



Leech Lake Area Update, September 2020

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Greetings!

This update is part of a series of reports the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is sending to Leech Lake area resorts, businesses and others interested in DNR activities on Leech Lake and the surrounding area. The goal of these messages is to provide information on our findings and sampling activities on area lakes. Feel free to contact our office if you have any questions or comments or would like copies of previous reports.

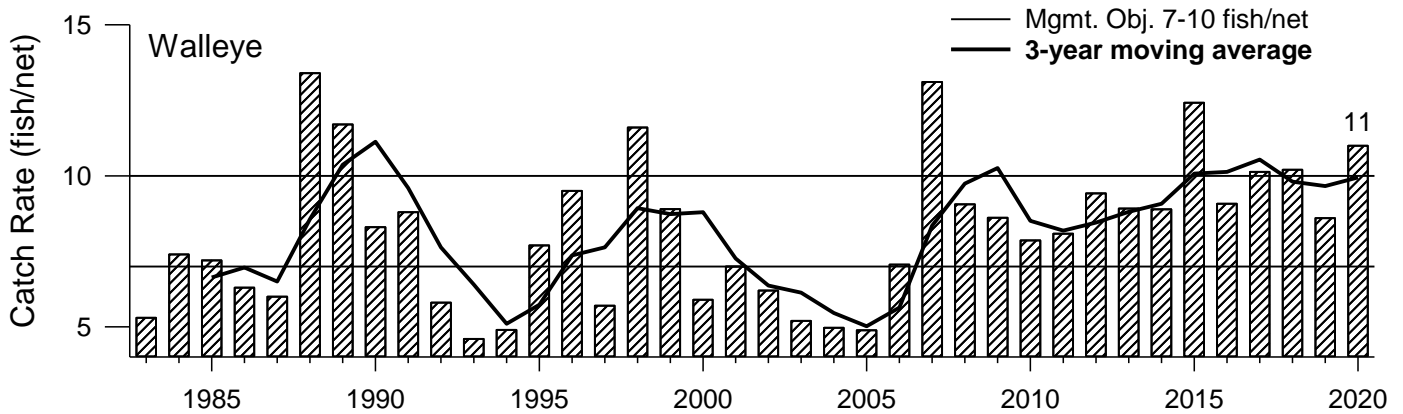
Regulations

- **A statewide Quality Bluegill Initiative (QBI)** has been developed in response to data collected by DNR staff and input from anglers, guides and resort owners that are happy with Bluegill numbers but concerned with the size quality. The purpose of this effort is to identify lakes with a history of producing large panfish that could benefit from reduced bag limits. A number of lakes in the Walker Area have been identified as candidate lakes for reduced panfish bag limits starting in 2021. These lakes include: Leech; Upper, Middle, and Lower Sucker; and Big, Rice, and Deep Portage. Comments are currently being taken and public meetings are scheduled this fall on these and other proposals. Persons interested in commenting on a specific lake, or a group of lakes at the statewide level, are encouraged to do so remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Local comments can be emailed to walker.fisheries@state.mn.us. For more information on this topic, or to link to an online commenting form for local or statewide proposals, go to the MN DNR homepage (www.dnr.state.mn.us), typing “Sunfish” in the search box and selecting the “Sunfish” search result link.
 - Virtual meetings are schedule for locations throughout the state. The Northwest region meeting will take place on Monday, Oct. 5th from noon to 1 p.m., information to attend these can be found on the MNDNR Sunfish page.
 - An in-person meeting is scheduled to take place at the Walker Area Community Center in Walker, October 14th from 6 to 8 p.m. There will be no formal presentation but staff members will be there to answer questions. No more than 10 people will be allowed at a time and all attendees will be required to wear face coverings (Executive Order 20-81).
- **Special bass regulations** are currently being reviewed on Blackwater and Mule lakes. Initially implemented as Catch-and-Release regulations in 2004, subsequent progressions have included a change to a 12-inch maximum length limit in 2012 and a 14-20 inch protected slot limit with 1 fish over 20 inches allowed in possession implemented in 2016. Size quality of both Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass has improved with regulation on both lakes. To comment on either of these regulations or to request more information, please email the Walker Fisheries office at walker.fisheries@state.mn.us.

