

Heart of the Lakes Fishing Opener

Annandale Advocate Maple Lake Messenger



Tweaking Your Walleye Gear for Improved Success

by Jerry Carlson

Every summer for the past 20 years, I have made a trek to Rainy Lake with a group of anglers that love to catch walleyes. Although there are multiple species to fish on Rainy, we spend nearly all of our time chasing marble eyes.

When you spend nine plus hours a day on the water for an entire week, you have a chance to experiment with many different options and techniques. The same tactics we utilize and perfect on Rainy serve us well when we target walleyes on other water.

One of the facts I used to drive home during the days I did lots of seminars was the importance of quality equipment. Many times, an angler can improve their

fishing success by upgrading their equipment, starting with the pole.

Most walleye anglers I know spend considerable time live bait rigging. This is a proven, time tested method of catching fish. However, it is imperative that the fishing rod being used is sensitive enough to detect the finicky bite walleyes are noted for.

There are lots of companies that make great walleye rods. The ones I use are seven-foot medium to medium light action with high graphite. I also like a soft, fast action tip. The soft tip is important because walleyes sometimes just hang on and all that is felt is weight on the rod. The soft action allows me to actually see the bite building up and the need to set the hook.

Many times, I have had people in my boat remark about the incredible feel and sensitivity that comes from a quality pole. The first step in improving your game may be in upgrading your walleye rod.

One other note about sensitive rods is that I have better feel of the bottom. I never drag my sinker on the bottom. I always try to lift it slightly and keep it just a few inches off of the bottom.

Line is what connects you to the fish. It is also what the fish see as they decide whether or not to eat the bait you are offering. Using light leader material is essential.

There was a day when I never used snell material heavier than four-pound-test.

Walleye
See page 3



Photo courtesy of Jerry Carlson

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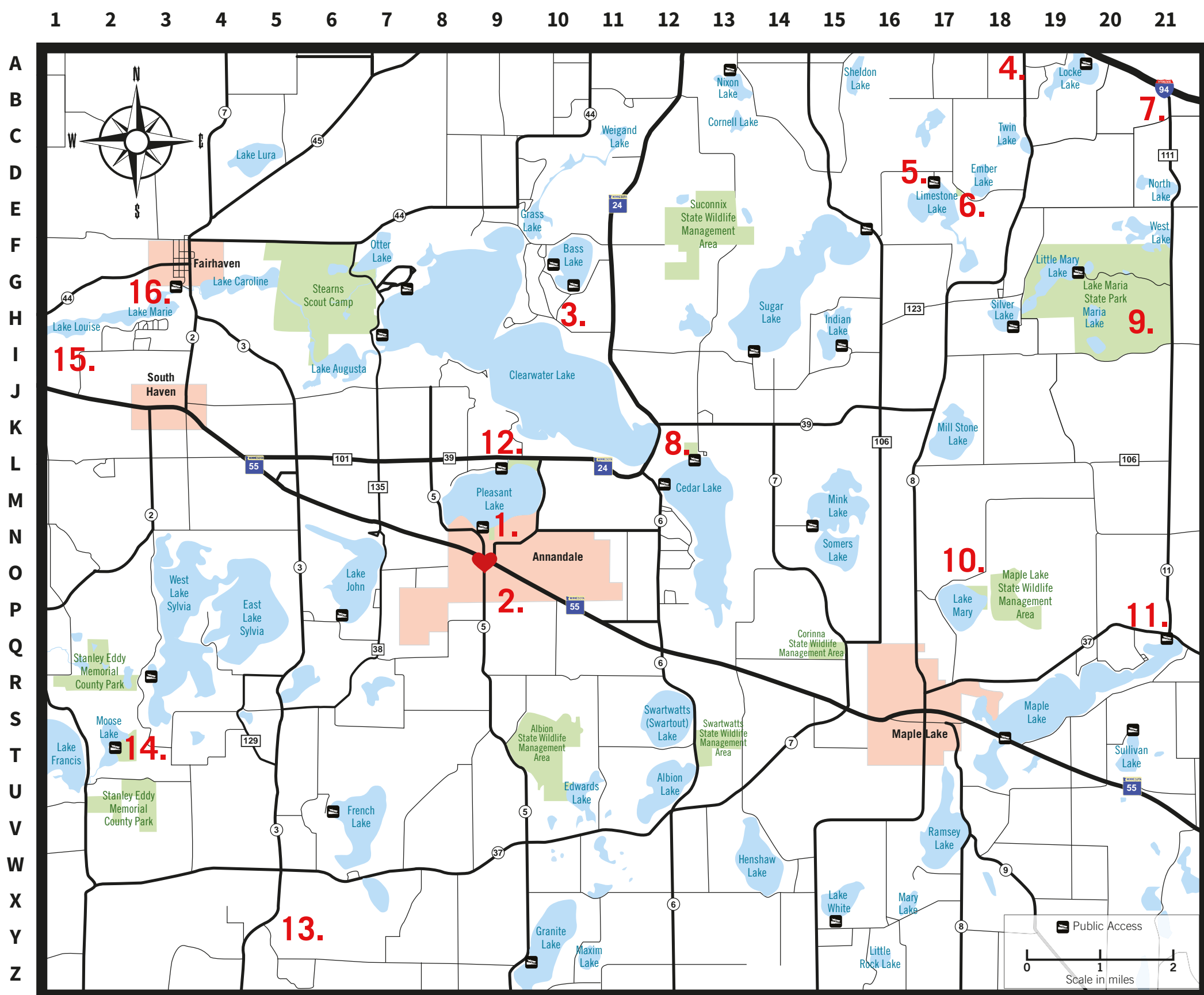
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|---|---|--|
| 1. Municipal Park - picnic area, pavilion, softball field, beach, fishing pier, public access | 8. Schroeder County Park - picnic area, camp ground, beach, fishing pier, public access | 13. Carl Johnson County Forest - picnic area, hiking trail, ski trail |
| 2. Minnesota Pioneer Park | 9. Lake Maria State Park - picnic area, camp ground, hiking trails, ski trails | 14. Stanley Eddy County Park - picnic area, hiking trails, ski trails |
| 3. 1872 Saint Mark's Episcopal Chapel in the Woods | 10. Ney Memorial County Park - Nature center, hiking trails, ski trails | 15. Lake Louisa County Park - nature |
| 4. Marcus ZumBrunnen County Park - hiking trail | 11. Maple Lake County Access - picnic area, fishing pier, public access | 16. Fair Haven Dam County Wayside - picnic area, fishing pier, historical marker |
| 5. Limestone Lake County Access - picnic area, fishing pier, public access | 12. Clearwater-Pleasant County Park - picnic area, beach, fishing pier, public access | |
| 6. Stirewalt Memorial County Park - beach | | |
| 7. Harry Larson County Forest - picnic area, hiking trail, ski trail | | |

