

# Waterville Area Fisheries 2021 Fishing Outlook

Lakes managed by the DNR Waterville Area Fisheries range from deep, stable lakes to prairie potholes - and provide a true variety of fishing opportunity for anglers. Waterville Fisheries staff follow strategic lake management plans, conducting rotating lake surveys to monitor fish populations in Le Sueur, Blue Earth, Faribault, Waseca, Steele, Dodge, Freeborn, Mower, and Rice counties in southern Minnesota.

The data provided here show a breakdown of fish caught during sampling in 2018, 2019, and 2020 for selected species, by size. We hope you can use this information to decide what to fish for and where in 2021.

The data we present here are from standard surveys conducted with trap nets, gill nets, and electrofishing. They represent a snapshot in time. One poor survey does not mean numbers have crashed or a lake has no big fish. Likewise, high net catches do not guarantee angling success. Use the results shown here as a starting point for your trip and best of luck!

## Bluegill and crappie

Bluegill and crappie abundance is usually measured with trap nets. Unfortunately, limited fish data were collected in some situations due to COVID-19 work place safety precautions. The figures presented here show trap net data for bluegill and crappies from 2018-2020, although most data are from 2018 and 2019.

In some cases, gill nets also give us a good look at bluegill and crappie numbers or size. For example, at Lura Lake, over 400 crappies were sampled in gill nets. Most were small, but fish over 14.5 inches were sampled. At Shields Lake, bluegill and crappies both were sampled in good numbers with gill nets. Crappies tended to run small but bluegill size was excellent with fish up to 9.5".

**Please release big bluegills (greater than 9 inches), they ensure quality size and take many years to replace.**

## Yellow Perch

Yellow Perch numbers were high in 2020 in lakes connected to the Cannon River – Tetonka, Upper Sakatah, Lower Sakatah, and Cannon Lake. High numbers of Yellow Perch usually means small Yellow Perch, but quality sized fish were found in all of those lakes. Other lakes with good sized yellow perch include Clear Lake (Waseca), Gorman Lake and Lura Lake.

Large numbers of small yellow perch are good news for walleye, northern pike, and largemouth bass which all feed on small fish.

## Walleye

Lakes connected to the Cannon River also produced good numbers of walleye in gill net surveys. Upper Sakatah, Lower Sakatah, and Cannon Lake all had good walleye numbers and size. Numbers were lower on Lake Tetonka but a creel survey showed strong Walleye fishing last winter and during spring of 2020. Plus, Tetonka's connection to Upper and Lower Sakatah means walleye are always nearby. These Cannon River lakes have also seen excellent natural reproduction the past 3 springs – the future looks bright.

## Northern Pike

Largemouth bass anglers at Lura Lake probably lost a few lures this summer. That's because the lake boasted record numbers of northern pike in the 2020 survey. Over 50 northern pike per gillnet were sampled (the graph shows about 35, but not all fish were measured) in gill nets. Most fish in Lura were under the 24 inch minimum length limit but legal fish were present as well. Big fish are caught every year in the Waterville Area. Lunker hunters may want to try Lake Tetonka, Clear Lake (Waseca), or Steele Lake.

Waterville area lakes are part of the new Southern Zone, which means anglers can only keep two northern pike that must be at least 24 inches long. St. Olaf Lake near New Richland has a 30 inch minimum size limit that will remain in effect.

