

DNR 2018 Fishing Opener Outlook for Northwest Region

(Continued from Page 2)

the shallower fishing lakes in the area might suffer. Those lakes that do suffer winter-kill will be restocked but it takes several years for a good fishery to develop again. If a late spring does materialize, walleye fishing could prove to be challenging as the fish are still recovering from spawning activities. Northern Pike should be active and feeding as they spawn earlier than walleyes. Spring fishing for black crappies is generally excellent and can be a great substitute for a slow walleye bite.

Island Lake, Becker County (1,142 acres) is located in south central Becker County approximately twenty miles east of the city of Detroit Lakes. Island Lake has an exceptional walleye population for a lake of its size and is entirely supported by natural reproduction. The historic average walleye catch rate for Island Lake is nearly 17 fish/net, and this was the case during the most recent fisheries assessment in 2017 when 15.3 fish/net were caught. Anglers should find plenty of harvestable size fish in Island Lake as walleyes have historically averaged just under 15 inches in length. Walleyes near this size are usually immature and as such would not be subjected to the rigors of spawning and would likely be actively feeding and easier to catch in a late spring. Island Lake is also one of the few lakes in the Detroit Lakes Area that support Smallmouth Bass. While Largemouth Bass are also found in Island Lake, Smallmouth Bass are more abundant and generally of larger size.

Lake Sarah (366 acres) located in south-central Polk County. The shallow nature and dark water make this lake a good candidate for early season walleye angling, particularly during a late spring year. Walleyes were introduced in Lake Sarah in 1974, and fry are currently stocked every other year. Natural reproduction of walleye has sporadically contributed to the fishery. In 2016, the relative abundance of walleye was extremely high (24.3 fish per net) and over twice the lake's historical average. The high abundance was the direct result of the very large 2012 year-class. These fish were four years old at the time of the survey and comprised 71% of all walleyes sampled. These fish averaged 16.3 inches in 2016. Growth data from Sarah Lake suggest these fish should be around 18 inches long during the 2018 fishing season.

Fergus Falls

General Outlook for Fergus Falls Area: As of early April, area lakes still have plenty of ice and extended forecasts are calling for below average temperatures. Unless weather conditions change, ice-out appears as if it is going to be late this year, especially on the large, deep lakes. Walleye spawning activities will occur later than normal and will likely occur during late April and into May. Anglers can expect to find Walleyes in spawn to post-spawn conditions by the May 12th opener. Late spawning seasons generally make for slower Walleye angling on the opener. North-

ern Pike may be more active as they spawn earlier than Walleyes. Panfish opportunities may be a viable option if the Walleye and Northern Pike are not cooperating. Many area lakes presently support abundant populations of Bluegill and Black Crappie with good size structures. Generally speaking, anglers should expect good Walleye fishing on area lakes during the 2018 season as several strong natural year classes and supplemental stockings have established abundant Walleye populations.

Big Pine Lake (4,730 acres) is located in northeastern Otter Tail County two miles east of Perham. DNR owned public accesses are located on the northwest, north, and south-east shorelines. Big Pine Lake is renowned as one of the best Walleye angling lakes in the county. The Walleye gill net catch rate during the 2017 standard fisheries survey was 18.3 per net, which indicates that the Walleye population is very abundant. Walleye net catches have consistently exceeded long range management goals for this lake. The 2014 and 2015 year classes are strong and they composed a majority of the Walleye sample. Walleyes from these year classes ranged in length from 10.3 to 16.8 inches with an average length of 13.4 inches. Overall, Walleyes ranged in length from 8.1 to 27.0 inches with an average length of 13.5 inches. Anglers are reminded that an 18.0 to 26.0 inch protected slot limit is in effect for Walleyes on Big Pine Lake. Anglers are allowed to possess one Walleye over 26.0 inches in length. A moderate density Northern Pike population exists with a good average size. Pike ranged in length from 20.2 to 31.7 inches with an average length and weight of 24.9 inches and 3.5 pounds.

