

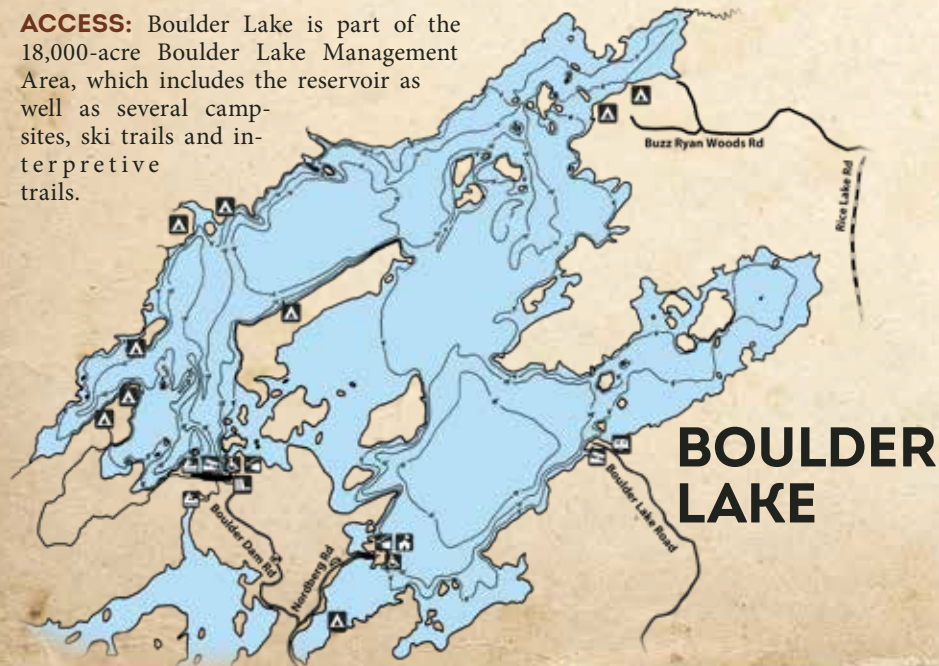
# FISHING HOLE

BY JOE SHEAD

**WHY GO:** Boulder Lake has an abundant walleye population, with some nice bonus crappies and perch. You'll find good fishing on a lightly developed lake with a wilderness-like atmosphere just a short drive north of Duluth. Plus, you'll find opportunities for camping, hiking, and skiing.

**ACCESS:** Boulder Lake is part of the 18,000-acre Boulder Lake Management Area, which includes the reservoir as well as several campsites, ski trails and interpretive trails.

A public access is located near the dam, while another fee launch is available at the Silver Fox Resort. To reach the public access, take Rice Lake Road (St. Louis County Highway 4) north from Duluth. Shortly after crossing the bridge over Island Lake,



turn left onto Boulder Dam Road. Proceed about 4 miles to the boat access at the end of the road. The access has a restroom and parking for about 15 rigs. Minnesota Power operates 18 free primitive campsites and four group campsites on the reservoir, which are available on a first-come basis.

**VITALS:** Boulder Lake is a 3,259-acre reservoir managed by Minnesota Power. It has a maximum depth of 18 feet. The lake is aptly named. In fact, there's a large boulder just out from the access. Water levels fluctuate and navigational hazards aren't marked, so proceed with caution.

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

**WALLEYE:** Dan Wilfond, Duluth area fisheries specialist, said that for decades after the reservoir was created, water levels fluctuated widely, which made it difficult for fish to spawn successfully, and the lake was dominated by bullheads. In the 1990s, a new policy was put in place that tamed those large fluctuations and the walleyes responded, feasting on bullheads to the point that there are few bullheads left. Walleyes do well and they are entirely reliant on natural reproduction. "We've been able to create a pretty nice fishery with exceptional natural reproduction," Wilfond said. During the last survey, Wilfond said the average walleye was about

14 inches, with some fish up to 27 inches sampled, although large fish are uncommon. Boulder's walleyes are relatively slow growing, but there are a lot of them and there's plenty of favorable rock and gravel habitat to sustain them.

**NORTHERN PIKE:** Pike numbers are relatively low, Wilfond said, and the fish are generally on the small side. Pike averaged 19 inches in the survey with the largest only reaching 25 inches. "Water level fluctuations can be problematic for pike spawning," Wilfond said. He noted that low pike abundance probably benefits the walleye population.

**BLACK CRAPPIE:** "Crappies are cyclical, but when they're up, they can be there in reasonably high abundance. Boulder's crappies are nice when you find them, often topping 12 inches. There are some areas of downed timber that can hold crappies at times.

**YELLOW PERCH:** The 2018 survey found perch averaging just under 9 inches. More than 25 percent of the perch sampled were over 10 inches, with some approaching 12 inches. "It's a nice bonus when people are walleye fishing," Wilfond said.

**NO BASS:** Despite what would seem to be excellent smallmouth bass habitat, and despite the fact that adjacent Island Lake is a good bass lake, there are no bass in Boulder Lake.

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