

FISHING HOLE

EAST BEARSKIN LAKE

WHY GO: It's a solid option for walleyes with no horsepower limit for most of the lake (except for the two easternmost arms). There are camping facilities on the lake, as well as Bearskin Lodge, and opportunities to catch other fish species.

ACCESS: The National Forest Service's East Bearskin Lake Campground has a boat ramp. To get to the campground, which is 26 miles from Grand Marais off the Gunflint Trail, take the Gunflint Trail to East Bearskin Road. Take a right on East Bearskin Road and follow the signs.

VITALS: This 593-acre Cook County lake sits inside the Superior National Forest, and partially inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). Consult a map, but the eastern end of the lake is subject to a 10-horsepower limit. The lake notably has portages to several BWCAW lakes, including Little Alder, Crocodile and Moon.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleyes, lake trout, smallmouth bass, northern pike, green sunfish, pumpkinseed, white sucker and yellow perch.

WALLEYES: The lake is stocked in back-to-back years on a five-year cycle, in an attempt to maintain anglers' interest in the state fish, according to DNR's Grand Marais area fisheries supervisor Steve Persons.

The lake was last sampled by fisheries crews in 2016, and some nice-size walleyes turned up, from eater-sized fish to those in the 20- to 24-inch category.

"It's a fair walleye lake," Persons said. "Catch rates have been modest."

There is some natural reproduction of walleyes in the lake, but not enough to sustain the demands of anglers, Persons said.

"In creel surveys, more people are fishing for walleyes than bass, but more people catch bass than walleyes," he said, noting that when DNR stopped stocking the lake with walleyes for a while, catch rates plunged. "So we have good reason to continue that."

SMALLIES: Persons noted that the gear fisheries crews use doesn't tend to capture many bass, but East Bearskin still has a solid smallmouth bass population, he said.

"There is a pretty good number of bass over 12 inches," he said. "I wouldn't say it is producing trophy smallmouths, but bass over 12 inches are a lot of fun."

The catch rates haven't changed on the lake for decades, but Persons noted that what has changed is anglers' habits when it comes to keeping smallmouth bass.

"Very few people keep them anymore," he said.

Don't be shy about taking some home for the table. Smallmouth bass from these cold canoe country lakes make excellent table fare.

LAKERS: DNR is in the process of evaluating its lake trout program for the lake,

which hasn't been showing promising numbers, unfortunately.

The fish hardly show up in gear, with a single lake trout caught in the most recent survey, and this is the second time in a row that only a single fish was surveyed.

Despite that lone lak-



THE REST: There are northern pike in the lake.

"Not great numbers, not great sizes, but people do run into them," Persons said. "That can provide some unexpected action."

While there's green sunfish and pumpkinseed present, Persons said he hasn't heard any significant reports of bluegills or crappies popping up in the lake.

"On the whole, bluegill would be a good thing," he said. "They don't compete seriously with any of the fish that are in there now. They would be a good, bonus fishery."

He's less rosy about the idea of black crappies finding their way into the lake. They can negatively impact a walleye fishery.—Javier Serna

er being a naturally reproduced lake trout, Persons said it doesn't appear there's enough natural reproduction to sustain a lake trout fishery, and, on top of that, anglers on the lake have shown little interest in pursuing them, according to creel surveys.

"We would hope that after all of these years of stocking the lake, we would be seeing a lot more trout in our nets," he said. "They are surviving, but they are not thriving there."

The lake, with a maximum depth of 66 feet but an average depth of about 10 feet, might not have enough deep, cold-water habitat to sustain these sensitive fish.

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