

FISHING HOLE

WHY GO: Mink is a popular option locally for those after rainbow trout, be it at the beginning of stream trout lake winter season in January or throughout much of the open-water season. It's an easy-to-access lake, which likely drives some of its popularity, especially in the winter when some lakes can be hard to get to.

ACCESS: There is a public access site on the east side of the lake, which is off Mink Road. It's a carry-in access and there are 20 vehicle parking spots there. From Grand Marais, head 10 miles up the Gunflint Trail, turning right on Trout Lake Road. There's also an accessible fishing pier with parking for three vehicles off of Trout Lake Road (F.R. 140).

VITALS: This 57.18-acre Cook County lake is inside the Superior National Forest. It's a shallow lake, with a maximum depth of 15 feet and a mean depth of 10.3 feet, according to the lake's Minnesota DNR LakeFind page.

FISH SPECIES PRESENT: Brook stickleback, fathead minnow, finescale dace, northern redbelly dace, rainbow trout and splake.

MANAGEMENT: The lake is a designated stream trout lake managed for both rainbow trout and splake, though the rainbow fishery is what's most viable for anglers at

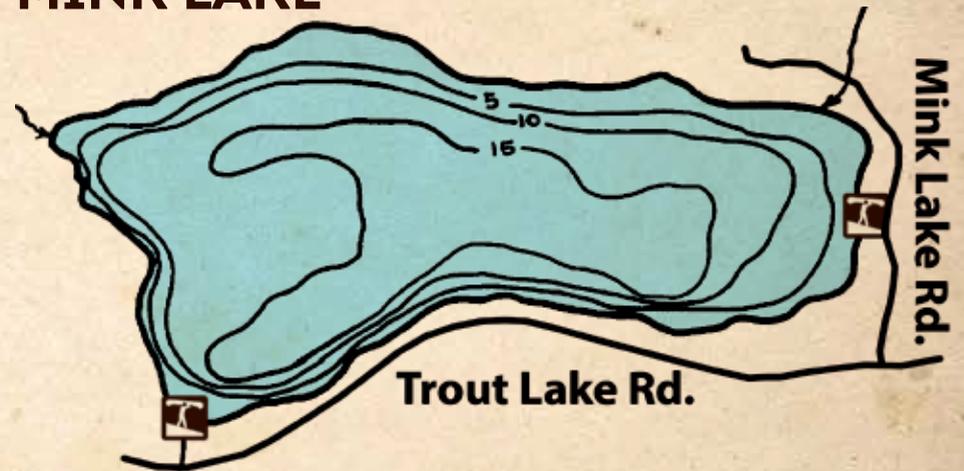
this point, according to Brian Homola, Minnesota DNR fisheries technician based out of the Grand Marais office. The lake was reclaimed in 2014, meaning the entire lake's aquatic system was killed off with rotenone because of the presence of yellow perch and rock bass.

Since then, the lake gets 2,500 rainbow trout yearlings every year, on top of about 5,000 splake fingerlings (planted in 2015, 2016 and 2018).

There's concern that fathead minnows have since showed up in the lake, presumably from minnow buckets. Not only is it illegal for anglers to use live minnows on this (and all) designated trout lakes, it increases the chances that something like yellow perch could be introduced into the lake. Reduced funding availability in general has managers concerned that the money for another rehabilitation, such as one done in 2014, would not be an option in the future because of the cost. So don't be the one that increases that risk by breaking the rules with live minnows. Managers were relieved to find that none of those undesirable species showed up during a targeted survey conducted in 2016.

WINTER ACTION: DNR has a pretty good idea of the amount of fishing pressure, thanks to a camera set up on the lake. "It is

MINK LAKE



nothing we can identify anybody off of, but it works because we can see the numbers of people," Homola said, pointing out that a winter creel is scheduled to be conducted on the lake this winter.

Homola said that small jigs with a waxworm or nightcrawlers are a solid choice of bait during the winter months. He also likes to float a crawler a foot or so off the bottom of the lake. This year's winter stream trout lakes outside or partly-outside the Boundary Waters season open on Jan. 12 and runs through March 31.

OPEN WATER: Mink Lake opens up this spring on May 11 (ending on Oct. 31).

Homola said the lakes get a fair amount of pressure throughout the season, though the opener is likely the peak. "You will see people fishing the pier all summer long," he said, noting that the pier is a popular spot for adults to bring kids fishing. Small spoons and spinners are a good bait, as are nightcrawlers.

CAMP NEARBY: There is a Forest Service campground just to the south known as the Kimball Lake Campground. The campground is a first-come, first-served deal, though during winter time, the water system is turned off, there's no garbage service, roads are not plowed and latrines may be snowed in.—*Javier Serna*