

2024 Wild Rice Harvesting Season Outlook

brought to you by DNR Wildlife staff

31 July 2024

Northwest Minnesota

- **Detroit Lakes (western Becker County)**

Wild rice stands in the Detroit Lakes work area are variable this year. Water levels at ice-out were quite low but there was one large, widespread rain event in mid-June and many isolated storms in early summer that significantly raised water levels on most basins. Rice coverage on many basins seems lower than average and much of the rice is short this year. Rice in rivers and flowages seems to be doing better than average. Scouting will be vital this year to find the best stands of harvestable rice.

- **Fergus Falls (Otter Tail County)**

As of the end of July, wild rice stands in Otter Tail County are average this year. Waterways in the western 2/3 of Otter Tail County have seen high flows throughout July, until the last week of the month when it returned to regular flows like were seen in the month of June. Whereas waterways in the eastern 1/3 of Otter Tail County have seen regular flows through most of July, with high flows throughout most of June. The past three years of drought in the area have produced conditions favorable for wild rice production, providing wildlife food and shelter. But the drought also limited some access to wild rice harvesting and waterfowl hunting opportunities. That has changed in 2024, as waterways have returned to average-to-high water levels from weekly precipitation events in early summer. The rain has led to average rice growing conditions and less-challenging water accesses compared to years past. Some wild rice patches appear dense, but may be too short for harvesting, so scouting will be critical to find harvestable wild rice beds.

- **Park Rapids (Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Wadena, eastern Becker, & northwestern Cass counties)**

Wild rice stands on area lakes are generally below average this year with quite a bit of variability, while rivers and flowages tend to look a little better. The better stands of rice can be found in the far northern and southern parts of the area. Water levels at ice-out were quite low, but many early summer storms have significantly raised water levels on most basins. There is quite a bit of variability in local rice development, with some stands having been headed out for some time, while some have yet to put up heads. Access should be good this year, but harvesters may find rice that will be too short to harvest. As always, scouting will be essential to find harvestable rice.

Northeast Minnesota

- **Aitkin (Aitkin County)**

Harvesting rice in the Aitkin area will be very challenging this season. Several June storms and the resulting high water uprooted and washed out much of the rice on many popular harvesting lakes. The surviving stands are smaller and less dense, but may be harvestable. Plant development seems to be behind “normal” schedule, so expect the kernels to be ripe a little later than usual. On some waters plants are looking short, so bending seed heads into the canoe might be a problem. Scouting will be essential to find harvestable beds this year.

- **Brainerd (Crow Wing & southern Cass counties)**

Rice coverage in the Brainerd Lakes Area this year is spotty. Ample rain this spring and summer has drastically improved access conditions in the area, but did wipe out most wild rice stands on the rivers. Remaining coverage on area lakes and ponds is spotty with some areas hardly being affected and some totally being wiped out. As always, scouting will be beneficial to those that put in the time.

- **Cloquet (Carlton, Pine, and southern St. Louis counties)**

It is shaping up to be a very poor year for rice harvesting in the Cloquet area. It does not appear that there will be harvestable rice at Leeman or Kettle lakes, two of the more notable ricing locations in the Cloquet area. Wildlife staff have not scouted all of the area rice waters, but expectations are not high.

- **Grand Rapids (Itasca and northeastern Cass counties)**

Low water conditions in early spring provided favorable conditions for rice germination this season. However, major rain events in late-May and early-June caused many rice beds to flood, and many existing plants were ripped out or drowned. Isolated rain events through the rest of the growing season set-back growth of the remaining rice crop. Shallow lakes in northeastern Cass and northwestern Itasca counties are showing some recovery, with historic rice lakes containing 30-50% coverage of wild rice. Some have rice stalks that are 2-3 feet in height and flowering, some are 3-4 feet in height and flowering, and the remainder of the rice plants are in a delayed growth stage of 1-foot-tall emergent leaves and no vertical shoot. Recent strong winds have caused some isolated damage to developing rice in portions of Itasca County.

This year's wild rice crop will be good for waterfowl forage and waterfowl hunting conditions, but it will have limited height and seed abundance for wild rice harvest. Harvesters will likely find better areas of rice in river outlets, secluded bays, and along the fringes of historically productive lakes. Pre-scouting of rice beds will be an important step prior to rice harvesting in this area.

- **Tower (northern St. Louis and northern Lake counties)**

Wild rice in the area is very poor due to the large amounts of rain in June including a devastating 8-inch rain event June 18th. Water levels spiked causing many wild rice waters to bounce up near or above flood stage, uprooting rice when it was in the floating-leaf stage. There are some rare pockets of moderate density wild rice out there, mainly on larger reservoirs and rivers.

- **Two Harbors (Cook and southern Lake counties)**

Wild rice in the Two Harbors area (Lake and Cook Counties) was negatively impacted by the mid-June flooding that occurred as well as multiple large rain events in early June. The rice was slow to transition from floating-leaf to emergent stage, and so it is just behind where it should be this time of year. There are some lakes that were looking better than expected given the conditions, others just have patches of rice or rim rice around the edges.

- **aerial wild rice survey and 1854 Treaty Authority monitoring reports**
MN DNR Wildlife, the 1854 Treaty Authority, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and the U.S. Forest Service work together to conduct an aerial survey of many wild rice waters in northeast Minnesota. The survey is scheduled for mid to late August. Photos will be posted to the 1854 Treaty Authority's [Wild Rice Condition Updates page](#) shortly after the survey. The 1854 Treaty Authority also provides wild rice updates as information becomes available. That information is also found on the [Wild Rice Condition Updates page](#).