





Winter Walleye Opportunities

By Ron Wilson

Earlier this decade, about the time this magazine was touting the state's ice fishing opportunities for yellow perch and northern pike in waters created or enhanced from exceptional wet conditions in the 1990s, fisheries biologists were thinking ahead.

The idea was to stock walleye in waters with good depth, habitat and forage, and then be patient. "What we have today are some new walleye lakes that were once shallow waters or even sloughs," said Scott Gangl, North Dakota Game and Fish Department fisheries management section leader. "We put these walleyes in several years ago as fingerlings . . . We've been monitoring them, and in some cases we've seen some exceptional growth."

In some cases, walleye were reaching 14-16 inches in two years instead of three to four, thanks to an abundance of fathead minnows for the game fish to eat.

Early on, anglers were likely catching yellow perch or pike in these waters, unaware that North Dakota's most-sought-after game fish were becoming established. "It took some time for the walleye to grow and thin the (fathead minnow) population, but once that happened, the walleye bite took off."

Some of the waters Department fisheries biologists consider "new" walleye fisheries include Antelope Lake in Pierce County, Alkaline Lake in Kidder County, and Twin

Lakes in LaMoure County. "It's very uncommon to have the number of brand new lakes that we have had in the last several years," Gangl said.

Like deer hunting in the state, the good old days of walleye fishing are now. "In terms of the number of new and established walleye waters around North Dakota, it's as good as it's ever been," Gangl said. "There are just a ton of walleye fishing opportunities out there. Throughout the central part of the state, for instance, there are thousands and thousands of acres of water to fish that at one time simply didn't exist."

The list of walleye winter fishing opportu-

nities that follows is a glimpse – but an insightful glimpse – of waters with the potential for good fishing after freeze-up. "Our district fisheries biologists around the state looked at their lakes and picked ones they thought had the most potential," Gangl said. "Some are waters that had good walleye bites this summer, and some are just the standards that hold decent walleye populations. The lakes listed, however, aren't an entire, complete list of walleye lakes for anglers to try in winter."

RON WILSON is editor of *North Dakota OUTDOORS*.

WATERS OLD AND NEW

The following public fishing waters in North Dakota are listed by county. The numbers in parenthesis that follow each fishery is simply a code used by biologists to help identify those waters managed by the Game and Fish Department. The codes are also found on the map to help readers locate the waters in which they are interested.

Check signs at each area for restrictions. Use extreme caution when ice fishing on lakes with aeration systems.

BOWMAN COUNTY

Bowman-Haley Dam (085) – 11 miles south, 8 miles east, 2 miles south of Bowman.

BURKE COUNTY

Northgate Dam (097) – 6 miles north, 1 mile west, 2 miles north, .5 miles west of Bowbells.
Smishek Dam (095) – 4 miles northwest of Powers Lake.

GRANT COUNTY

Heart Butte Reservoir (160) – 15 miles south of Glen Ullin.

Lake Audubon in McLean County attracts its share of ice anglers every winter in search of walleyes.

GRIGGS COUNTY

Lake Addie (596) – 4 miles east, 1 mile south, 1 mile west of Binford.

HETTINGER COUNTY

Indian Creek Dam (171) – 1.5 miles west, 2 miles south, 2 miles west, 3 miles south of Regent.

KIDDER COUNTY

Alkaline Lake (590) – 15 miles south, 3 miles east of Tappen.
Lake Josephine (186) – 2 miles north of Tuttle.
Round Lake (181) – 1.5 miles east of Pettibone.

LaMOURE COUNTY

Twin Lakes (552) – 3 miles north, .5 miles east of LaMoure.

McHENRY COUNTY

Buffalo Lodge Lake (205) – 1 mile east, 3 miles north, 2 miles east of Granville.

MCINTOSH COUNTY

Dry Lake (213) – 3 miles west, 3.5 miles north of Ashley.

