



Cass Lake Fisheries

Information

Newsletter

Spring 2008

An annual fisheries e-newsletter for the Cass Lake Chain of Lakes

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Interesting Links

Lake Associations

www.paulbunyan.net/users/quam/andrusia

Lake Andrusia Watershed Association

www.trwa.ws/

Turtle River Watershed Association

Other Resources

www.minnesotawaters.org

www.riversmn.org

www.beltramiswcd.org

Beltrami Soil and Water Conservation District

From the Editor

Greetings Cass Lake enthusiasts! I hope everyone is having a great spring. If you're like me, you're already looking forward to open water fishing. But, as I write this, it's early May and we still have quite a bit of ice cover on the lakes! In the fisheries business, a late spring is usually welcome, as it buys us a little extra time to wrap up our winter work and get ready for all the spring work that needs to be done. But this year, things are pushed back a little too far. With the opener only a week away, the walleyes are still spawning and open water by May 10 is uncertain.

In this issue of the *Cass Lake Fisheries Information Newsletter*, I have included the results of our annual fall population assessment work, a primer on our upcoming creel survey, and information about a new fish disease heading towards Minnesota. I have also included some of the standard fare regarding aquatic invasive species, the 2008 fishing season and tournament dates, and water levels.

I hope everyone has a great summer, whether you're into fishing, sailing, water sports, or simply relaxing and spending time at the lake with family and friends. Enjoy!

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2007 Fall Population Assessment

The walleye population of Cass Lake is healthy, and, as always, consists of good numbers of fish distributed among many different year classes. The 2007 gill net catch rate of 10.5 fish/net was slightly below the long-term median catch rate (13.3 fish/net). Nevertheless, angler catch rates should be decent this year, with an abundance of quality-sized walleyes available due to the presence of two strong year classes produced in 2001 and 2002. Most of those fish are currently 16 to 20 inches in length. In addition, the strong 1999 year class will provide the occasional quality-sized fish over 20 inches. There also appears to be an abundance of walleyes in the 9 to 14 inch size range from the 2005 and 2006 year classes.

The northern pike population is at normal levels of abundance with good numbers of fish in the 26 to 30 inch size range. This population has been nearly constant over the past 25 years, with consistently moderate densities and a stable or improving size structure.

U.S. Forest Service

www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/chippewa/
Chippewa National Forest

Turn In Poachers (T.I.P.)

www.turninpoachers.org
1-800-652-9093

The yellow perch population in Cass Lake is cyclic and appears to be driven by periodic strong year classes. Currently, yellow perch numbers are below average; however, average fish size is good due to strong year classes produced in 1999, 2001 and 2002. Anglers should have no trouble finding some keeper-sized perch for the frying pan.

2008-09 Creel Survey

The summer of 2008 will be the first year of a two-year, open-water creel survey on Cass Lake. These angler surveys are conducted on a rotating basis, with two consecutive years out of every six targeted for sampling. The main objective is to estimate angling pressure and associated harvest and size structure of fish caught during the 2008 and 2009 open-water fishing seasons. Secondary objectives include estimating the number of fish released (all species), release mortality (walleye only), overall angling success, and angler demographics. This survey will document changes in the sport fishery that may have occurred since the last survey. Periodic harvest estimates combined with trends in angler behavior and catch statistics will be valuable for future management of the Cass Lake fishery.

DNR Fisheries creel clerks are trained to be courteous and to minimize the amount of impact they have on your fishing experience. Participation in the creel survey is optional, but we will certainly appreciate everyone's full cooperation.

In a nutshell, here's what the creel survey entails: The creel clerk will be assigned to move randomly around the lake at different times and on various days of the week. Within each pre-determined area of Cass Lake, the clerk will count all boats, and interview as many parties as possible, preferably at the end of an outing. Fishing activity and interview information obtained throughout the workday is then expanded to represent the entire fishing day. Daily estimates of fishing pressure and harvest are then expanded to a specified time period.

The creel survey interview takes just a minute or two. The creel clerk will record:

- 1) Number of anglers in the party
- 2) Length of fishing trip
- 3) What species were targeted
- 4) How many fish were harvested and released, by species
- 5) Measured lengths of harvested fish
- 6) Home zip code from one angler in the party

If you are approached for an interview, the most difficult thing you face is trying to remember what time you started fishing, and the number of each species of fish you may have caught and released. We encourage everyone to prepare themselves and their guests for a creel survey interview by keeping track of their catch as accurately as possible. The more accurate the interview data, the better our estimates will be.

