

DNR 2018 Fishing Opener Outlook for Northwest Region

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is very good with the biggest fish reaching 52 inches.

Walker

General Outlook for Walker Area: Ice out might not occur until May this year, which will be later than the historical average of April 26 than the previous three years. Walleye spawning should be winding down by the May 12 fishing opener but fish, especially males, could still be congregated and make for a very good, shallow bite for the opener.

Northern Pike are abundant in most area lakes with smaller fish easy to find. Several lakes in the Walker Area have a protected slot limit of 24 to 36 inches for Northern Pike. In most cases, surveys have found an increase in the proportion of Northern Pike 30+ inches long since the regulations were implemented in 2003. With exception to lakes with a 24 to 36 inch protected slot limit, all others in the area will fall under the new regulation for pike in the North Central Zone, which is a 10 fish limit with only two longer than 26.0 inches. Pan-fish action should be good in shallow water areas by Memorial Day.

A number of lakes in the Walker area have experimental or special regulations for certain species. These special rules are designed to maintain or improve fishery quality. A notice of these regulations is typically posted at each lake's public access. Anglers should consult their 2018 Minnesota Fishing Regulations booklet for the most current information.

Rainbow Trout are stocked into five lakes in the Walker area and that harvest season also opens May 12. Diamond (82 acres) is located on the Woodtick Trail southeast of Walker and supports trout up to 20 inches. The lake has a very good concrete ramp maintained by the U.S. Forest Service that can handle larger watercraft on a trailer. Teepee (21 acres), located west of Diamond, is also accessible off of the Woodtick trail. It has an earthen access and trout up to 16 inches were sampled. This remote lake is best accessed with a canoe or small boat. Hazel (15 acres) is located east of Diamond Lake, provides a remote setting and has an earthen ramp best accessed with a canoe or small boat. Trout up to 17 inches have been sampled and this lake can be accessed from County Road 5. Perch (13 acres) is west of Backus and has trout up to 18 inches long. The lake is best accessed using a canoe or small boat from State Highway 87 along the Snoway #1 snowmobile trail.

Long (1,007 acres) is a new two-story fishery northeast of Longville that has traditionally supported Northern Pike, Black Crappie, and other species. Trout were introduced in 2016 and fish up to 20 inches are present. Long Lake has a well-developed access on the north shoreline. Diamond, Hazel, Perch, and Teepee are all designated trout lakes; anglers must have a valid Trout Stamp to fish on designated trout lakes and the use of live bait is prohibited. Long Lake is not designated as a trout

lake and the use of live bait is allowed but a Trout Stamp is required to harvest trout. All lakes are also open to winter trout angling, but the use of wheeled vehicles on designated snowmobile trails during winter is prohibited.

Woman Lake (5,496 acres), Child (285 acres), and Girl (428 acres) are located southeast of Longville in Cass County and connected by the Boy River, which is navigable by most boats between the three lakes. The main public accesses are on the south side of Child, the north side of Woman, and on the north side of Girl, all on County Road 5. Woman Lake has the majority of the Walleye habitat and supports an excellent population, with sizes sampled in the 2017 survey ranging from 8-24 inches long. There are very strong 2013 and 2016 year classes in the lake, with an above average number of fish in the 15-18 inch lengths. Similar to other good Walleye lakes in the area, anglers tend to do best until mid-June and again during September and October. Woman Lake also has a good population of quality-sized Yellow Perch and these are often targeted by anglers during fall and winter. Northern Pike numbers are similar to other lakes of this type. The proportion of Northern Pike longer than 28 inches increased since a protected slot limit of 24 to 36 inches was put in place in 2003. Smallmouth Bass are also abundant in Woman Lake and size quality is exceptional; fish exceeding 20 inches are frequently caught by anglers. Child and Girl lakes have better habitat for Largemouth Bass, Black Crappie, and Bluegill, and are better options for catching preferred sizes of these species. Pike numbers also tend to be higher in Child and Girl lakes. All three lakes support a low-density Muskellunge population with excellent sizes.

Large Lake outlook

Lake of the Woods: Walleye and Sauger are the most important sport fish on Lake of the Woods, and as such those populations are monitored annually. This assessment has been conducted every September since 1981, so there is a lot of good population trend data available for these species.

There were strong Walleye year classes produced in 2011 and 2013. These Walleye range from 14 to 18 inches long, and should be very abundant on the opener. In addition to these keeper-size walleye, anglers should also notice good numbers of small walleye, in the 6 to 10-inch range. These walleye showed up in good numbers in our annual fall survey, as well as during the creel survey conducted last winter.

