

# FISHING HOLE PINE LAKE

**WHY GO:** Pine Lake is a large, easy-to-access Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Lake offering the wilderness experience along with the chance to catch trophy-sized walleyes, lots of smallmouth bass, and even lake trout.

**ACCESS:** The lake is entirely within the BWCAW, so you'll need a permit. The easiest way to access the lake is via Entry Point No. 68 (McFarland Lake). Head to the northwest corner of McFarland. Depending on the water level, you may not even need to get out of the canoe to "portage." In other instances, you may need passengers to get out of the canoe to line it over to Pine, and vice versa. There are a number of portages from other BWCAW lakes (Canoe, Gadwall, Little Caribou, Long, Vale, and West Pike), as well.

**VITALS:** This 2,122-acre Cook County lake is deep, with a maximum depth of 113 feet. It's also clear, with average water clarity of 18.2 feet, according to Minnesota DNR's most recent fisheries survey of the lake in 2016. There are about 11 campsites on the lake, the majority of which are along the long north shore of the lake.

**GAME SPECIES PRESENT:** Burbot, cisco, lake trout, lake whitefish, northern pike, smallmouth bass, tullibee, walleyes, yellow perch and white sucker.

**INTERESTING HISTORY:** According to DNR, Pine originally supported only lake trout and northern pike as



game species, but by the 1959 survey, walleye had replaced lake trout and, in turn, were on the verge of being overtaken by smallmouth bass.

Still, walleyes persisted, and lake trout managed to hang on to a small remnant population. DNR has tried to maintain lake trout in the lake for the last 30 years, while, according to the last lake management plan, maintaining walleye as the primary management species.

As sort of a last ditch effort on lakers, DNR was set to stock the second of three lake trout stockings, spaced three years apart, to hopefully reestablish the lake trout population. Matt Weberg, DNR's Grand Marais area assistant fisheries supervisor, said 22,000 yearling lake trout (fish between 7 and 9 inches) would be stocked this May. The final round of lake trout would be stocked in 2022.

"We want to give that population a shot in the arm, and get more fish in the system," he said, noting that DNR hasn't given up on the lake because it has high-quality lake trout habitat in the form of deep, well-oxygenated water, on top of a dwarf cisco population, which is about the best forage

there is for inland lake trout.

"The low numbers (of lake trout) in there are a bit of a mystery," Weberg said.

There is a bit of encouragement that the last survey, conducted in 2016, turned up two naturally reproduced lake trout. And a few anglers have also reported catching lake trout in the lake.

"We are hoping to start to see the numbers you would expect in a lake that size with the high-quality habitat that is there," Weberg said. "Restoring the lake trout population is worth trying."

**WALLEYES:** As mentioned, walleyes are the primary management species in the lake.

The walleye numbers sampled in 2016 were down a bit from recent years, and were below the goals of the lake management plan (at 2.5 fish per gill net). But there were walleyes of many sizes sampled, including one fish that was 29.2 inches long.

"It has long had a reputation as one of our better large BWCAW walleye lakes," Weberg said, who pointed out that a number of small fish turned up in the nets.

"Typically, those young fish are less susceptible to our gear, so when we get a number of those, it is usually indicative of larger year classes," he said.

**SMALLIES:** Last, but definitely not least, is the lake's smallmouth bass population. They are the most abundant fish in the lake, to be sure.

They've been present in the lake for decades, and the 2016 survey turned up one of the higher catch rates of smallies ever recorded.

"There are some larger fish, too," Weberg said.

In the last three surveys, dating back to 2003, a number of smallmouth have been sampled in the 15- to 19-inch range. *-Javier Serna*

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