



Wisconsin Department Of Natural Resources

Fisheries Information Sheet

Big Muskellunge Lake, Vilas County, 2026

Waterbody Information

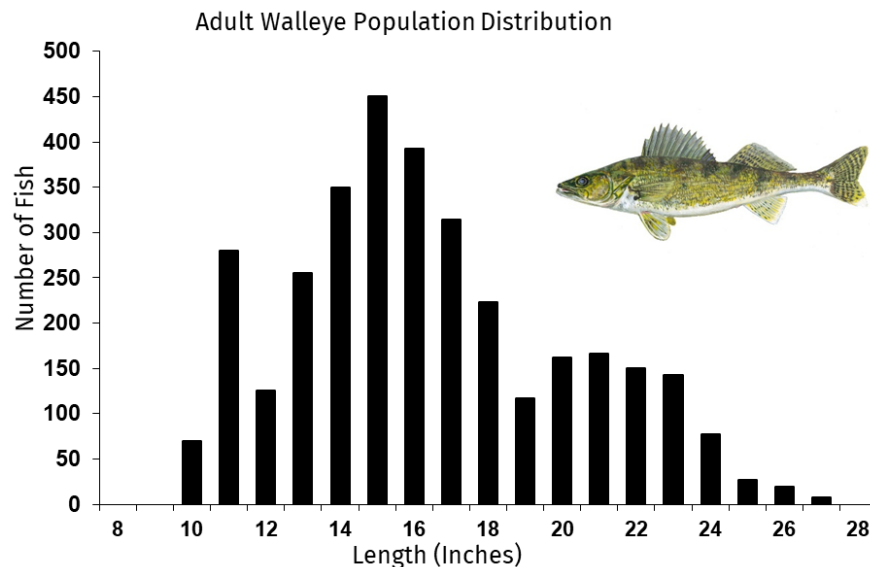
Big Muskellunge Lake is a 930-acre seepage lake with 10.2 miles of shoreline and a maximum depth of 70 feet. Big Muskellunge is classified as a complex-two story system. Bottom substrates consist predominantly of sand, gravel, and rock. Big Muskellunge Lake's walleye population is sustained through natural reproduction (NR), while the muskellunge population is supported by limited NR and supplemental stocking.

Survey Information

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) conducted spring netting and electrofishing surveys of Big Muskellunge Lake targeting adult walleye (April 21 – 27, 2026), adult muskellunge (April 28 – May 6, 2026) and adult bass (May 28, 2026). Other species reported here weren't specifically targeted during the surveys, but the catch provides some insight into their abundance and length distribution.

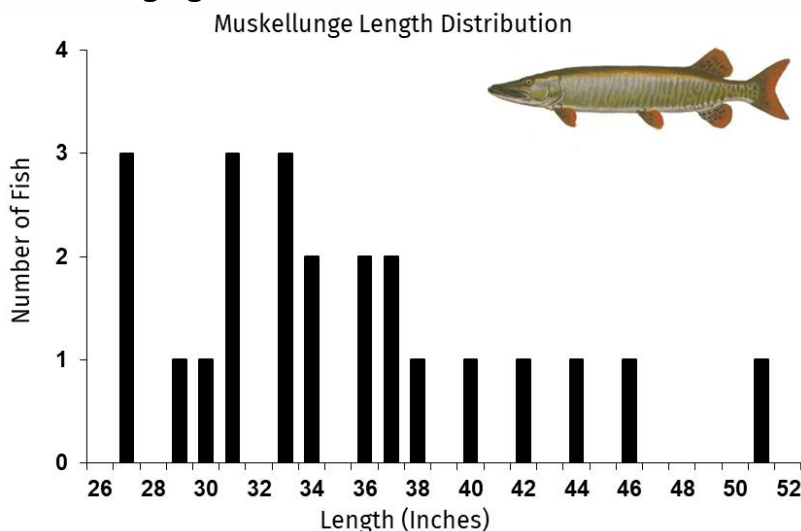
Walleye

A total of 1,231 adult walleye (sexually mature or ≥ 15 inches) were captured during target survey efforts. Mark-recapture procedures estimated 3,330 (3.6/acre) adult walleye in Big Muskellunge Lake. An estimated 68% of adult walleye were ≥ 15 inches, and the largest captured was a 27.5-inch female. The accompanying bar chart shows the estimated adult walleye population distribution with fish ranging from 10 to 27 inches and a peak occurring at 15 inches.



