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Cover Art: Steve Hilt, Portland, OR
Fish Graphics: Virgil Beck, Stevens Point, WI
INTRODUCTION

Fish populations can fluctuate due to natural forces like weather, predation or competition; management actions like stocking, regulations or habitat improvement; habitat loss and harvest impacts. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources fisheries crews regularly conduct fishery surveys on lakes and reservoirs to gather the information needed to monitor changes, identify concerns, evaluate past management actions, and to prescribe fishery management strategies. Netting and electrofishing surveys are used to gather data on the status of fish populations and communities, measuring such parameters as species composition, population size, reproductive success, size and age distribution and growth rates. The other key component of the fishery that we often need to measure is harvest.

On many lakes in the Ceded Territory of northern Wisconsin, harvest of fish is divided between sport anglers and the six Chippewa tribes who harvest fish under rights granted by federal treaties. The tribes harvest fish mostly using a highly efficient method, spearing, during a relatively short time period in the spring. Every fish in the spear harvest is counted – a complete “census” of the harvest.

We also measure the sport angler harvest to assess its impact on the fishery. However, it would be highly impractical and very costly to conduct a complete census of every angler who fishes on a lake. Therefore, we conduct creel surveys.

A creel survey is an assessment tool used to sample the fishing activities of anglers on a body of water and make projections, or estimates, of harvest and other fishery parameters. Creel survey clerks work on randomly-selected days and shifts, forty hours per week. The survey is conducted during the open season for gamefish from the first Saturday in May through the first Sunday in March. Creel surveys are not conducted in November when fishing effort is low and ice conditions are often unsafe. The survey is run during daylight hours, and shift times change from month to month as day length changes.

Creel survey clerks travel their lakes using a boat or snowmobile to count the number of anglers at predetermined times, and to interview anglers who have completed their fishing trip. Data is collected on what species they fished for, catch, harvest, lengths of fish harvested, marks (fin clips or tags), and hours of fishing effort. Collecting completed-trip data provides the most accurate assessment of angling activities, and it avoids the need to disturb anglers while they are fishing.

A computer program is used to estimate catch and harvest of each species, catch and harvest rates, and fishing effort by month, as well as for the year in total. Keep in mind that these are estimates based on the best information available, and not a complete accounting of effort, catch, and harvest. Accurate estimates require that we sample a sufficient and representative portion of the angling activity on a lake. The accuracy of creel survey results depends on good cooperation and truthful responses by anglers when a creel clerk interviews them.

You may have encountered a DNR creel survey clerk on a recent fishing trip. We appreciate your cooperation during an interview. The survey only takes a few minutes of your time, and it gives the Department valuable information needed for management of the fishery.
This report provides estimates of:
1. Overall fishing effort (pressure)
2. Fishing effort directed at each species
3. Numbers of fish caught and harvested
4. Catch and harvest rates

Also included are a physical description of Oxbow Lake; discussion of results of the survey; and detailed summaries by species of fishing effort, catch and harvest.

**GENERAL LAKE INFORMATION**

![Oxbow Lake map](image)

**Location**
Oxbow Lake is located in Vilas County in the town of Presque Isle.

**Physical Characteristics**
Oxbow Lake is a 515-acre drainage lake with a maximum depth of 42 feet. Littoral substrate consists primarily of sand, gravel, and muck. Oxbow Lake contains soft, slightly acidic, light brown water of moderate transparency.

**Seasons Surveyed**
The period referred to in this report as the 2018-19 fishing season ran from May 5, 2018 through March 3, 2019. The open-water creel survey ran from May 5 through October 31, 2018, and the ice fishing creel survey ran from December 1, 2018 through March 3, 2019.

**Weather**
Ice-out on Oxbow Lake was around May 5, 2018. Fishable ice formed on Oxbow Lake in late November. Deep snow during the second half of February made ice travel difficult and resulted in low fishing effort during February and March.

**Fishing Regulations**
The following seasons, daily bag limits, and length limits were in place on Oxbow Lake during the 2018-19 fishing season:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Bag Limit</th>
<th>Min. Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Largemouth Bass</td>
<td>5/5-3/3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallmouth Bass</td>
<td>5/5-6/15</td>
<td>Catch&amp;Release</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6/16-3/3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musky</td>
<td>5/26-11/30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>40&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Pike</td>
<td>5/5-3/3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walleye</td>
<td>5/5-3/3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No Minimum, 1&gt;14&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panfish</td>
<td>year round</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Bass</td>
<td>year round</td>
<td>none</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SPECIES CATCH AND HARVEST INFORMATION**
Angling effort, catch, and harvest information is summarized for each species in Table 2 and Figures 1-10. Table 2 also includes a comparison of these statistics with the previous creel survey. Information presented about species whose fishing season extends beyond March 3 should be considered minimum estimates. Each species page has up to five graphs depicting the following:

1. **ESTIMATED FISHING EFFORT**
   Total calculated number of hours during each month that anglers spent fishing for a species.