Green Lake (210) – 2 miles east, 4 miles south, 1 mile east of Wishek.

McLEAN COUNTY

Crooked Lake (223) – 11 miles north, 5 miles east of Turtle Lake.
Lake Audubon (225) – North of Coleharbor.
Lake Brekken (232) – 1.5 miles north of Turtle Lake.

NELSON COUNTY

Stump Lake (516) – 12 miles south, 1 mile west of Lakota.

PIERCE COUNTY

Antelope Lake (617) – 8 miles west, 3 miles south, 5 miles west, 2 miles south of Esmond.

RAMSEY COUNTY

Devils Lake (275) – Near the City of Devils Lake.

RENVILLE COUNTY

Lake Darling (285) – 16 miles north, 13 miles west of Minot.

STARK COUNTY

Dickinson Reservoir (Patterson Lake) (330) – 2 miles west of Dickinson.

TOWNER COUNTY

Bisbee Dam-Big Coulee (350) – 1 mile east of Bisbee.

WELLS COUNTY

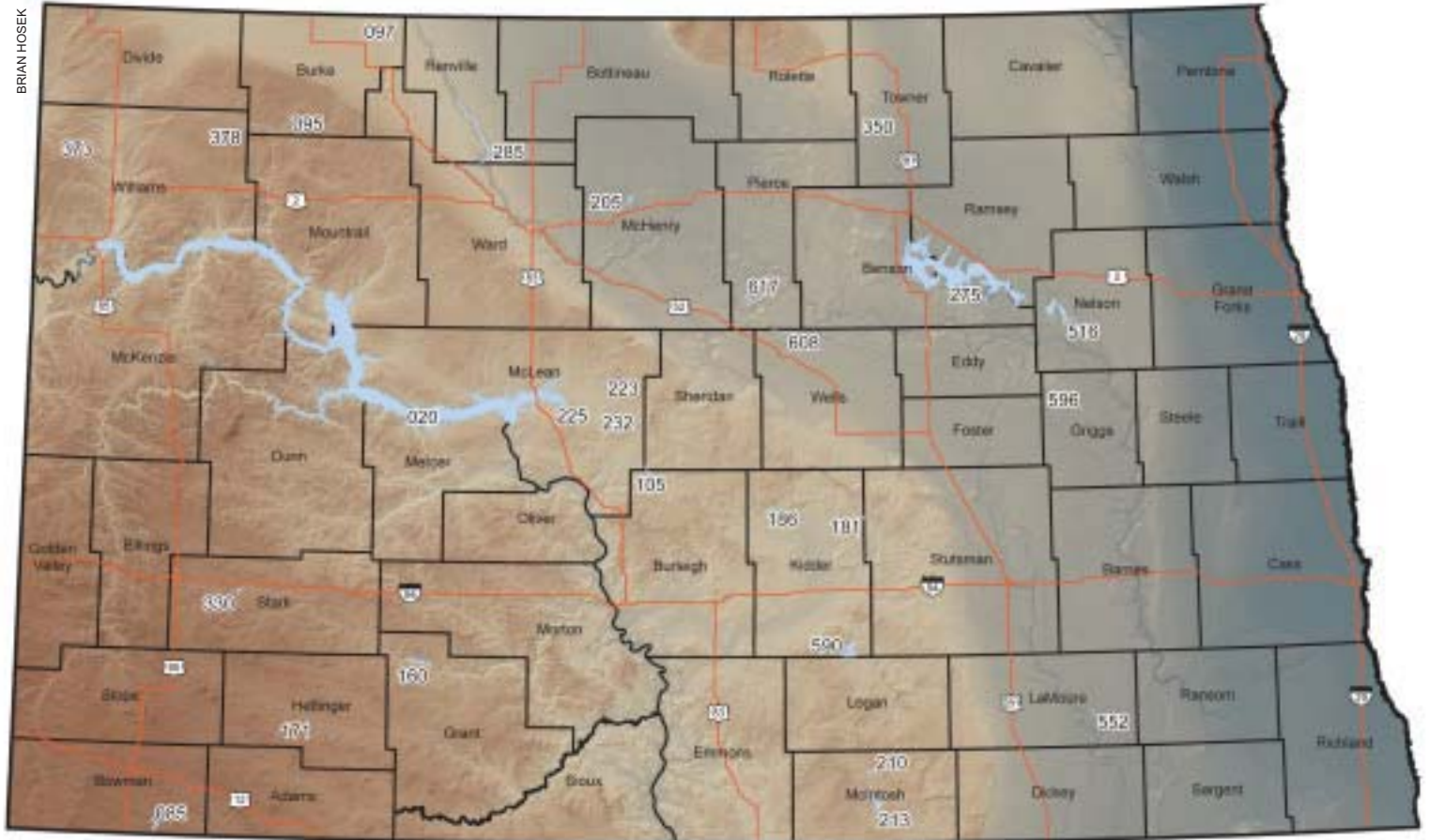
Goose Lake (608) – 3 miles north, 3 miles east, 1 mile north of Harvey.

