

FISHING HOLE

WILD RICE RESERVOIR

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Wild Rice Reservoir is a shallow, productive lake that offers quality fishing opportunities. “It’s a pretty good fishery,” said Dan Wilfond, Duluth area fisheries specialist. “Most of the species that are there are found in quality sizes and abundance.” Plus, the lake is just a short drive from Duluth.

ACCESS: The reservoir, usually just called Rice Lake, is north of Duluth. From the airport, proceed east on Airport Road for 1 mile. Turn left onto County Road 4 (Rice Lake Road) and head north for 5 miles. Turn left onto Township Road 2903 (Rice Lake Dam Road) and proceed a half-mile to the landing on your left. The landing has a concrete-slab ramp, a porta-potty and parking for about 10 rigs.

VITALS: Rice Lake is an impoundment of the Beaver River created by Minnesota Power. The lake is large and shallow, spanning 2,372 acres, with a maximum depth of just 11 feet, although most of the lake is much shallower. Most of the shoreline is owned by Minnesota Power. A public access is located near the dam. The access is scheduled to be improved in 2024. The dam, located just down from the access, is a popular shore fishing spot. According to Wilfond, the lake isn’t affected much by drawdowns, but anglers should be

careful when navigating this shallow lake. You’ll find submerged boulders here (including an unmarked one below the surface about 100 yards to the right of the boat landing) as well as a “mine field” of woody debris on the south end, Wilfond said. The lake also features a lone campsite on an island near the southeast end, available on a first-come, first-served basis.

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

WALLEYE: “In the summertime and spring it’s popular for walleyes,” Wilfond said. “In the middle of the summer we tend to see a very substantial dropoff (in angling pressure) because of heavy vegetation.” Rice’s walleyes are abundant and have a healthy average size. Plus, they are entirely dependent on natural reproduction. The 2019 DNR survey turned up over 15 walleyes per gillnet, which is way above average for the lake type. Walleyes had an average length of 15.6 inches. The lake is loaded with eaters and they can be caught trolling the open expanses or by pitching jigs and live bait to rocks.

NORTHERN PIKE: “We know it’s a very popular place to go for northern pike,” Wilfond said. “It has consistent action and a de-

cent chance of a pretty good fish.” He said anglers could encounter pike in the upper-30-inch range, or perhaps even 40 inches. The latest DNR survey found above-average pike numbers, with the largest measuring 37 inches. The abundance of weeds provides plenty of good pike habitat.

BLUEGILL: “Both crappies and bluegills are found in average abundance and above-average size structure,” Wilfond said. Bluegill average size in the last survey was over 7 inches, with several fish over 9 inches turning up. To protect this quality size structure, bluegills and crappies have a special regulation in place, limiting harvest to five apiece.

BLACK CRAPPIE: Crappies grow similarly large. Average size in the last survey was 11 inches, with some topping the foot mark.

YELLOW PERCH: Yellow perch numbers can fluctuate and lately they have been quite high in Rice Lake, but size quality hasn’t suffered. The latest DNR survey turned up 29.4 perch per gillnet lift, with an average size of over 8 inches. In fact, about one-third of the fish sampled were greater than 10 inches.

LARGEMOUTH BASS: Largemouth bass found their way into Rice Lake in the early 2000s and have now become established. Be-



tween the weeds and stumps, there is great bass habitat. Although they don’t often turn up in gillnet surveys, bass up to 17 inches have been sampled in DNR nets.

FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORY: If there’s a downside to Rice Lake, it’s this: anglers should use caution when eating any fish from Rice Lake. “The one thing about Rice is folks should take a look at our consumption advisory related to PFOS contamination,” Wilfond said. Check advisory information posted at the access. Or click on the link on the DNR’s Lakefinder page for more information.

View all our Fishing Hole Maps at:
northernwilds.com/fishingholemaps