonwood, School Gove, Lady Slipper, and Tyson).

With the relatively long winter, heavy snowfalls and few winter thawing events, some winterkill of fish due to low dissolved oxygen levels has occurred. SFMA lakes with known winterkill events are Swenson, Mud/Monongalia near New London, Elizabeth/Ella and Schoolgrove (near Cottonwood, MN). Winterkill checks will be conducted in these and other known winterkill lakes to determine surviving fish present and if re-stocking is necessary. Feel free to call us (320-409-2044) for those results prior to May 13<sup>th</sup>.

Nonetheless, the SFMA provides quality year-round shore and boat angling opportunities for traditional gamefish species such as sunfish, crappie, and Yellow Perch. Beginning on May 13<sup>th</sup> (this year's "Opener" date), Walleye, Northern Pike, and bass can be angled for (bass are catch and release only until May 27<sup>th</sup>). Don't forget about the opportunities that other fish species present as well for both fun and table-fare such as freshwater drum, bullhead, and carp. The SFMA challenge this year on lakes such as Norway, Games, Andrew, and Florida is to "Google" how to clean and cook a freshwater drum. For shore anglers on lakes like Foot/Willmar, "Google" how to catch (i.e., sweet corn) and smoke a carp or how to catch (i.e., piece of Slim Jim on a hook/bobber) and prepare bullhead "blackened" style. Chances are you might very well be surprised on how tasty those species can be and, in the process, save a few bucks on that red meat grocery bill!

When mother nature finally decides to warm 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. On Lake Koronis, try the HWY 55 bridge area and at the far west access. An accessible shore fishing spot to try on the "Opener" for Walleye would be Ringo Lake (HWY 71) and between Minnetaga and Kasota lakes. Of course, anywhere where there is flow coming into a lake, especially warmer water flow, should be worth the effort. For example, after a heavy rainfall, the storm drainage at the stoplight of Civic Center Drive and HWY 23 on the east side of Willmar Lake can be a great spot. There are many spots like this. We are constantly adding to our simple map of these shore-based locations available by request (spicer.fisheries@state.mn.us).

Each year, [aquatic invasive species](#) (AIS) are being spread to more and more area and statewide lakes. Protect your waters by following all "MN Aquatic Invasive Species Laws" found at [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us) or refer to the 2023 Minnesota Fishing Regulations booklet now in multiple languages. Area lakes on the "MN Infested Waters List" now include (zm-Zebra Mussels, ewm-Eurasian Watermilfoil, ss-Starry

Stonewort); Andrew (zm, ewm), Calhoun (zm/ewm), Diamond (zm), Eagle (zm), Elkhorn (zm/ewm), Florida (zm/ewm), Games (zm/ewm), George (zm), Green (zm/ewm), Henderson (zm/ewm), Koronis (zm/ss), Rice (ss), Nest (zm), Norway (zm/ewm), and Willmar (zm).

Waterbodies in the SFMA that are managed with fishing harvest regulations differing from 'statewide' regulations include a reduced sunfish 'daily' possession limit of 10 on Long (near Hawick), Nest, and Florida and 5 on Diamond and George; a reduced crappie 'daily' possession limit of 5 on George; a reduced Walleye 'daily' possession limit of 3 on Green; and, bass between 14-20 inches must be immediately released on Long (near Hawick).

**Walleye:** Lakes where recent fisheries netting or electrofishing surveys show current excellent populations include Andrew, Cottonwood, Eagle, Koronis, Minnetaga, Norway, and Schoolgrove (winterkill check needed to confirm). The shallower (i.e., warmer) lakes or shallow bays of deeper lakes may be the preferred locations to fish this year at the beginning of the season as the recently spawned-out adult Walleye seek warmer water to recover and feed. Also consider targeting inlets coming from shallow/rapidly warming wetlands. Slip bobbers or crankbaits may be the ticket.

**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 Norway being particularly good. Smaller lakes with quality bass populations include Monson, Camp and Bass. Lakes with excellent smallmouth AND largemouth bass angling are Koronis, Nest, Eagle, and Green. Smallmouth Bass angling on Big Kandiyohi Lake has recently become popular.

**Sunfish:** Lakes where recent fisheries surveys show excellent populations of quality sized bluegill include Florida, Long (near Hawick), Nest, George, Elkhorn, Diamond, Green, and Bass.

**Crappie:** Diamond Lake has another massive year-class of crappie ready (9+ inches). Also look to Foot, Rice (near Paynesville), and Ringo lakes for some of the best area current crappie populations. If searching for a trophy, look to Nest Lake where 14-16 inch 'slabs' occur.

**Northern Pike:** Look to East Solomon, Koronis, Rice, Diamond, Florida, and Green for the best combination of numbers and size right now.

**Yellow Perch:** Cottonwood Lake (near Cottonwood, MN) is the place to be for larger Yellow Perch right now. Traditional SFMA lakes that have historically produced "Jumbos" are Big Kandiyohi, Wakanda, Minnetaga, and Lillian (depending on winterkill extent). Tyson Lake south of Wood Lake, MN also has decent sized perch right now.

