

FISHING HOLE

PARTRIDGE LAKE

WHY GO: Being completely inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and a bit off of the beaten path, Partridge Lake remains a solid option for catching lots of lake trout, mainly in the winter or spring. You'll likely have the lake to yourself.

ACCESS: ABWCAW entry permit is required to visit Partridge Lake. One way of accessing Partridge is via Entry Point No. 59 (South Lake Trail/Partridge Lake). The South Lake Trail is basically an old road bed, and snowmobilers are known to use the trail almost all of the way to Partridge, stopping at the BWCAW boundary and hiking the rest of the way in, according to David Seaton of Hungry Jack Canoe Outfitters. Partridge is about two miles on the South Lake Trail from the Gunflint Trail.

Otherwise, according to Voyageur Map No. 9, Partridge is a 173-rod portage from Duncan Lake, and Seaton said the portage is every bit of 173 rods, if not more. Seaton noted a beaver pond that can be a pain navigating around during the soft-water months can be walked across in the winter.

VITALS: Partridge is a 118 acres, according to the Minnesota DNR's Lakefinder website, with a maximum depth of 80 feet, and a mean depth of 35 feet. It had an average water clarity of 15 feet during the most recent DNR fisheries survey in July of 2013. It's entirely inside Cook County.

SPECIES PRESENT: Lake trout, green

sunfish and white sucker.

GOOD FISHING: Because there is little for forage in the lake (no dwarf cisco) beyond bugs, the lake is not known for producing large lake trout and its potential to do so is limited. It is known for putting out lots of smaller lake trout.

"It can be a really good lake," Seaton noted. "Not everyone that goes in there does well. If whatever the gods do that make fish bite happens, it can be a pretty cool place."

Seaton noted that the lake was hit hard by the infamous 1999 blowdown, though the trails to the lake are still lined with some pretty tall trees.

"It's at the top of the hill and it got clipped off," Seaton said. "If people want to go somewhere quiet, it's always quiet there."

During the winter, Partridge lakers can roam freely about the lake, uninhibited by low oxygen levels and then have better access to the lake's population of green sunfish, which were not sampled at sizes exceeding 5 inches in 2013.

CLIMATE CHANGE:

Steve Persons, DNR's Grand Marais area fisheries supervisor, said that the mean weight in the last survey

was the second highest ever recorded for the lake. That might not mean that the fish are actually getting bigger, but more likely means there is less reproduction in the lake, and that could be because of climate change, Persons said.

There were several year classes present in the lake, during the recent survey, but it was observed that Partridge lakers grow slower than in similar lakes in the area (an average of 15.1 inches by the end of their sixth year, compared to 17.7 inches for similar lakes).

Basically, with warmer, longer summers, that might be making the lake less hospitable for lake trout, which need cool, deep, highly oxygenated lakes to thrive. It probably doesn't help that Partridge is fed by tannin-stained bogs, which keeps the lake darker than clearer lakes. Those darker waters absorb more heat, and longer periods of lake stratification are probably reducing oxygen levels in the



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depths of the lake, squeezing their comfort zone.

INTERESTING GENETICS:

Partridge, Persons noted, is part of the Lake Superior watershed, unlike many of the waters inside the BWCAW, which flow to the Rainy River watershed. The lake trout in Partridge, researchers have found, have genetics that are more similar to the lakers in Lake Superior.

"You would not be able to tell them apart by looking at them," Persons said, noting that Partridge's lakers tend to be dark, bronze-colored, with very orange flesh.

CAMPING: There are three campsites on Partridge Lakes, each with latrines. All three are on the south-facing shore of the lake. The Border Route Trail is accessible via the South Lake Trail and a relatively short trail from the easternmost campsite.—*Javier Serna*