

HEART OF THE LAKES FISHING OPENER

ANNANDALE
Advocate

2023

The Maple Lake
MESSENGER

A SUPPLEMENT TO THE ANNANDALE ADVOCATE AND MAPLE LAKE MESSENGER • WEDNESDAY, MAY 10, 2023

Avoiding nagging snags on rocky structure

By Jerry Carlson

Every summer, I get together with a group of anglers to head to Rainy Lake for a week of walleye fishing. During our stay at Island View Lodge, we have ample time to explore and target walleyes on the many pieces of structure that are found throughout the lake.

If there is one thing we have learned about Rainy Lake, it is the fact that the walleyes on this lake love rocks. However, if you are generalizing about walleyes, I would have to say that these fish love rocks no matter what lake you are fishing or where they are found. Rocks and walleyes simply go hand-in-hand.

The problem people have when live bait rigging walleyes on the rocks is the snags. Being snagged frequently is not only frustrating, it is also time consuming. Once a snag occurs, it is necessary to try to maneuver the boat in an effort to get unsnagged, or worse yet, retrying due to a break off.

There is no magic solution for totally avoiding

snags when live bait rigging rocks. However, there are some strategies that can be applied that will greatly reduce the number of snags that occur.

The first suggestion I have is to change the style of sinker to something that is more pencil shaped than round. We have found that Lindy No-Snagg sinkers and Northland Rock Runner weights greatly reduce the number of snags due to their design.

When moving, these sinkers will ride in an upright position which helps the weight slide up and over crevasses and creases in the rocks instead of finding a permanent home. Once a person is snagged, these pencil style sinkers usually will come free when the boat is moved in the opposite direction.

Another tactic we use is to fish with heavier weights than normal. We usually use half to three-quarter ounce weights. This allows for the line to be quite straight down and not back at an angle. The straighter down



your line is, the fewer snags you will have.

Something else we do that reduces snags is to lift the weight off of the bottom

so it isn't dragging through the rocks. This is a tricky proposition as waves and

Snags

Turn to page 3



Photos courtesy of Jerry Carlson

Walleyes are very attracted to rocky structures. By making a few adjustments to your live bait presentation, you can reduce snags and put more walleyes in the boat.

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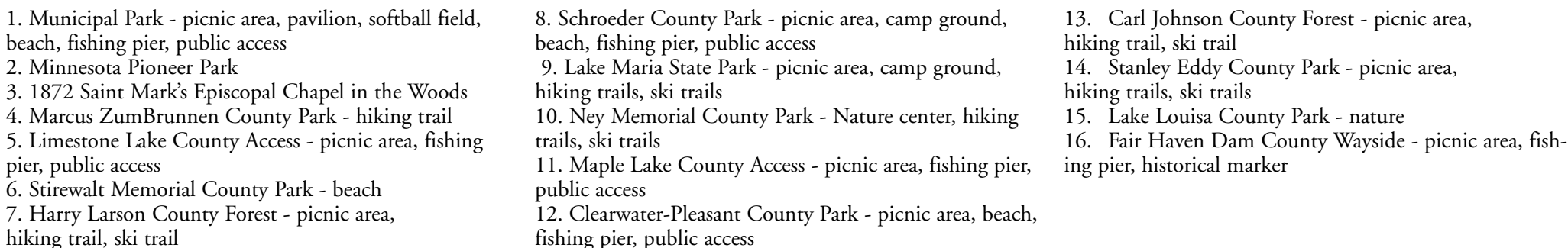


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The Heart of the Lakes area has an abundance of lakes, rivers and streams that offer a variety of fun and challenging fishing opportunities. Most of the lakes in Wright and Stearns counties are managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Area Fisheries office in Montrose. Public water access maps are available from the Section of Trails and Waterways, and are helpful guides to the state owned public access sites. Also, visit any local bait shop for maps.

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Late spring won't delay fishing opener

By Brenda Erdahl
Staff Writer

It looks to be a pretty typical fishing opener despite what felt like a really late spring. In actuality, ice was off area lakes only about a week later than normal, according to Area Fisheries Manager Joe Stewig.

Some of the larger and deeper lakes like Sugar and Cedar, have only been ice free for a little over a week, but Stewig suspects with the extended forecast they will catch up temperature wise.

That's good news for anglers who are looking to wet

their lines on Saturday, May 13, during this year's opener for walleye, sauger and northern pike.

Stewig advises anglers to look for walleyes in the shallows until the water warms up. He suspects things are probably about a week behind temperature wise in the main lake basins at least, and walleye will likely be finishing up spawning activities.

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, a majority of the lakes south of a line from Bemidji to Walker to Duluth were ice free as of May 5. Lakes further north and in the

Arrowhead region will likely be dealing with ice for opener.

