



2015 Lake Oahe Fishery Projections

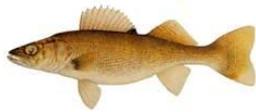
Each year, biologists working on Lake Oahe collect information on the fisheries from population surveys and information on angler use and harvest from creel surveys. By looking at trends in fish populations and angler use and harvest, predictions can be made about fishing on Lake Oahe for 2015.

Walleye

Regulations for Lake Oahe Walleye

For 2015, daily and possession limits remain the statewide limit of **4 walleye per day** and at most **1 walleye 20 inches or greater** can be kept. The possession limit also remains at **8 walleye**.

Walleye Regulations for Lake Oahe



4 Walleye/day

Year-long



**at most 1 fish
over 20 inches per day**

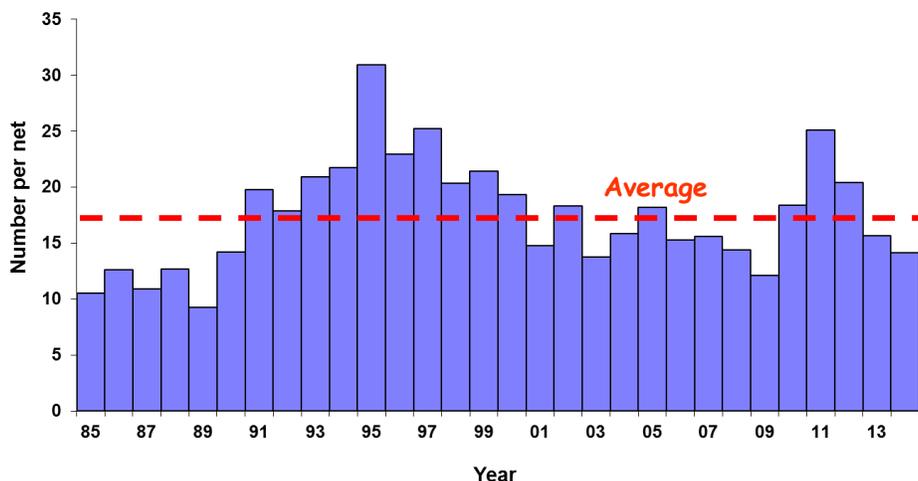
Year-long

J F M A M J Ju A S O N D

Possession limit of 8

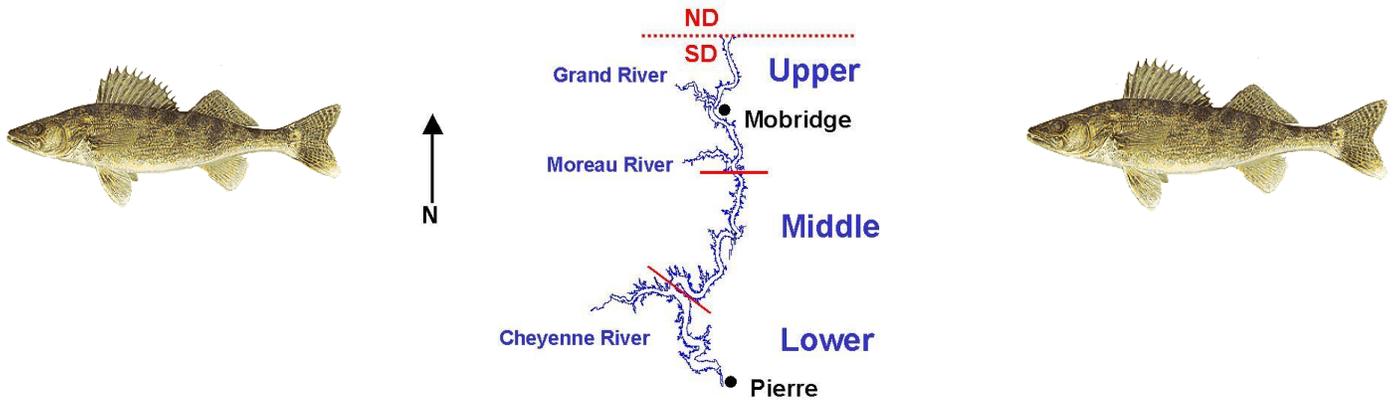
Walleye Fishing Trends for 2015

Walleye abundance is indexed using the average number of walleye caught per gill net. In 2014, walleye abundance for Lake Oahe was 14.1 walleye per net. Abundance was slightly lower than the long term average of 17 walleye per net.



