

FISHING HOLE SEA GULL LAKE

WHY GO: Sea Gull is a beautiful lake partially inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. It's an easy-to-access lake that offers a variety of camping options and a good chance of catching a Boundary Waters grand slam.

ACCESS: Well, you could get here the hard way, portaging from Alpine, Grandpa, Gull, Paulsen, Meditation or Rog lakes, but there are two public accesses on the lake, including one from Trail's End Campground at the end of the Gunflint Trail. It's best to access that via canoe only because it's in a protected bay that is shallow and rocky at its mouth on the lake. The main access, where boats can launch, is also just off the Gunflint Trail on the east end of the lake. The lake sits mostly inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, but a portion of the lake is not inside the wilderness area, so motors are allowed here. And 10 hp outboard motors are allowed in the BWCAW portion generally east of Threemile Island, but only with a permit.

VITALS: This 3,957-acre gem is entirely inside Cook County, though it isn't a long paddle from here to the Lake County border. It has a maximum depth of 145 feet and water clarity down to 12.3 feet, according to Minnesota DNR's 2012 survey of the lake.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleye, lake trout, northern pike, smallmouth bass.

DWARF CISCO: Because of the lake's abundant population of dwarf cisco, which provide a constant source of food for the lake's predator fish, these gamefish have been able to flourish in the vast lake.

LAKERS HOLDING ON: Steve Persons, DNR's Grand Marais area fisheries supervisor, said the lake's main attraction is between walleye, which have been in decline, and its lake trout.

The lakers are doing just fine right now, he said, in large part because of those dwarf cisco.

"Lake trout really thrive when they have that available for forage," he said.

But the lake's deep, cold, clean water, low in nutrients, in addition to the cisco, give lake trout the ingredients they need to survive, Persons said.

"There's something about that Canadian Shield bedrock," he said. "It doesn't leach a lot of nutrients

into the lake."

The lake has excellent spawning habitat—rocky reefs with the cracks and crevices that allow eggs protection from predators.

"Numbers have been steady for the last 20 years," Persons said. "It's a big lake and a lot of it is tough to fish because you have to fish out of a canoe. That is probably helping keep that population up."

Persons said most of the lakers are in the 15- to 20-inch range.

"I hear of an occasional trophy fish," he said. "We don't see them in our assessments because our nets aren't geared towards catching the largest lake trout."

WALLEYE WORRIES: Sea Gull was one of three lakes (including Saganaga and Gull, as well as connected waters) that were given new special regulations. The minimum size limit is now 17 inches (with only one over 20 inches) and the limit was dropped from six fish to three fish.

"We are trying to protect those smaller, younger fish and get the most bang for the buck out of any year classes that the lake is able to naturally produce," Persons said.

DNR isn't sure why the last two surveys have shown a decline in the walleye population, but it could be a number of reasons, Persons said. The regs will be in place for 10 years, at which point they will be reviewed. In the meantime, a closer

eye will be kept on these lakes.

And anglers could pick worse places to fish for walleye than Sea Gull, Persons said. But do your homework. Study those maps.

"People that know the lake well tell me that they can still do pretty well fishing for walleye," he said. "It's a tough lake to go to if you are not familiar with it."

OTHER OPTIONS: The lake is known to harbor some quality northern pike as well as smallmouth bass.

The pike seem to have surged a bit lately, perhaps the by-product of recent strong wildfires, that have leached more nutrients into the lake, allowing some weed beds to do well and provide more of the cover that pike need.

"The potential is really good for trophy fish," Persons said.

Ditto for smallmouth.

"We don't see them in our assessment gear much because we use gill nets, but we hear there are plenty of bass and some nice-sized fish," he added. All in all, Sea Gull can be a pretty good destination for fishing."