Main lake temperatures are running between 47-50 degrees while shallower bays are in the middle 50s.

"With days to go before the opener and the extended forecast I don't see it being drastically different from years past," he said.

According to the DNR, high water conditions this year may benefit northern pike by providing extra nearshore rearing areas. Northern pike like to spawn on submerged vegetation and there is plenty of that this spring. The DNR expects to see strong recruitment (the

number of fish surviving to enter a fishery) in lakes where a lack of habitat typically limits the amount of pike reproduction.

Around the Wright, Stearns, and Sherburne County area, Stewig suspects that the walleye will still be shallow – less than 10 feet. He said anglers' best bets for Walleye are Buffalo, Clearwater, Sugar, and the Sauk River Chain of Lakes.

Other lakes will be hit or miss as far as walleyes go, he said.

Crappies and sunfish on the other hand, should be active in some of the shallower bays fattening up getting ready for their spawning activities.



Minnesota moms: join the Mother's Day weekend fishing challenge

Moms who live in Minnesota are invited to join a free virtual fishing challenge Saturday, May 13, through Sunday, May 14, during Take a Mom Fishing Weekend, when all Minnesota moms can fish without purchasing a fishing license.

To participate in the Mother's Day weekend fishing challenge, moms simply need to join the Minnesota Moms Fishing Challenge Facebook group and submit one photo of each fish they catch. All participants who submit a fish will be entered in a random drawing for prizes provided by the Student Anglers Organization, including SCHEELS gift cards. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources is partnering with the Student Anglers Organization to organize the challenge.

Contest details are available on the Student Anglers Association website opens in a new browser tab. In the contest, no fish is too small and all fish species count.

The Minnesota State Legislature established Take a Mom Fishing Weekend in 1988 to coincide with Mother's Day. This year, the weekend also happens during fishing opener — seasons begin Saturday, May 13, for walleye, northern pike, bass, and trout in lakes.

To celebrate the fishing season, the Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener event is taking place May 12-14 in Mankato. During the event on May 13, several anglers with the Student Anglers Organization will be fishing with their moms on Madison Lake, and the moms will be taking part in the Minnesota Moms Fishing Challenge.

Source Minnesota DNR

Heart of the Lakes fishing outlook

Anglers looking to get out and hook some fish are excited to wet their lines this weekend. In preparation, the fishing outlook has been released for the Heart of the Lakes area. It looks like we can expect some good fishing for the opener. Read on for a few of the local lakes and if you're headed out of the area for the opener you can read the outlooks for other areas online at: www.dnr.state.mn.us/fishing/outlooks.html

Clearwater Lake

Clearwater Lake is a 3,158-acre lake located two miles north of the City of Annandale on the border of Wright and Stearns County. Clearwater Lake is the largest lake in the Sauk Rapids office management area and a popular destination for bass fishing and other recreation. There are two public accesses on the west basin and a private fee access located on the east basin. Anglers can expect good fishing for northern pike, largemouth bass, and panfish. While walleye opportunities are currently somewhat limited, anglers still have some chances to catch them too.

Northern pike provide a good harvest opportunity for anglers due to their relatively high numbers.

Northern pike averaged two and a half pounds in the 2022 survey with some fish over 32 inches available. Largemouth bass numbers are also high and can provide plenty of action for anglers. Black crappie and sunfish are available in good numbers and some larger crappies (up to 14 inches) are present. The walleye fishery is sustained through fry stocking with additional supplemental fingerling stocking during years with poor fry survival. Walleye numbers in Clearwater Lake in 2022 were lower than what would typically be expected for lakes of its size and location. Despite the declines in catch rates, Walleye up to 27 inches were sampled with an average weight of three pounds.

Sugar Lake

Sugar Lake is a 1,015-acre lake located five miles north of the City of Annandale in northern Wright County. The lake has excellent water quality and is a popular recreation lake. The lake was designated for muskellunge management in 1967 and is also managed for walleye, and northern pike. The walleye and muskellunge populations are managed through annual fingerling stocking. In 2007, experimental fishing regulations were put in place for northern pike (24

to 36-inch protected slot) and black crappie (five fish daily bag limit). A recent fisheries lake survey conducted at Sugar Lake indicated an abundance of game fish, making it an excellent destination for anglers. The lake offers great fishing opportunities for smaller sized northern pike, largemouth bass, and bluegill. Additionally, anglers can expect a chance to catch quality sized black crappie, and walleye with the potential for trophy muskellunge as well once that season opens June 3. There are two public accesses on the lake, one each on the north and south ends of the lake. During the fishing opener, both can be crowded, but the south access has room for up to 18 vehicles with trailers.