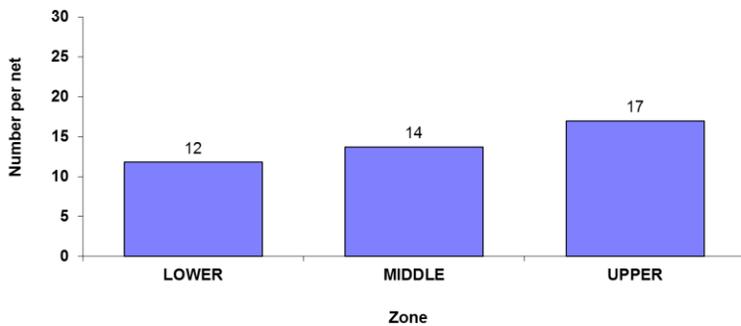
Walleye abundance in Lake Oahe is usually highest in the upper zone. This remained true in 2014 as abundance in the upper zone equaled the long term average of 17 walleye per net and decreased as you head downstream.

Lake Oahe Zones



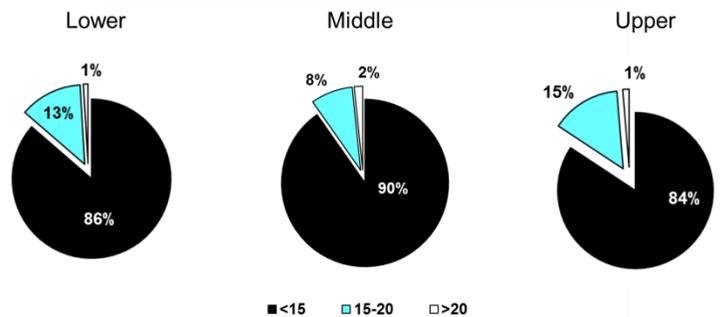
Historically, the average size of walleye decreases as you move upstream. Due to high reproduction in recent years, fish around 15 inches will be common throughout Lake Oahe in 2015. Lake-wide, the majority of the walleye population was produced in 2009 and growth has slowed due to so many fish of the same size in the system. Walleye 20 inches or larger are less abundant than years prior to the 2011 flood; however, large fish can be found throughout the lake. The average size of walleye caught and kept by anglers was the same as in 2013 at 14.8 inches.

Walleye abundance was highest in the upper zone of Lake Oahe



Walleye (<15 inches) are common throughout Lake Oahe

Percent of walleye surveyed in 2014



Rainbow Smelt: the 2011 Flood affects and predictions for 2015

The flood of 2011 caused increased amounts of water to be released through Oahe Dam. The high flows through Oahe Dam caused many rainbow smelt to be swept through the dam into Lake Sharpe. Survey estimates show 134 million rainbow smelt or 84% of the population were removed from Lake Oahe. The majority of the rainbow smelt were young, newly hatched fish. Although estimates are higher than 2014, current rainbow smelt numbers are low compared to the long term average. This is due to low reproduction in 2012, 2013 and 2014. However, rainbow smelt is a prolific species and the population is abundance enough that, depending on spring spawning conditions, they could rebound quickly.

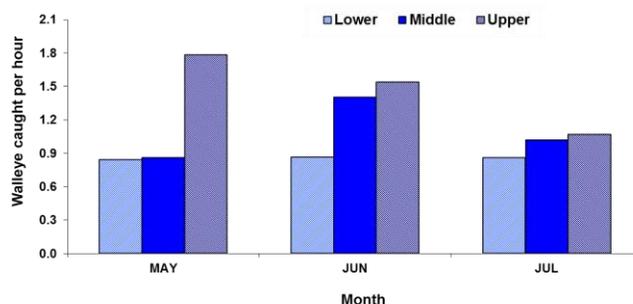
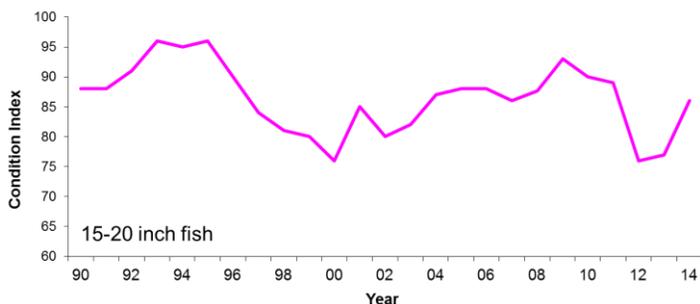


Walleye fishing usually peaks at different times for different regions of Lake Oahe. Anglers experience high success in the upper region of Lake Oahe from late May through June while the middle and lower reaches peak a little later in the year. In 2014, walleye catch rates (number of walleye caught per hour per angler) decreased from 2011, 2012 and 2013, but remains higher than the long term average. In 2015, walleye fishing should continue to be good due to high numbers of walleye in the population; however, hourly catch rates may decrease in 2015 due to the 6th highest warm-water prey fish abundance on record in Lake Oahe.

