

# FISHING HOLE

**WHY GO:** Musquash Lake has high numbers of splake and is a good option for winter angling, as well as open-water splake action when accessible.

**ACCESS:** Access is the trick with Musquash. According to Steve Persons, Minnesota DNR's Grand Marais area fisheries supervisor, the lake gets a fair amount of winter traffic from snowmobilers. The lake can be a good spring-time option for fishing, but frost heaves and wet weather can make access quite difficult to reach it's U.S. Forest Service-maintained carry-in access.

"If we have wet weather, the road can be really bad," Persons said. "You might want to be prepared for carrying a canoe in for a distance, because we can't guarantee you can get a vehicle close to the lake."

The "road" leading to Musquash is accessible via Pine Mountain Road and the Gunflint Trail. Pine Mountain Road is about 16 miles up the Gunflint.

**VITALS:** This 130-acre Cook County lake is entirely in the Superior National Forest. It has a maximum depth of 26 feet according to the Minnesota DNR, and an average water clarity of 10.1 feet.

**GAME SPECIES PRESENT:** Splake and white sucker.

**TWEAKING SPLAKE:** Minnesota DNR tried to see if the lake could be maintained with fewer stocked splake, and in 2009, the state reduced the stocked fish from 9,000 fingerlings to 6,000 fingerlings. "And yet, that last survey (in 2017), we still got an extremely high catch rate." While the numbers of splake have held up, the average size has come down a bit. "The size isn't what it used to be. It was never known for producing a lot of big splake, but it nevertheless is down a bit from past years."

There are a lot of white suckers in the lake, Persons said, and they seem to be in competition with splake for forage. DNR tried mechanically removing the suckers. "But all that seemed to do was stimulate them to try harder," Persons said.

Poisoning the lake could remove all of the suckers, but it's a deep lake, which would make such a project expensive and DNR has grown more sensitive to those types of projects, Persons said.

Persons said another cut may be decided on in the future, but managers would like at least one more survey to be done on the lake before making any changes.

**WINTER/SPRING BITE:** There's a fair amount of pressure on Musquash for splake in the winter, Persons said, though it's more

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of a numbers lake than anything.

Spring can be a good time, too, if access is possible.

"The first three or four weeks of the season the lakes are pretty cool and the trout are usually active," Persons said. "It's a lot like brook trout fishing. Same kinds of techniques—jigs and a Twister tail. You are always looking for cooler water. In the middle of the summer, you won't find them on the surface, but you don't have to go down deep." Nightcrawlers and

spoons can be effective. "They are pretty catchable."

**GRAYLING:** Many years ago, Musquash was one of three lakes that the state stocked with grayling, which actually did pretty well here. "It seemed sensible to stick with what (Minnesota anglers) knew," Persons said of the decision to instead manage for trout species. The lake has been managed for stream trout since at least 1941.—*Javier Serna*

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