Area Lake Profiles

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.

Augusta (I-6)

180 acres. Public access via Clearwater Lake. Resort. Good northerns, panfish, walleye.

Bass (G-10)

213 acres. Public access on the west side.
Crappies, largemouth bass, northerns, panfish.

Camp (Henry) (Off map)

108 acres. Public access on the north end. Panfish, northerns and bass. Located south of Maxim Lake (Z-11.)

Cedar (M-12)

837 acres. Public access from County Road 6 or Schroeder Park. The lake is over 100 feet deep. Schroeder has camping facilities on north side. DNR fishing pier. Panfish, northerns, walleyes, bass.

Clearwater (J-10)

3,182 acres. The area's largest lake. Two public accesses on the west side. Head north on Nevens Ave. from Highway 55. Best fishing

in the area for northern, walleye, panfish and largemouth bass.

Francis (T-1)

1,172 acres. Public access on the northwest side. Panfish, northerns, bass, walleye.

French (V-6)

332 acres. Public access on the northwest corner. Some trophy walleyes with crappie, northerns and carp.

Granite (Y-10)

339 acres. Public access on west side, County Road 5. Sunken island good for crappies, bass, walleyes and northerns.

John (P-6)

411 acres. Public access on the south side, 67th Street. Nice sized panfish along with bass and northerns.

Indian (H-15)

129 acres. Public access on the south side.
Lots of panfish and a few nice northerns.

Limestone (E-17)

188 acres. Public access on the north side. Resort and campground. Weedless lure will catch northerns, bluegills and bass.

Louisa (H-1)

179 acres. Public access on Lake Marie. Some large pike, panfish.

Marie (H-2)

141 acres. Access on the northeast side. Panfish, northern. See the scenic Fair Haven Mill dam on lower east side.

