

MN Dept. of Natural Resources fisheries summary

Mule Lake is a 456-acre lake located near Longville, MN that has 7.3 miles of shoreline and a maximum depth of 47 feet. There is a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) public access on the west shore off of State Highway 84. The DNR has classified Minnesota's lakes into 43 different classes based on physical, chemical and other characteristics. Mule Lake is in Lake Class 23; lakes in this class are very deep and very clear lakes. This lake is primarily managed for northern pike, walleye, and yellow perch and secondarily for smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, bluegill, and black crappie. A catch-and-release regulation for largemouth bass and smallmouth bass was implemented in 2004 on Mule Lake.

Northern pike are abundant in Mule Lake when compared to other Lake Class 23 lakes. The northern pike mean length was 20 inches and fish up to 34 inches were sampled. Of the fish sampled, 40% were greater than 21 inches. Walleye abundance increased from the historical low in 2001. The mean length was 15 inches and fish up to 29 inches were sampled. Mule Lake is part of research project to determine the best stocking rate and size for other lakes in the same Lake Class as Mule Lake. Yellow perch numbers are low when compared to other Lake Class 23 lakes but consistent with previous surveys. Other fish species that are available to anglers to catch are black crappie, bluegill, brown bullhead, cisco, pumpkinseed sunfish, largemouth bass, rock bass, smallmouth bass, and white sucker.

Anglers can help maintain or improve the quality of fishing by practicing selective harvest. Selective harvest allows for the harvest of smaller fish for table fare, but encourages release of medium- to large-sized fish. Releasing these fish can help maintain balance in the fish community in Mule Lake and provide anglers the opportunity to catch more and larger fish in the future.

Shoreline areas on the land and into the shallow water provide essential habitat for fish and wildlife that live in or near Minnesota's lakes. Overdeveloped shorelines can't support the fish, wildlife, and clean water that are associated with natural undeveloped lakes. The combined effects of all lakeshore owners "fixing up" their property can destroy a lake's valuable natural shorelines.

Shoreline habitat consists of aquatic plants, woody plants and natural lake bottom soils. Plants in the water and at the water's edge provide habitat, prevent erosion and absorb excess nutrients. Shrubs, trees, and woody debris such as fallen trees or limbs provide good habitat both above and below the water and should be left in place. Natural lake bottom materials like silt or gravel are more ecologically productive than pure sand trucked in for a swimming beach. A tidy lawn and a sandy beach make great spots for sunbathing and swimming but do little to provide habitat for fish and wildlife. By leaving a buffer strip of natural vegetation along the shoreline, property owners can reduce erosion, help maintain water quality, and provide habitat and travel corridors for wildlife.

Only if more lakeshore owners manage their shoreline in a natural condition can fish and wildlife populations on Minnesota lakes remain healthy and abundant. More specific

information on protecting or restoring shorelines and watersheds is available through the local DNR Fisheries office.

In 2006, the MLPOA worked closely with Harlan Fierstine of the Walker Area DNR Fisheries to develop a revised Fish Management Plan for Mule Lake. The primary focus was on the improvement of walleye fishing and the results in the DNR Fisheries sampling of walleyes. As a result of this new plan the following actions are in process (see appendix D for the detail plan).

Mule Lake was part of the fifty lakes DNR 5 year program to determine what is the best stocking plan is for lakes of our size. This resulted in the DNR to change Mule Lake from a "core" lake to a "contingent lake".

2007 is the first year that we are "contingency lake". This means is that the DNR stocked 250,000 walleye fry in Mule Lake early in 2007. The DNR will be back in the fall of 2007 to conduct electro fishing to analyze the success rate of the young of year walleye stocking. If the electro fishing catch rate of young of year walleye is less than 25 per hour, the plan is to stock an additional 364 pounds of walleye fingerlings this fall. If the electro fishing catch rate is greater than 25 young of year walleye in September, there would be no additional stocking this year. Regardless of this year's results, the next stocking of 250,000 walleye fry, will be scheduled in the spring of 2009 with the same contingency requirements from 2007.

The Walleye limit has been reduced to 3 on Mule Lake beginning with the fishing opener in 2007. That information is in the DNR fishing rules and regulations book for 2007. It has also been posted at the public landing. Mule Lake will also continue to be a bass catch and release lake. A public forum review of the catch and release regulation will take place in the fall of 2009. Any change in the provision would be enacted in the spring of 2010.

The DNR has also selected Mule Lake, with several other area lakes, to conduct creel surveys this year, on a random basis, in 2007. The DNR will be on the lake to interview fishermen and measure fish anglers have kept. The collected data will be used by the DNR to determine daytime fishing pressure and the species of fish caught.

We also need to continue our strategy to reduce our northern pike population to improve our walleye population. This is to harvest the smaller northern pike up to 21", but to return northern pike longer than 22". An aggressive harvest of northern pike each year will help to meet our Walleye goal of 6-8 per gill net.

For Mule Lake the DNR Area Fisheries Manager is Harlan Fierstine, Area Fisheries Manager, 7316 State Hwy 371, Walker, MN 56484, Phone: (218) 547-1683, email: harlan.fierstine@dnr.state.mn.us.