

FISHING HOLE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Kawishiwi Lake is an entry point to the Boundary Waters. As such, you can enjoy a day of fishing inside the wilderness, without bothersome motorboat traffic. From there, you can continue into the wilderness if you have a permit, or just make a day of it. You'll find a good number of eater-sized walleyes and a nice population of good-sized perch.

ACCESS: Kawishiwi Lake lies about 20 miles northeast of Isabella on USFS Road 354. It is Boundary Waters entry point 37. It's got a large parking lot that can hold 20 or more vehicles and a five-site campground near the access. There are also six remote campsites on the lake. No motors are allowed, so the launch is for small, non-motorized crafts only.

VITALS: At 372 acres and with a maximum depth of 12 feet, Kawishiwi is a moderate-sized, shallow lake. Dean Paron, DNR Area Fisheries Supervisor in Finland, says the lake has quite a bit of structure, including rock and more than 20 species of aquatic vegetation. Paron says the campground gets a lot of visitors, and fishing pressure in the summer is fairly heavy. It's quiet at other times of the year.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleyes, yellow perch, northern pike and smallmouth bass.

WALLEYE: Paron says Kawishiwi is a good walleye lake. "The numbers are lower than some of our area lakes, but the size tends to be a little better," he says. "The catch has remained slightly above average." Paron

says the lake was stocked with walleyes until 2004, but has relied entirely on natural reproduction since then, and the fish are doing fine. Several year-classes are present. The 2017 DNR survey found an average walleye size of 15 inches, with 62 percent of the population measuring greater than 15 inches. Paron has personally fished the lake on a few occasions and suggests anglers use live bait. He suggests slowly pulling spinner rigs over reefs or points for summer success. But you may have to put in your time to find fish. "It's one of those lakes you've got to learn. There's lots of structure," Paron says.

YELLOW PERCH: "I think primarily people still pursue walleye there, but the size structure of perch - it's one of our better perch lakes," Paron says. Perch are present in above-average numbers in Kawishiwi. The latest DNR survey found the majority of the perch to be over 8 inches, with quite a few over 10. Average size was 9 inches, and 26 percent of the perch in the survey measured 10 inches or greater. Paron says most people probably target walleyes, but good-sized perch can be a nice bonus catch. Some of the weedy bays may be worth a look for perch.

NORTHERN PIKE: Northern pike fishing isn't too notable on Kawishiwi. Although pike are present in average numbers, their size tends to be small. In the latest DNR survey, average size was 17 inches and only 7 percent of the pike measured 22 inches or more. The largest captured was just under 30 inches.



KAWISHIWI LAKE

SMALLMOUTH BASS: Smallies are a recent addition to Kawishiwi Lake. "They have been surveyed in both of the last surveys," Paron says. Scale sampling indicates that at least four year-classes are present. Paron expects the fish are now well established. The mean length of smallmouth bass in the latest survey was 14 inches, and some good-sized bass were sampled. The population could be even larger than the DNR survey indicates because bass are net shy. They

are best sampled by electro-fishing, which isn't permitted in the Boundary Waters.

TAKEAWAY: "It's more the experience of being in the Boundary Waters than a world-class fishery," Paron says. Still, those nice perch and eater-sized walleyes may warrant a look.

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