Big McDonald Lake (935 acres) is located in north-central Otter Tail County nine miles west of Perham. A DNR owned concrete public access is located along the northwest shoreline of the lake. Big McDonald Lake is a good all-around fishing lake. Data from the 2017 standard fisheries survey indicate that many gamefish species are thriving in Big McDonald Lake. The Walleye catch rate was 9.1 per net, which exceeds the long range management goal for this lake. The 2014 year class is strong and correlates to a year of fingerling stocking. Walleyes from this year class ranged in length from 13.5 to 16.7 inches with an average length of 14.8 inches. Overall, Walleyes ranged in length from 11.4 to 24.2 with an average length of 16.8 inches. The Black Crappie and Bluegill populations are very abundant and possess excellent size structures. Black Crappies up to 13.9 inches in length were sampled and 79% of the sample measured 10.0 inches or greater in length. Bluegills up to 9.4 inches were sampled and 41% of the sample measured 7.0 inches or greater in length. Big McDonald Lake also has an abundant Largemouth Bass population. Bass ranged in length from 3.0 to 17.6 inches with an average length of 11.6 inches.

Franklin Lake (1,336 acres)

is located in northwestern Otter Tail County ten miles northeast of Pelican Rapids. DNR owned public accesses are located on the north and east shorelines of the lake. Franklin Lake is a good all-around fishing lake. The Walleye catch rate during the 2016 fish population assessment was 8.3 per net, which exceeds the long range management goal for this lake. Age data indicate that the 2013 and 2014 year classes are very strong as they composed a majority of the Walleye sample. Walleyes ranged in length from 7.8 to 18.9 inches with a mean length of 13.3 inches. The Black Crappie and Bluegill populations are very abundant and possess excellent size structures. Black Crappie up to 13.9 inches were sampled and ninety-seven percent of the Black Crappie sample was 10.0 inches or greater in length. Bluegill up to 10.0 inches were sampled and thirty-nine percent of the Bluegill sample was 8.0 inches or greater in length. Anglers are reminded of the Black Crappie regulation on Franklin Lake: minimum size limit is 10 inches with a possession limit of five.

Glenwood

General outlook for Glenwood Area lakes: As of late March, there continues to be more than 30 inches of ice on the lakes. It is reasonable to project that ice cover will linger for at least two more weeks and thus water temperatures will be cold on

the May 12 fishing opener. Shallower, productive prairie lakes in west-central Minnesota may be ice-free sooner and game-fish, particularly Walleyes and crappie, may be more active at the time of the opener than those deep, clear lakes in which walleye spawning activities may still be under way or wrapping

up. Based on 2017 survey information and size, Pelican Lake in Grant County and Lake Mary, Douglas County are 2018 fishing opener selections for the Glenwood Area. Other shallow lakes in Grant and Stevens counties merit consideration for fair to good Walleye and crappie fishing opportunities. Rec-


ommendation include Barrett and Pomme de Terre lakes in Grant County and Hattie, Long, Page, and Perkin lakes in Stevens County.

Pelican Lake (3,761 acres) is a large, shallow, fertile lake located in northeast Grant

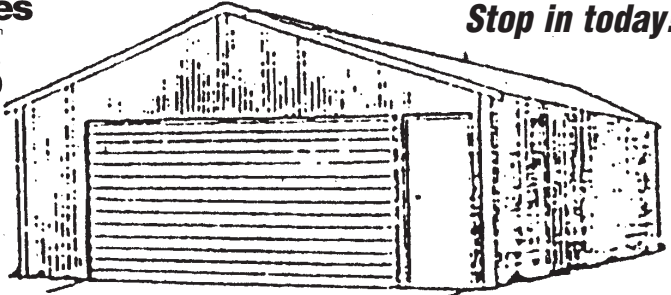
(Continued on Page 4)

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