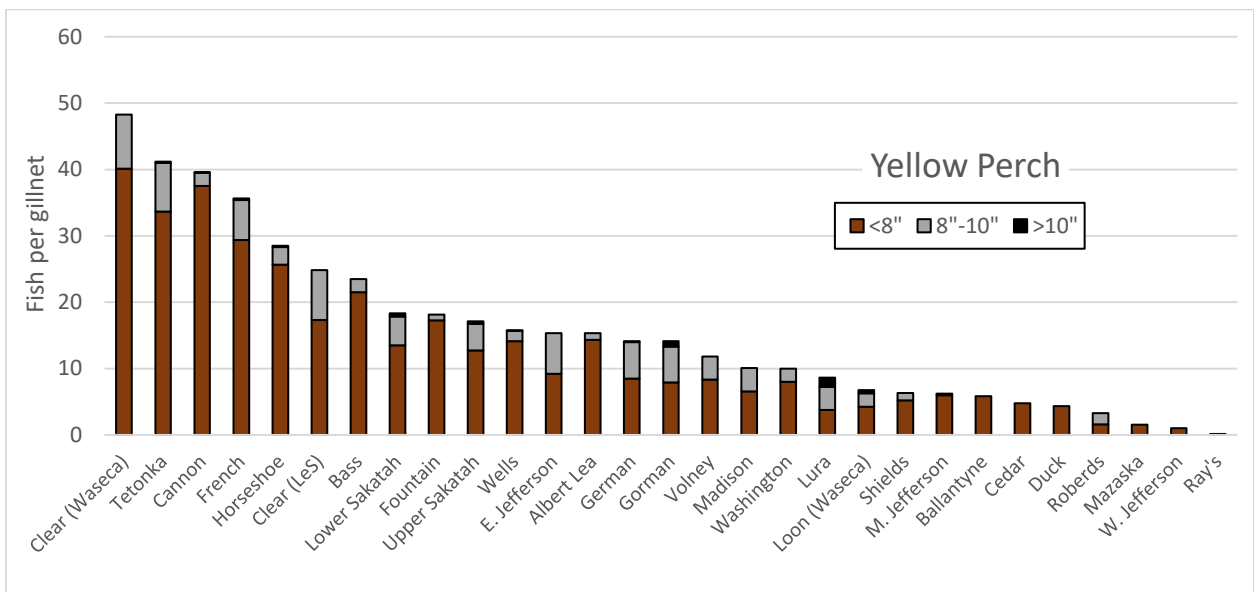
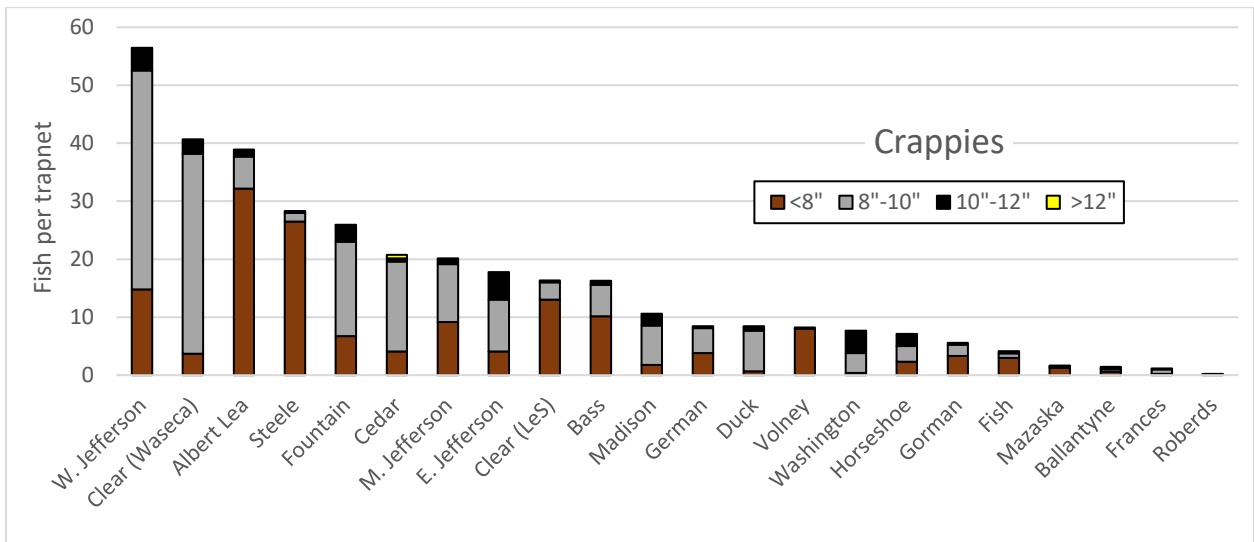
