



# 2013 Lake Oahe Fishery Projections

Each year, biologists working on Lake Oahe collect information on fish populations from netting surveys and information on angler use and harvest of those populations 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 2013.

## Walleye

### Regulations for Lake Oahe Walleye

Lake Oahe walleye regulations for 2013 have changed from the statewide regulation to allow anglers the opportunity to harvest more of the abundant small walleye that are currently in the lake.

The 2013 **walleye regulations** include a **daily limit of 8 walleye** with the following size restrictions: no more than **4 walleye can be 15 inches or greater** in length per day and at most 1 walleye can be **20 inches** or greater per day.

This means anglers are allowed to harvest up to 8 walleye per day under 15 inches or combinations of as long as only 4 walleye are greater than 15 inches with only 1 walleye greater than 20 inches.

The **possession limit** also increased to allow for higher harvest. The current possession limit is **24 walleye** after a minimum of 3 days of fishing with the above per day length restrictions.



### Lake Oahe Walleye Regulations

**Daily Limit: 8 walleye, sauger, and walleye/sauger hybrids, in combination with the following size restrictions:**

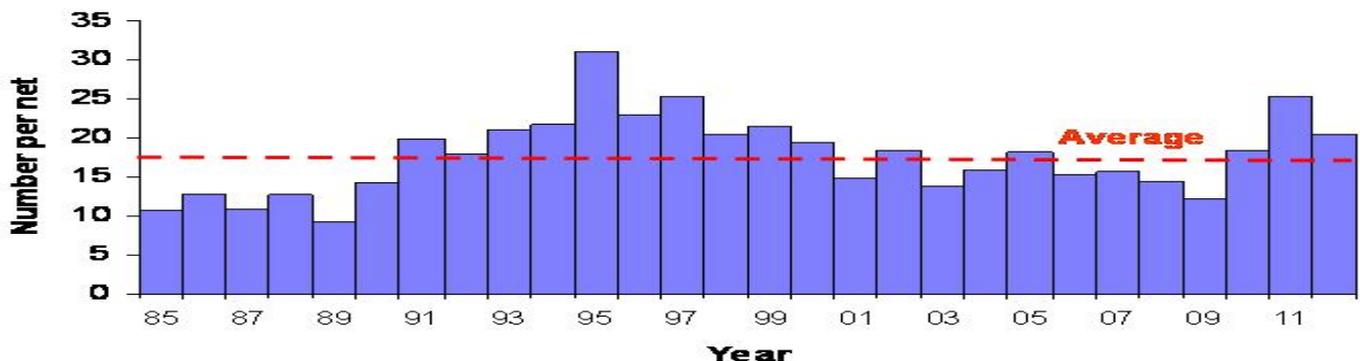
- **No more than 4 fish can be 15 inches or greater per day**
- **At most 1 fish can be 20 inches or longer per day**

**Possession Limit: 24 walleye, sauger, and walleye/sauger hybrids with the above size restrictions after a minimum of 3 days of fishing**

### Walleye Fishing Trends for 2013

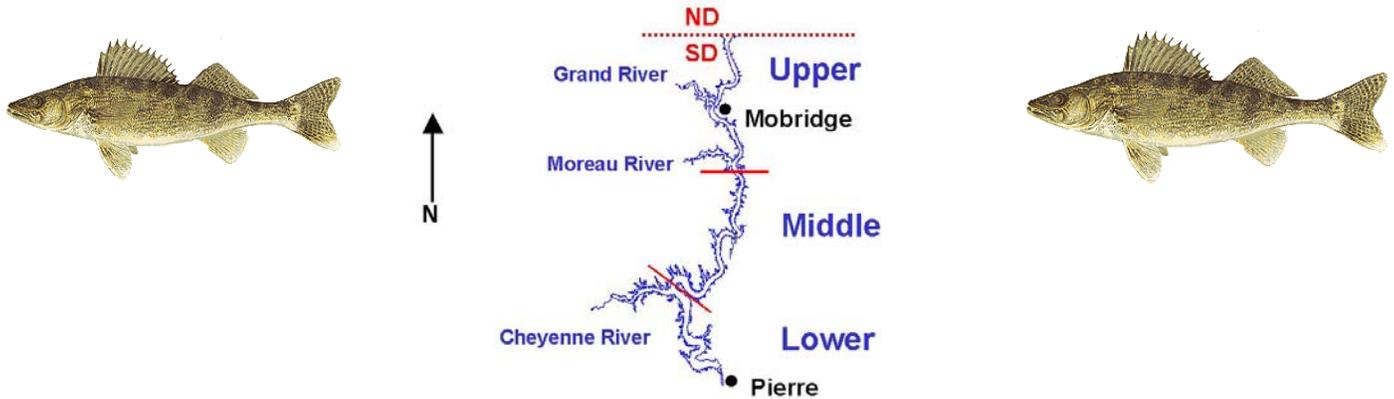
Walleye abundance is indexed using the average number of walleye caught per gill net. In 2012, the walleye abundance index was 20.5 walleye per net. This walleye abundance was higher than the long term average of 17 walleye per net. Overall walleye abundance has increased due to production of young fish during the 2005 to 2011 period.