New Fish Disease - VHS

A new fish disease is working its way towards Minnesota – Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia. VHS is a serious viral disease of freshwater and saltwater fishes, and it is currently spreading throughout the Great Lakes region of the United States and Canada. So far, it has been documented in all of the Great Lakes except Superior, and in inland

Invasive Species

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/index.html>

DNR Website

www.seagrant.umn.edu/aids/

Minnesota Sea Grant

Mississippi River

Water Levels/River Flows

www.mvp-wc.usace.army.mil/dcp/KNUM5.html

Water level at Knutson Dam

http://waterdata.usgs.gov/usa/nwis/uv?site_no=05200510

Ottetail Power Dam

www.mvp-wc.usace.army.mil/dcp/KNUM5.html

ROPE – U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

waters in New York, Michigan, and Wisconsin. Because the disease is new to North America, our fish populations have a low resistance to the virus, and new outbreaks can cause large-scale fish kills. During a VHS outbreak, infected fish will display widespread hemorrhaging (bleeding) throughout the body surface (eyes, skin, and fins) and throughout internal organs. Sick fish will appear listless and swimming in circles or struggling at the surface of the water. To minimize the chance of spreading VHS, do not move live fish or water between lakes. Drain all water from boats, motors, bilge areas, livewells, and bait containers before leaving the lake, and thoroughly clean and dry your boat and other equipment before entering another lake (for more information about disinfecting your equipment, see the section on aquatic invasive species below).

Aquatic Invasive Species

Species that have been introduced through human activities to a location where they do not naturally occur are termed "exotic," "nonnative," "alien," or "nonindigenous." Nonnative species are not necessarily harmful, but when nonnative species cause ecological or economic problems, they are termed "invasive." Minnesota's aquatic resources are threatened by a variety of aquatic invasive species. These species have a high risk of continued spread, as they are easily established and can be unknowingly transported from lake to lake by human activity. The movement of any type of equipment (boats, boat trailers, boat lifts, docks, personal watercraft, bait containers, etc.) between lakes risks potential invasive species transfer if precautions are not taken. To avoid being an accomplice to the spread of these unwanted species, people should make sure all equipment is thoroughly cleaned and dried before entering new waters. Items that are difficult to dry (livewells, baitwells, bilge areas, etc.) should be treated with scalding water or a small amount of iodine or chlorine bleach solution to kill any organisms that may be hiding there. For more information on invasive species, check out the link to the DNR website at left.

2008 Fishing Seasons

This year the season opener for walleye and northern pike is on Saturday, May 10. Largemouth bass season opens on May 24, and muskellunge opens on June 7. Anglers should remember the statewide 20-inch "one-over" rule for walleye that went into effect two years ago. That rule states that only one walleye larger than 20 inches may be taken per day (more than one walleye over 20 inches is allowed in possession if each fish was caught on different days). Anglers should also remember the 48-inch minimum length limit for muskellunge that was implemented last year. This regulation is now in effect for a number of lakes in Minnesota, including Cass Lake and all connected water.

2008 Tournament Dates

Regardless of your opinion on fishing tournaments, you may be interested in knowing the dates that have tournaments scheduled. Following is a list of permitted tournament dates for the Cass chain, by month for 2008. This list does not include local club or league (non-permitted) events, and it could change if tournaments are cancelled or events are held on short notice.

Minnesota DNR

http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/permits/water/water_permit_contacts_wrapper.html?id=BELT
Permits and Contacts

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/shorelandmgmt/index.html>

Lakeshore Management

www.dnr.state.mn.us
DNR Website

www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/bemidji/
Bemidji Area Fisheries

May – no tournaments scheduled

June – one walleye tournament on the 7th
- one walleye tournament (two events) during June 11th-14th

