

FISHING HOLE KEMO LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Kemo Lake is a quiet, undeveloped lake where anglers can fish for lake trout in a wilderness-like setting without suffering through arduous portages. In fact, most anglers visit the lake in winter to ice-fish, using snowmobiles.

ACCESS: Kemo Lake is about 10 miles northwest of Grand Marais, as the crow flies. Matt Weberg, assistant area fisheries supervisor in Grand Marais, says most anglers visit the lake in winter. He says anglers often park at a plowed gravel pit just east of Two Island Lake along Ball Club Road. From there, they ride the snowmobile trail to Trestle Pine Lake. Cross to the west side of Trestle Pine and head west toward the southeast end of Kemo Lake. It's about a 0.2-mile portage trail between the lakes. In summer, there are a couple very small pull-offs where you can park along Trestle Pine and paddle across that lake to the portage trail.

VITALS: This is a nice little lake if you're looking for a remote trout-fishing experience. Kemo is 189 acres with a maximum depth of 65 feet. The bottom consists of rubble, boulder and gravel, which is ideal spawning habitat for lake trout. As lake trout waters go, Weberg says this is one of the smaller lakes in the area, but it seems to have sufficient depth and dissolved oxygen in summer to maintain the lake trout fishery, and natural reproduction is good.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Lake trout.

"It's a very popular lake trout lake, well known for producing small to medium-sized lake trout," Weberg says. He says lake trout feed primarily on aquatic invertebrates, so growth is slow and lake trout don't grow as large as they might on lakes with tullibee forage bases. Most run 13 to 18 inches, occasionally up to 25. Lake trout and a few other species were native here, but the lake was reclaimed in the 1960s and now is made up of a simple fish community consisting mostly of lake trout, white suckers and creek chubs. "We were stocking for quite some time," Weberg says. "The last few surveys we've seen very high numbers of unclipped (naturally produced) fish. Our gillnet catches were high enough with wild fish that we decided to end our stocking and see how it does on its own." Weberg says angling success is usually pretty good here.

TAKE A SPLAKE?: Nearby Trestle Pine Lake is regularly stocked with splake. These lake trout/brook trout hybrids can and do swim up the stream that connects Trestle Pine to Kemo, and pretty much every DNR survey turns up splake—sometimes good-sized ones. They occur in Kemo often enough that anglers do catch them. Regulations differ between lake trout and splake, so make sure you can identify your catch. Lake trout have deeply forked tails; splake moderately forked tails. Also, splake tend to have some red spots, while lake trout just have white spots.



View all our Fishing Hole Maps at:
northernwilds.com/fishingholemaps