

LOCALNEWS

The water may be cold, but there’s fish to be caught

Area lakes likely to have ice on season opener

BY LAUREL BEAGER
Editor

Recent high winds may have helped push ice around on area lakes, but anglers taking part in the May 10 Minnesota walleye fishing season opener in Borderland will likely still see some of the hard water floating.

“It’s kind of almost looking a lot like last year,” said Ben Vondra, large lake specialist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Office in International Falls.

Complete ice out on Rainy Lake occurred on May 16 in 2013, and ice out was May 14 on Lake Kabetogama. See the DNR’s website at http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ice_out/index.html?year=median for median ice out dates across the state.

Vondra said anglers may find walleye in shallow bays and inlets and rivers where they will be staging to spawn. And many of these locations are accessible from shore.

“I don’t think the lake will be open by then completely,” he said. “But there are definitely areas people can get in and fish.”

And he said Rainy Lake is a good place to seek walleye.

“Rainy Lake is looking very good right now as we are seeing relatively high catch rates due to very good walleye recruitment,” he said. Recruitment refers to natural reproduction.

The DNR’s fall assessment last year showed a fair number of fish from the strong 2006 and 2007 year classes that are still under 17 inches and should provide opportunity for anglers to catch harvestable-size fish this year, he said.

“We also saw a lot of 9-, 10-, 11-, and 12-inch walleyes from the 2010, 2011, and 2012 year classes that all appear to be strong,” said Vondra. “These fish will provide excellent angling opportunities over the next few years.”

Vondra said field work planned for spring by DNR fisheries staff has been pushed back a bit because of the late spring. He said staff just this week got onto the Rat Root River to tag walleye as a part of a long-term study.

“We’re seeing a couple fish trickle in here and there, but not a lot, yet,” he said. “We’re still on the front end of (the spawn).”

And while the weather is often cool and rainy in Borderland for the walleye season opener, many still venture out to seek the elusive walleye and other species.

“It’s been a long winter,” said Vondra. “People are ready to get out.”

Vondra said catching and harvesting walleye in the pre- or early-spawn stage is not a concern of resource managers.

“We have some years (the spawn) is really late and some years it’s really early, so it kind of balances

out,” he said.

For many, the walleye season truly begins to heat up as temperatures rise in July.

The walleye/sauger possession limit on Rainy Lake is eight, with no more than four walleye. All walleye from 17-28 inches must be immediately released. One walleye over 28 inches is allowed in possession. These regulations are in effect for Rainy Lake, including the Rainy River above the dam at International Falls, all of Rainy Lake to the dam at Kettle Falls, Black Bay including Gold Portage below the rapids, all of the Rat Root River, and Rat Root Lake, in Koochiching and St. Louis counties.

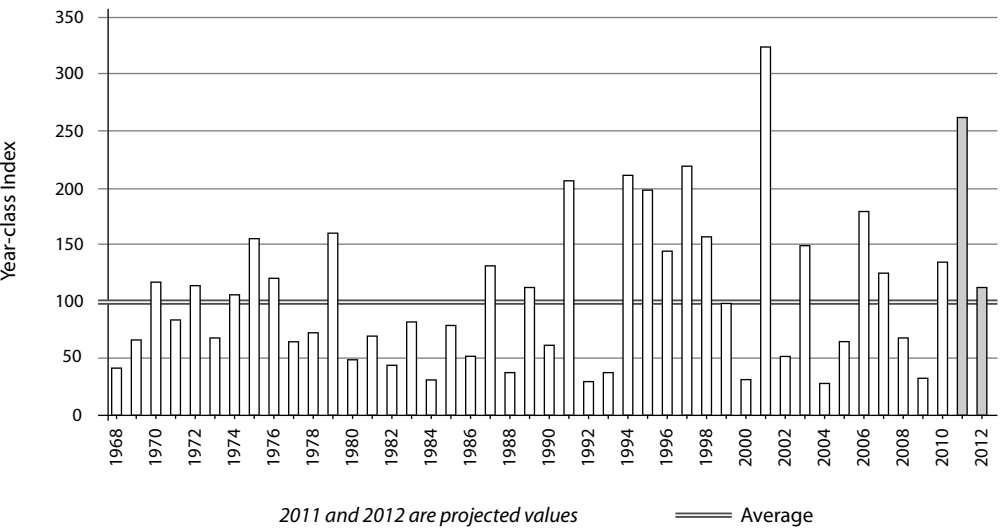
On Rainy River, six fish are allowed in possession, with no more than four being walleye. Walleye 19.5-28 inches must be immediately released. Only one walleye over 28 inches is allowed in possession.

But for opener, the biggest catch may be of northern pike.

“Northern pike as ice goes out will be moving into their spawning grounds, which will match up with the opener,” he said.

The pike season is open year around and the possession limit is three fish, with just one allowed over 30 inches. On Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River to the dam at International Falls, state regulations allow three fish, with all from 30-40 inches to be immediately released. Only

Rainy Lake Year-class Index



Graphic source: DNR / graphic remade by Nicole Bullock

one 40-inch pike is allowed in possession.

Safety tips

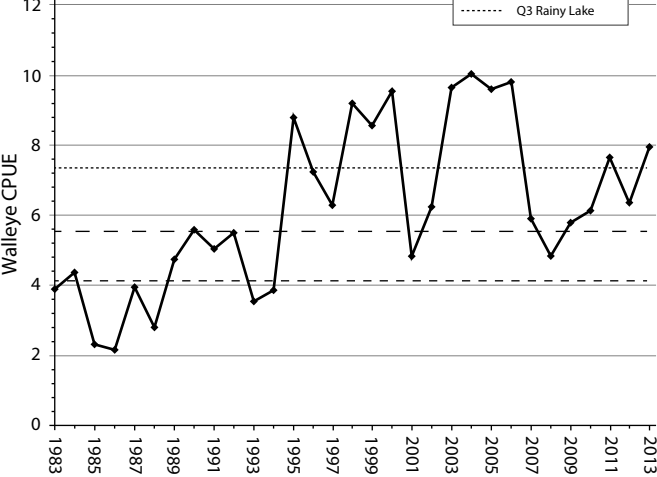
With the cold water of area lakes, Vondra encouraged anglers venturing out to keep safety in mind.

More than 30 percent of boating fatalities in Minnesota happen in cold water — water below 70 degrees — with a victim not wearing a life jacket, according to the DNR. Falling into icy water can be deadly because many boaters do not think about the effects of cold water immersion. The shock of the cold water causes an involuntary gasp reflex. It takes less than a half cup of water in the lungs to drown. The shock of sudden entry into the water can also cause cardiac arrest, even for people in good health.

The DNR offers the following safety tips:

- Wear a U.S. Coast Guard approved life jacket.

Gill Net History



Graphic source: DNR / graphic remade by Nicole Bullock

- Wear a wetsuit or dry-suit when paddling in water colder than 70 degrees.
- Don’t boat or paddle alone. Boating safety increases with numbers.
- If a boat or canoe tips, try to reboard or stay with it until rescuers arrive. Most watercraft will continue to float, even after capsizing and filling with water. People are more likely to be seen by potential rescuers if they are next to a boat. Drowning often occurs when the victim tries to swim to shore rather than face the embarrassment of being rescued.



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