



2012 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 anglers use and harvest, predictions can be made about fishing on Lake Oahe for 2012.

Key Issues for Lake Oahe in 2012

- Water levels were high in 2011 and should provide great access in all regions of the lake.
- As water levels increased in 2008 to 2010, the flooded shoreline vegetation increased the productivity of the lake.
- Many species of fish increased in abundance by using the newly flooded vegetation as spawning habitat, including northern pike and yellow perch.
- Yellow perch have once again become an important prey fish.
- Rainbow smelt experienced high loss through Oahe Dam in 2011 due to the flood, but has potential to rebound depending on spring conditions.
- Walleye, northern pike, and yellow perch have increased in abundance within the lake and will provide a great fishery for the future.
- Lake Oahe should have good fishing for many species of fish during 2012.



Lake Oahe Walleye

Regulations for Lake Oahe Walleye

Lake Oahe walleye regulations include a daily limit of 4 walleyes, which may include no more than one walleye 20 inches or longer, per day, year-round and the possession limit is 8. The regulation is the same as the standard statewide regulation.

Lake Oahe Walleye Regulations

4 Walleye/day



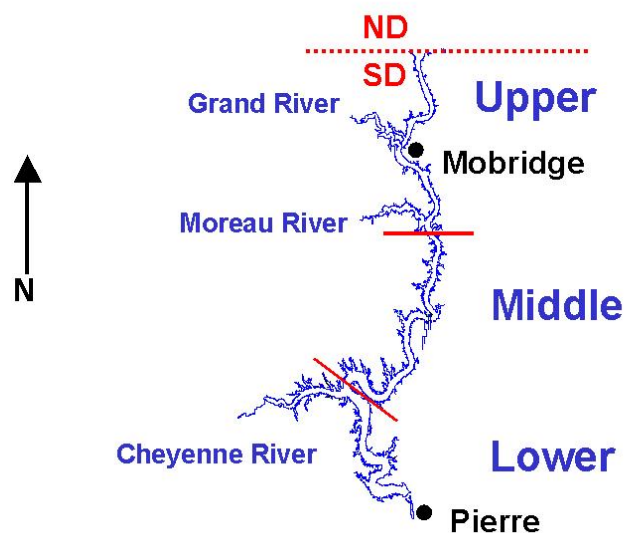
One over 20 inches

**Statewide
Regulations**

