

# Want Some Advice on Where to Go Fishing?

*Updated Jan 2016*

Florence County has a wide variety of fishing opportunities...and guess what? Some spots are better than others. While most of our lakes have similar fish species in them, the populations of each species vary wildly from lake to lake. Here are my recommendations on where you should try your luck for each of our major game fish species.

## **Northern Pike**

The most abundant northern pike populations currently in Florence county are (starting with the most abundant); Patten Lake, Fay Lake, Seidel Lake, Twin Falls Flowage, Kingsford Flowage, Sea Lion Lake and Long Lake. These are the lakes someone should try if they are interested in catching pike in good numbers. While all these lakes have decent sized pike in them, because of the high density of pike present, the growth rates are slower than other waters with smaller pike populations. If what you really want is a large pike... you will have to work for it, spend a lot of time on the water and make the most of your opportunities. If a trophy pike is what you want here is a list of the lakes that have them; Lake Ellwood, Brule River Flowage, Kingsford Flowage and Halsey Lake. With the exception of Kingsford Flowage, these are all low density populations and you are not likely to catch many pike while fishing for that trophy.

## **Walleye**

It is amazing how many calls I get asking me "where are you stocking walleye this year? I want to increase my chances of catching walleye." Really, if you are looking to increase your chances you should ask the question, "What walleye populations don't require stocking?" This is because stocking is much less impactful to a population than natural reproduction. Walleye lakes that are capable of naturally reproducing tend to carry populations of adult walleye in the 3-8 fish/acre range. Compare that to our most successful stocked waters, which are right around 1 adult walleye/acre. The two lakes that have the best natural reproduction of walleye in Florence County are the Brule River Flowage and Patten Lake. Patten Lake's walleye population crashed from the late 1990s through about 2010. The problem that caused the crash has now been fixed, but it will be a few more years before the population is truly desirable. Lake Emily and Fay Lake are probably our best long-term stocked walleye fisheries, walleyes can be caught on both of these lakes, just not with the regularity that they can on the naturally reproducing waters.

## **Largemouth Bass**

Just like northern pike, largemouth bass thrive in a lot of our lakes here in Florence County. The most abundant largemouth bass populations within the county are as follows; Cosgrove Lake, the Spread Eagle Chain, and Keyes Lake. Those are the lakes where you can expect to have your best chances of catching largemouth bass, and likely in high numbers. For those of you looking for true trophy largemouth bass, you have to direct your effort to the lakes that have low abundance, in these lakes bass grow incredibly fast and achieve a larger ultimate size. For those anglers looking for that once in a lifetime bass I would recommend Patten Lake, Sea Lion Lake, Fay Lake or Twin Falls Flowage.

## **Smallmouth Bass**

Smallmouth bass are in most of the lakes here in Florence County, however, in most lakes their population is quite low and catching a smallmouth bass is much more of a surprise than their more abundant cousin the largemouth bass. The lakes with the highest abundance of smallmouth bass are the Brule River Flowage, Lake Ellwood, Pine River Flowage and the riverine sections of Twin Falls and Kingsford Flowages. Just like largemouth and pike, the true trophies come from low density populations. The two lakes that I have seen the most trophy smallmouth in are Patten Lake and Keyes Lake. However, even some of the most abundant populations in Florence County can kick out some big smallmouth, so for trophy smallmouth don't overlook places like Brule River Flowage and Lake Ellwood.

## **Pan fish**

Pan fish are the most sought after group of fish by Wisconsin anglers, mainly because they are great table fare. Since harvest rates are so high on pan fish I am not comfortable directing more angling pressure to our quality pan fish lakes. I will leave those lakes to the anglers that go out and find them. But what I will tell you is that angler harvest is the biggest impact on quality pan fish populations in Florence County. If you know of a lake that doesn't get much angling pressure....it likely has a nice pan fish population. We just had an opportunity to put some "experimental" pan fish regulations on waters that receive a lot of harvest. These regulations will restrict the number of pan fish an angler can keep in a day, which in the long run should allow pan fish to live longer and achieve a more desirable size. The three lakes that we will be restricting harvest on are the Spread Eagle Chain, Sea Lion Lake, and Halsey Lake. If the regulation works the way it is intended these could be great pan fish destinations in 3-5 years!

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