Mary (P-17)

209 acres. Public access on the northwest side. County park. Panfish, northerns, walleyes – and some two-pound crappies.

Mink-Sommers (N/M-15/16)

459 acres. Public access on Sommers Lake.
Five-pound northerns, panfish.

Nixon (A-13)

56 acres. Access on the north end. Sleeper bass. Bluegills and northern.

Pleasant (M-9)

509 acres. Adjoins city of Annandale. Two public accesses (one on the south side at Municipal Park, one in Clearwater-Pleasant County Park on the north side). One of the top 100 walleye lakes in the state. Bluegills, bass and northerns.

Sugar (H-14)

1,050 acres. Public access on the north and south ends, 102nd St. and County Road 7. Wright County's only muskie lake. Northerns, bass, panfish and walleye.

Lake Sylvia (P-3/4)

1,524 acres. Public access on Quinn Ave. on the west side. The cleanest in the area with 30-inch walleyes. Panfish, bass and northerns.

Use the coordinates following each lake name above to easily find out where that lake is located within the map at the top of this page.

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It’s time for ‘bassing’

by Jerry Carlson

When it comes to bass fishing lures, I am definitely not a purist that believes in one specific technique. I will use whatever I think is going to put fish in the boat. There are times when a spinnerbait can be deadly. It covers water quickly, is quite weedless and is a no brainer to fish. Some days, twitch baits are hard to beat. The sporadic stop and go pattern that mimics an injured minnow will get lots of attention from aggressive bass. Texas rigged worms, skirted jigs and tubes all have their place in the bassing arsenal. With all of that said, there are three bass rigs that I find to be consistent producers, especially early in the year. I refer to these as the big three.

At the top of my list is the jig worm. This simple lure has caught more fish for me than any other artificial lure I have ever used. It works as well early in the year as it does all summer. There is something about this combination that bass can’t resist. My standard set up is an eighth-ounce jig head with a five or six inch straight plastic worm. If I am fishing shallow water, I will switch to a 16th-ounce jig. Occasionally, I will use a weedless jig head but prefer to use a standard open hook jig. This rig is more weedless than one would expect. The open hook does increase my hooking percentage. Although there are times I will swim this rig, I usually will work it back to the boat by fishing close to the bottom with a subtle jigging action. A few hops with a pause will trigger the most strikes. The

biggest mistake anglers make is to fish this rig too fast. My second lure in the big three is the wacky worm. This is the most do-nothing lure I have ever fished. Again, the biggest mistake anglers make is to fish it too fast. The wacky worm is an ideal shallow water, early season lure. With the hook in the middle and the worm dangling off each end, it does nothing but slowly sink into the depths. Why bass love it, I don’t know, I just know they readily eat it. Fishing this lure is easy. I cast it out, let it sink for a few moments and then raise my rod tip to bring the lure towards the surface. After that, I let it sink again. That’s it. If I am fishing deeper water, I will utilize a wacky hook that is weighted. This will speed up the process of getting to the depths the fish are at. (This is not a good

presentation on windy days.) The last of my big three is the Ned rig. This is another simple lure that looks like it would have little fish appeal. However, it can be deadly and is my wife’s favorite presentation. This lure can be fished on the bottom like the jig worm or just swim it back with a slow retrieve. I carry a variety of jig head sizes to match the depth I am working. Weedless jigs work quite well with this lure. There are a lot of productive methods anglers use to put bass in a boat. For me, the jig worm, wacky worm and Ned rig are the most consistent producers.

Jerry Carlson, St. Augusta, has fished Annandale area lakes for many years. He is an occasional contributor to the Advocate and Messenger.



Photo courtesy of Jerry Carlson

Although largemouth bass can be caught on a variety of baits, some are superior to others.

2024 fishing opener outlooks

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

This 3,158-acre lake is located two miles north of Annandale on the border of Wright and Stearns counties. Clearwater is the largest lake in the Sauk Rapids management area and a popular destination for bass fishing and other recreation. 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. Walleye up to 27 inches were sampled with an average weight of three pounds. Northern pike provide a good harvest opportunity for anglers due to 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. Starting March 1, daily sunfish and crappie limit were reduced so that the daily possession limit for sunfish is now 10, while the daily possession limit for crappie is now five. There are two public accesses on the west basin and a private fee access located on the east basin. Invasive species present include Eurasian Watermilfoil, Starry Stonewort and Zebra Mussels. It is important to take extra caution and prevent spreading these species to other bodies of water.

