

# FISHING HOLE

## BIRCH LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

**WHY GO:** Birch Lake, located up the Gunflint Trail, has better-than-average size rainbow trout, with an off chance of catching a lake trout.

**ACCESS:** Birch is a long, skinny lake that parallels the Gunflint Trail. To reach it, travel 33 miles up the Gunflint from Grand Marais and turn right into the Birch Lake Overlook Trail parking lot. From there it's just a short hike to the lake, but you'll need to carry your canoe or other small boat. Or drag a sled during the winter for ice fishing.

**VITALS:** Birch Lake is a 236-acre lake with a maximum depth of 69 feet and a mean depth of 26 feet. It has steep-dropping shorelines and is generally fairly deep. There's a fair amount of development by Gunflint Trail standards.

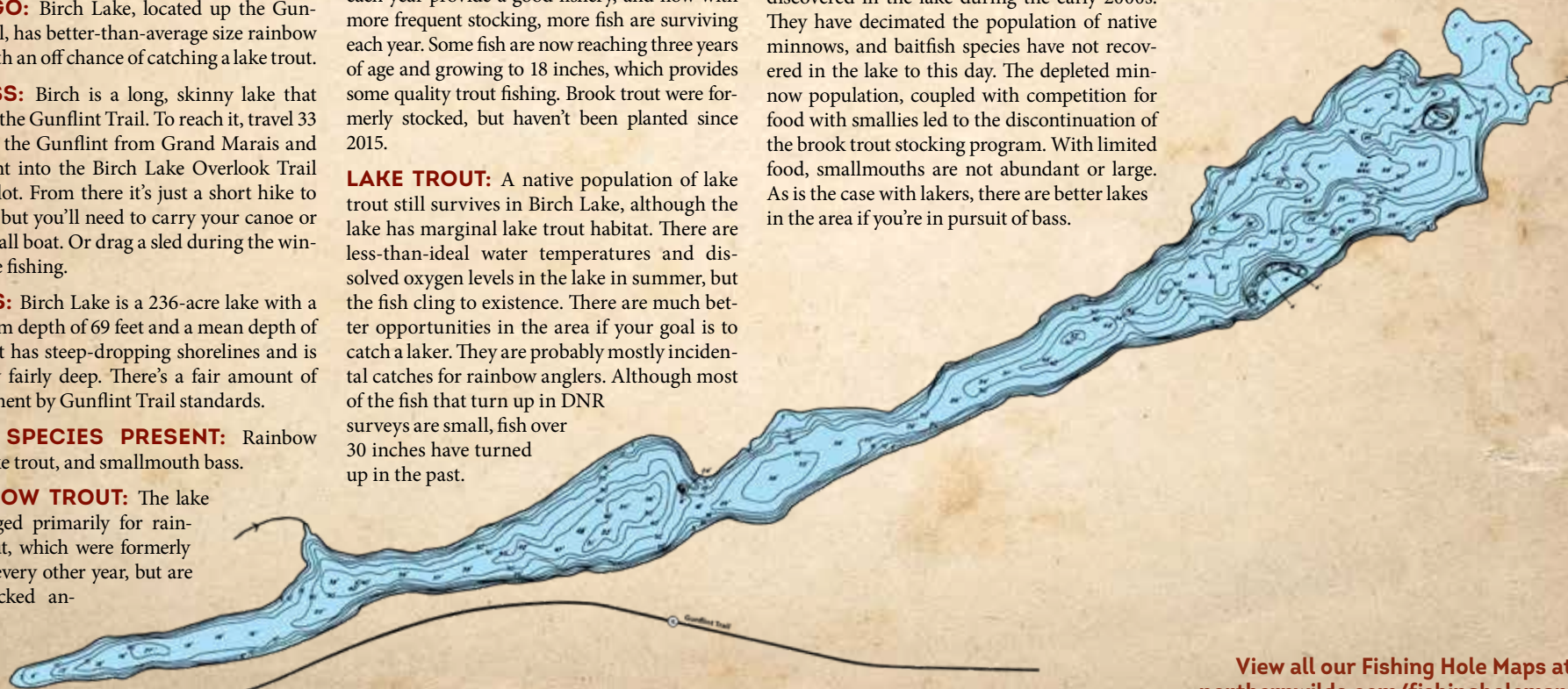
**GAME SPECIES PRESENT:** Rainbow trout, lake trout, and smallmouth bass.

**RAINBOW TROUT:** The lake is managed primarily for rainbow trout, which were formerly stocked every other year, but are now stocked an-

nually. The 4,000 yearlings planted in the lake each year provide a good fishery, and now with more frequent stocking, more fish are surviving each year. Some fish are now reaching three years of age and growing to 18 inches, which provides some quality trout fishing. Brook trout were formerly stocked, but haven't been planted since 2015.

**LAKE TROUT:** A native population of lake trout still survives in Birch Lake, although the lake has marginal lake trout habitat. There are less-than-ideal water temperatures and dissolved oxygen levels in the lake in summer, but the fish cling to existence. There are much better opportunities in the area if your goal is to catch a laker. They are probably mostly incidental catches for rainbow anglers. Although most of the fish that turn up in DNR surveys are small, fish over 30 inches have turned up in the past.

**SMALLMOUTH BASS:** Smallies were first discovered in the lake during the early 2000s. They have decimated the population of native minnows, and baitfish species have not recovered in the lake to this day. The depleted minnow population, coupled with competition for food with smallies led to the discontinuation of the brook trout stocking program. With limited food, smallmouths are not abundant or large. As is the case with lakers, there are better lakes in the area if you're in pursuit of bass.



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