July – no tournaments scheduled

August – no tournaments scheduled

September – two musky tournaments: Sept. 5th-7th and Sept. 20th - 21st

October – one walleye tournament on the 4th

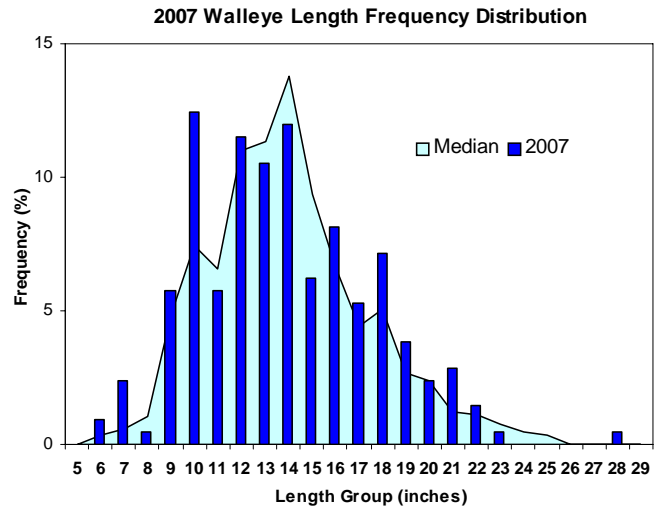
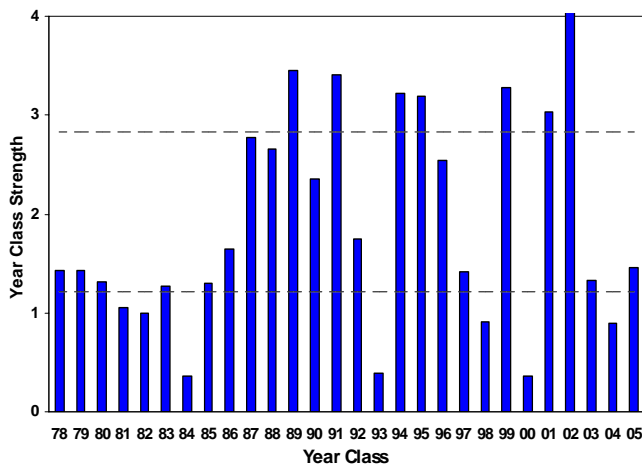
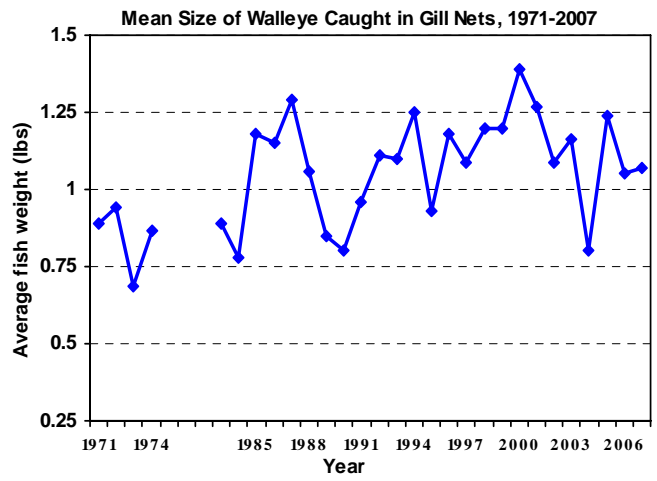
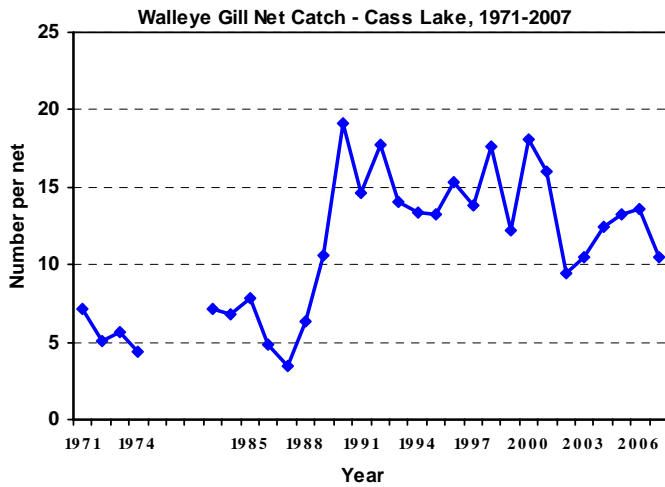
Water Levels

Most of you are probably aware that the Bemidji/Cass Lake area has been in a severe drought for the past couple years, and local lake levels certainly reflect that. We made some significant moisture gains last fall, and, as of this writing, it appears that we may have some spring runoff that should result in average spring conditions. However, if spring and summer rainfall is below average again this year, water levels will undoubtedly drop through the summer. Operation of the various dams on the Mississippi River influence water levels to some extent, but during very dry or very wet weather conditions, Mother Nature takes over, and no amount of water manipulation will solve everyone's problems. So, be careful out there! With low water levels, places that are typically just deep enough for casual boat travel are now underwater hazards—and there are a lot of areas like that on Cass Lake.

Area Fisheries Office Contact Information

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Cass Lake 2007 Walleye Population Assessment Summary



- The 2007 walleye gill net catch rate was slightly below the long-term median catch rate.
- Mean size of individual walleye in the 2007 gill net sample was about average, reflecting a diversity of year classes.
- The 2002 year class is the strongest on record, and currently comprises approximately one-fourth of the entire population.
- Approximately 23% of the walleye sample consisted of fish from the strong 2002 year class, while 63% of the sample was made up of fish younger than age-5, primarily the 2005 and 2006 year classes.
- Size structure of the 2007 walleye sample was very good, and similar to the long-term median length distribution.