Lake of the Woods is well known for the trophy-size Walleye that anglers catch every year, and Walleye up to 32 inches are sampled every year during DNR fish sampling. Consider that these fish are quite old, and that it takes a long time for them to get to be of trophy size. Carefully consider what you will do with one of these fish before you harvest it, as it may have more value to the gene pool than it does as a fillet. Gener-

ally, a 25-inch long Walleye is about 10 years old, and a 30-inch Walleye is about 20 years old.

Overall Sauger abundance increased to the highest level since 2011 due to strong year classes produced in 2011, 2014, and 2015. Sauger length ranged from 6-18 inches with good numbers in the 12-15 inch range.

Anglers should be aware of special fishing regulations on Lake of the Woods. These regulations are designed to maintain a quality fishery and fishing experience. The combined Walleye-Sauger limit is six, but no more than four of those fish may be Walleye. All Walleye between 19.5 and 28 inches in length must be immediately released, and only one Walleye longer than 28 inches may be possessed.

Northern Pike are frequently overlooked by many anglers on Lake of the Woods. Both Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River support populations of trophy pike, with individuals over 40 inches long. The Northern Pike season is open continuously on Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River. The period immediately after ice-out is an excellent time to participate in this fishery. Anglers who would like to target Northern Pike should focus their efforts near spawning sites. Major spawning sites are Bostic Creek, Zippel Bay, and the Warroad River.

Northern Pike are also managed by special regulation. The possession limit is three. All Northern Pike from 30 to 40 inches long must be released immediately. An angler may possess one Northern Pike over 40 inches long.

Lake Sturgeon are another species that anglers may encounter, particularly if fishing the lower reaches of the Rainy River or Fourmile Bay. Sturgeon are highly vulnerable to over-harvest, so the regulations governing the harvest of these fish are fairly restrictive. Anglers that have purchased a Lake Sturgeon Harvest Tag may harvest one Lake Sturgeon per license year. The harvest season runs from April 24 to May 7, and from July 1 to September 30. Anglers may catch and release fish for sturgeon from May 8 to May 15, and from October 1 through the following April 23. The Lake Sturgeon season is closed from May 16 to June 30, so anglers cannot fish for sturgeon during this period. Only Lake Sturgeon from 45 to 50 inches long, or over 75 inches long, may be harvested.

Anglers should also be aware that Lake Sturgeon regulations are much more restrictive in Ontario. Sturgeon are classified as "Threatened" and the fishing season is closed. You may not harvest, or fish for, sturgeon on the Ontario portions of Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River. If you are fishing for Lake Sturgeon, know which side of the border you are on.

Spiny water flea, an invasive species, was discovered in Lake of the Woods in 2007, so Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River have been designated as infested waters. With this infestation, anglers have an obligation to prevent the spread of this in-

vading species to other water bodies. Spiny water fleas are predators that will compete with young Walleye, Sauger and Yellow Perch for food resources. They are a highly undesirable species in any water body. Anglers must make sure they do not transport any lake water in their boats. Bilges, live wells and bait wells must all be drained at boat landings, and boat has to be trailered with all of the plugs out. Also, spiny water flea tends to wrap around fishing line and anchor rope, so anglers must clean their fishing equipment when leaving the lake or river. Check the DNR web site for more specific information of how to prevent the spread of spiny water flea.

Cass Lake: Cass Lake, and connected waters, are typically a good choice for early season Walleye fishing, particularly in years in years when ice out is later, like things are shaping up for this year. During these late years, fishing near the Mississippi or Turtle River mouths can be very productive – particularly in the early morning or evening. The inlets and outlets of the connected waters are also popular. The Walleye population is healthy and comprised of good numbers of fish distributed among many different size and age classes. Angler catch rates should be good, with an abundance of fish from the strong 2013 year class that are in the 15- to 17-inch range as well as a

number of fish in the low- to mid-twenties. Although night fishing has been popular on Cass Lake for a number of years the water, which was already clear, has gotten even clearer from the recent zebra mussel invasion. As a result, fishing when there is a chop on the water or during low light periods tends to most productive.

The Northern Pike popula-

tion is at above-average levels of abundance with good numbers of fish between 22 and 30 inches. Cass Lake generally produces a few trophy Northern Pike each year as well. Cass is also well known as a premier native Muskellunge lake and anglers catch a wide size range of fish, with some topping 50 inches.

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