Sugar Lake

This 1,015-acre lake is located five miles north of Annandale in northern Wright County. The lake has excellent water quality and is a popular recreation lake managed for walleye, muskie, and northern pike. 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 sunfish.

Additionally, anglers can expect a chance to catch quality sized black crappie (up to 15 inches) and walleye (up to 31 1/2 inches) with the potential for trophy muskie (up to 54 inches!) as well after the June 1 opener for muskie. Overall, Sugar Lake is an ideal spot for anyone looking for a quality fishing experience. 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. Eurasian milfoil, and zebra mussels are present in the lake and users should be careful not to spread these invasive species to other lakes.

Sauk River Chain of Lakes

Located in south-central Stearns County near the cities of Richmond and Cold Spring, the Sauk River Chain of Lakes is formed by a dam near the city of Cold Spring and is made up of nine different lakes, several of which are located directly on the Sauk River, while others are off channel but still influenced by the river. The Sauk River chain is a great all-around fishery with an excellent variety of species for the area. Anglers can catch quality-sized sunfish, black crappie, largemouth and smallmouth bass, walleye, muskie, northern pike, and

channel catfish. A fisheries survey conducted in 2021 found good numbers of walleye with an average size of 16 inches and 1 1/2 pounds. The lakes also support a good number of sunfish 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 1/2 pounds with the largest being 35 inches. Anglers have also reported catching muskie exceeding 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 exceeding 30 inches. The chain has special bag limits on catfish and sunfish so be aware of these if you are planning on harvesting these species. 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 lakes are infested with zebra mussels and so anglers should be mindful of this and remember to clean, drain and dry their boat.

Source: Minnesota DNR

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.

Source: Minnesota DNR

► Walleye

From page 1

The rocky terrain we fish on Rainy has helped me realize that six-pound fluorocarbon works equally as well. The heavier pound-test is more forgiving when snagged in rocks. The length of the snell can be important. When dealing with finicky fish, I have found that adding length between the sinker and hook increases the number of bites. I often use a six-foot leader. However, on Mille Lacs, I often extend the length to nine feet. Long leaders are a hassle to use, but they do work. One last thought is to keep your hook size small. By using small, light wire hooks, your bait has more action and there is less for the walleyes to see. And yes, I do like red hooks. I have learned over the years that little things often make a big difference in results. Quality rods, longer leaders, light line and small hooks have improved my game considerably.

Jerry Carlson, St. Augusta,



Photo courtesy of Jerry Carlson

Walleyes can be finicky biters that are tricky to catch.

has fished Annandale area lakes for many years. He is an

occasional contributor to the Advocate and Messenger.

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Prepare for new regulations on some area lakes

By **Brenda Erdahl**
Staff Writer

Saturday, May 11, marks the full opening of walleye and northern pike season in Minnesota, which means anglers will be casting their lines into local waters in search of their limit.

Starting May 11, anglers can also target largemouth bass on a catch-and-release basis until Memorial Day weekend when bass season opens fully.

While walleye and pike are the most sought-after fish on the opener, many others will go out in search of species such as sunfish and crappie. Sunfish is a favorite for families with young children and the opener marks the start of a summer full of enjoyment out on the lake.

In fact, angler surveys suggest that sunfish, primarily bluegill and pumpkinseed, are among the most prized gamefish in the state.

According to Joe Stewig of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Fisheries, Minnesota anglers harvest around 16 million sunfish each year, making them the state's most harvested fish.

Unfortunately, all that love for sunfish has negatively impacted size quality. Minnesota angler attitude surveys between 1987 and 2017 found that anglers were generally satisfied with the number of sunfish they caught but were often dissatisfied with size, Stewig said.

Today, an increasing number of everyday anglers, professional guides, resort owners, and fishing celebrities are expressing concern about declining sunfish size quality. At the same time, sunfish numbers have generally increased in DNR lake surveys, suggesting an overall increase in sunfish densities, a trend often linked to size quality decline.

Daily limits reduced

Because of this information, daily limits of sunfish



Advocate and Messenger file photo

Look for self-service AIS cleaning stations like this one at some Wright County boat landings this fishing season and help prevent the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species.