Sauk River Chain of Lakes

The Sauk River Chain of Lakes (SRCL) is located in south-central Stearns County near the cities of Richmond and Cold Spring, MN. The Sauk River Chain of Lakes is made up of nine lakes and is formed by the dam near the city of Cold Spring. Several of the lakes are located directly on the Sauk River, while others are off channel but still influenced by the river. There are two public accesses located on the chain, one located on the

Sauk River off County Road 22 just east of Becker Lake and the other is off County Road 71 east of Cedar Island Lake. The SRCL is a great all-around fishery with an excellent variety of species for the area. Anglers have the opportunity to catch quality-sized bluegill, black crappie, largemouth bass, smallmouth bass, walleye, muskellunge, northern pike, and channel Catfish. A fisheries survey conducted in 2021 found high numbers of walleye with an average size of 16 inches and 1 ½ pounds. The lakes also has good numbers of bluegill over eight inches and black crappie over 10 inches.

Moderate numbers of northern pike were observed with an average length of 22 inches and 2 ½ pounds with the largest being 35 inches. Anglers have also reported catching muskie in excess of 40 inches. Bass can provide some excellent action with largemouth averaging 12 inches with fish up to 21 inches and smallmouth averaging 13 inches with fish up to 20 inches. Good numbers of large channel catfish are also available with fish averaging 21 inches with a few pushing 30 inches.

Source: Minnesota DNR

► Snags

From page 1

wind can make it difficult to keep a steady speed. However, the more you can keep your weight just above the rocks, the fewer hang-ups you will experience.

We also use small, wire hooks that do not drop into the rocks as easily as heavier hooks. If you find that your hook is constantly getting caught, go smaller and lighter. Floating jighheads will also help with this issue.

Bottom bouncers are another possibility for keeping out of the rocks. When utilizing bottom bouncers and spinners, we

try to go about a mile an hour or slightly greater to keep the spinners above the snags.

One last thought. Although I do like to use mono on my live bait rigs, if the snag issue is severe, switching to a quality braid will give you more feel when it comes to rock issues. Braids do have their advantages when rigging on rocks.

Fishing in snag invested waters is not always my favorite thing to do. However, if the walleyes are on the rocks, that is where I am going to fish. By making a few simple adjustments to your live bait presentation, it possible to greatly reduce the number of snags and catch more fish in the process.

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Spring bass and the inside weed line

By Jerry Carlson

It was a long time ago that I learned the value of targeting edges when searching for fish. Edges come in a wide variety of forms in the water world. Fish utilize edges where ever they are found.

One of my favorite edges in the spring of the year is the one created where the shallow sand meets the weed growth. This inside weed line edge is extremely productive when searching for early season largemouth bass.

Not all lakes have this distinct weed edge. Most lakes that do have this inside weed line will not have it everywhere. You need sand on the shoreline and then a transition to weeds once the water gets to be a few feet deep.

Most of the bass lakes I fish in the spring have clear water. This allows me to actually visualize where this transition from sand to weeds takes place. Polarized sunglasses are a must for this!

Being able to see exactly where the edge is located allows me to focus my efforts on the weed line. I will target this edge one of two ways. Sometimes I find it is best to cast from the deep water to the shallow and work back across the edge. At other times, I find it more efficient to work parallel to the shore line. A lot depends on how tight the fish are hanging to the edge.

I have two main presenta-

tions I use for this fishing. One is the wacky worm and the other is the Ned rig. Both are simple, do-nothing presentations that are dynamite. I always have rods rigged with each ready and available. A twitch bait is also a good inside weed line option for those that like that method.

Many times, I find the Ned rig to be my best option. Because of the slow and steady retrieve I use with the Ned rig, I can cover water a little faster than with the wacky worm presentation. This is especially true on days when the fish are not always tight to the weed edge.

I also find that the Ned rig is much easier to fish in the wind. Wacky worms and wind do not go well together.

In the spring of the year, northern and sometimes crappies can also be found on this inside weed line. The Ned rig will readily catch both.

Although I am a big believer in using braided line for most of my bass fishing, I find that ten-pound-test mono is the best choice for this shallow water presentation. If I do use braid, I will tie a fluorocarbon leader on the end.

Although I fish edges for bass all summer long, the edge I concentrate on in the spring is the one where the sand meets the first line of weed growth. This inside weed line is a fish magnet in the early season.



Photos courtesy of Jerry Carlson
The inside weed line is a magnet for bass in the early part of the year. The Ned rig is an easy-to-fish lure that works great for shallow, weed line bass.



