

FISHING HOLE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: White Pine Lake has very limited shoreline development and boasts an accessible fishing pier and a small, free campground. The shallow, weedy lake has good fishing for walleye, perch, and northern pike, and is one of the few Cook County lakes with a viable bluegill fishery.

ACCESS: White Pine is a quiet, out-of-the-way lake that doesn't attract a lot of anglers, but gives up some pretty nice fish to those who ply its waters. From Lutsen, head north on Cook County Highway 4 (Caribou Trail) for about 6 miles. Turn left onto Forest Road 164 (Honeymoon Trail) and proceed about 2.5 miles. Turn right onto White Pine Access. The lake is straight ahead and the campground is on your left. The public access has a concrete slab ramp, an accessible fishing pier, and an out-house. The four-site rustic campground has free, non-reservable sites.

VITALS: The hourglass-shaped lake spans 346 acres and has a maximum depth of 10 feet. Abundant weeds provide good fish habitat, but can pose a challenge to anglers.

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

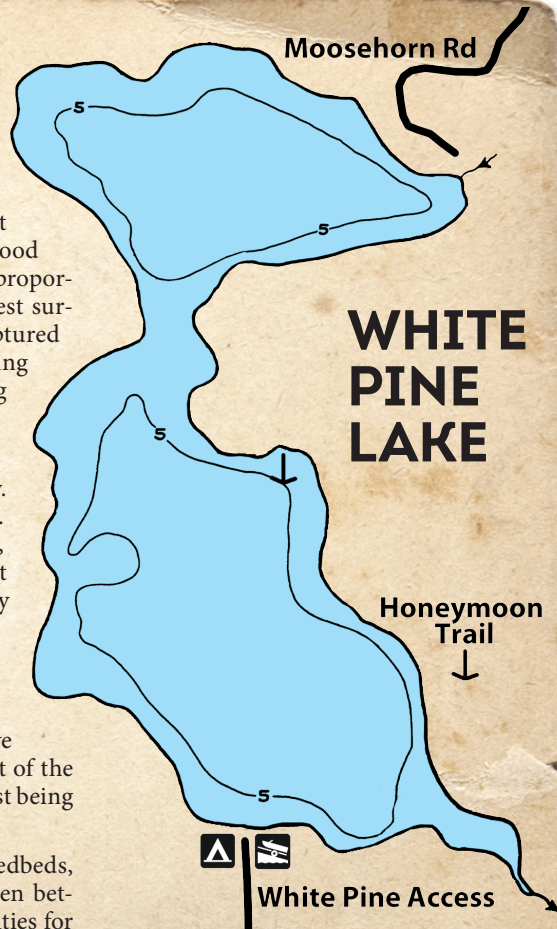
WALLEYE: Most Cook County anglers fish primarily for walleyes or trout. White Pine isn't a bad walleye lake, but there are better ones out there. "It's been on somewhat of a declining trend," said Matt Weberg, assistant area fisheries manager in Grand Marais. "Our walleye gillnet catches were highest in the years after walleyes were first stocked in the lake. It kind of remained stable through the '80s and into the '90s. This survey result (2022) was a little below the average for a lake like White Pine." That said, the latest survey was up from the previous three surveys. And the size structure is good, with the median fish measuring 14 inches and the largest just over 25. As of right now, walleyes are maintained entirely through natural reproduction. Weberg said fry stocking is a pos-

sibility, but there really hasn't been a public outcry for more walleyes, since fishing pressure is light and there are other good walleye lakes in the area.

YELLOW PERCH: If you pursue perch, you might want to peruse White Pine. "It's long been known as a good jumbo perch fishery," Weberg said. "It has pretty high proportions of fish that are over that 9-inch mark." The latest survey had strong numbers, and 29 percent of perch captured measured 9 inches or more, with the largest measuring just under a foot. Although perch are worth targeting in their own right, Weberg said they also provide good forage to pike and walleyes.

BLUEGILL: Cook County isn't prime bluegill country. Most lakes are rocky, but White Pine is an exception. Abundant vegetation provides good bluegill habitat, and this popular panfish is starting to take hold. First appearing in the lake around 1990, bluegills, for many years, remained at low levels. But that seems to be changing. "This is the first time we've seen that kind of expansion," Weberg said about the higher bluegill numbers seen in the most recent lake survey. "Some of these shallower lakes like White Pine seem to have come on in the last five to 10 years." About 25 percent of the catch consisted of fish 6 inches or larger, with the largest being a 10-year-old specimen that taped out at 10.8 inches.

NORTHERN PIKE: Pike do well in White Pine's weedbeds, feasting on perch. And the fish you find here are often better than average. "There are certainly some opportunities for some nice-sized fish," Weberg said. "There are good numbers of fish between 20 to 30 inches and some larger fish there. We typically see some pretty high-quality northern pike approaching 36 inches." Indeed, three fish topped 30 inches, with the largest stretching just over 3 feet in the latest survey.



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