Possession limit of 8

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

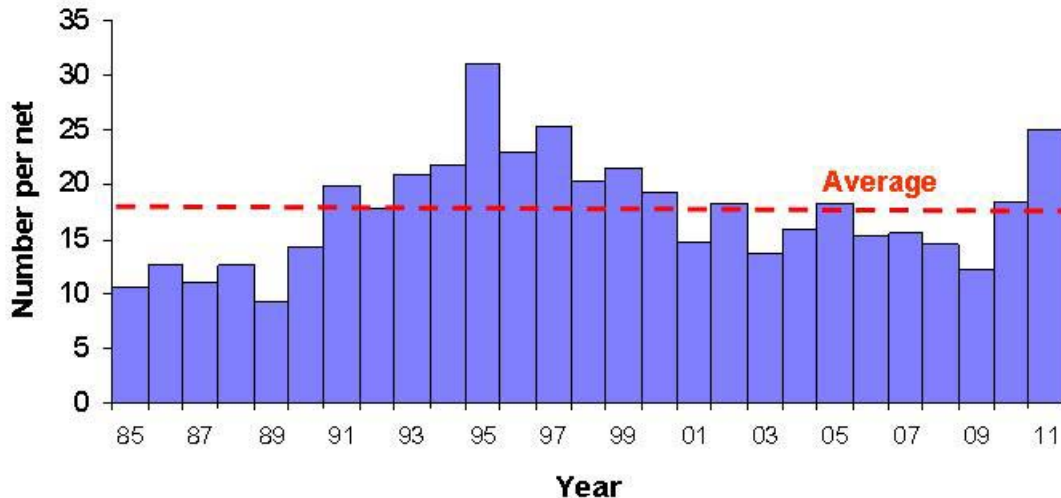
Lake Oahe Zones



Walleye Fishing Trends for 2012

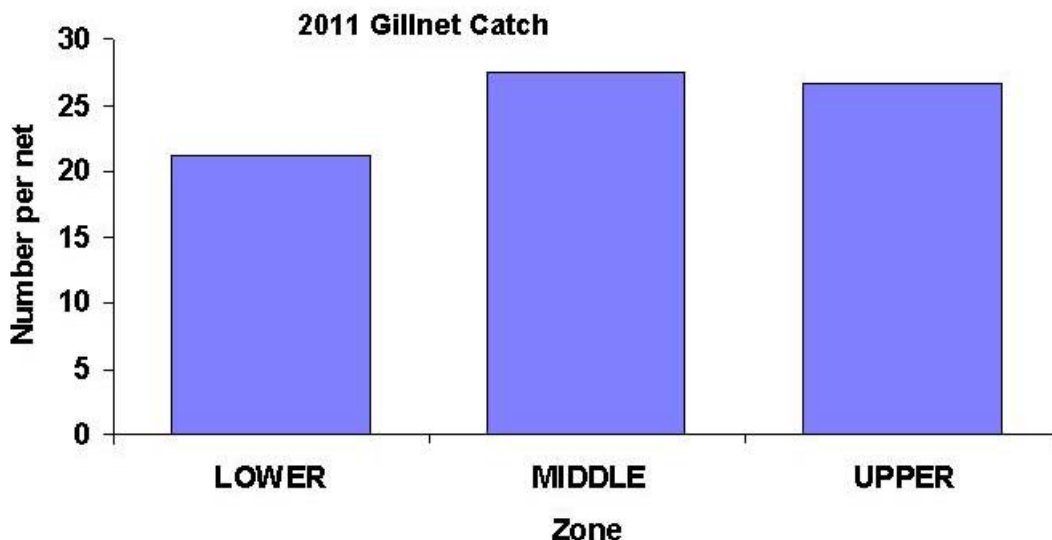
Walleye abundance is indexed using the average number of walleye caught per gill net. In 2011, the walleye abundance index was 25 walleye per net. This was the highest walleye abundance seen since the mid-1990's. In 2011, the walleye abundance index was well above the average for Lake Oahe of 17 walleye per net. This means there are more walleye in Lake Oahe currently, compared to recent years.

Lake Oahe walleye abundance has increased above the long-term average in 2011



Walleye abundance in Lake Oahe is usually greater upstream due to higher natural production of young walleyes in the upper section of the reservoir. The middle and lower portions of Lake Oahe have a good abundance of walleye as well. Overall walleye abundance has increased due to production of young fish during the 2005 to 2011 period. Walleye fishing should be good in all regions of Lake Oahe in 2012.

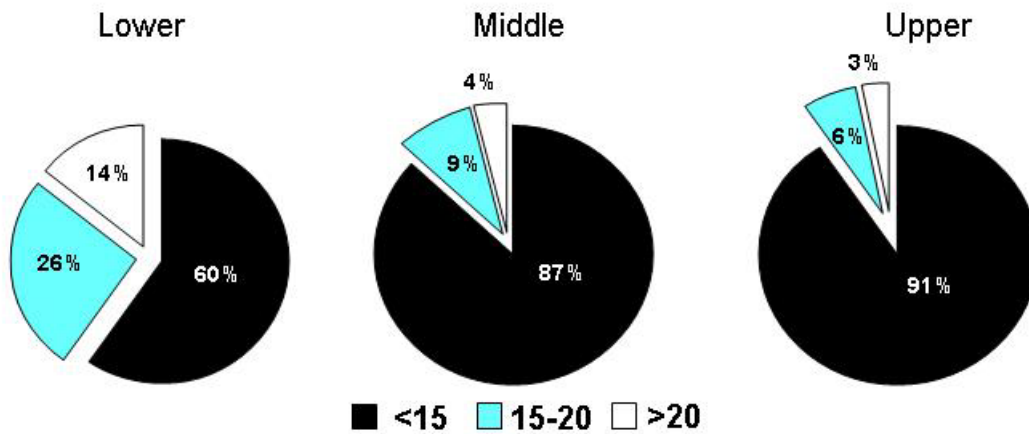
Walleye abundance was similar throughout Lake Oahe



Typically, the average size of walleye decrease as you move upstream from the lower end of the lake. Fish less than 15 inches will be common in 2012 in the middle and upper regions of the lake. This is due to high

