

FISHING HOLE

MOSS LAKE

WHY GO: In the winter, it's fairly easy to reach this lake trout destination. There aren't many big lakers in Moss, but it's known as a numbers lake. In the soft water months, smallmouth bass become a target for anglers.

ACCESS: Moss Lake is accessible via a portage trail from the Hungry Jack Rd. on the Gunflint Trail or from a portage trail on Birch Lake at the far east end of that lake. The trail from Birch pops out on the western end of Moss.

VITALS: Though its northeast corner borders the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and provides access to Duncan Lake, which is in the BWCAW, Moss is entirely in the Superior National Forest. It's a 254-acre lake with one deep basin that has a maximum depth of 86 feet.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Lake trout and smallmouth bass.

LAKERS: Moss used to be stocked by Minnesota DNR about every three years. It's received both the Gillis Lake and Mountain Lake strains of lake trout, according to Minnesota DNR's Grand Marais area fisheries supervisor Steve Persons. But the lake, which once had its own native strain of lakers before being poisoned back in the 60s (more on that below), has had enough natural reproduction of lakers that DNR has discontinued the stocking program, which

would have otherwise likely seen another stocking in 2014.

"It's always really good to see these fish reproducing on their own," Persons said. "We don't know if that's the Gillis fish or the Mountain Lake fish that have done so well," Persons said. "Whatever they are, they seem to like where they are at."

Persons said Moss has generally had a higher number of lake trout than most lakes in the area.

"People there have good luck, but they aren't going to be big," he said, noting that most catches are between 14 and 16 inches. Though there are white suckers in the lake, the lakers probably feed mostly on bugs, and there probably aren't many trout longer than 20 inches, Persons said.

SMALLIES IN THE SUMMER: Smallmouth bass aren't native to Moss, and biologists first became aware of their presence around 1987, Persons said.

"By then, they were pretty well established," Persons said, noting that the bass haven't seemed to interfere with the lake trout population, since smallmouth target crayfish as the staple of their diet.

There's some decent-sized smallies in the lake, with some fish reaching three and four pounds, he said, though it's more of a June to September fishery. "People going in there looking for smallmouth bass can do very well," Persons said.

RECLAMATION HOLDING UP: The lake was reclaimed, or poisoned, back in the 1960s to manage it specifically for lake trout. There were lake trout in the lake at the time, so that natural strain is long gone now, but those fish had to compete with other fish such as walleye, northern pike, and yellow perch, which had been introduced. Also lost, along with the native lakers, were ciscoes and lake whitefish, Persons said, but the reclamation has benefitted the lake trout population.

"The reclamation has held up all of these years," Persons said.

OCCASIONAL STREAMERS: In the most recent DNR survey of the lake, back in 2009, a single brook trout, which was between 15 and 19 inches, and a single splake, which also fell into the same size category turned up.

"There is an outside chance of getting an occasional splake or brook trout coming from Birch, but it would be very rare," Persons said. "We probably got them all. I wouldn't be surprised."

CAMP OUT: The U.S. Forest Service maintains one of its backcountry campsites on Moss Lake, which has a fire ring, latrine, and possibly a picnic table, according to the USDA website. There's a nine person limit at this campsite. Access to this campsite is on a portage to the southeast corner of the lake from Hungry Jack Road.
-Javier Serna