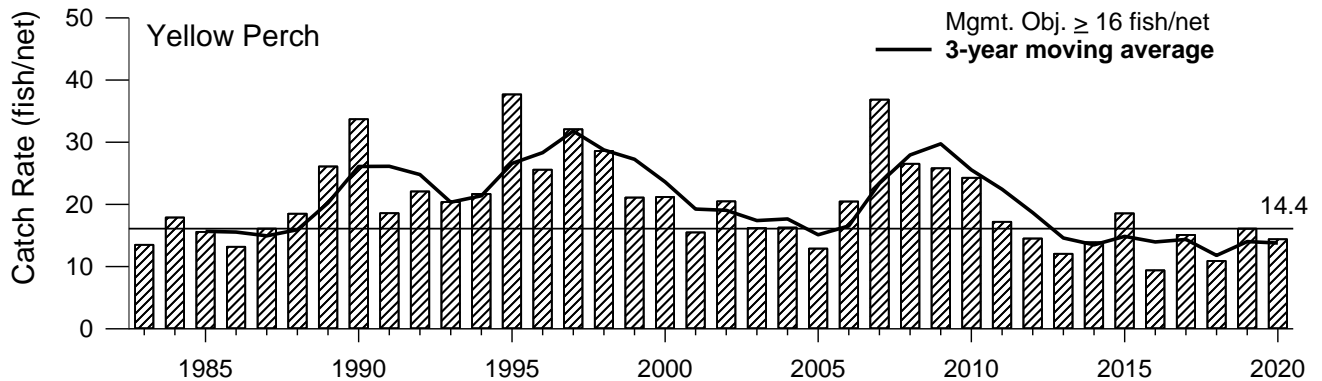


2020 Survey work – Leech Lake

- Walleye Abundance and Size Range:** The gill net catch rate of 11 fish/net was above the management objective range (7-10 fish/net) with very good reports from area anglers and guides in 2020. Lengths of Walleye sampled ranged from 6 to 27 inches and demonstrated a balanced size distribution.

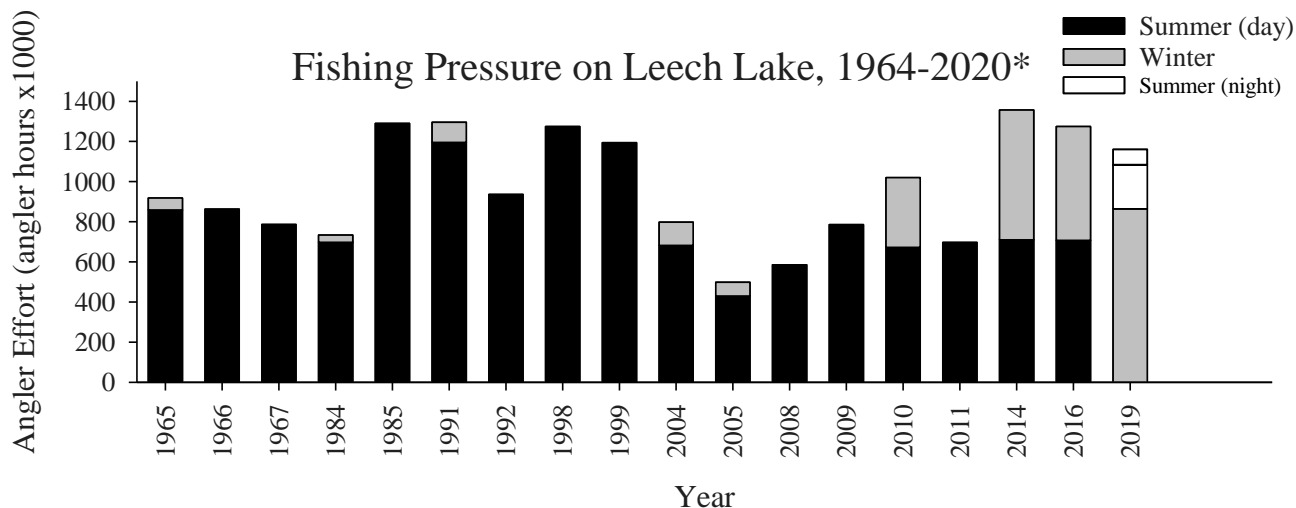


- Yellow Perch Abundance and Size Range:** The gill net catch rate (14.4 fish/net) was just below the management plan objective of at least 16 perch per net. Perch up to 13 inches long were sampled.





