

NDF&G May 12th, 2009 newsletter

Several North Dakota Lakes Suffer Winterkill

A long winter caused a prolonged ice pack, and coupled with near-record snowfall throughout much of the state, resulted in conditions that made it difficult for fish in some lakes to receive enough oxygen to survive.

Scott Gangl, fisheries management section leader for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said 37 winterkills have been confirmed so far. The majority were in the western half of the state, where lake water levels were very low going into winter.

“The winter of 2008-09 was on par with the epic winter of 1996-97, when 46 lakes experienced winterkill,” Gangl said. “Similar to that winter, all is not lost.”

Fisheries personnel have already started restocking efforts on some lakes that experienced winterkill. “We are stocking with hatchery raised fish, or fish transported from another lake with an abundance of the preferred species,” Gangl said. “These fish may take a while to grow to catchable size, but in two to three years there should be populations of fish for anglers to catch.”

The severity of a die-off may vary by lake, but usually there are some fish left in the lake. “Most of the lakes that experienced winterkill are prone to die-offs,” Gangl said. “So while there was some disappointment in losing good fisheries, there weren’t many surprises.”

Fisheries biologists are in the process of sampling suspected winterkill lakes to document the severity of the die-offs. Biologists use three levels to describe the severity of a fish kill: total, where all fish died; significant, where the game fish population is greatly reduced; or partial, where dead fish were observed but game fish are still present.

Confirmed lakes with winterkill are listed by fisheries management districts. Anglers can contact the local Game and Fish Department fisheries supervisor to get more information on the status of these lakes, or to report fish kills that may not be on the list.

North Central – Jason Lee, Riverdale, 654-7475

- North Carlson Lake, Ward County – significant
- Coal Mine Lake, Sheridan County – significant
- Cottonwood Lake, McHenry County – significant
- Crooked Lake, McLean County – significant
- South Carlson Lake, Ward County – partial

Northeast – Randy Hiltner, Devils Lake, 662-3617

- Harvey Dam, Wells County – significant
- Island Lake, Rolette County – significant
- School Section Lake, Rolette County – significant
- Sykeston Dam, Wells County - significant

Northwest – Fred Ryckman, Williston, 774-4320

- McLeod (Ray) Reservoir, Williams County – significant;
- Nelson-Landers Pond, Ward County – total;
- Skjermo Lake, Divide County – significant
- Stanley Reservoir, Mountrail County – total
- Tioga Dam, Williams County - total

South Central – Paul Bailey, Bismarck, 328-6688

- Beaver Lake, Logan County – significant
- Braddock Dam, Emmons County – significant
- Cherry Lake, Kidder County – significant
- Dollinger-Schnabel Lake, McIntosh County – significant
- Fresh Lake, Kidder County – significant
- Lake No. 5, Kidder County - significant

Southeast – Gene Van Eeckhout, Jamestown, 253-6480

- Crystal Springs, Stutsman County – partial
- Bisek Slough, Richland County – significant
- Boom (Marion) Lake, LaMoure County – significant

Southwest – Jeff Hendrickson, Dickinson, 227-7431

- BarZ Dam, Dunn County – total
- Cedar Lake, Slope County – significant
- Danzig Dam, Morton County – significant
- Dickinson Reservoir (Patterson Lake), Stark County – significant
- Gascoyne Lake, Bowman County – significant
- Holocek Dam, Bowman County – total

- Mirror Lake, Adams County – significant
- Odland Dam, Golden Valley County - partial

In addition, East Spring Lake Pond in Williams County, Watford City Park Pond in McKenzie County, Beach City Pond in Golden Valley County, Belfield Pond and Dickinson Dike in Stark County, and Gaebe Pond in Morton County suffered fish kills this winter. However, those ponds are stocked with catchable size fish, typically consisting of trout, sunfish or catfish. Anglers visiting these ponds may notice some dead fish, but there are recently stocked fish to catch.

Spring Spawn Wrapped Up

Fisheries crews concluded a successful spawning season by nearly reaching the goal set for northern pike and far surpassing the target for walleye.

Jerry Weigel, fisheries production and development section leader for the North Dakota Game and Fish Department, said department staff, along with personnel from the Garrison Dam National Fish Hatchery, collected 22 million pike and 61 million walleye eggs during spring spawning. “We had a very good spring, with high quality eggs that are far above average,” Weigel said.

