



2025 SPRING FISHERIES SURVEY SUMMARY

SISSABAGAMA LAKE, SAWYER COUNTY

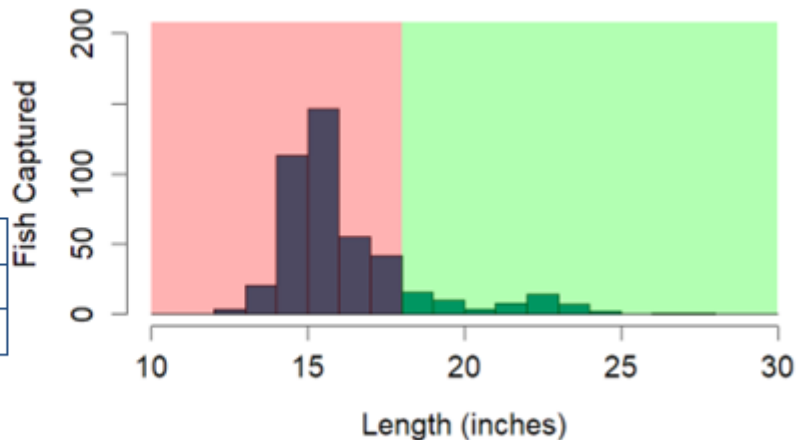
Report by Max Wolter

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Hayward Fisheries Management Team conducted a fyke netting survey on Sissabagama Lake from April 8-16, 2025 and April 29-May 2, 2025. The primary targets for the first round of netting were walleye and northern pike, and muskellunge and black crappie were targeted in the second round. An electrofishing survey was conducted on June 6, 2025 to target largemouth bass, smallmouth bass and bluegill and included six miles of shoreline. Quality, preferred and memorable sizes referenced in this summary are based on standard proportions of world record lengths developed for each species by the American Fisheries Society.

WALLEYE



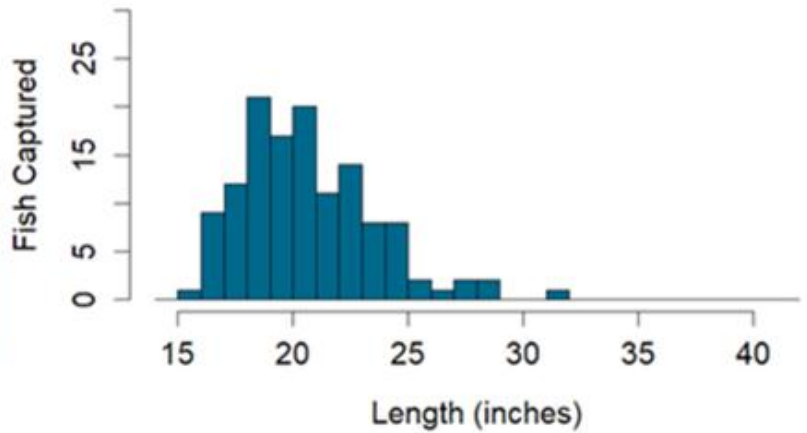
Captured 19 per net-night ≥ 10 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 15 "	66%
Preferred Size ≥ 20 "	6%



NORTHERN PIKE



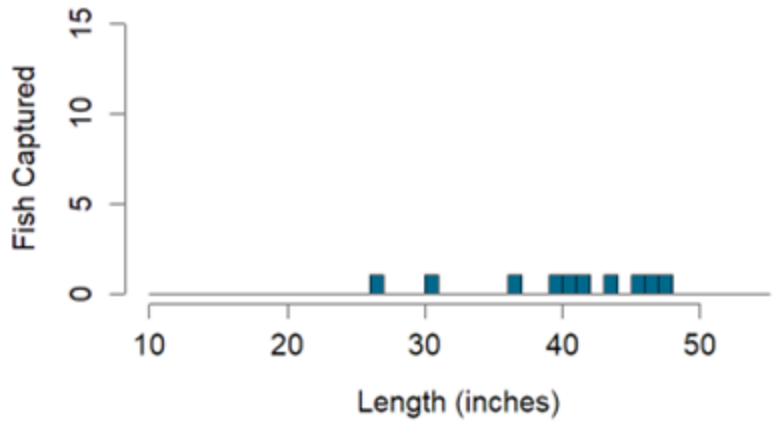
Captured 5 per net-night ≥ 14 inches	
Quality Size $\geq 21''$	34%
Preferred Size $\geq 28''$	2%