## **Waterville area**

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

Winterkill took a toll on Walleye in many local shallow lakes popular with anglers. Ice-out netting showed little in the way of Walleye at favorites like Eagle Lake, Lake Elysian, and Lake Crystal. Smaller lakes used as rearing ponds such as Henry Lake or Sprague Lake likely experienced winterkill as well. Other lakes appear to have been spared – Lura Lake and Freeborn Lake both survived the winter



relatively unscathed. Weather will also be a factor for those deciding which species to target and where to target them – it always is. A late ice-out and slow onset of spring (minus a few days of summer in between snow showers) may mean cooler water temps and different tactics. Then again, summer could return at any moment and throw us all for a loop once again. Whatever the weather brings we're all looking forward to some open water fishing. For more information visit [LakeFinder](#) on the MN DNR website or the [Waterville 2023 Area Outlook](#).

**Walleye:** Anglers should target large, deep lakes that typically don't winterkill for Walleye. Madison Lake and Lake Washington are perennial favorites but may be a little busier than usual this year due to hosting the Governor's Fishing Opener. Other lakes to consider are Lake Tetonka, Fountain Lake, Clear Lake in Waseca County, or Loon Lake in Blue Earth County.

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 conditions at 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 numbers in most area 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, Clear Lake in Waseca County, and the German/Jefferson Chain. Lura Lake, Rays Lake, and Reeds Lake will be hard to beat for numbers.

Remember, Waterville Area lakes are included in the northern pike management Southern Zone. Anglers are limited to 2 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 1 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.

**Largemouth Bass:** For fast action Largemouth Bass anglers should check out lakes with high numbers such as Lake Frances, St Olaf, or Clear Lake in Waseca. Lakes with low to medium densities of bass such as Lake Tetonka, Cannon Lake, Ballantyne Lake, and Lura Lake often offer the best crack at fish topping the 20-inch mark. Clear Lake in Waseca is catch-and-release only for Largemouth Bass.

**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; the Buckmaster's Bridge area on Madison Lake; 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 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 Lake and Roberds Lake also sport 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 for common carp.

## **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 due to lack of precipitation during the summer and fall and ice is snow covered. During the summer and fall of 2022, southwest Minnesota was in a severe drought where precipitation was sparse much of the year, resulting in extremely low water levels at ice on. This past winter was one of the snowiest in recent history, with ice thickness approaching 30 inches at some southwest Minnesota lakes. These factors, coupled with snow cover on the ice all winter, may result in partial fish kills across the Windom Fish Management Area. Dissolved oxygen readings for area lakes during the winter of 2022-2023 can be viewed [here](#). During the winter of 2022-2023, anglers reported poor fishing much of the winter. Mobility issues due to deep snow on many of our lakes we suspect limited some angler's opportunities and the amount of ice fishing at times. Despite the tough winter, there are still a lot of lakes that should provide good fishing this spring. For additional information regarding stocking, fish surveys, oxygen monitoring, contour maps, and other fish management activities, please visit the Windom area fisheries webpage at [here](#).

### **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 2023 Walleye opener should be a good one, as the gill net catch rate in the 2022 survey was 33.8 per gill net, the second highest catch rate ever recorded at Lake Shetek. Several years of good open water and ice fishing on Lake Shetek should continue into the 2023 open water season. Lengths of Walleye averaged around 12.8 inches, but good numbers of harvestable fish were also sampled. If Walleye action is slow, anglers can try their luck in catching Black Crappie as they are also present in in good numbers. Action could be fast if you locate a downed tree that they are hanging around and many are over 10 inches. Although fishing pressure may be high on the opener, Shetek's vast surface area should provide plenty of options. Zebra Mussels were determined to be present in Lake Shetek in 2022 so anglers should take the appropriate precautions when boating.

#### **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 2023. 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 in the spring of 2022, many 25+ inch Walleye were observed, with fish up to 12 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. 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!

### **Dead Coon Lake (547 acres) Lincoln County**

Dead Coon Lake should be your destination for an action packed 2023 opener. The 2021 Walleye catch rate on Dead Coon was 17.3 per gill net. 17-18 inch Walleye 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 2023 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 26.0 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.

### **Round Lake (929 acres) Jackson County**

This ever popular Walleye lake may be poised to give up some fish on the 2023 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 excellent Walleye 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 2023, 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 16.7 during the 2022 survey, which is the highest catch rate in nearly a decade. Additionally, many adult Walleye were observed while electrofishing for fingerlings during the fall of 2022. Average length of Walleye in the 2022 survey was 15.5 inches with many of the Walleye being longer than 14.0 inches in length.

### **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 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 2023. 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.

#### **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. 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.

#### **Yankton Lake, (403 acres), Lyon County**

16.0 per gill net in 2022, average length of 17.9 inches.

#### **Mountain Lake (241 acres) Cottonwood County**

14.0 per gill net in 2022; average length of 17.5 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**

24.0 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 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 2023 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 2023. 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 2021 catch rate of 7.0 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 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.

### **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. Buffalo Lake may have experienced a

partial winterkill during the winter of 2022 – 2023, as there were reports of dead fish in the aeration hole and the dissolved oxygen was low.

**Additional Opportunities for Northern Pike:**

**Bingham Lake, (269 acres) Cottonwood County**

8.3 per gill net in 2022, averaged 24.2 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. May have winterkilled during the winter of 2022-2023.

**Cedar Lake (710 acres) Martin County**

4.0 per gill net in 2018, averaged 25.4 inches.

**East Stay Lake (221 acres) Lincoln County**

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