

FISHING HOLE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Island Lake Reservoir is located just north of Duluth, but it has nice scenery and isn't overly developed. It has an abundant walleye population, although fish tend to be small. Although muskies are found here in low numbers, 50-inch fish can reward patient anglers. Panfish populations aren't large, but when you find them, they're usually nice.

ACCESS: The lake has three concrete boat ramps owned by Minnesota Power and an earthen ramp owned by United Northern Sportsmen. The Island Lake Dam Recreation Area has a boat launch, a dock, swimming area, restrooms and picnicking, with parking for 20 trailers. To reach this ramp, head north out of Duluth on Highway 53. Turn right onto Lavaque Bypass Road. Proceed 2.3 miles to Martin Road, where Lavaque Bypass Road turns into Lavaque Road and continue straight. Then continue on Lavaque Road for 7.5 miles. Lavaque Road then turns into Island Lake Dam Road. Continue straight, then bear left and follow approximately 1.1 mile to the end of the road. Alternatively, the Hideaway Recreation Area has a boat launch, a dock, shore fishing, restrooms and picnicking, with parking for 14 trailers. The Abbot Road boat launch has a dock, restrooms and parking for eight trailers.

VITALS: Island Lake Reservoir covers 8,000 acres and has a maximum depth of 94 feet. The lake is an impoundment of the Cloquet River and the shoreline is owned by Minnesota Power, which leases property to lake dwellers. Minnesota Power owns 11 free primitive campsites on the lake, available on a first-come, first-served basis.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleye, smallmouth bass, muskellunge, northern pike, black crappie, yellow perch and bluegill.

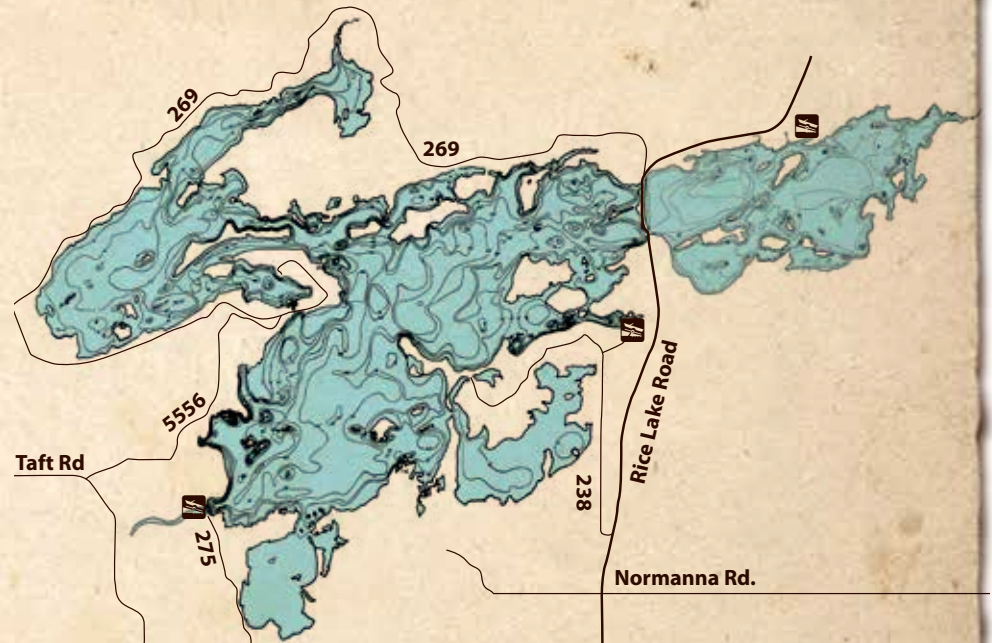
WALLEYE: "This is a fishery that has some fairly unique characteristics in terms of the walleye population," said Dan Wilfond, Du-

luth area fisheries specialist. "It has really good natural reproduction, but the growth is extremely slow—the slowest in the Duluth area." Wilfond said to combat the slow growth rate, recently, a 10-fish daily bag limit with a protected slot from 15 to 20 inches was implemented as an experimental regulation. The goal is to thin out the population of small walleyes to provide more food for the remainder. "We have an overabundance of small walleyes," Wilfond said. "We're trying to concentrate the harvest on small walleyes while protecting medium and large fish. Wilfond said anglers are taking advantage of the new regulation. "In the past, people were hesitant to keep those 10- to 14-inch walleyes (because of the small fillets). When you bump that up to 10, you have the potential to put some food on the table." Part of the problem for walleyes is a lack of food in the reservoir. Island Lake was the first inland lake in the state to be invaded by spiny water fleas. Although the native spottail shiners do feed on this invasive species, sometimes the spine of the spiny water flea becomes lodged in their digestive tract, killing the fish. To help combat the forage problem, last fall, the DNR began stocking ciscoes into Island Lake. "We think if we can get an established population of cisco in the lake, it could really move the needle in terms of walleye size," Wilfond said. Last fall, a small number of ciscoes were stocked, but the DNR plans to stock ciscoes in heavier numbers over the next five years. Although only adult walleyes will be able to prey on adult ciscoes, Wilfond said the hope is that smaller walleyes will prey on juvenile ciscoes.

SMALLMOUTH BASS: Wilfond said smallmouth bass have always been present, but in recent years, their numbers seem to be growing. Anglers do well fishing rocky shorelines or under docks. Wilfond said you'll find most bass in the 14- to 16-inch range, with some up to 20 inches.

MUSKELLUNGE: There aren't too many

ISLAND LAKE RESERVOIR



muskie lakes in the Arrowhead region, but Island Lake has a decent muskie fishery, and fingerlings are stocked regularly. Muskies are found here in low numbers—Wilfond said the DNR estimates the adult muskie population at 400 to 800 fish. But the trophy potential is there. Wilfond said the largest muskie the DNR has netted was 53.9 inches. "We see quite a number of fish over 50 inches," Wilfond added. Because of the lake's dark, tannin-stained water, muskies are very light in color. "You see these big white ghostly-looking creatures coming through the water for your bait," he said. Wilfond said muskies have a better forage base than walleyes because the Cloquet River is home to shorthead redhorse, in addition to white suckers. Muskies prefer these large, soft-finned prey, but they are usually too large to be preyed upon by walleyes. Muskies will likely prey on ciscoes as well, once they are established.

NORTHERN PIKE: Northern pike are

present in low numbers, with most fish measuring around 20 inches. Wilfond said in rare cases, they can reach 35 inches.

BLACK CRAPPIE: Island isn't a destination crappie fishery because the fish are hard to find, especially in the summer. If you do find crappies, however, they are often nice; up to 14 inches or so, Wilfond said.

YELLOW PERCH: The same can be said for the lake's perch. Wilfond said they are moderately abundant and they are often caught incidentally by walleye anglers. However, because of their size quality, they often end up in the livewell with those small walleyes.

BLUEGILL: Like the other panfish species, bluegills aren't commonly caught. However, Wilfond said they can exceed 10 inches when you do find them.

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