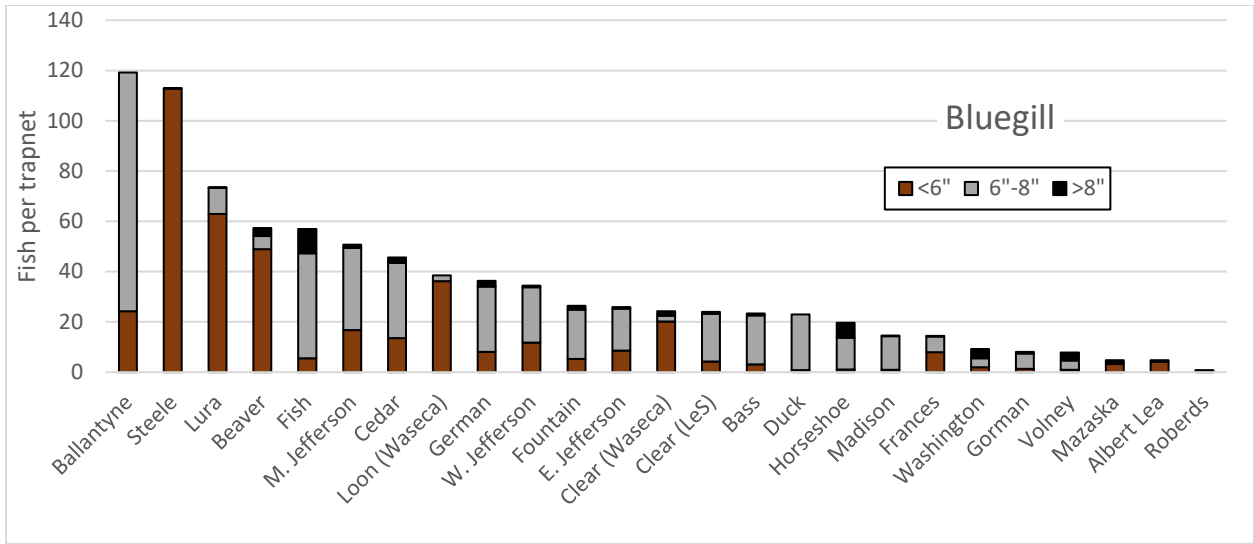
## Largemouth Bass

