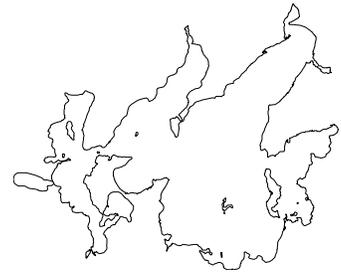




Leech Lake Update, October 2009
Walker Area Fisheries Office
07316 State Hwy. 371 NW
Walker, MN 56484
218-547-1683



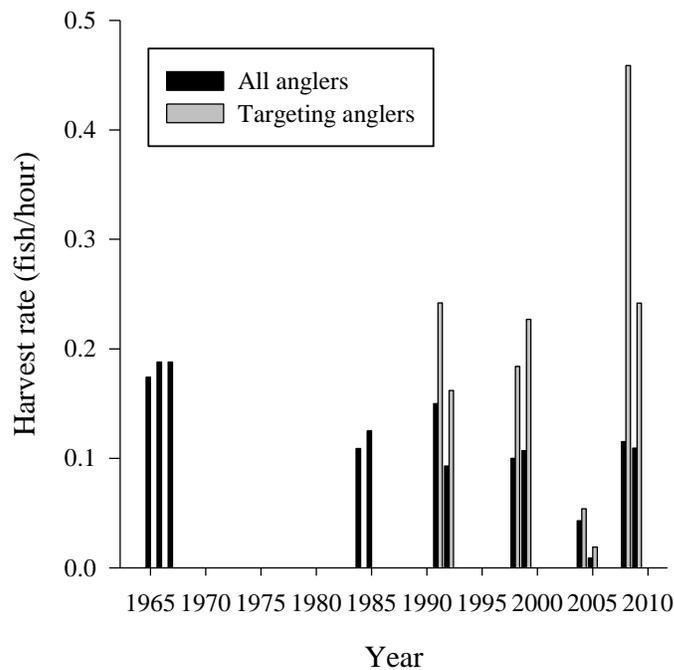
Greetings!

This update is part of a series of reports the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is sending to Leech Lake area resorts, businesses and others interested in DNR activities on Leech Lake. The goal of these messages is to keep you up to date with our findings and current activities on the lake. Earlier updates are available by visiting <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/areas/fisheries/walker/index.html>. Feel free to contact our office if you have any questions or comments, would like copies of previous updates not posted on the website, or if you would like to be added to the mailing list. **Please note new email addresses for Doug and Harlan at the end of this document.**

2009 Fishing Season

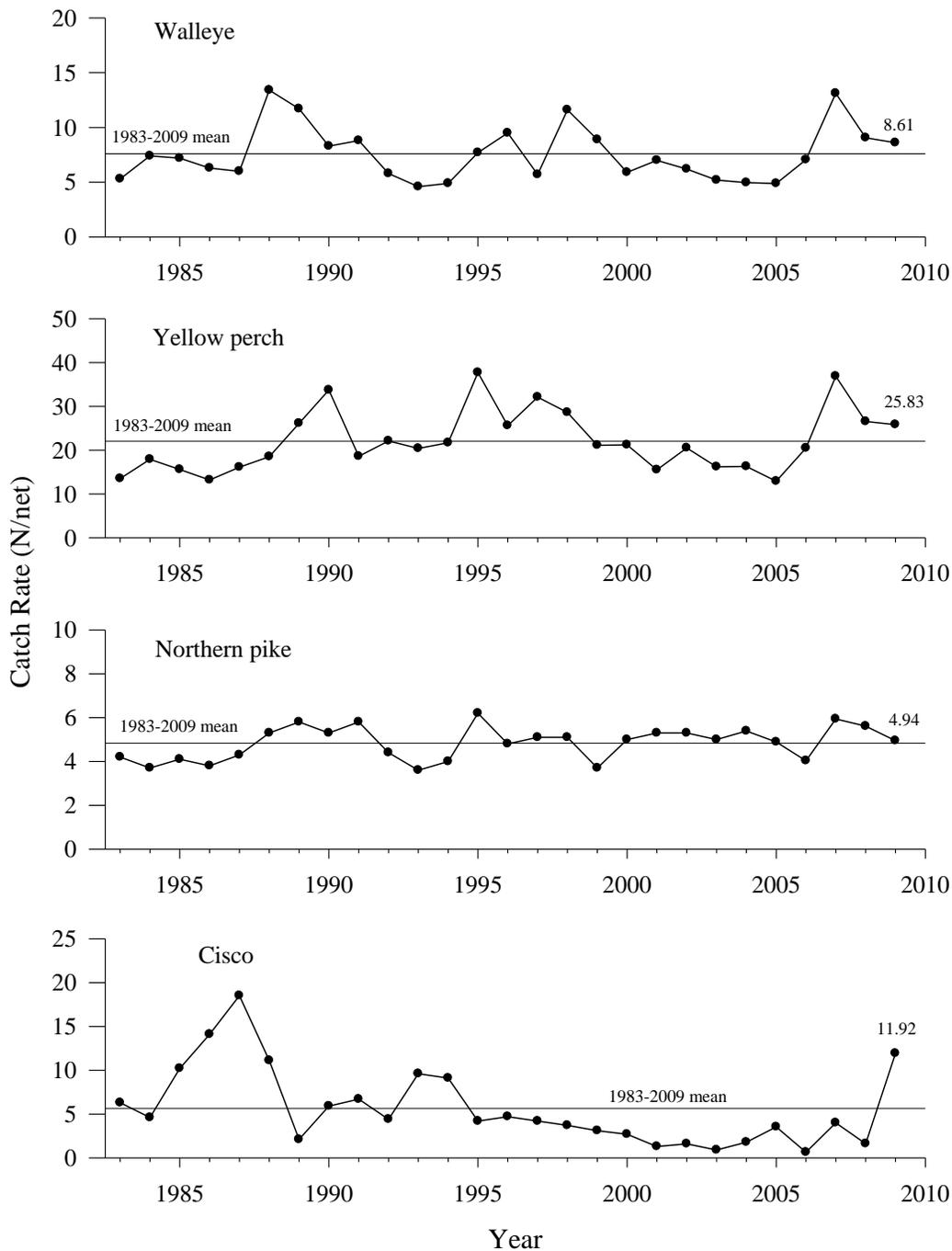
- Another great summer of walleye fishing on Leech Lake is in the books. Total fishing pressure during the open-water season was approximately 785,000 angler-hours, the highest observed since 1999.
- Approximately 102,000 pounds of walleye were harvested. Anglers targeting walleye had a season average catch rate of nearly 1.0 fish/hour and a harvest rate near 0.25 fish/hour (right).
- Nearly 35% of all walleye caught by anglers during the season were within the 18-26" protected slot limit.
- The current walleye regulation is an 18-26" protected slot limit (18.0-26.0 must be immediately released) with 4 fish in possession, only one of which can be longer than 26.0 inches. The regulation was originally due for review this winter. However, to accommodate the broader statewide evaluation of slot limits across all of Minnesota's large walleye lakes as well as to obtain an additional year of information, the Leech Lake walleye slot limit will be formally reviewed prior to the 2011 fishing season. The current regulation will remain in effect for the 2010 fishing season.