Weather conditions dictated a quick, three-day pike spawn. In the end, fisheries biologists were short 1 million pike eggs, but the above-average egg quality provided more than enough eggs to meet hatchery goals. “We are in really good shape,” Weigel said, “and we are still going to be able to meet our northern pike production goal, which is the highest in more than a decade.”

Crews collected 11 million pike eggs from Alkali/Spiritwood Lake in Stutsman County, 8 million from Lake Irvine in Ramsey County, and 3 million from Beaver Bay on Lake Oahe. Weigel said pike eggs are hatching and many of the ponds at Valley City and Garrison Dam national fish hatcheries have already been stocked. After about three weeks of growing, fingerlings will be shipped to waters statewide.

Weigel said the timing was perfect for spawning walleye in North Dakota. “The weather was ideal and the fish were healthy,” he added. “We are fortunate to get into several good runs of walleye.”

Crews collected 35.4 million walleye eggs from Lake Sakakawea, the most from the big lake in a number of years. In addition, 18.4 million came from Devils Lake, and another 7.4 million from a couple other state lakes.

“About the time we reached our goal of 30 million, South Dakota contacted us and indicated their runs were over and they were far short of their walleye egg collection goal,” Weigel said. “In a short time, our crews were able to collect additional eggs to meet their needs.”

In exchange, South Dakota had a surplus of perch eggs they were able to give to North Dakota. “That was unexpected,” Weigel said. “We struggled a little bit with perch, and didn’t anticipate receiving any

help. Everything worked out well as we often assist each other with egg needs when one state comes up short.”

Trappers to Remove Nest Predators from Lake Arena, Mallard Island

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department and Delta Waterfowl are working together to improve duck production on two state wildlife management areas.

Mike Johnson, game management section leader for the Game and Fish Department, said trappers will remove nest predators from Mallard Island and Lake Arena Island from early May through July 15.

“We want to alert the public that this project is ongoing through early summer, and there are some risks involved with people, and especially dogs, in these areas,” Johnson said. “Lake Arena isn’t really an issue due to lack of human activity during the summer. Mallard Island, on the other hand, may be visited by people fishing or boating on the east end of Lake Sakakawea.”

Targeted predators include coyotes, fox, skunks, raccoons, badgers and ground squirrels. “Both of these areas have been developed by the Game and Fish Department in cooperative efforts with Ducks Unlimited, the Bureau of Reclamation and other partners, to improve duck production,” Johnson said. “These islands attract large numbers of nesting hens that can have extremely high nest success once the predators are removed.”

Arena WMA is located between Wing and Tuttle in Burleigh County. Mallard Island is part of Wolf Creek WMA in McLean County. Limited signage will be posted in these areas to warn the public about trapping activities.

Missouri River Safety Day Set for May 30

Last year’s inaugural Missouri River Safety Day in Mandan was so successful, organizers decided to have another.

The North Dakota Game and Fish Department, Cumulus Broadcasting and Gate City Banks are sponsoring the second annual Missouri River SPLASH – a recreation and boating safety event for everyone who enjoys the Missouri River.

The four-hour event is May 30 in Mandan from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Moritz Sport and Marine. Displays, hands-on activities, demos, regulations, registrations and prizes are included.

Nancy Boldt, boat and water safety coordinator for the Game and Fish Department, said the event is free, and people of all ages are invited to attend. “It was a great success last spring, and we hope to build on this and make it a wonderful event for the entire family,” Boldt said. “There is a lot of public

interaction with many different agencies, and you don't have to stay for the entire day. People can come and go as they please."

Safety on the Missouri River has been a major enforcement issue for the Game and Fish Department, as the number of boaters and jet skiers has almost doubled in the past five years. "With the high water level we anticipate an increase in the number of people recreating on the river this year, and with more users occupying a limited space additional problems are sure to arise," Boldt said.

Holding this event should remind people to take the North Dakota Boating Course, know the navigation rules, and use common sense and courtesy while on the water. "And like last year, people who bring a completed boating safety exam to the event are eligible to win a special prize," Boldt said. "At the very least, if you present a certified boater card you can win a life jacket, tow behind tube or something else."

State law requires youngster's ages 12-15 who want to operate a boat or personal watercraft with at least a 10 horsepower motor to first pass the state's Boat North Dakota safety course. In addition, some major insurance companies give adult boat owners who pass the course a premium discount on boat insurance.

The Boat North Dakota safety course is free and available at the Game and Fish Department, or in Bismarck and Mandan at any local boat dealer, all Gate City Bank locations, and at Cumulus Broadcasting.