

FISHING HOLE

LEO LAKE

WHY GO: This little lake off the Gunflint Trail and inside the Superior National Forest, nestled between Poplar Lake and Hungry Jack Lake, is easy to reach and has populations of rainbow trout and walleye worth targeting.

ACCESS: There is a carry-in access on the northeast corner of the lake, just off C.R. 65/Hungry Jack Road, less than a mile north of the Gunflint Trail. There is roadside parking, down the road a little ways from the access, for four vehicles.

VITALS: This 102-acre lake has a maximum depth of 28 feet, and is fairly clear. For a lake of its size, it has quite a bit of water that's at least 15 feet deep. The Minnesota DNR last surveyed the lake in 2010 and found water clarity to be 13 feet.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Rainbow trout, walleye, smallmouth bass, green sunfish.

RAINBOW FUN: Steve Persons, Grand Marais area DNR fisheries supervisor, said annual stockings of rainbow trout yearlings have paid off. "It's been a pretty reliable trout lake for a very long time." Persons said most of the rainbows, which are stocked in May, average between three quarters of a pound and a pound and a quarter. "There are a few bigger fish," he said. "We have heard of a few rainbow trout in the 20-inch range, but that's very rare."

WALLEYE PERSISTING: Persons said that the lake has a population of naturally-reproducing walleye, though the fish were not originally swimming in the lake. But illegal stockings, along with that of smallmouth bass, have continued their presence in the lake, despite the lake being poisoned at least twice since 1957. The lake's most recent assessment in 2010 turned up both young and adult walleye, including a fish that was at least 25 inches.

LOST IDENTITY: Persons said the lake was first stocked with trout of one kind or another in the 1930s. The lake was first surveyed in 1957, at which point there were bass, walleye and bluegill in the lake, none of which are believed to have occurred naturally in there. "We don't know what

was originally in the lake," Persons said. The lake once was experimentally stocked with Kokanee and coho salmon back in the 1970s. "Neither was particularly successful," Persons said. They are long gone. As are splake, which were last stocked in the lake in 2002. "Once bass and walleye got in there, splake no longer worked," Person said. The 2010 survey turned up a bunch of small green sunfish, and even a single bluegill, though such panfish generally don't do well this far north, Persons said.

SMALLIES, TOO: Persons said smallmouth bass have also persisted at the lake, thanks to

illegal stockings. A single smallmouth turned up in DNR's 2010 survey, but that's doesn't mean they are in small numbers. "We see them in our nets, but our sample isn't designed to catch them." Smallmouth bass are generally disruptive to trout in a lake setting, but Persons said they don't appear to be affecting Leo's rainbow population.—*Javier Serna*