Prevent invasive species

It is important to take a few minutes for invasive species prevention every time a boat comes out of the water. “All anglers and boaters in Minnesota are required to take three simple steps: clean, drain, dispose,” said Lt. Col. Greg Salo, DNR Enforcement Division assistant director. “It’s not only the best way to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species, but it’s also the law in Minnesota.”

According to the Wright County Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention and Management Plan, there are 163 lakes in Wright County, 61 public launches and countless private accesses. There are 45 known AIS infestations of Eurasian watermilfoil in Wright County, five more than in 2016. Three lakes are known to be infested with starry stonewort (West Lake Sylvia, Pleasant, and Clearwater), two more than in 2016. Thirty-three waterbodies have a known population of zebra mussels which is 24 more than in 2016.

There are five plus self-service AIS cleaning stations at Wright County boat landings and there is an AIS decontamination station in Annandale.

and West Lake Sylvia have adhered to the 10 fish daily bag limit for sunfish and five fish daily bag limit for crappies since 2021. Sugar Lake put those same limits in place in 2007. Mink and Somers lakes allow a five fish daily limit on both sunfish and crappies.

While reduced bags limits can be a social question, research has found that reduced bag limits for sunfish and crappies can be an effective tool to maintain or improve size quality, Stewig said.

If you are looking for a lake to wet your line this May 11th, Maple Lake in particular has always been a hotspot for bluegill, crappies and bass.

“Maple Lake has historically been and continues to be a destination lake for panfish anglers, especially during early ice and early spring when fishing pressure is relatively high,” he said.

Maple Lake also sports bass numbers that are above average for the area with plenty of bass longer than 15 inches in the population.

Northern pike are also abundant with an average size of less than 20 inches, but despite all the walleye stocking the past six years, the walleye population remains low, less than two per gill net in Maple Lake.

Buffalo and Pulaski however, have been known to be good walleye lakes. According to local experts, Buffalo and Pulaski are “late night lakes” which means walleyes are most active in the wee hours of the morning. If you are out for walleyes this opener, look for lakes with rocky or sandy bottoms, experts said.

Minnesota fishing opener has been celebrated annually since 1948 when the first Governor’s Fishing Opener was conducted at Wahkon on Mille Lacs Lake. It takes place every May on the Saturday two weeks before Memorial Day.

and crappies have been reduced on several area lakes and anglers should be aware of the new regulations when they hit the water this May 11th.

As of March 1, the daily limit of sunfish and crappies for Maple Lake was reduced from 20 to 10 for sunfish and 10 to five for crappies.

Several lakes on the

Clearwater chain were also affected starting March 1. Augusta, Caroline, Grass and Otter all had their daily limits reduced similarly to Maple Lake’s reduction – 10 sunfish per daily bag limit and five crappies per daily bag limit.

Four other lakes in the area also have special sunfish and crappie regulations, some for quite a few years already. East

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 Minnesota 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



Photo courtesy of DNR

The 2024 Walleye Stamp, above, was designed by Sam Larsen. Larsen is an artist and also the Visual Marketing Coordinator and Product Development Manager for Northland Fishing Tackle.

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.

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, see 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

2024 Minnesota Moms Fishing Challenge May 11-12

Fish free, win prizes

Join the 2024 Minnesota Moms Fishing Challenge: a free, virtual fishing challenge conducted Saturday, May 11, through Sunday, May 12, during Take a Mom Fishing Weekend.

This year, like every year on Mother’s Day weekend, all moms across Minnesota can fish for free without a license. We introduced the Minnesota Moms Fishing Challenge for the first time in 2023 for moms who want even more fun!

Last year, more than 2,400 Minnesota moms joined the challenge. This year, we hope even more will join the fun!

The 2024 Minnesota Moms Fishing Challenge is a collaboration between the DNR, Student Anglers Organization opens in a new browser tab and Women Anglers of Minnesota opens in a new browser tab.

How to participate

Participation in the fishing challenge is free on Facebook and open to moms statewide. Simply join the challenge Facebook group opens in a new browser tab and get your bait and camera ready! Submit one photo of each fish that you catch. All species and sizes welcome. Snap a photo and let your fish go or keep it for dinner if it’s in season.

Win prizes


All participants who submit a fish will be entered in a random drawing for more than 100 prizes provided by the Student Anglers Organization and its partners, including gift cards from SCHEELS stores and Lund Boats.

Source: Minnesota DNR

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



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