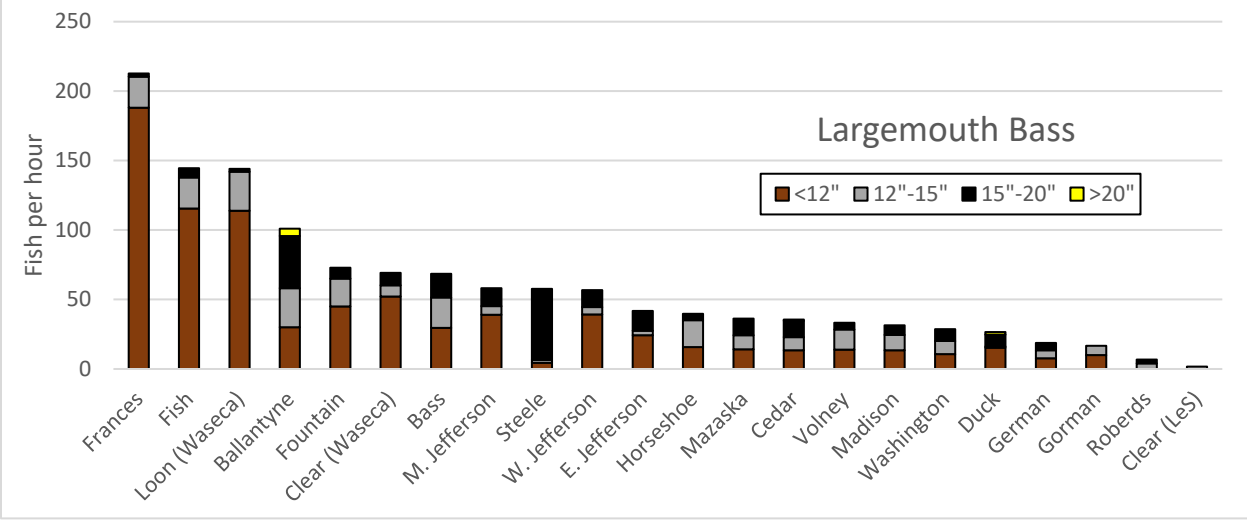
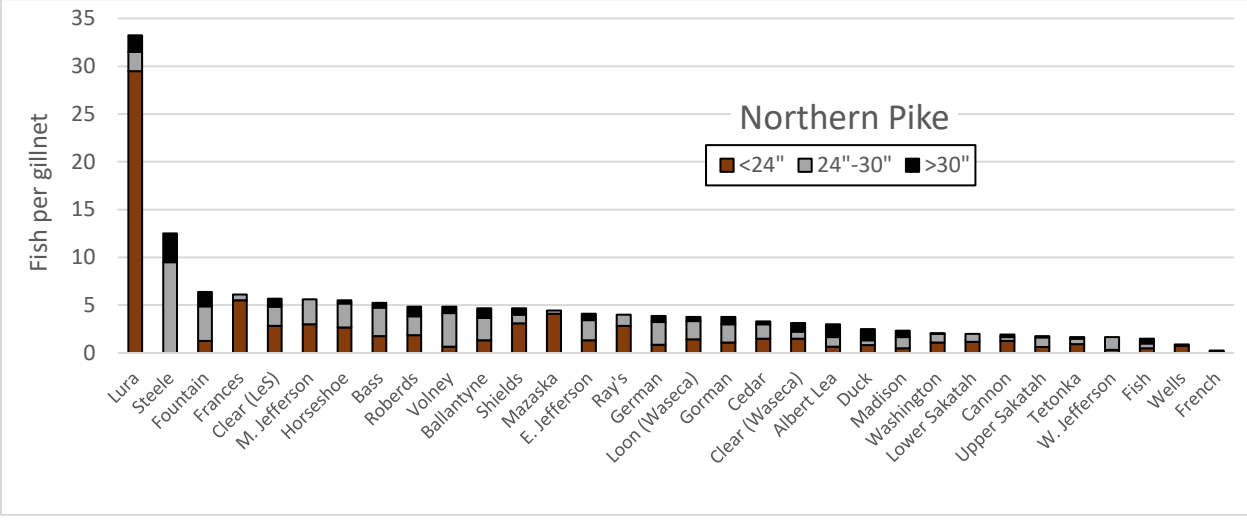
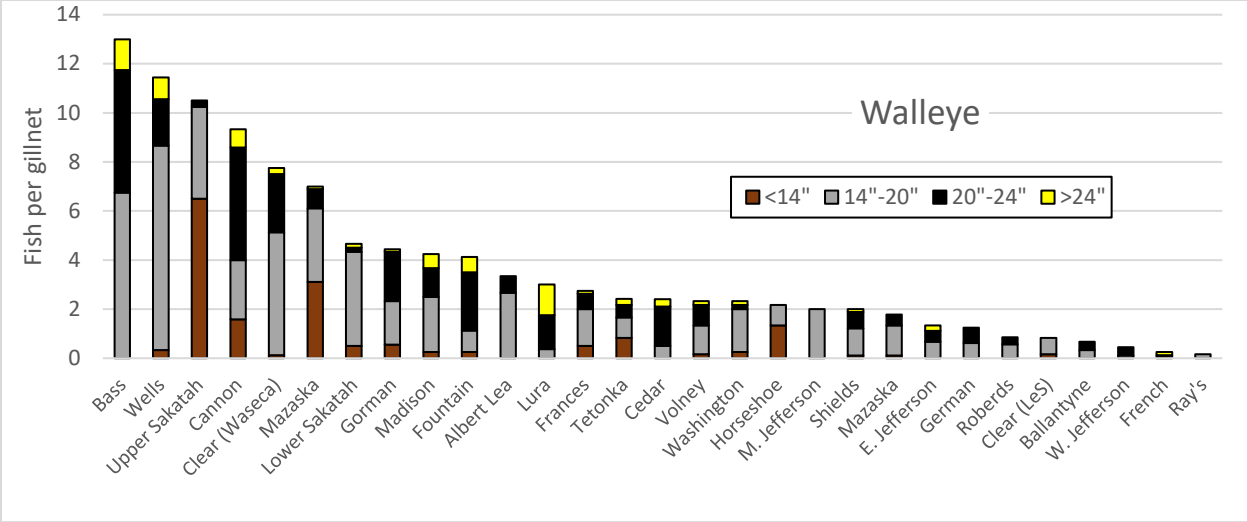
Largemouth bass sampling was limited in 2020. However, the Waterville Area is full of quality largemouth bass lakes. For fast action anglers should check out lakes with high bass numbers such as Reeds or Frances. Lakes with low to medium densities of bass such as Tetonka or Lura often offer the best crack at fish topping the 20 inch mark.

