

FISHING HOLE

CRESCENT LAKE

BY JOE SHEAD

WHY GO: Crescent Lake is a popular walleye lake located off The Grade north of Lutsen. In addition to its reputation as a good “numbers” walleye lake, it is one of the only lakes with muskies in Cook County. The lake is entirely undeveloped, except for a Forest Service campground, which is very popular. Whether you fish Crescent or use the campground as a hopping off point for other area lakes, this is a real destination place.

ACCESS: From Lutsen, drive 1.1 miles east up Highway 61 and turn left onto the Caribou Trail (Cook County Highway 4). Proceed north about 16.8 miles until you reach the T intersection with The Grade (Forest Road 170). Go west about 7 miles until you reach the road to the Crescent Lake Campground on your left. Go about 0.9 mile. The boat launch is within the campground. The campground has 33 campsites. Several of them are on the water. Facilities include a fishing pier, vault toilets, and potable water. There is also one dispersed campsite that users have to boat to. Boaters should go slowly because there are hazardous rocks that are difficult to see.

VITALS: Crescent Lake is 755 acres with a maximum depth of 28 feet. It is a classic rocky Canadian Shield lake with several islands. There's no development, other than the campground.

GAME SPECIES PRESENT: Walleye, muskellunge, smallmouth bass, northern pike, and yellow perch.

WALLEYE: Crescent is known for its good numbers of small walleyes. “It’s still producing good numbers of walleyes,” said E.J. Isaac, DNR area fisheries supervisor in Grand Marais. “The size range has more eaters than big ones. We do see fish in our surveys that are over 25 inches. But they’re really numerous in the 12- to 18-inch range.” Walleyes find plenty of rocky structure suitable to their liking on Crescent. “For people going to catch some walleyes to eat, it’s a pretty good producer,” Isaac said.

MUSKELLUNGE: Cook County only has a handful of muskie lakes, all of which are connected to Crescent. Shoepack-strain muskies were stocked here decades ago, and they continue to persist, giving area anglers a unique fishing opportunity. Shoepack muskies are the smallest muskie strain, but what they lack in size, they make up for in numbers. “We seem to catch a couple muskies in each survey,” Isaac said. “They’re in the 25- to 35-inch range. Sucker numbers (a preferred prey species) fluctuate, but they seem to be adequate to support muskies.” Although some anglers do target muskies specifically, it’s not out of the ordinary to catch a muskie on Crescent on walleye lures or even to have a muskie attack a walleye struggling on

the end of your line. Northern pike are present in low numbers in Crescent. However, they are known to hybridize with muskies, producing a strikingly beautiful striped hybrid known as a tiger muskie. It would be uncommon to catch a tiger, but not out of the question.

SMALLMOUTH BASS: Smallies were not native to Crescent, but have been around now for a quarter-century or so. They are slow-growing and don’t usually grow large here, despite the abundance of rocky habitat. If you catch a 12-incher, consider yourself lucky. You’ll likely encounter lots of 8-inchers while fishing live bait for walleyes.

YELLOW PERCH: “Yellow perch numbers have been adequate to support walleyes,” Isaac said. “We’ve seen some uptick in perch numbers.” Still, perch tend to be small. You might get one big enough to fillet while walleye fishing, but that’s the exception, rather than the rule. Perch do serve an important role as prey for walleyes and muskies, however.



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