Putting your stamp on conservation

Some anglers go above and beyond to make fishing better in Minnesota by purchasing walleye stamps that help the Department of Natural Resources add walleye to lakes where there otherwise would be none.

“Buying a walleye stamp is a concrete way to help maintain fishing opportunities in Minnesota,” said Neil Vanderbosch, DNR fisheries program consultant.

Funds from walleye stamps go toward the cost of purchasing 4- to 6-inch walleye called fingerlings from private fish farms for stocking into lakes. A walleye stamp is not required to fish for or keep walleye.

Anglers with a fishing license can purchase the walleye stamp validation for \$5, and for an extra 75 cents can have the pictorial stamp mailed to them. Walleye stamps can be purchased anywhere Min-

nesota fishing licenses are sold, online at mndnr.gov/buyalicense or by phone by calling 888-665-4236. Alternatively, anglers can download a form found at mndnr.gov/stamps and return it to the DNR to have the stamp mailed.

The DNR raises and stocks walleye, but also buys walleye fingerlings from private producers to be stocked into lakes – walleye stamp sales help pay for these fish. Since 2009,

funds from the walleye stamp have purchased over 40,000 pounds of walleye fingerlings that have been stocked in the fall, all over the state. Walleye fingerlings generally are stocked in lakes that do not have naturally reproducing walleye populations.

More information about habitat stamps can be found at mndnr.gov/stamps.



Illustration by Melissa Mickelson

Above is the 2023 stamp illustration by Melissa Mickelson of Minneapolis. When you buy a walleye stamp, you're helping purchase fingerlings that will be used in the state's lakes.

FISHING FACTS

- Licensed anglers: about 1.4 million
- Fishable lakes: 5,400
- Miles of fishable rivers and streams: over 18,000
- Species of fish: 162 (although not every kind of fish lives everywhere)
- Most resident anglers are from urban areas. However, a higher percentage of people living in rural Minnesota fish.
- Males account for 65 percent of fishing license holders, compared to 35 percent females.
- Significantly more time is spent fishing on lakes than on rivers and streams.
- The average Minnesota angler spends 15 days fishing each year.
- Walleye are the most sought-after fish in Minnesota, followed by northern pike and muskie combined, then panfish, bass, crappie and trout.

* Data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

LICENSES AND RULES

- There are adult individual angling licenses and licenses for married couples. Anglers can buy licenses for 24-hour, 72-hour and three-year time periods. Lifetime licenses can keep someone fishing long into the future, and come at great prices, especially for children 3 and under and those ages 51 and older. Lifetime licenses can also be given as gifts.
- Youth ages 16 and 17 can buy an annual license for \$5. Minnesotans 15 and under are not required to buy a license to fish, but must comply with fishing regulations. All nonresidents need a license, except those age 15 and younger do not need one if a parent or guardian is licensed.
- Buy licenses online with a mobile or desktop device at mndnr.gov/buyalicense, or by phone at 888-665-4236. Mobile buyers receive a text or email that serves as proof of a valid fish or game license to state conservation officers.
- Minnesota residents can fish without a fishing license in most Minnesota state parks. All park rules must be followed as usual, along with any rules and regulations relating to the taking of game and fish. You will still need a vehicle permit to enter a Minnesota state park. Fishing licenses are still required in city, county, regional and federal parks.

Boat launches

Here are some Wright County lakes with launch ramps. A county map (or a DNR PRIM map) is helpful. Cities indicated are for direction. Watch for “Public Water Access” signs. Also, note the map on page 2.

South Haven

- West Lake Sylvia: CR 2 south, continue on Quinn Ave.
- Lake Marie, connects to Louisa, CR 2 north to Clearwater River.

Cokato

- Cokato Lake: CR 4 north


Annandale


- Pleasant Lake: 1) CR 5 in town, municipal park and 2) south of 90th St.
- Clearwater: Hwy. 55 west to Nevens Ave., north on Nevens.
- Lake John: 75th St west to Nevens, south to 65th St, then west.
- Cedar Lake: 1) CR 6, 2) Schroeder Co. Park, south of CR 39.
- Granite Lake: CR 5 south
- Sugar Lake: 1) CR 7 to 102nd St., 2) CR 7 north

Howard Lake

- Howard Lake: 1) in town, off Hwy. 12, 2) in town, off CR 6, 3) CR 6 north
- Waverly**
- Little Waverly Lake: CR 8 north
 - Waverly Lake: CR 9
- Maple Lake**
- Maple Lake: 1) Hwy. 55 east, 2) CR 37 northeast
 - Ramsey Lake: CR 8 south
- Buffalo**
- Buffalo Lake: 1) CR 35 in town, 2) CR 12 in town
 - Lake Pulaski: Pulaski Rd, in town

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