Walleye Harvest Rates in Leech Lake, 1964-2008

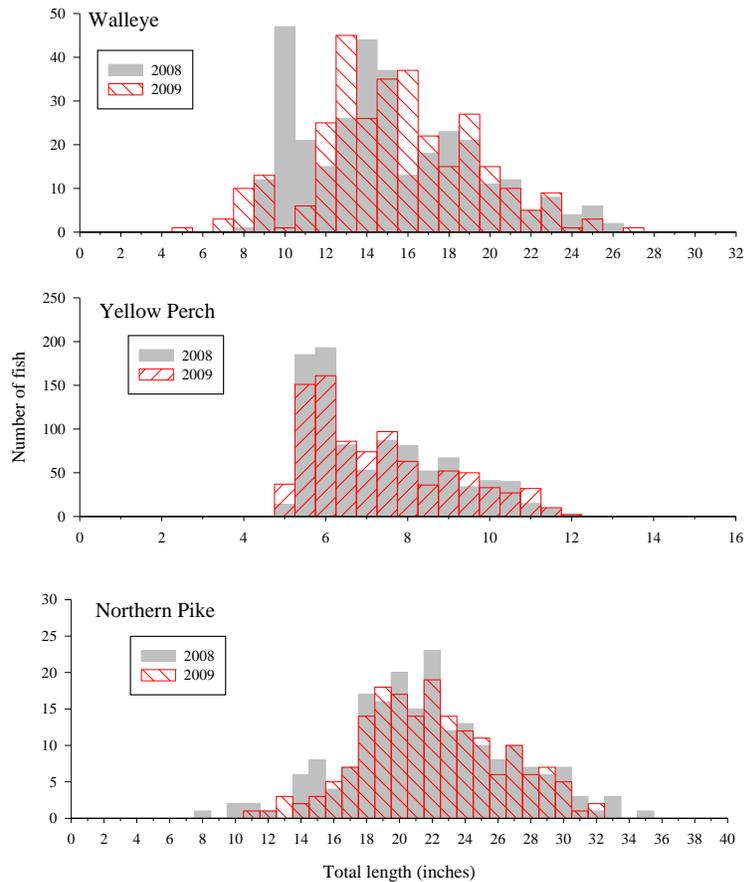


2009 Large Lake Survey Results

- Shoreline seining was completed in July, trawling in August, and gill netting and electrofishing in September.
- Seine (65 age-0 walleye/acre) and trawl (153 age-0 walleye/hour) catch rates were near the historical averages. Seine catch rates of young-of-year yellow perch were below average, but trawl catch rates of YOY perch were near the long-term average.
- Gill net catch rates (below) of walleye, yellow perch, and northern pike were similar to last year and remain above long-term averages (horizontal lines). Catch rates of cisco were the highest observed in 20 years. Good recruitment of young cisco in the last couple of years led to the increase in catch rates.



