

# FISHING HOLE

**WHY GO:** It's a solid walleye lake with the opportunity to chase nice bluegills, along with northern pike and smallmouth bass.

**ACCESS:** There is a back-in access at the U.S. Forest Service campground on the east end of the lake, with a large parking lot for vehicles and trailers. The campground is located on Forest Road 10, 10 miles west of Isabella. From Hwy. 61, turn on to State Road 1 at Illgen City and follow to Isabella. Proceed 10 miles west to F.R. 106. Turn left and continue a half-mile to the campground entrance.

**VITALS:** This 273-acre Lake County lake is relatively shallow, with a maximum depth of 13-feet. Fourth McDougal, Middle McDougal and South McDougal lakes can also be accessed via North McDougal. Despite some cabins scattered along the south and west shores, development is limited. "It's a pretty scenic lake," noted Dean Paron, Minnesota DNR's Finland area fisheries supervisor. His office most recently surveyed the lake in the summer of 2016.

**GAME SPECIES PRESENT:** Bluegill, northern pike, smallmouth bass, walleye and yellow perch.

**WILLING WALLEYE:** North McDougal definitely gets some pressure from local anglers on account of its walleye fishery. Last year's survey did turn up one walleye that topped 27 inches.

But most of the walleye in the lake were

in the eater size or coming into that size, with a sizable 2013 year class noted among 9-year classes documented, not including young-of-year walleyes. In the gillnets, the mean length of walleye was 12.22 inches, with fish up to 18 inches long. In the trap nets, the mean length was 13.21 inches, with 36 percent of the catch longer than 14 inches.

"They're there, they're definitely there," said Nathan Stewart, a Minnesota DNR fisheries specialist based out of the Finland office. Stewart worked on last year's survey.

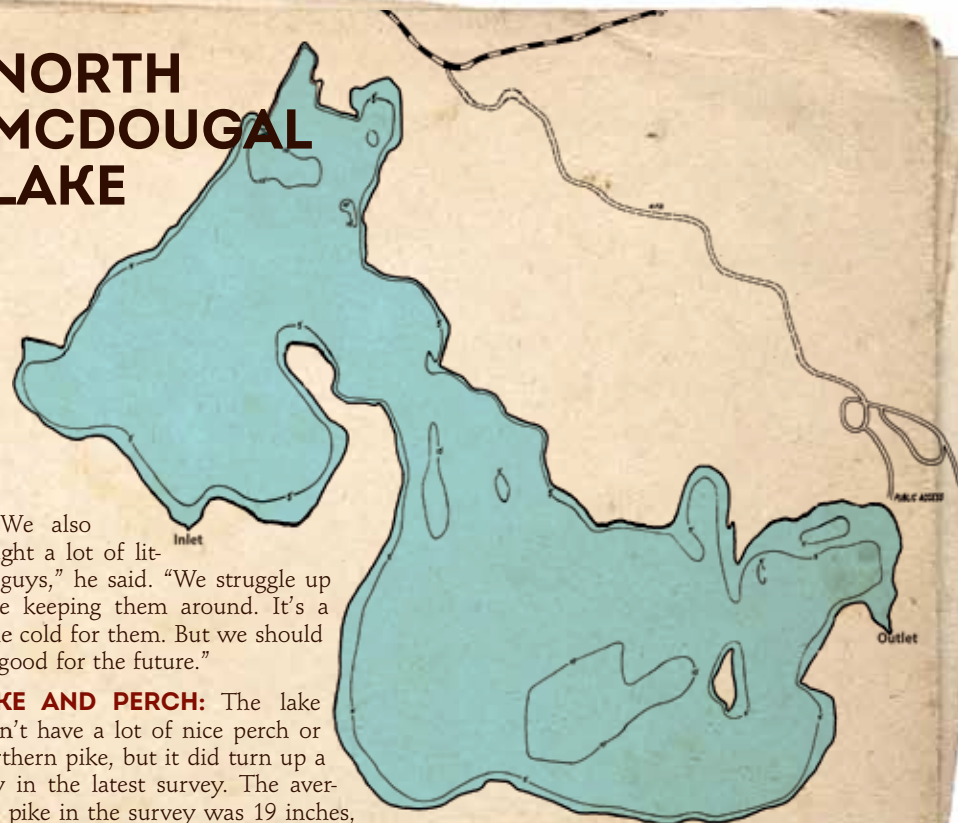
**BIGGER BLUEGILLS:** Northeast Minnesota is not known for its bluegill, but North McDougal has broken the mold recently, if last year's survey is any indication, particularly in comparison to the previous survey in 2011.

The average length in the latest survey was 8 inches, Paron said, noting that bluegills of that size made up 60 percent of the catch for that species. Fish up to 10 inches were sampled.

"There are some big bluegills in there, but where they are, I can't tell you," Paron said, noting that he didn't find any on a recent fishing outing on the lake.

Stewart, however, said the survey didn't turn up a lot of 10 inchers, but the ones sampled last July were in the shallow side bays.

## NORTH MCDUGAL LAKE



"We also caught a lot of little guys," he said. "We struggle up here keeping them around. It's a little cold for them. But we should be good for the future."

**PIKE AND PERCH:** The lake didn't have a lot of nice perch or northern pike, but it did turn up a few in the latest survey. The average pike in the survey was 19 inches, Paron said, noting that one pike that measured 45 inches did turn up.

"Only 3 percent were longer than 30 inches," he said.

Stewart said most of the perch measured between 5 and 8 inches, with a few about 10 or 11 inches.

"Right now, it looks like a healthy perch population," he said. "Some lakes around here do very well for big perch, others not so much. This one is in-between."

**DIVERSE STRUCTURE:** Stewart also noted the lack of development, which has boded well for habitat in the lake. "There's diverse substrates, with sand, cobble, and boulders, a little bit of everything," he said.

**CAMPING:** The U.S. Forest Service's Tofte Ranger District manages the McDougal Lake Campground, with 21 single sites, a swimming beach, a boat launch and hiking trails. The \$15 per night campground has water available, but no electricity.  
-Javier Serna