

FISHING HOLE

TOFTE LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Tofte Lake is one of the most popular designated trout lakes in the Ely area. Rainbow trout and splake are stocked here on a put-and-take basis. The small lake is in a picturesque setting, with only a couple cabins. Plus, it has a few free campsites.

ACCESS: From Ely, head east on the Fernberg Road for 15 miles. The gravel parking lot is on the left. During trout opener and on holiday weekends, the access can get crowded. There is overflow parking across the road. The main lot has parking for about 10 trailers, plus an outhouse. There are no motor restrictions, but the concrete slab landing is shallow and you may have a hard time loading a large boat. There are four free campsites on the lake available on a first-come, first-served basis. They all have a picnic table, fire grate and latrine.

VITALS: Tofte Lake is 133 acres of trout fishing paradise. This little lake is deep, with a maximum depth of 73 feet, and much of the lake is over 30 feet. It has a mostly rocky bottom, except for one shallow bay on the north end. It has been stocked with trout since 1942 and has a long reputation as a good trout fishery. Because of this reputation, it tends to get crowded on weekends and particularly on the winter and spring trout openers. You may see 75 ice shacks

during the winter trout opener! Go during the week if you can.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Rainbow Trout and Splake.

RAINBOW TROUT: Rainbow trout are Tofte's bread-and-butter species. Each spring, about 5,700 yearling rainbows are stocked into the lake. "It's probably the most popular stream trout lake in our area," said Jeff Mueller, DNR fisheries technician based out of Tower. He noted that one year on winter trout opener, he saw 220 trout that had been harvested just on opening morning. Despite the pressure, anglers keep on catching fish. Tofte's rainbows subsist mostly on zooplankton and somewhat on minnows, Mueller said. Formerly, the shallow north bay had good aquatic vegetation, which produced minnows, but invasive rusty crayfish decimated the weeds. In the summer, you can catch rainbows in a variety of ways: dunking a worm, casting spinners or flies or even trolling with small crankbaits or spinners. In the winter, ice anglers catch rainbows on tiny jigs with waxworms or on small jigging spoons.

SPLAKE: Splake are hybrids between brook trout and lake trout. The DNR stocks about 2,500 fingerlings into Tofte Lake in the fall of odd-numbered years. "The ones we've been putting in seem to be growing well,"

Mueller said. He noted that starting in 2017, the DNR began stocking a new strain of splake and they seem to be growing a little bit larger. Despite the heavy fishing pressure, some splake do survive for multiple years and have been known to exceed 20 inches. Splake will eat crayfish and will even take down small suckers, which the lake is full of. The same lures



that work for rainbows will also work for splake.

TOO CROWDED?: If Tofte is too crowded for your liking, you could try Glacier Pond 1 and Glacier Pond 2, just across the Fernberg Road. Glacier Pond 1 has a stepped carry-down canoe access. This 15-acre lake is stocked with rainbow trout. Glacier Pond

2 is six acres and has a short carry-down access and one campsite. It has some pretty nice brook trout.

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