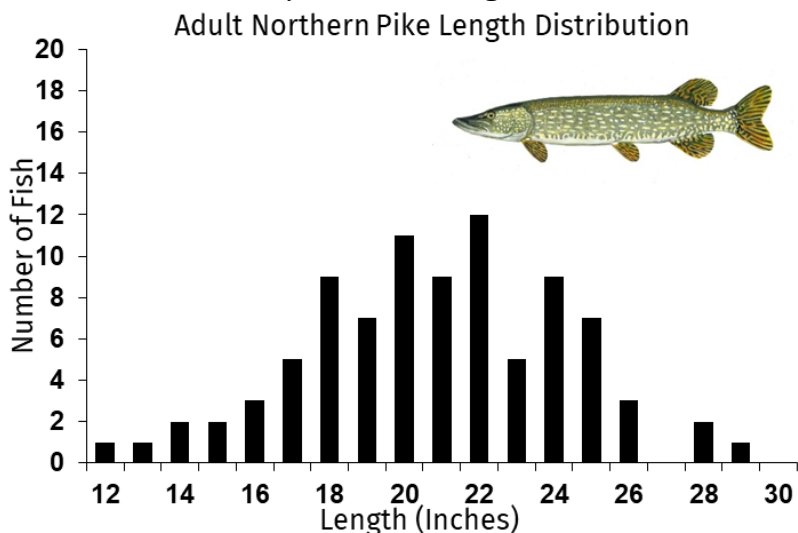
Muskellunge

During the surveys, 23 adult muskellunge (sexually mature or ≥ 30 inches) were captured. During muskellunge-targeted netting, adult muskellunge were captured at a rate of 0.22 per net night, placing it below the 25th percentile for its lake class. Of the adults captured, 22% were ≥ 40 inches, and the largest captured was a 51.3-inch female. The accompanying bar chart shows the observed muskellunge length distribution with fish ranging from 27 to 51 inches.



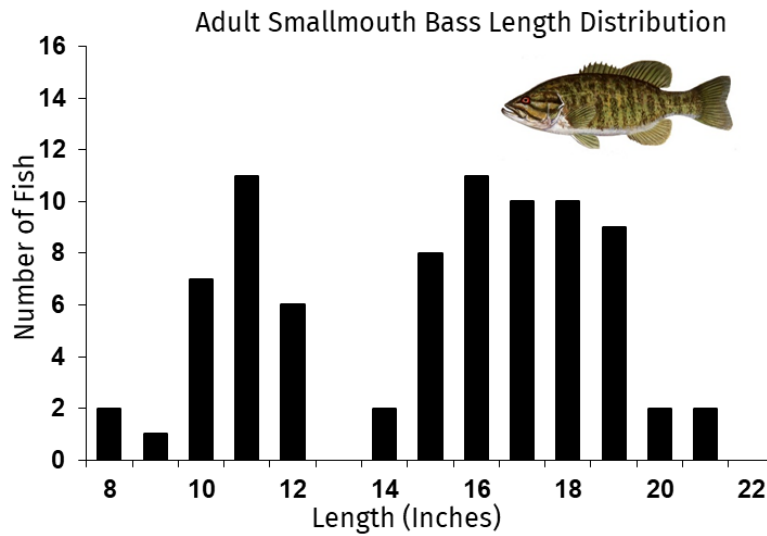
Northern Pike

During surveys, 89 adult northern pike (sexually mature or ≥ 12 inches) were captured along with 5 juveniles. Pike were caught at a rate of 0.8 per net night, placing it between the 25th and 50th percentiles for its lake class. Approximately 54% of adult northern pike were ≥ 21 inches, and the largest was 29.8 inches. The accompanying bar chart shows the observed adult northern pike length distribution with fish ranging from 12 to 29 inches and a peak occurring at 22 inches.