MUSKELLUNGE



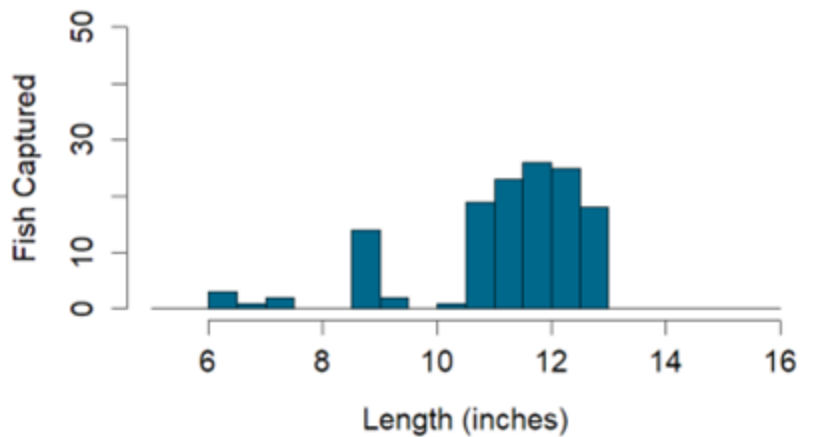
Captured 0.4 per net-night ≥ 20 inches	
Quality Size $\geq 30''$	89%
Memorable Size $\geq 42''$	44%



BLACK CRAPPIE



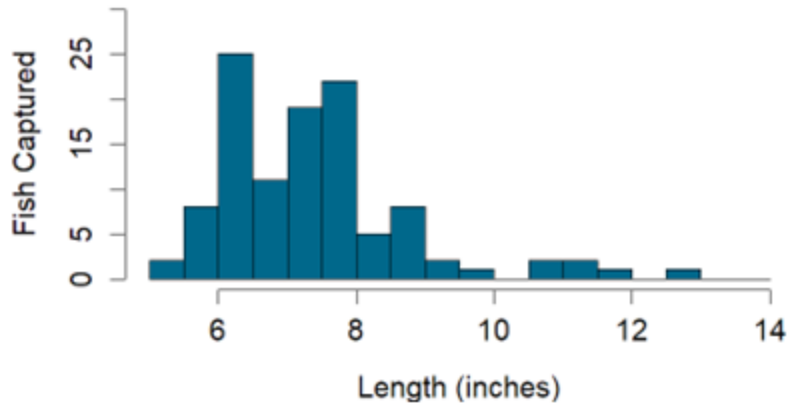
Captured 6 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size $\geq 8''$	96%
Preferred Size $\geq 10''$	84%



YELLOW PERCH



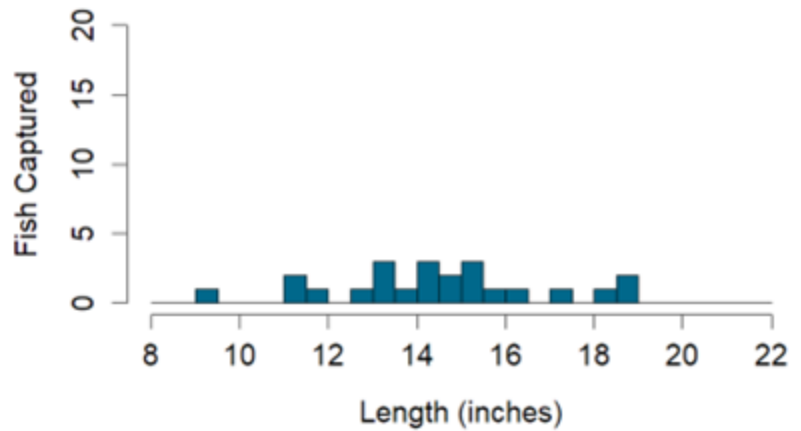
Captured 4.5 per net-night ≥ 5 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 8"	20%
Preferred Size ≥ 10"	6%



LARGEMOUTH BASS



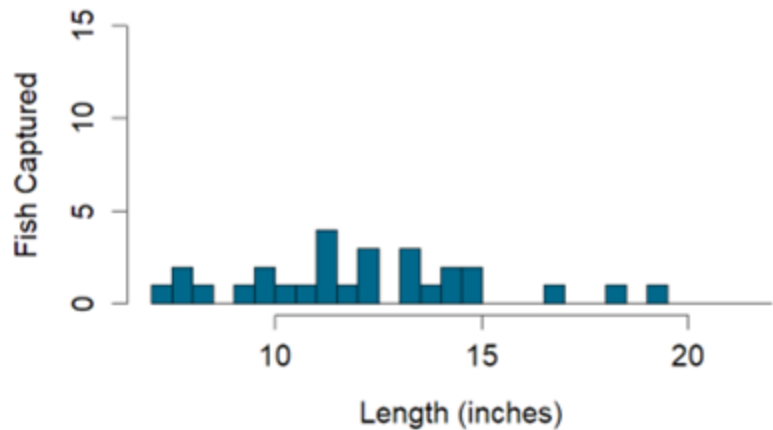
Captured 4 per mile ≥ 8 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 12"	82%
Preferred Size ≥ 15"	39%