**Lake Oahe walleye abundance has increased above the long-term average beginning in 2010**



Walleye abundance in Lake Oahe is usually greater upstream due to higher natural production of young walleye in the upper section of the reservoir. Unlike previous years walleye abundance was high throughout Lake Oahe in 2012. If trends remain similar to previous years, then walleye fishing should be good in all regions of Lake Oahe in 2013.

## Lake Oahe Zones

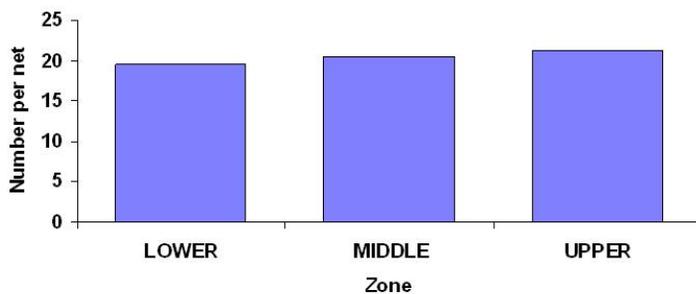


Historically, the average size of walleye decrease as you move upstream. Due to natural production during recent years, fish less than 15 inches will be common throughout Lake Oahe in 2013. Lake-wide, approximately 75 percent of the current walleye population was produced in 2009 and growth has slowed due to so many fish of the same size in the system. Walleye 20 inches or larger make up a greater portion of the population in the lower reach of the lake, but large fish can be found throughout the lake.

The average size of walleye caught and kept by anglers was lower in 2012 at 15-3/4 inches. The average was 17 inches the past several years. This decrease in average size of walleye was due to a high abundance of small walleye in the lake.

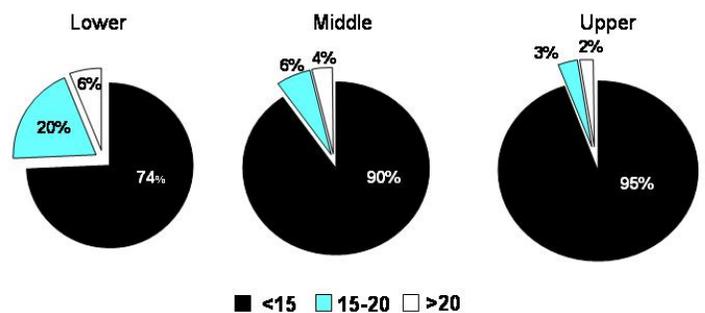
### Walleye abundance was similar throughout Lake Oahe

2012 CPUE by Zone



### Small walleye (<15 inches) are common throughout Lake Oahe

Percent of walleye surveyed in 2012



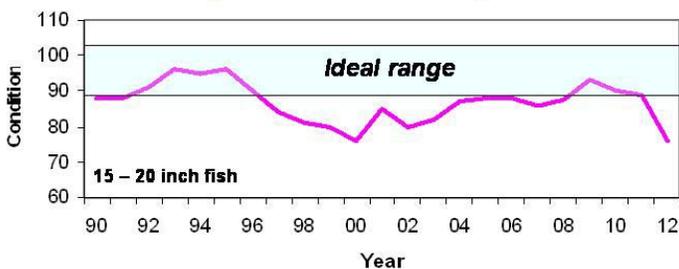
### Rainbow Smelt: the 2011 Flood affects and predictions for 2013



