

# Fishing in Minnesota's Northwest Region . . .

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population is maintained with fry stocking on a two of every three-year stocking rotation. The year-class currently dominating this population is the 2015 year-class, making up nearly 70% of the gill net sample. The dominance of this year-class is no surprise either as they were sampled as young of the year in fall of 2015 at record numbers of 750 per hour of electrofishing. This year-class is now prime for the harvest fishery ranging from 13-17 inches.

Anglers should expect a fair amount of Northern Pike action as well when fishing Blackduck Lake. The gill net catch rate of 6.27/net is not exceptionally high but there is an abundance of small pike under 22 inches in the population right now. These are perfect for the new expanded 10 fish bag limit in the North-Central Zone, but remember to release all Northern Pike from 22 to 26 inches. Once waters warm up and the Bluegill start biting, Blackduck will put out some high quality fish. Be aware that a special regulation limiting anglers to a five fish bag limit is in place.

Balm Lake, Beltrami County (537 acres): Balm Lake is one of the lakes managed with Walleye fingerling stocking in the Bemidji Management Area. The alternate year stocking rotation has been very successful producing a Walleye population sampled at 15.67/gill net in the recent 2018 assessment. While this sounds appealing as a Walleye destination you might want to wait for the Bass opener to visit Balm Lake. Largemouth Bass, not typically sampled very well in gill nets, were sampled at an astounding 26 fish/gill net. A special regulation on Largemouth Bass was recently modified from a 12-20 inch protected slot to a 14-20 inch protected slot, to allow additional harvest of the abundant young bass under 14 inches. Other species worth noting are Bluegill with good numbers of fish up to 9.5 inches, and Northern pike at relatively low density, 2.6/gill net, but good quality sizes available.

## DETROIT LAKES

General Outlook for the Detroit Lakes Area: As of early April, things are shaping up for a normal to late spring. Some concentration of the snow pack on area lakes has occurred but little actual melting. The snow cover and weather in the end of March and early April is critical in determining the amount of winterkill some of the shallower fishing lakes in the area might suffer. Those lakes that do suffer winterkill 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 Walleye. Spring fishing for Black Crappie is generally excellent and can be a great substitute for a slow Walleye bite.

Tamarack Lake, Becker County (1,389 acres) is located in central Becker County approximately twelve miles northeast of the city of Detroit Lakes. Tamarack Lake lies within the Tamarack National Wildlife Refuge resulting in a complete undeveloped shoreline. There are two gravel boat launches in good condition, and a surface use restriction prohibiting recreational watersports such as water skiing and jet skis. Tamarack Lake has a reputation for exceptional Bluegill and Black Crappie angling, but a survey in 2018 also found a quality Walleye population. This survey found nearly eight Walleye per net with an average length near 18 inches. These Walleye grew fast, exceeding 16 inches in four years. Nearly half of the sampled Walleye were two years old, so there should be an abundant number of catchable size fish for the angling season of 2019. Tamarack Lake has a maximum depth of 17 feet and moderate turbidity. These factors should make Tamarack Lake an excellent option for early season fishing, particularly if 2019 starts with a later than normal spring. If Walleye fishing

is slow, anglers are encouraged to take advantage of the excellent panfish populations. Nearly one quarter of the Bluegill sampled in 2018 were over eight inches long, with some fish over ten inches captured. Meanwhile, Black Crappie averaged almost ten inches in length.

Marshall Lake (191 acres) located in southwest Becker County. Marshall Lake is rather small at 191 acres and a maximum depth of 20 feet, but the shallow nature and dark water make this lake an early season Walleye destination for local anglers. Structure in the lake is also not complex so novice Walleye anglers have a good chance at success. The boat access is adequate for all size boats, and there is adequate parking. A survey in 2018 found eleven Walleye per net, with these fish averaging over 18 inches in length. A majority of the captured Walleye were four-year old or younger and should provide a good number of catchable-sized fish. The fish community in Marshall Lake has historically been quite simple, comprised mainly of bullheads and Walleye. Recently, Bluegill, Largemouth Bass, and Northern Pike have increased in abundance, but these populations have not been established long enough to provide fisheries worth targeting. These species may someday prove to be viable options if they continue to exhibit the excellent growth shown by Walleye in the lake.

## 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; therefore, Walleye spawning activities will occur later than normal. Spawning activities likely will occur during late April and into May. Anglers can expect to find Walleyes in spawn to post-spawn conditions by the May 11th opener. Late spawning seasons generally make for slower Walleye

angling on the opener. Northern 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 2019 season as several strong natural year classes and supplemental stockings have established abundant Walleye populations.

Pelican Lake (3,986 acres): is located in Northwestern Otter Tail County seven miles north of Pelican Rapids. DNR owned concrete public accesses are located on the east and southwest shorelines. Data collected from the 2018 standard fisheries survey indicate that many fish species are thriving in Pelican Lake. The Walleye gill net catch rate was 13.7 per net, which indicates that the Walleye population is very abundant. Walleye net catches have consistently exceeded DNR long range management goals for this lake. Walleye age-structure is excellent as five strong year classes were represented in the age-class distribution. Walleye ranged in length from 8.6 to 26.0 inches with a mean length and weight of 16.0 inches and 1.6 pounds. A moderate density Northern Pike population exists with a good average size. Pike ranged in length from 14.7 to

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