

FISHING HOLE

ELBOW LAKE



WHY GO: Elbow is a good numbers lake for both walleye and northern pike, and it's one of the few lakes in the area with a fishable bluegill population.

ACCESS: There's a boat landing in the southeast corner of the northeast basin of the lake. The road to the landing is about 10 miles up the Gunflint Trail from Grand Marais. There's parking for about 20 vehicles.

VITALS: Minnesota DNR's Lakefinder App lists 16 lakes named Elbow and two in Cook County. This Elbow Lake is not to be confused with the one on the Timber-Frear Canoe Route near Sawbill Landing. This Elbow Lake is about 408 acres, and is fairly shallow, with a maximum depth of 9 feet. "And you'll be hard pressed to find that much water out there," said Steve Persons, Minnesota DNR's Grand Marais area fisheries supervisor.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleye, northern pike, bluegill and yellow perch.

WALLEYE: Persons said Elbow is more of a numbers lake for walleye, but the 2010 DNR survey of the lake did turn up

one walleye that was at least 25 inches long.

"People tend to go there to get fair numbers of walleye, and there aren't many big ones," he said.

There's decent natural reproduction on the lake, though DNR is still monitoring that after discontinuing the stocking program on the lake several years ago.

"We were seeing what looked like good natural reproduction," he said. "Stocking didn't seem to be contributing much. If it can support itself, it's best to let it do that."

PANFISH POSSIBILITIES: The latest survey of the lake showed there was a large yellow perch population, including some fish that exceeded 8 inches. With perch that big, it might be worth it to spend some time fishing for them.

DNR is also attempting to establish a bluegill population on the lake, which seems like it could be hospitable to bluegill, Persons said.

"The main limiting factor up here for bluegill is water temperature," Persons said. "With Elbow's shallow water, it warms up quicker. We thought it might be closer to the preferred temperature, plus there are good areas for them to spawn."

DNR stocked the lake in 2007 and 2009 with about 30 pounds of the fish each time. While the most recent survey showed their numbers to be low, they did find one bluegill that was at least 9 inches long. That survey also showed signs of natural reproduction.

"It seems to be headed in the right direction," he said.

NORTHERN PIKE: "So Elbow isn't the place trophy pike hunters would spend much time, but it does have quite a few of the toothy critters in it," Persons said.

"You can almost always catch northerns here," he said.

The shallow water, and lack of deeper water, is the limiting factor.

"It doesn't have a lot of cool water refuge that you'd want for big pike," he said.

GO SLOW: Persons warns newcomers to the lake about the shallow rock piles and reefs that have to be crossed to get to the main lake from the boat access. "You have to really proceed with caution," he said. For that matter, most of the southern basin is quite shallow, and is generally choked with weeds later in the warm-water season. "There are fish in there, but you have to work hard to catch them," he said.

—Javier Serna