## Catfish

The Minnesota River is the best bet for channel catfish and flathead catfish in the Waterville area. The stretch from Cortland to Henderson holds a variety of catfish habitat, especially woody snags. The Le Sueur and Blue Earth rivers are also excellent choices for channel catfish. If you prefer to chase channel catfish in lakes try Roberds Lake, Lake Tetonka, or Cannon Lake.

*(more species continued on back page)*





## Bullheads

Bullheads remain a popular target for Waterville area anglers. We field many calls each year asking where to go for good bullhead fishing. All Waterville Area lakes have bullheads, the graph at the right shows the lakes with the highest net catches. The majority of bullheads sampled are Black Bullheads.

## Muskellunge

French Lake, by Faribault, is the only muskie lake in the Waterville area. Recent sampling shows a population of about 200 adult Muskie in the lake, or only 1 fish for every 4 acres of water. There may not be a lot of muskie in French Lake (and that's by design) but fish over 40 inches are common and fish over 50 inches are a real possibility. French Lake is also home to a small population of big northern pike.

## Trout

A few options exist for those seeking trout in the Waterville area. The ponds at Paul's Creek near St. Peter are stocked every spring with 5,000 ten to twelve inch rainbow trout.

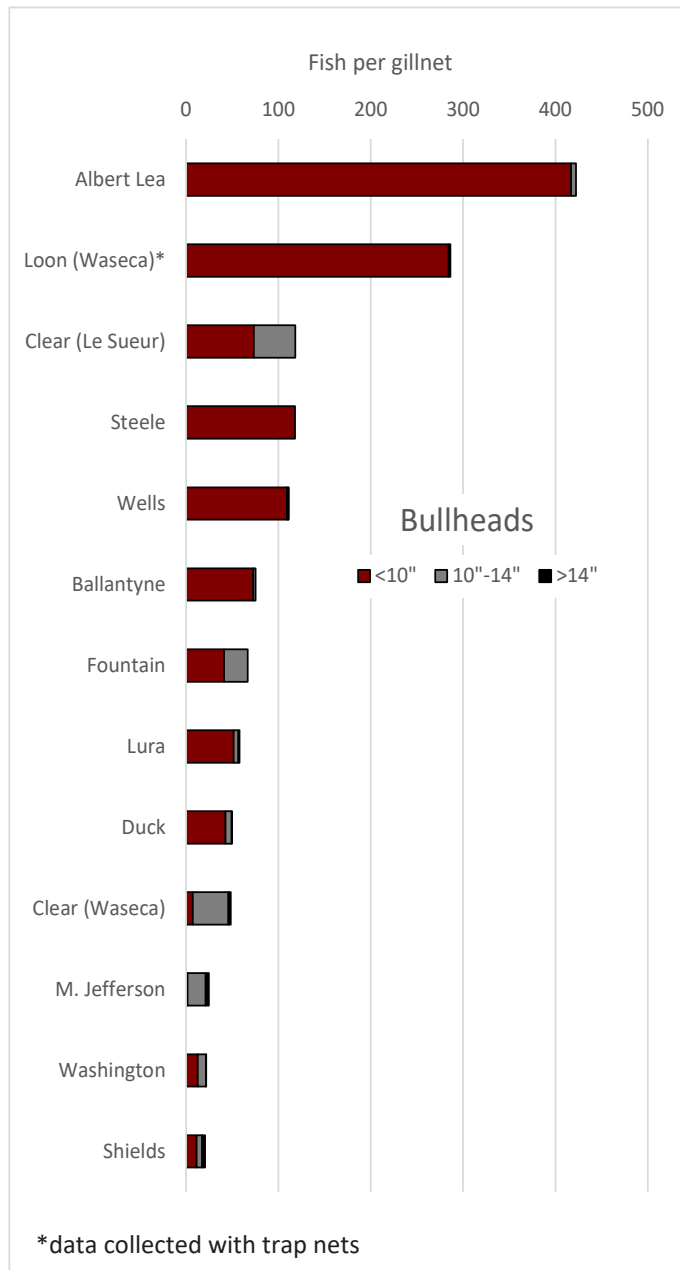
If you prefer to fish moving water check out Rice Creek, by Dundas, for brook trout. Rice Creek is loaded with small to medium sized brook trout and some large fish. Rice Creek is accessible to anglers via angling and angling easement. To learn more about angling easements and trout fishing in general, see DNR's trout stream webpage [https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fishing/trout\\_streams/index.html](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/fishing/trout_streams/index.html)

Also, the 2020 stocking of Wolf Creek (Austin) was popular and successful. Rainbow trout will be stocked in Wolf Creek again in 2021.

## Other Species

For those seeking something off the beaten track, the Waterville area offers a host of "other" fish. Lakes like German and Mazaska offer longnose gar. Mazaska also sports a healthy population of big, hard fighting white bass. The Minnesota, Le Sueur, and Blue Earth rivers (as well as other, smaller rivers) are a bonanza for anglers looking for less sought-after species like various redhorse, white suckers, shovelnose sturgeon (catch and release only!), and gar. Tetonka Lake, along with the Cannon River, Straight River, and the Minnesota River offer an opportunity to catch a smallmouth bass or two. Options are nearly endless for anglers or those looking to arrow a carp.

For more information visit LakeFinder on the MN DNR website (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lakefind/index.html>).



## Lake survey year

**2018** - Clear (Le Sueur County), Albert Lea, Bass, German, Horseshoe, Middle Jefferson, West Jefferson, East Jefferson, Clear (Waseca County), Fountain, Loon (Waseca County).

**2019** - Ballantyne, Steele, Cedar, Duck, Madison, Frances, Washington, Gorman, Volney, Mazaska, Fish.

**2020** - Roberds, Cannon, French, Lower Sakatah, Upper Sakatah, Lura, Ray's, Shields, Tetonka, Wells.

**2021** - Clear (Waseca County), East Jefferson, German, West Jefferson, Fountain, Kelly-Dudley, Elysian, Lily, Greenleaf, George, Albert Lea.

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