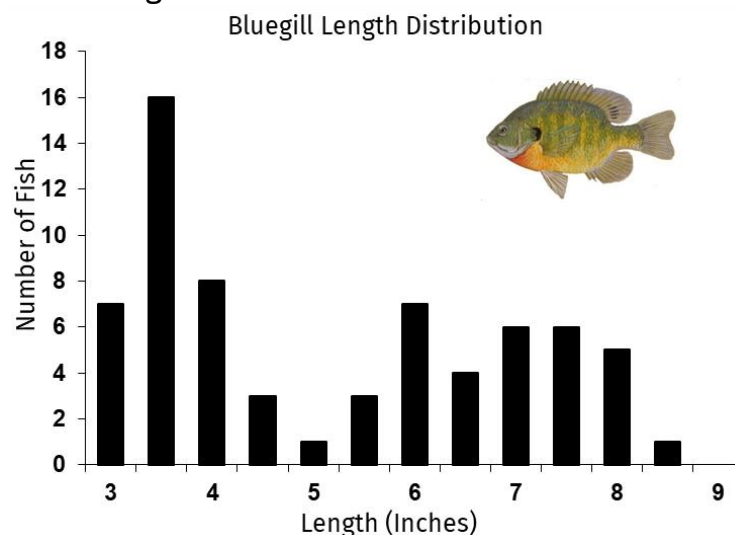
Smallmouth & Largemouth Bass

A total of 81 adult smallmouth bass (≥ 8 inches) were captured, 67% were ≥ 14 inches, and the largest was 21.2 inches. A targeted electrofishing survey caught adult smallmouth bass at a rate of 7.8 per mile of shoreline, placing it above the 75th percentile for its lake class. Only six largemouth bass were caught during the surveys of Big Muskellunge Lake and ranged in length from 12.9 to 18.5 inches. The accompanying bar chart shows the observed adult smallmouth bass length distribution with fish ranging from 8 to 21 inches with peaks at 11 and 16 inches.



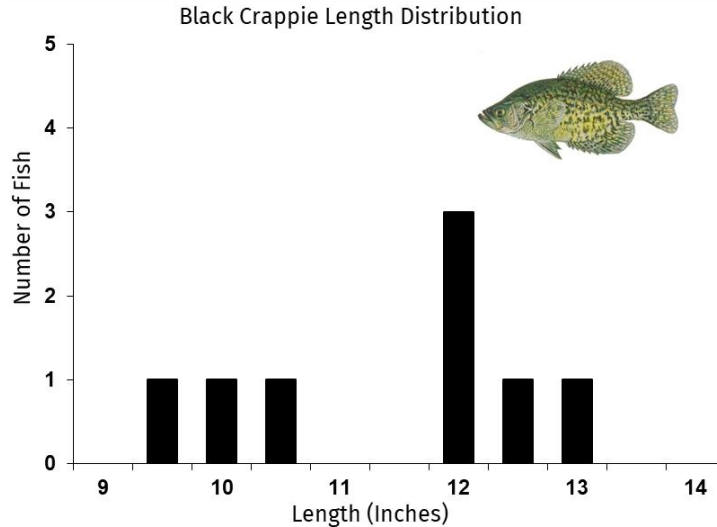
Bluegill

A total of 100 bluegill were captured during surveys. A targeted electrofishing survey captured bluegill at a rate of 18.0 fish per mile, placing it just above the 25th percentile for its lake class. Of the 67 bluegill measured, average length was 5.3 inches, 27% were ≥ 7 inches and the largest was 8.8 inches. The accompanying bar chart shows the observed bluegill length distribution with fish ranging from 3 to 8.5 inches and a peak occurring at 3.5 inches.