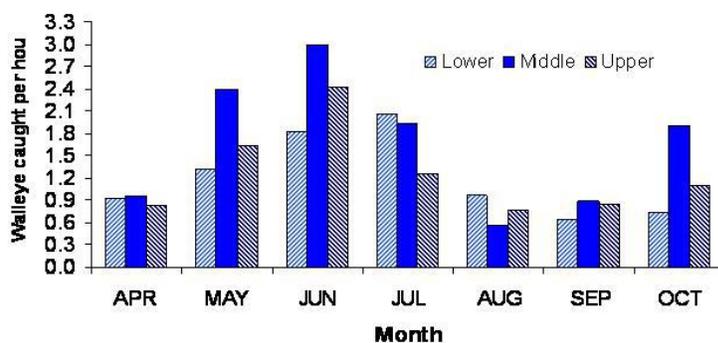
The flood of 2011 caused increased amounts of water to be released through Oahe Dam. The high flows through Oahe Dam caused many rainbow smelt to be pulled through the dam into Lake Sharpe. Survey estimates show 134 million rainbow smelt or 84% of the population were removed from Lake Oahe. The majority of the rainbow smelt were young, newly hatched fish. However, current rainbow smelt numbers are low due to low production of young rainbow smelt in 2012 and a high abundance of walleye and other predators. The adult rainbow smelt population is abundant enough, depending on spring spawning conditions, to rebound quickly.

Walleye fishing usually peaks at different times for each region of Lake Oahe. Fishing in the upper region of Lake Oahe usually peaks from late May through June. The middle and lower regions of Lake Oahe peak during June and July. During peak fishing times, walleye catches by anglers can be higher in the upper and middle regions of Lake Oahe compared to the lower region. The number of walleye caught per hour by anglers was high in 2012 due to the abundance of small fish in the population and low availability of food. In 2013, walleye fishing should continue to be good due to high numbers of walleye in the population and low availability of food.

## Walleye condition or fatness has decreased below the ideal range for Lake Oahe.



## Hourly catch rates of walleye were very high in 2012 for each month and 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 other endless techniques to catch fish. 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 2013 is unknown. A high number of salmon were pulled through Oahe Dam in 2011 with a good number of Chinook salmon found below Oahe Dam. Chinook salmon likely came down from Lake Sakakawea in North Dakota to Lake Oahe. Annual stockings of Chinook salmon have and will continue to provide a salmon fishery for the future. The summer months are typically a good time to catch Chinook salmon. However, early spring can also be a good time to fish for Chinook salmon 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 Chinook salmon are a cold water fish. The warmer the water gets, the deeper Chinook salmon tend to go. In the spring and fall, anglers fishing the lower portion of the lake can do well trolling with spoons and crankbaits. During the warm summer months, Chinook salmon tend to concentrate in the cold water layer and downriggers equipped with crankbaits, spoons, herring, dodgers, flashers and squids are used to get fishing lines 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 abundance in Lake Oahe is high and they are found in a wide range of depths and habitats. Excellent shore fishing opportunities for channel catfish exist especially in the spring. There is no daily limit for Lake Oahe channel catfish. Many of the channel catfish caught from Lake Oahe are incidentally caught by walleye anglers. Channel catfish are excellent to eat and easy to catch. If an angler would change a few tactics and target channel catfish, they could have good 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 for northern pike and the number of young pike has increased. Good numbers of 3 to 10 pound northern pike will be available now along with larger northern pike. Some northern pike loss may have and could occur due to the reduction in baitfish in Lake Oahe. Overall, the upcoming years look good for northern pike fishing as smaller northern pike grow to larger 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 the 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 2013

- Walleye abundance is high lake wide, with majority of the population less than 15 inches in length.
- Walleye daily and possession limits have increased to allow anglers the opportunity to harvest from an abundant population.
- Rainbow smelt abundance is low due to high loss through Oahe Dam from the flood of 2011 and poor production in 2012; but smelt have potential to rebound if spring conditions are ideal for their spawn.
- Northern pike abundance has increased with many reaching an attractive size to anglers.
- Chinook salmon fishing success is unknown for 2013, but stocking will continue to provide a future fishery.
- Lake Oahe should have good fishing for many species in 2013.
- Boat access may be an issue depending on water levels for Lake Oahe.

***For more information, please contact:***

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