- The size distributions of walleye, northern pike, and yellow perch sampled in gill nets were also similar to 2008 in many respects (right).
- Of walleye sampled in gill nets, 42% were shorter than 15 inches.
- The 2008 year class of walleye appears to be near or below average in strength and, based on young-of-year sampling, the 2009 year class is projected to be in the range of average.
- With strong year classes produced during 2005-2007, below-average recruitment during 2008 and potentially 2009 despite higher fry densities than 2005-2007 is not a surprise. While cool summers and slow growth appear to be the primary cause, interactions between previous year classes (ie. suppression) and increased competition within a year class (ie. more mouths competing for same food supply) should not be discounted as possible contributors.
- Currently the Leech Lake walleye population is in good condition and anglers have been enjoying excellent fishing.



Thanks for the help!

During the 2009 field season about 60 different volunteers contributed a total of 307 hours with muskie sampling and egg take, walleye fry stocking, and Large Lake sampling on Leech Lake alone. Other persons assisted staff with sampling and work on other Walker area lakes throughout the year. These contributions by many individuals made a BIG difference in our ability to complete work objectives in an effective and timely manner in spite of staffing shortages, especially during peak work load periods in spring and fall. On behalf of Walker Fisheries office staff and the DNR, THANK YOU!

2009-2010 Muskie Assessment Update

- If participating in the muskie study, **REMEMBER TO TAKE SCALE SAMPLES** from fish you catch! We cannot do a population estimate without your participation!
- Scale samples from anglers are beginning to trickle in.
- If you have samples that need to be turned in you can either mail them to the Walker office or contact Doug Schultz or Harlan Fierstine directly to make arrangements.



Leech Lake Advisory Committee (LLAC)

- A committee comprised of 17 stakeholders with diverse interests will make recommendations to DNR on walleye stocking, fishing regulations, cormorant management, and habitat protection as the DNR updates its 2005-2010 Leech Lake fisheries management plan.
- The LLAC, which began meeting in August, includes representatives from the Leech Lake Fishing Task Force, Leech Lake Association, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Leech Lake Watershed Foundation, Izaak Walton League, and Anglers for Habitat as well as fishing guides and local and statewide anglers.
- The group is charged with recommending a management framework to the DNR that identifies objectives, management actions, thresholds, models, and monitoring plans for each of these four key areas.
- DNR leadership is seeking recommendations pertaining to the biological and social aspects related to Leech Lake and will consider the committee's recommendations and other public input when approving a 2011-2015 plan for Leech Lake.
- Information on Leech Lake and the planning process is available online at <http://mndnr.gov/fisheries/management/llfmp.html>. Final LLAC recommendations to DNR leadership are expected sometime this coming winter.
- Questions on the planning process should be directed to Joe Mix, Northeast Assistant Regional Fisheries Manager, 218-999-7825, joe.mix@state.mn.us.

Photo by Juris Ozols



Invasive Species Watch

- Eurasian watermilfoil (EWM) was discovered in Leech Lake in 2004 and has been expanding every year since. Extensive searches have not discovered rooted EWM outside of artificial harbors to date, however, this invasive species continues to be discovered in new locations. Follow-up inspections found EWM in 22 harbors throughout Leech Lake in 2008. Inspection and treatments are underway.
- The DNR posts Invasive Species signs at all public landings on Leech Lake. This year the Leech Lake Association posted signs at private accesses as well.
- Boaters, anglers, and hunters can help prevent further spread invasive species by taking a few simple extra precautions:
 - inspect and remove all visible aquatic plants, animals and mud from boats, trailers and equipment such as anchors and decoys before leaving a water access;
 - inspect and remove all visible aquatic plants, animals or mud from docks, boat lifts and swim rafts before transporting to another water;
 - drain all water from boats - including live wells, bilges and bait buckets - before leaving a water access;
 - spray or rinse boats with high pressure and/or hot water, or let them dry thoroughly for five days before transporting to another water.
- Precautions for anglers and boaters can be found at: www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/preventspread.html
- Further details on aquatic invasive species and the DNR Invasive Species Program can be found at: <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/invasives/index.html>

Double-crested cormorant control (from Steve Mortensen, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe)

- The Leech Lake Reservation DRM conducted cormorant control efforts again this year with a total of 3,084 birds removed from the lake. As in past years, these efforts were contracted to Wildlife Services, U.S. Department of Agriculture with financial assistance from the MN DNR.
- A telemetry study tracking cormorant movement and foraging patterns on the lake was also initiated by the DRM this past summer. Data collected from this effort will be analyzed this coming winter. Details of the cormorant control efforts and research can be obtained from Steve Mortensen, Leech Lake Reservation, Division of Resources Management, 115 6th St. NW, Cass Lake, MN 56633; 218-335-7423, or from the DRM's web site (www.lldrm.org/corm.html).

If you have questions, comments, or requests please contact:

Doug Schultz (doug.w.schultz@state.mn.us)

or

Harlan Fierstine (harlan.fierstine@state.mn.us)