WILLIAMS COUNTY

Blacktail Dam (373) – 5 miles north, 5 miles west, 1 mile north of the junction of U.S. highways 2 and 85.
McGregor Dam (378) – 1 mile south of McGregor.

GDU Canal Lakes (105) – Includes New Johns (Burleigh County), Heckers (Sheridan County) and East and West Park (McLean County) lakes – 9 miles south and 3 miles east and west of Mercer.

LAKE SAKAKAWEA (020) – Near cities of Williston, New Town, Garrison and Riverdale.



WINTER WALLEYE TIPS

Greg Gullickson, avid ice angler and North Dakota Game and Fish Department outreach biologist in Minot, offers some tips for putting some winter walleyes atop the ice.

Walleye Bite

- Yellow perch, another ice fishing favorite in North Dakota, typically bite best during daylight hours. While you certainly can catch walleyes during the day, the best bite is typically an hour before sunrise and an hour after sunset.

Fish Deep, Fish Shallow

- Depth is something you need to experiment with. Walleye can be caught in 2-60 feet. Typically at first ice, fish will be in 8-12 feet of water. In the heart of winter, they tend to slide down a little deeper to 15-35 feet. The main thing is to experiment. Set a few tip-ups or lines at varying depths. I urge anglers to use caution when pulling fish out of deep water, especially during winter, as the quick change in pressure can be fatal to fish you're intending to release.

Baits

- Jig and a minnow seems to be the most common combination. Small jigging baits are also very productive. On some lakes, walleyes really key in on movement. For example, Lake Sakakawea walleye really like the action of a jigging lure. One of my favorites is a small minnow-type lure that hangs horizontal, with the line attaching to the middle of the body, and a small treble hook on each end. Minnows are my favorite, but many of the synthetic baits work well, too.

Structure

- My favorite setup for walleye is a point with shallow water closely adjacent to deep water. My second choice is a sunken island, but drop offs and even large flats seem to hold fish at certain times of the year. I use my Global Positioning System a lot. I mark spots in summer that look interesting, which saves me from drilling dozens of holes trying to find the right spot.

Methods

- I prefer to jig, then move if the fish aren't biting in a certain area. But I also enjoy the comfort of a permanent shack and watching the tip-ups out the window while a pot of chili simmers on the stove. Tip-ups are a great tool because you can fish different depths at the same time. Once I find The Spot, I deploy my ice house and fish in comfort.

Safety

- Safety is a major concern while ice fishing. The lighter you travel the better. You don't have to travel far for ice conditions to change significantly. Avoid pressure ridges, cracks, slushy or darker areas that signify thinner ice. Stay away from ice that forms around partially submerged objects such as trees or brush.



Doesn't matter if the water is frozen or not – the walleye is king among anglers in North Dakota.