

FISHING HOLE

ISABELLA LAKE

WHY GO: Isabella Lake is an easy-to-access lake entirely in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) that is a good option for eater walleye, trophy pike and even fall whitefish netting.

ACCESS: The easiest way to get to Isabella is via a relatively short portage (DNR calls it 56 rods, Voyageur Maps calls it 35 rods) from the end of Tomahawk Road (F.R. 377). This is basically BWCAW entry point No. 35 (Isabella Lake). The lake can also be accessed via a portage on the west side of the lake from Isabella River (28 rods) or from the east side and Boga Lake (16 rods).

VITALS: Motors aren't allowed on this 1,257-acre BWCAW lake. It's not a very clear lake, thanks to its bog-stained water, and water clarity was measured at 5.5 feet during DNR's most recent fisheries survey in 2016. It's a decent-sized lake with several islands and bays.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Black crappie, bluegill, largemouth bass, rock bass, sunfish, walleye, whitefish, white sucker and yellow perch.

WALLEYES: Most (95 percent) of the walleyes surveyed in 2016 were under 15 inches.

But Isabella isn't a bad option for some good spring and summer walleye action inside the Boundary Waters, without having to make much effort to get there.

And there are some nice-sized walleyes

present. The largest walleye sampled in 2016 was 21.2 inches long and weighed just under three pounds.

The previous fisheries survey, conducted in 2006, turned up a walleye that was just under 27 inches.

Walleyes don't grow fast in this lake, but natural reproduction is doing pretty well in the lake, with eight-year classes showing up in the survey nets. For that matter, the walleye catch in the survey nets was above average compared to similar lakes in northeastern Minnesota, with 87 walleyes sampled.

BIG PIKE: While that 2016 survey turned up a below-average catch of northern pike, Isabella remains a good option for catching a trophy-sized pike. The 2016 survey turned up a 39.4-incher that weighed nearly 15 pounds.

And five of the 19 northerns sampled were longer than 35 inches.

So if you like big pike, it wouldn't hurt to bring some heavier tackle and some pikey plugs, spoons and in-line spinners.

The survey found nine-year classes of pike in the lake, and growth rates for northerns in Isabella appear to be faster than most lakes in the area around Finland.

WHITEFISH: Isabella has a pretty good lake whitefish population, and the most recent survey turned up individuals up to two pounds. The lake is open to sport gill netting in the fall, and DNR says that a small



number of individuals participate in that season every year. The 72 whitefish that were surveyed in 2016 is about average for comparable lakes in northeast Minnesota, according to DNR.

THE REST: There are some decent-sized black crappies in the lake, with fish up to almost 12 inches sampled in the last survey, which turned up 33 black crappies in total. Almost 40 percent of the fish were at least 10 inches long. An angler that bumped

into a school of black crappies on Isabella might have some fun with some light jigs and tackle.

Crews also caught quite a few yellow perch, and a good number of them were big enough to eat (in that 10-inch range).

CAMPING: There's nine campsites on this lake with an additional site listed as a "resting" site.—*Javier Serna*

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