SMALLMOUTH BASS



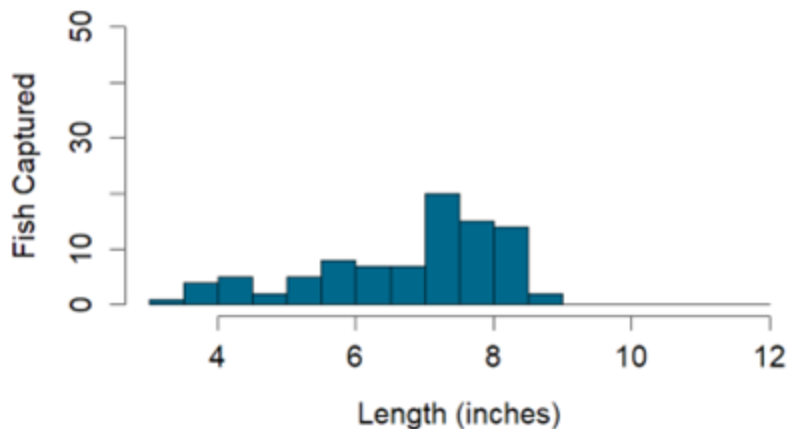
Captured 5 per mile ≥ 7 inches	
Quality Size ≥ 11"	67%
Preferred Size ≥ 14"	25%
Memorable Size ≥ 17"	7%



BLUEGILL



Captured 61 per mile \geq 3 inches	
Quality Size \geq 6"	72%
Preferred Size \geq 8"	18%



SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The Hayward DNR Fish Team put in a considerable amount of effort towards surveying Sissabagama Lake in 2025. A fishery management plan was recently completed for the lake and the 2025 survey was an opportunity to update our understanding of the fishery and close several information gaps.

The initial survey effort focused on walleye and included an estimate of the total number of adult walleye in the lake. Northern pike data were also collected in this early netting effort. Catch rate for other species like black crappie and muskellunge was low in the early netting effort, so a second netting effort was completed in late April and early May. Finally, an electrofishing survey in June was used to survey bass and bluegill.

Sissabagama is a complex-cool-dark lake in the fisheries lake classification system. Comparisons are made throughout this report between Sissabagama Lake and other lakes of this same classification.

WALLEYE

Walleye were the main target of our 2025 survey. Our mark-recapture survey delivered an estimate of 2,379 adult walleye in Sissabagama, which comes out to 3.3 per acre. This is an increase compared to population estimates conducted in 2015 and 2019. Sissabagama is primarily a stocked walleye fishery. It is also managed with a more restrictive length limit (18-inch minimum length for harvest, color-coded in the figure above). The combination of stocking and reduced harvest appears to have been successful in boosting the number of adult walleye in the lake. However,

natural reproduction remains very low based on fall surveys over the last decade. This population has shown some improvements, but underlying issues persist.

NORTHERN PIKE

Northern pike are moderately abundant (75th to 90th percentile compared to similar lakes), but size is somewhat poor. Only 35% of pike are over 21 inches, and just 2% are over 28 inches. Northern pike represent a good harvest opportunity for anglers. There is no size limit for northern pike (anglers are encouraged to keep small ones) and a 5-fish daily bag.

MUSKELLUNGE

Muskellunge are a popular species in Sissabagama Lake. The lake has a long history of producing high-quality muskellunge, especially given the lake's relatively small size. The 2025 survey found a somewhat low catch rate for muskellunge (25th-50th percentile), but high-quality size (44% over 42 inches). There is a 50-inch size limit for muskellunge in Sissabagama Lake and it receives stocked fingerlings every three years.

BLACK CRAPPIE

Crappie are a very popular species for Sissabagama Lake anglers, especially in winter months. Crappie remain moderately abundant (50th-75th percentile compared to other similar lakes) and have good size (84% over 10 inches). Panfish in Sissabagama Lake are managed with a 10-fish daily bag limit (all species combined).

YELLOW PERCH

Yellow perch are relatively low abundance in Sissabagama Lake (25th-50th percentile compared to other similar lakes) and the majority are small (6-8 inches). However, a few large perch were captured in the survey. Perch present limited opportunities for Sissabagama anglers, but they may still serve an important role as food for other species.

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Largemouth bass abundance in 2025 was considerably lower than in other surveys over the last 20 years. The drop in largemouth bass abundance is welcome, as it comes with an improvement in size structure (39% over 15 inches). Maintaining a lower abundance and good size of largemouth bass is the preferred state for this fishery.

SMALLMOUTH BASS

Smallmouth bass abundance has been steady in Sissabagama Lake. The drop in largemouth bass abundance resulted in this survey producing a higher catch rate for smallmouth bass in Sissabagama Lake for the first time in several decades. There are areas of suitable habitat for both bass species in Sissabagama, explaining why each species has similar catch rates. Most smallmouth captured in the survey were small, with just 25% over 14 inches.

BLUEGILL

The size of bluegill was one of the biggest surprises of our 2025 survey of Sissabagama Lake. There was a much higher percentage of bluegill over 8 inches (18%) than any other recent survey of Sissabagama. The specific reason for the increase in bluegill size is not precisely known, but may be linked to the concurrent increase in walleye abundance. Bluegill abundance was lower than past surveys, which likely allowed for better growth and size.

Survey Crew: Max Wolter, Scott Braden, Dan Nelson, Jeremiah Fisk and Aaron Cole
Reviewed and approved by Aaron Cole