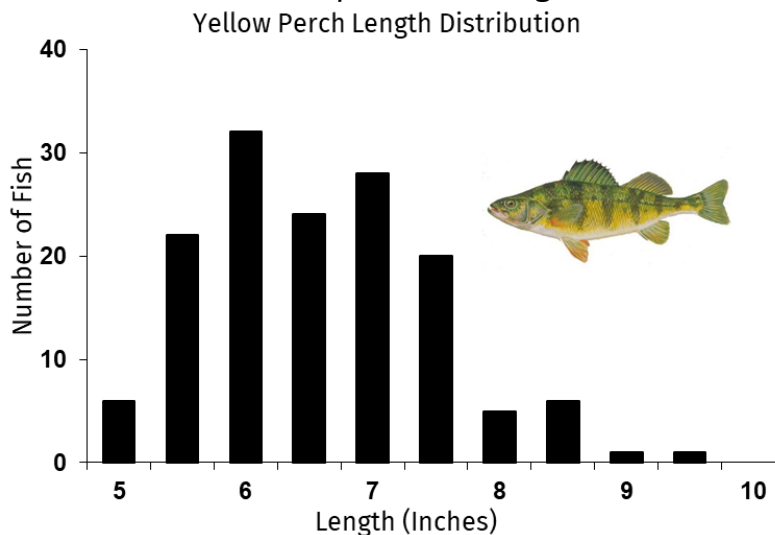
Black Crappie

A total of 11 black crappie were captured at a rate of 0.1 fish per net night, placing it in the 1st percentile for its lake class. Of the 8 black crappie measured, average length was 11.6 inches, 88% were ≥ 10 inches and the largest was 13.2 inches. The accompanying bar chart shows the observed black crappie length distribution with fish ranging from 9.5 to 13 inches and a peak occurring at 12 inches.



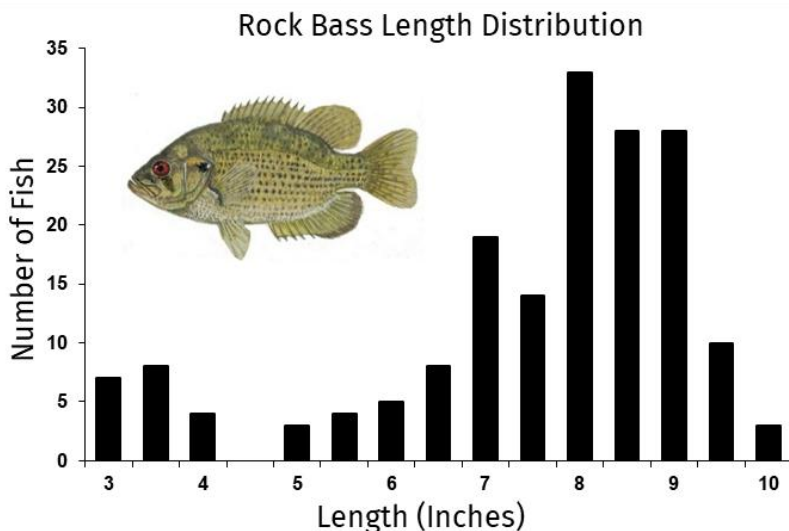
Yellow Perch

A total of 3,322 yellow perch were captured at a rate of 31.0 fish per net night, placing it above the 75th percentile for its lake class. Of the 145 yellow perch measured, average length was 6.7 inches, 9% were ≥ 8 inches and the largest was 9.5 inches. The accompanying bar chart shows the observed yellow perch length distribution with fish ranging from 5 to 9.5 inches and a peak occurring at 6 inches.



Rock Bass

A total of 341 rock bass were captured during surveys and lengths were taken from a subsample. Rock bass ranged in length from 3.0 to 10.4 inches and average 7.7 inches. The accompanying bar chart shows the observed rock bass length distribution with fish ranging from 5 to 9.5 inches and a peak occurring at 8 inches.



Other Species

Other species captured during surveys were bluntnose minnow, burbot, johnny darter, mimic shiner, mottled sculpin, pumpkinseed, and white sucker.

Table 1. General fishing regulations for Big Muskellunge, Vilas County, WI in 2026-27.

Species	Season Dates	Daily Bag Limit	Size Limit
Largemouth bass (LMB)	1 st Saturday in May – 1 st Sunday in March	1 in total with SMB	18 inch mininum
Smallmouth bass (SMB)	3 rd Saturday in June – 1 st Sunday in March	1 in total with LMB	18 inch minimum
Northern pike	1 st Saturday in May – 1 st Sunday in March	5	None
Muskellunge	1 st Saturday in May – Dec 31 (open water only)	1	40 inch minimum
Walleye	1 st Saturday in May – 1 st Sunday in March	3 in total	No minimum with only one allow over 14 inches
Panfish	Open all year	25 in total	None

Contact Information

For questions regarding fisheries management activities on the Big Muskellunge, contact Vilas County Fisheries Biologist Eric Wegleitner. Fish illustrations by Virgil Beck.

Eric Wegleitner

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