Lake Oahe walleye condition or plumpness has increased in 2014.

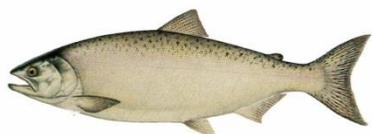


Hourly catches of walleye were good in 2014 for May and June especially in the upper zone of Lake Oahe.

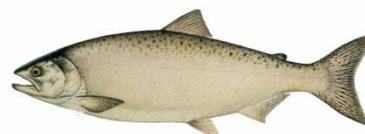


Walleye Fishing Techniques

There are a wide range of techniques to fish for walleye in Lake Oahe. Many anglers fish with live bait on minnow or crawler rigs directly below their boats while drifting or trolling slowly. Other techniques include shallow or deep trolling crankbaits, deep vertical jigging, open water trolling for suspended fish, casting wind blown shorelines and various other techniques. Many anglers tend to fish 10 to 40 feet of water depending on the time of year, conditions and mood of the fish. The best way to fish for walleye is just keep trying a few techniques and depths until you catch your first fish and keep repeating it.



Chinook Salmon



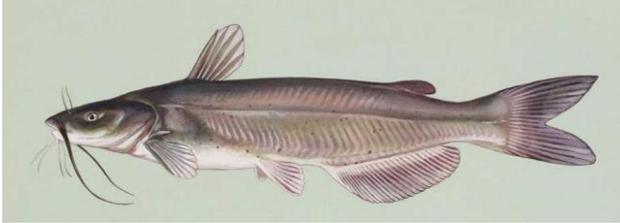
The outlook for the Chinook salmon fishing season in 2015 is unknown. Annual stockings have and will continue to provide a salmon fishery for the future. The summer months are typically when most salmon are caught. However, early spring can also be a good time to fish without the need of downriggers. If you are after larger Chinook salmon, try fishing in the late summer and fall.

Salmon Fishing Techniques

To effectively catch Chinook salmon on Lake Oahe, anglers need to remember salmon are a cold water fish. The warmer the water gets, the deeper Chinook salmon tend to reside. In the spring and fall, anglers fishing the lower portion of Lake Oahe can do well trolling with spoons and crankbaits. During the warm summer months, downriggers are used to get a variety of lures such as: crankbaits, spoons, herring, dodgers, flashers or squid down to where the fish are. In the fall, shore anglers can do well casting spoons and crankbaits from shore around Whitlock Bay when the Chinook salmon are preparing to spawn.

Channel Catfish

Channel catfish are abundant in Lake Oahe, representing 40% of the sample collected during 2014 gill net surveys and are found in a wide range of depths and habitats. Excellent fishing opportunities exist, especially in the spring. Channel catfish are excellent to eat and easy to catch. There is no daily limit and many are caught incidentally by walleye anglers. If an angler would specifically target channel catfish, they could have high success. To effectively fish for channel catfish, an angler should fish in the back of large bays with a variety of baits such as night crawlers, minnows or commercially prepared baits.



Northern Pike

Lake Oahe contains a trophy northern pike population with many of the fish exceeding 10 pounds. When Lake Oahe refilled in 2008 and 2009, vegetation and trees on the banks provided excellent spawning habitat and the number of young pike increased. Good numbers of 3 to 10 pound northern pike are available now along with larger fish. Some mortality likely occurred due to recent reductions in baitfish in Lake Oahe. Overall, the upcoming years look good for northern pike fishing as smaller fish grow to large sizes.

Northern Pike Fishing Techniques

Anglers fishing for northern pike on Lake Oahe have the best opportunity to catch one in the early spring. Northern pike activity increases when open water starts to show up around the edges of ice cover. Northern pike stay in shallow water through June, and then typically go deeper for the rest of the summer. In the spring, many anglers fish from shore or shallow water with a dead smelt on a treble hook rig or cast slow moving lures. Northern pike seek out the warmest water available in the spring and feed on anything they find, including fish that died during the winter months.

Key Issues for Lake Oahe in 2015

- Walleye abundance is near the normal lake wide average, with majority of the population around 15 inches.
- Walleye daily and possession limits have remained the statewide regulation of 4 per day with at most only 1 over 20 inches and 8 total in possession.
- Rainbow smelt abundance is low due to high loss through Oahe Dam from the flood of 2011 and poor production since; but smelt have potential to rebound if spring conditions are ideal for their spawn.
- Northern pike abundance has remained stable, with many reaching a size attractive to anglers.
- Chinook salmon fishing success is unknown for 2015, but stocking will continue to provide a future fishery.
- Lake Oahe should have good fishing for many species in 2015.
- Boat access may be an issue depending on water levels for Lake Oahe.



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