



Fishing Tips by Species

Numerous fish populate the BWCA and Quetico Park, but the four most popular species are the smallmouth bass, northern pike, wall-eye, and lake trout. Following are some detailed BWCA fishing tips and Quetico Park fishing tips to help make your canoe trip a successful one. Rods can vary in size and length. Rods that can be broken down into a very compact length travel better in the canoe and across portages. Although we will suggest a number of flies and bugs, don't be afraid to use your favorites; presentation and action of flies and bugs frequently have more impact on fishing success than a particular color or style.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

Smallmouth bass generally spawn from very late May to mid-June depending on water temperature. Pre-spawn smallmouth will usually locate in mid-depth (6-12 feet) and gradually move to shallow closer to spawning. On occasion, smallmouth bass will hang around soft, dark bottom areas more typical of largemouth bass (during pre-spawn) only for food and warm water. Small, slow-moving baits (rapalas, spinner baits, jigs and small hair bugs) all work well. This pattern is short-lived, however, as the water temperatures begin to rise. Fishing at spawn time can be difficult. We recommend release of any spawning or pre-spawn female bass. Immediately after the spawn, the females usually go into deeper water to recuperate. The smaller males guard the nests and are quite susceptible to hitting lures (sometimes repeatedly) while protecting the eggs.



About 5 to 10 days after the spawn the bigger females become active again hitting surface lures, crank baits, spinners, jigs and live bait. By mid-summer look for shallow rock piles, points, reefs, shorelines with big rocks or boulders, and even some weeds. Top-water tends to be more productive early and later in the day, while jigs and diving crank baits are best during mid-day hours.

The best smallmouth fishing time is in late May through late June or early July (although they can be caught by fly rod throughout the summer). When fly fishing use 7-8 wt or floating 8-9 wt, with a 6 to 10 pound tippet. Hair bugs and poppers are best, but don't overlook a sink tip and small streamers or a lead eye leech. Late summer and early fall deeper fishing tactics work best. Mid to late September smallmouth generally move to deeper water and tend to form tight schools which can make locating them more difficult.

The Minnesota State Record for smallmouth bass is an even 8 pounds.

NORTHERN PIKE

Northern pike spawn as the ice leaves the lake or immediately afterwards. This usually occurs at the end of April or early May. Spawning occurs in shallow, soft-bottom bays, sometimes associated with an incoming stream or creek, with water sometimes barely deep enough to cover the pike's back. Lightweight spoons, buzz and spinner baits, and floating plugs work well. When pike are shallow and spooky, try a mega diver on a fly rod.

As the temperatures rise, pike, though still shallow, start moving towards deeper water. By late May and into June, concentrate on areas like the entrance of shallow bays close to the deeper water - especially associated to points. Gradually increase the size of baits and lures used, as the summer progresses. Bigger Mepps spinners, Daredevils, rapalas, etc., also produce well. By mid-summer, when water temperatures are the warmest, try bigger deep diving crank baits by deep weeds. Usually smaller pike can still be caught in shallow weeds throughout the summer, but big pike like cooler water. Don't overlook logs and boulders for holding pike.



With the cooling water temperatures of fall, the bigger pike begin to move shallower again. This time of year, they are looking to fill up for the late fall and winter months. Start using big baits (big spoons, buck tails, crank baits, jerk baits, etc.) and as weeds start to die off, concentrate on green weeds that produce oxygen for the pike (dying weed beds use up oxygen). Some of the biggest pike are caught in the late summer and fall.

Northern pike are best in May and September. When fly fishing, consider 8-9 wt floating line with a 20-40 test leader with a special wire tippet. Big hair divers (mega divers) or large streamers work well.

The Minnesota State Record pike is 45 pounds and 12 ounces caught in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

WALLEYE

Walleye are considered the Minnesota state fish and are a favorite for "shore lunches". Walleye spawn around mid-May depending on when the ice leaves the lakes. They usually spawn in moving water (rapids or below falls) on mixed sand or gravel bottoms, often at night. In the BWCAW it is not very common for the spawn to occur after the fishing season is opened, but occasionally it happens. If so, pre-spawn walleye can be caught in about 6 to 15 feet below spawning areas. Slow-moving jigs with live bait work best, but a slow retrieved crank bait will catch a walleye or two also. Please release spawning females! During their actual spawn, fishing can be difficult. Look for alternate lakes that might be earlier or later in the spawning process.



After the spawn, generally the smaller males recover first. Focus on rocky, gravel shorelines and shallow points first, then deeper points and main lake reefs as the summer progresses. Jigs, live bait, and diving crank baits are productive now. Don't overlook deep weeds for summer walleye, as they provide the shade and cooler temperatures they like. Try cranking a shad rap along the edge of some deep weeds. Low light times are usually best for summer walleye.

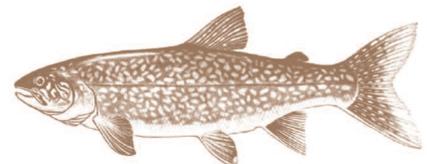
As summer rolls into fall, the walleye will concentrate on deep points and areas related to current (not necessarily rapids), such as narrows between lakes. Try bigger minnow type baits or jig live bait around these areas in the late evening or at night. Later into fall, walleye can scatter a bit and a more mobile approach can be effective.

Walleye fishing with a fly rod is very challenging, but a 7-8 wt sinking line with 6-8 pound tippet would be a great choice. Small streamers or something on the order of a lead eye leech would be good selections. A small live leech could help get a walleye in the boat. Slowly work off the bottom in 8-10 feet of water. June is probably best for walleye.

The Minnesota State Record walleye is 17 pounds 9 ounces caught in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

LAKE TROUT

Lake trout are from the char family and spawn in the fall (mid-October to mid-November) after our legal fishing season closes (September 30). Being a cold water species, they are easiest to catch in early spring (May to early June) and fall (September). Paddle trolling through a lake with a flashy spoon or diving crank bait is an effective way of locating fish. Generally, natural colors (white, black or silver) are good, but bright colors (chartreuse, fluorescent red or fluorescent yellow) are very good on dark overcast days.



As water temperatures increase into the summer... down go the lake trout to depths of 40, 50, 60 feet or deeper to the colder, seeking oxygenated water to accommodate their physical needs. Even though they are in deep water, they are not impossible to locate. Baits such as weighted jigging spoons, blade baits, and heavy jigs fished vertically are an effective way to catch trout. In years that are not extremely warm, deep fishing tactics are not always necessary. Often just a "magnum style" deep running lure and long line can find trout.

Lake trout are best in May and September. When fly fishing, try an 8-9 wt sinking line with 10-12 pound tippet. We've seen the best success with small saltwater streamers (white, white/chartreuse, white/blue and white/gray). One can actually troll a streamer with sink tip or sinking line. For an exciting way to take lake trout, try a fly rod with sinking or sink tip line with a #1-2 streamer in the spring or fall.

The Minnesota State Record lake trout is 43 pounds 8 ounces and was caught in northeastern Minnesota.