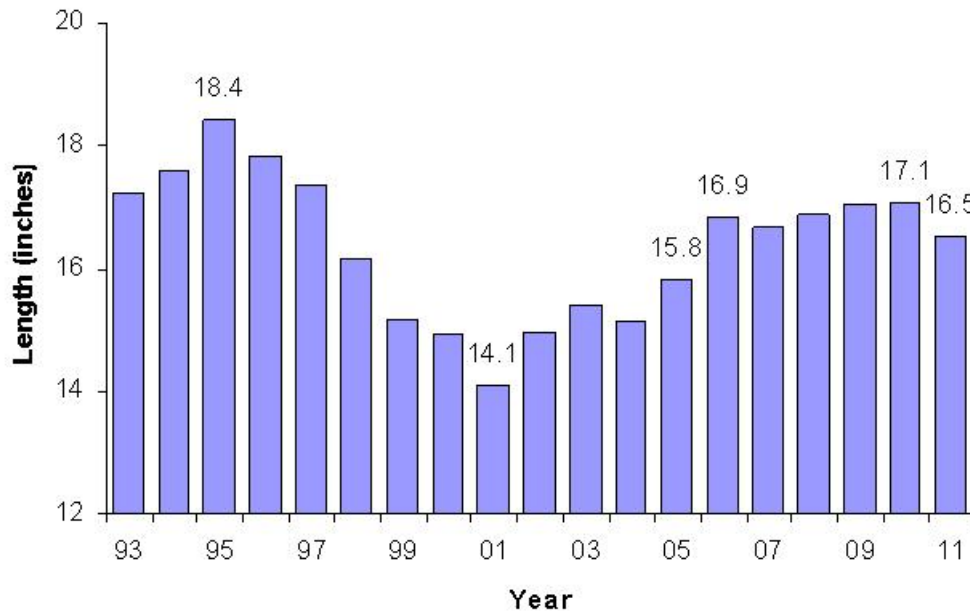
reproduction in recent years. Walleye 20 inches or larger make up a greater portion of the population in the lower reach of the lake, but large fish are found throughout the lake. Larger fish will be more common as the walleye population continues to mature. Your best chance to catch a larger walleye will be in the lower/middle portion of Lake Oahe.

Sizes of walleye differs between areas of Lake Oahe



The average size of walleye caught and kept by anglers has averaged 17 inches the past several years. In 2011, the average size decreased slightly due to the high numbers of small walleye available in the population currently and will continue into 2012.

Average size of walleye kept by anglers has remained near 17 inches

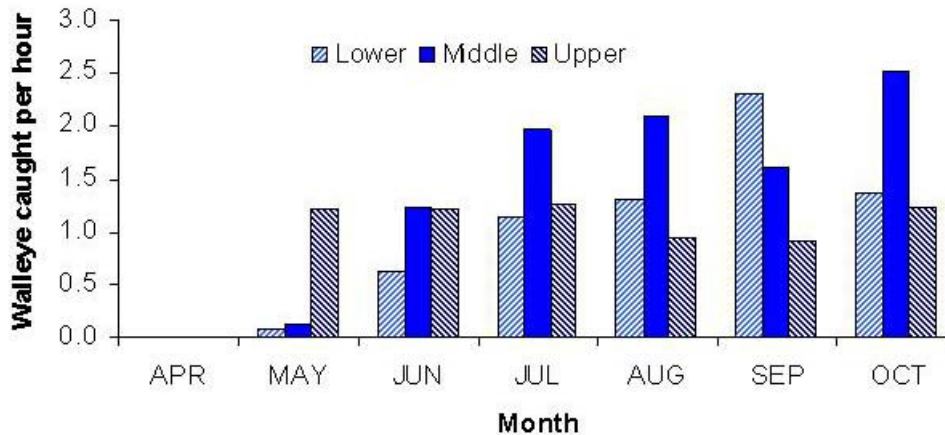


Lake Oahe has many fish species that serve as prey for larger predators. In the cold, deep water, rainbow smelt and lake herring are the primary prey fish. The shallows contain a different array of fishes including emerald and spottail shiners, yellow perch, freshwater drum, and white bass.

With the increased productivity of Lake Oahe beginning in 2008, the prey fish abundance also increased. The walleye growth rates and condition, or plumpness, increased as well and the walleye condition in 2011 was ideal and has been that way since 2008.

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, catches of walleye by anglers can be higher in upper and middle regions of Lake Oahe than the lower region of Lake Oahe. Angler catch rates, or fish caught per hour, were very high in 2011 due to the high numbers of small fish in the population. In 2012, above average catch rates may continue due to the high numbers of walleye in the population.

