

# FISHING HOLE POPLAR LAKE

**WHY GO:** It's a big lake with a lot to offer, with a handful of game species to target. "If you are flexible and take whatever comes, it's a good lake to fish," said Steve Persons, Minnesota DNR's Grand Marais area fisheries supervisor, mentioning walleye, smallmouth bass and northern pike. The lake is also popular with whitefish netters in the fall.

**ACCESS:** Several resorts on the lake offer access, but the only public landing is on the west side of the lake, accessible by heading south from the Gunflint Trail. The ramp is concrete, with quite a few parking spaces, and is also used by paddlers heading into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, as four portage trails lead out from the lake.

**VITALS:** This 764-acre lake is entirely in Cook County and is surrounded by the Superior National Forest, though there is quite a bit of private land bordering the lake, as evidenced by the number of lake homes. The lake is generally deep and clear, with a maximum depth of 73 feet and clarity down to 10.4 feet, according to Minnesota DNR's latest survey conducted on the lake in July of 2012.

**GAME SPECIES PRESENT:** Walleye, northern pike, smallmouth bass, whitefish, burbot, black crappie, pumpkinseed, yellow perch.

**WHITEFISH HAVE REMAINED:** Despite all of the homes on the lake, which are associated with decreased water quality, Poplar has hung on to its population of whitefish, which are associated with high water quality. Historically, there were lake trout in the lake, which have disappeared for unknown reasons, Persons said, but the water quality has been good enough to support whitefish. That's probably been helped by a Cook County program that stays on top of septic systems, ensuring they are maintained at a high enough level. "It's a productive lake for netters," Persons said. "They do pretty well out there."

**WALLEYE STRUGGLES:** Walleye aren't native to the lake, but they were introduced in the 1930s, Persons said. There is little natural reproduction occurring in the lake, and DNR has been trying to figure out a way to improve the fishery for years, most recently going to an every-other-year stocking regimen in 2011. "We have tried almost every trick in the book," Persons said, noting that the next move might be regulations that

would limit the number of fish harvested — though that approach would need public support. Still, while the population of walleye may not be where managers would like, there are fish to be found. "It seems like folks who are familiar with the lake are able to find some walleye," Persons said.

**PIKE ARE PLENTY:** That recent 2012 survey showed that the lake was meeting DNR's goals for northern pike, though most of the fish collected in that survey were under 20 inches. There wasn't a single fish collected that was at least 30 inches, and Persons said he doesn't hear

of many giants being landed. "I don't hear of real big pike too often, which is kind of surprising," he said. It's surprising because northern pike usually grow big when they have access to deep, clear water and an oily forage base such as whitefish, as is the case at Poplar. "It's possible that with the amount of people on the lake, even though it doesn't get that much fishing pressure, that fish don't live long enough to reach those sizes," Persons said.

**PONDERING PANFISH:** The pumpkinseed and yellow perch on the lake aren't generally big enough to warrant spending any time pursuing them, Persons said. But there are occasionally some large black crappies caught on the lake. "They are probably not worth targeting, but if you happen to run into a school, you could have an interesting time with it," he said.

