

# FISHING HOLE

## BENSON LAKE

**WHY GO:** Benson Lake is a solid option for splake once the winter season for stream trout on lakes opens up on January 13. It is inside George Crosby Manitou State Park, and there are a few campsites on the lake, making it a good option to combine a little winter camping with ice fishing.

**ACCESS:** Benson Lake is 8.5 miles north-east of Finland, off of C.R. 7, and there is a carry-in access on the northwest side of the lake. During summer months, it's a shorter walk to the lake from where you park. During the winter, the access road is partially closed to vehicles, so the hike to the lake is about a half-mile long.

**VITALS:** Benson is 19.4 acres, with a maximum depth of 36 feet. It's relatively clear, with an average water clarity of 15.5 feet. Because it's inside a state park, an entrance fee is required, available at Tettegouche State Park's Visitor Center (218-353-8800), which administers the park, or the self-registration envelopes available around the state parks. Crosby Manitou is popular with snow-shoers, and snowmobiles are not allowed in the park.

**GAME SPECIES PRESENT:** Splake.

**NOW A SPLAKE LAKE:** The state used to stock the lake with brook trout until about the 1970s, when it began alternating between brookies and splake. Since 1988, it has been exclusively stocked with splake,

said Dick Stern, a DNR fisheries technician out of the Finland office.

Benson has been known to produce some stocky splake. It has typically been stocked with about 2,500 splake every spring.

The action always seems best for those first couple of weeks of the winter season, Stern said, with a hit or miss scenario once February rolls around.

Stern said ice anglers typically use smaller jigging tackle, like a jigging spoon tipped with a minnow head, or a small jig tipped with a waxworm.

**OPEN WATER, TOO:** While the heaviest fishing pressure on Benson is in the winter, the lake is a decent spring option for anglers, too. There is a boardwalk spanning the lake's entire shoreline, extending some easier access to shore anglers.

**BATTERIES NOT INCLUDED:** Because Benson Lake is inside the state park, gas augers, like gas boat motors, aren't allowed. So hand augers or quiet, electric or battery-powered augers, which have gained popularity in recent years, are allowed.

This is how park staff tends to interpret statute, as electric boat motors are generally allowed inside state parks, while banning gas motors since state statute prohibits motorized watercraft in excess of 10 miles per hour.

**CAMPING OPTION:** There are four fee campsites on the lake, with three on the closer shore, as you approach, and a fourth on the far end of the lake, for those seeking more privacy. They are all "backpack" sites (Nos. 19-22), with food lockers and latrines, and there is a hike to get to any of these sites.—*Javier Serna*