- **Seasonal Angling Pressure:** Creel surveys conducted in 2019 and the winter of 2019-20 showed angling pressure was within historical averages. Additionally, a nighttime summer component was added to the 2019 summer creel survey to estimate the amount of angling that occurs in the first few hours after dark.



*For years when a winter creel was conducted the year when the creel was initiated is indicated on the graph, even though they were conducted in portions of two calendar years.

2020 survey work on Leech Lake

- Reports of adult Zebra Mussels have continued mostly in the western bays but high concentrations have not yet been observed throughout the lake.
- Monthly sampling of zooplankton (very small animals that fish like to eat) at five locations lake wide was initiated in 2012 and continued from mid-May through mid-September, zooplankton densities and biomass do not currently show impacts from Zebra Mussels with not all 2020 samples being analyzed yet.
- Standard July shoreline beach seining was completed, no Walleye were caught but Yellow Perch were sampled at each sampling site.
- Standard trawling that historically has been completed in August and has been used to get an idea on young Walleye sizes was canceled in 2020 due to the inability to socially distance while conducting that sampling and the number of staff that this sampling requires.
- The annual gill net survey used to specifically target Walleye, Yellow Perch and Northern Pike was completed from September 8-18. Catch rates were above management goals for Walleye, within goal for Pike and just below goals for Yellow Perch.
- Shoreline night time electrofishing for young-of-year Walleye will be completed from late September into October and will be used to assess this year's crop of young Walleye.
- Unfortunately, due to COIVD-19 restrictions we were unable to bring volunteers in the boat with us during 2020 sampling. Also when not in the field, staff continue to work remotely from home. As a result the best way to get in touch with us would be through email (walker.fisheries@state.mn.us).



2020 survey work on Walker Area lakes

- Electrofishing surveys targeting Largemouth Bass were completed on Moccasin and Hovde Lakes. Data was collected for age and growth analysis by the statewide bass technical committee.
- Spring trap netting for Black Crappie, Muskellunge re-capture survey (Little Boy/Wabedo Lakes), and Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI) surveys were cancelled due to the inability to socially distance while sampling.
- Score The Shore, a lakeshore habitat assessment tool, was completed on seven area lakes. Go to www.dnr.state.mn.us/scoreyourshore/index.html to learn more.
- Standard surveys were completed on six area lakes with gillnet-only surveys completed on five lakes including the Woman Lake chain. Vertical gill netting was completed on Long Lake (DOW# 11-0142-00) targeting stocked Rainbow Trout.
- Creel survey on Little Boy and Wabedo Lakes took place from May 9th – September 30th. The completion report will be available in spring 2021.
- Shoreline night time electrofishing for young-of-year Walleye will be completed from late September into early October to assess the 2020 year class on five area lakes.

2020-2021 Walker Area stocking plans

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic no wild egg take took place across the state this year, meaning there were no fry available for stocking into lakes or into ponds to be grown to fingerling sizes for fall stocking. The DNR will be purchasing Walleye fingerlings from the private sector this fall. These fish and Walleye from last year's production will provide fish to stock some lakes in fall 2020.
- Currently, and assuming some sense of normal operations returns in 2021, we anticipate an increased take of wild eggs next year to backfill some of the missed 2020 stockings where feasible. Specifically, "make-up" stockings would be reserved for lakes on an alternate year stocking schedule which would be looking at three consecutive non-stocked years resulting from the missed 2020 stocking. In other words, we would swap the 2020 non-stocked year for the 2021 programmed non-stocked year on lakes with an alternate year stocking schedule.
- We will not double up stocking densities on lakes stocked annually where 2020 was missed. As we have learned repeatedly, higher stocking densities are often counter-productive to producing a year class.
- In addition to Walleye egg take on the Boy River, Muskie egg take from Leech Lake is also scheduled for 2021.

If you have questions, comments, or requests please contact:

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or

Doug Schultz, Area Fisheries Manager (doug.w.schultz@state.mn.us)