

FISHING HOLE

CLARA LAKE

WHY GO: This relatively shallow lake north of Lutsen, nestled in the Superior National Forest, has a mix of species, including northern pike, walleye, bluegills and yellow perch. It also offers the opportunity for camping.

ACCESS: From Hwy. 61, just north of Lutsen, turn north on C.R. 4 (Caribou Trail) and drive about 8 miles to F.R. 340. Take a left and drive 3.5 miles. The entrance to the campground and a gravel boat ramp is on the right, down a ¾-mile entrance road.

VITALS: This 387-acre lake sits entirely in Cook County. It has a maximum depth of 15 feet, with 4.71 miles of shoreline and water clarity down to 6.5 feet.

FISH SPECIES PRESENT: Bluegill, hybrid sunfish, northern pike, sunfish, walleye, white sucker and yellow perch.

WALLEYE: Clara's walleye population is naturally-sustaining, and the most recent fisheries survey of the lake turned up 10 different year classes. At that time, there were a lot of fish showing up in the 12- to 14-inch range, 15- to 19-inch range and 20- to 24-inch range. No fish registered in any size classes above that.

The majority of the open water in the lake is 15-feet deep, though the edges are shallower and host aquatic plant communities, and there are a few humps to key in on surrounded by that deeper water. There's also an island in the southern part of the

lake, with a sandbar and reef to focus on, according to Minnesota DNR's bathymetric map of the lake.

PIKE: Most of the pike that showed up in the most recent fisheries survey in 2007 fell between 15 and 24 inches. There were a few in the 25- to 29-inch range, and one in the 30- to 34-inch range. Suffice it to say, with yellow perch, sunfish and white suckers present, the pike population has the potential to produce some big fish in this lake. That survey turned up pike from eight different year classes, and growth rates were average for the lake class. With a handful of homes on the southern shore of the lake, it's unclear how much pressure the northern pike fishery receives, and whether that limits many fish reaching trophy size.

PANFISH: As mentioned, the lake does have weedy edges, and an aquatic plant survey conducted by Minnesota DNR in 2012, documented the flora in the southwest end of the lake, which included submersed, emergent, floating-leaf and shoreline plants, many of which will give cover, attracting both panfish and predators such as pike. Bluegill, hybrid sunfish, pumpkinseeds, sunfish and yellow perch have all been documented in the lake, and that most recent survey showed most of the bluegills to be under 5 inches, though there were a handful surveyed above that, including a fish in the 10- to 11-inch range. Pumpkinseeds weren't seen in that most recent survey, and

the hybrid sunfish and sunfish were all too small to target in that survey.

But while most of the perch in the lake were under five inches, more than a handful fell in the 8- to 9-inch and 10- to 11-inch range. There was even one perch between 12 and 14 inches.

CAMP OUT: There is free camping at the Superior National Forest's Clara Lake Rustic Campground. While there are no trash receptacles or water available at the campground, it does have an outhouse. There is a maximum of nine people per site, with space for one vehicle and one towed vehicle. Additional vehicles must park on the spur, and may not park on the grass or

where they impede traffic.—*Javier Serna*

