

FISHING HOLE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Whiteface Reservoir lies in a scenic setting and is only moderately developed. The lake offers good fishing for walleyes, bluegills and crappies. It also has a nice campground.

ACCESS: The lake has two notable boat ramps. That U.S. Forest Service campground has a concrete slab ramp with parking for 11 trailers, two docks and a restroom. To reach it from Biwabik, head south on County Road 4 for 13 miles, then head east on County Road 16 for 6.5 miles. Proceed south on County Road 618 for 3 miles to the campground. Minnesota Power owns a concrete ramp on the south end of the lake with parking for three trailers, but no dock or restrooms. From Duluth, proceed north on County Highway 4 (Rice Lake Road)/Rudy Perpich Memorial Drive/Vermilion Trail for 40 miles. Turn right onto County Road 265 (Blais Road) for 1.3 miles to the landing.

VITALS: Whiteface Reservoir covers 4,567 acres at full pool and has a maximum depth of 35 feet. The lake has two dams: on Whiteface River and Skunk Creek. The reservoir was created in 1923 by Minnesota Power to produce hydroelectric power. The lake boasts a 52-site National Forest campground (32 with electricity) with five picnic sites, 2.5 miles of hiking trails, a playground

and a sandy beach. There are a few primitive remote campsites as well. Although the forest was logged prior to impoundment, you'll still find stumps, reefs and other unmarked navigational hazards, so proceed with caution. At full pool, the lake is 35 feet deep. Prior to 1995, drawdowns as much as 14 feet occurred. However, today, winter drawdowns are no more than 5 feet, which has increased aquatic vegetation and benefitted species such as bluegills and black crappies. Because of the winter drawdowns, ice fishing pressure is very light.

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

WALLEYE: "We've got a really healthy (walleye) fishery and most anglers are pretty satisfied," said Dan Wilfond, Duluth area fisheries specialist. Wilfond said a recent creel survey found most anglers harvesting walleyes in the 13- to 16-inch range, with some larger ones taken as well. He said the lake is known for consistent natural reproduction, although the walleye growth rate is slow. Anglers will find plenty of good walleye structure, including wood, reefs and points.

BLUEGILL: Bluegills have become a draw for area panfish anglers. "We're seeing some really nice 'gills and we're hearing about a lot

WHITEFACE RESERVOIR

of pressure on black crappies," Wilfond said. In fact, a 2021 targeted panfish survey found the average bluegill size at 8.2 inches, with the largest measuring 9.7 inches, although to be fair, that survey was conducted during the spawning season when adult bluegills were up shallow. In order to protect those quality fish, recently a five-fish daily bag limit on sunfish was imposed.

BLACK CRAPPIE: Crappie fishing is likewise good on Whiteface, with 10-inch fish fairly common and 12-inchers available. Like bluegills, crappies now have a five-fish daily bag limit as well.

YELLOW PERCH: DNR surveys don't show large numbers of perch in the root beer-colored reservoir, but the size quality is there. You'll find perch in excess of 10 inch-

es here, and Wilfond said the latest survey produced a perch of more than 13 inches.

NORTHERN PIKE: Northern pike fishing isn't overly productive. Pike are present in low numbers, with most fish measuring around 20 inches.

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