Hourly catch rates of walleye were very high in 2011 for each month and zone of Lake Oahe



In the past, low lake levels created access issues which will not be a problem in 2012 due to increased water levels in Lake Oahe beginning in 2008. The overall quality of the walleye fishery has improved, so enjoy the excellent fishing Lake Oahe has to offer.

Rainbow Smelt and Flood affects of 2011

The flood of 2011 caused increased amounts of water to be released into and through Oahe Dam. The high flows through Oahe Dam caused many rainbow smelt to be pulled through the dam and into Lake Sharpe. Survey estimates show a loss of 84% of the rainbow smelt population. It appeared that the majority of the rainbow smelt lost were young, newly hatched fish. The adult rainbow smelt population is reduced but have enough numbers that, depending on spring spawning conditions, they have the potential to rebound very quickly.

Lake Oahe Chinook Salmon

Chinook salmon in Lake Oahe were healthy and were experiencing good growth due to an abundance of rainbow smelt and lake herring. Stockings are made annually to continue the Chinook salmon fishery. The success of Chinook salmon fishing season in 2012 is unknown due to the high number of fish being pulled through Oahe Dam in 2011. A good number of Chinook salmon were found below Oahe Dam. On the other hand, a large number of Chinook salmon came from Lake Sakakawea from North Dakota into Lake Oahe. The summer months are typically a good time to catch Chinook salmon due to salmon concentrating in the deep, cold waters of Lake Oahe. 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.

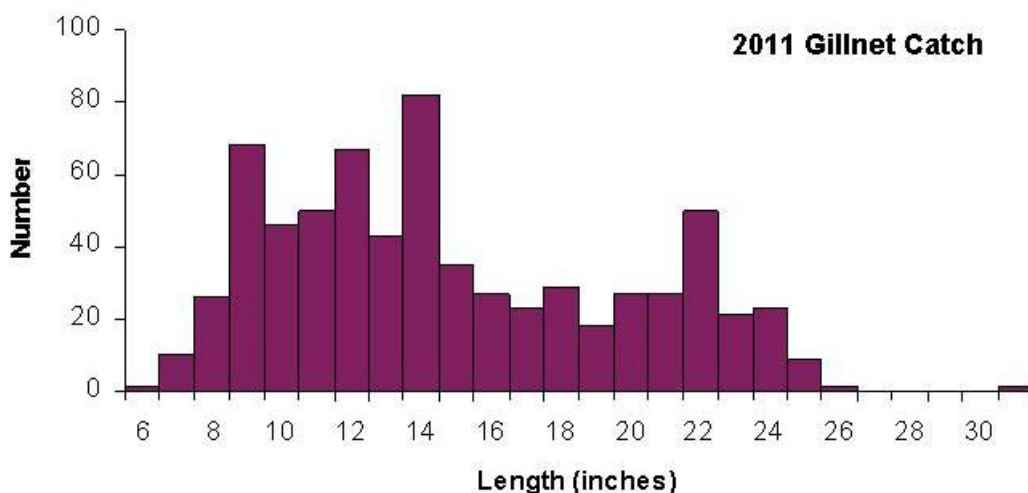
Salmon Fishing Techniques

To effectively catch Chinook salmon on Lake Oahe, an angler needs to remember Chinook salmon are cold water fish. The warmer the water gets, the deeper Chinook salmon tend to go to find food. In the spring and fall, anglers fishing the lower portion of the lake can do well trolling with spoons and plugs. During the warm summer months, Chinook salmon tend to concentrate below the thermocline, in the cold water layer and downriggers equipped with plugs, spoons, herring, dodgers, flashers and squids are used to get fishing lines down to where the fish are. During the fall, shore anglers can do well casting spoons and plugs from shore around Whitlock Bay when the Chinook salmon are preparing to spawn.

Lake Oahe 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 throughout the lake. There is no daily limit for Lake Oahe channel catfish. Many of the channel catfish caught from the waters of 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 specifically fish for 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, and commercially prepared baits.

Lake Oahe has a wide range of sizes of Channel Catfish.



Lake Oahe 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. Catches of 3 to 10 pound northern pike will be available and good numbers of large northern pike will be available now and in the coming years as they grow into 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.

Additional information can be obtained by contacting:

**Fort Pierre District Office
Missouri River Fisheries
20641 SD Hwy 1806
Fort Pierre, SD 57532
(605) 223-7681
www.sdgfp.info**