2. **ESTIMATED CATCH AND HARVEST**
   Calculated number of fish of the indicated species caught or harvested by all anglers, regardless of targeted species.
3. **ESTIMATED SPECIFIC CATCH AND HARVEST RATES**
   Calculated number of hours it takes an angler to catch or harvest a fish of the indicated species. Only information from anglers who were specifically targeting that species is reported.

4. **LENGTH DISTRIBUTION OF HARVESTED FISH**
   All fish of a species that were measured by the clerk during the entire creel survey season.

5. **LARGEST AND AVERAGE LENGTH OF HARVESTED FISH**
   Monthly largest and average length of harvested fish of a species. Only fish measured by the creel survey clerk are reported.

**CREEL SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Survey Logistics**
We encountered no unusual problems conducting the survey or calculating the projections contained in the report. This was the third time the Department conducted a creel survey on Oxbow Lake. The last creel survey took place in 2008-09.

**General Angler Information**
Anglers spent 8,835 hours, or 17.3 hours per acre, fishing Oxbow Lake during the 2018-19 season (Table 1). That was less than the Vilas County average of 34.5 hours per acre, and less than the fishing effort documented during the 2008-09 creel survey (26.6 hours per acre). August was the most heavily fished month (1,811 hours), and fishing effort was lightest in January (45 hours). The creel clerks were able to conduct 329 interviews throughout the survey.

**RESULTS BY SPECIES**

**Walleye** (Table 2, Figure 1)
Walleye received the most fishing effort of any gamefish species during the season. Anglers spent 3,703 hours targeting Walleye. The greatest fishing effort for Walleye was in May (1,140 hours). January had the least amount of Walleye fishing effort (34 hours).

Total catch of Walleye was 1,163 fish, with a harvest of 444. Highest catch (548 fish) and highest harvest (224 fish) occurred in May. Anglers fished an average of 3.2 hours to catch, and 8.3 hours to harvest, a Walleye during the survey. The mean length of harvested Walleye was 12.8 inches, and the largest measured was a 24.9-inch fish.

**Northern Pike** (Table 2, Figure 2)
Fishing effort directed at Northern Pike was 512 hours during the season. Northern Pike fishing effort was greatest in July and December (104 hours). Total catch of Northern Pike was 205 fish, with a harvest of 16. Anglers fished an average of 8.3 hours to catch a Northern Pike during the survey. The mean length of harvested Northern Pike was 18.3 inches, and the largest measured was a 21.3-inch fish.

**Muskellunge** (Table 2, Figure 3)
Anglers spent 3,693 hours targeting Muskellunge during the season. Muskellunge fishing effort was greatest in September (1,114 hours). Total catch of Muskellunge was 164 fish, and the highest catch (38 fish) occurred in August. Anglers fished 25.6 hours to catch a Muskellunge, and there was no documented harvest during the survey.

**Smallmouth Bass** (Table 2, Figure 4)
Fishing effort targeted at Smallmouth Bass was 1,360 hours during the season. Smallmouth Bass fishing effort was greatest
in August (544 hours). Total catch of Smallmouth Bass was 1,943 fish, with 12 harvested. Highest catch (807 fish) occurred in August. Anglers fished an average of 1.4 hours to catch a Smallmouth Bass during the survey.

**Largemouth Bass** (Table 2, Figure 5)  
Fishing effort directed at Largemouth Bass was 407 hours during the season. Largemouth Bass fishing effort was greatest in June (148 hours). Total catch of Largemouth Bass was 144 fish, with no documented harvest. Highest catch (70 fish) occurred in August. Anglers fished an average of 14.4 hours to catch a Largemouth Bass during the survey.

**Panfish** (Table 2, Figures 6-10)  
**Yellow Perch** were the most sought after panfish species during the survey. Fishing effort directed at Yellow Perch was 1,230 hours. Total catch of Yellow Perch was 2,874 fish, with 348 harvested. The mean length of Yellow Perch harvested was 7.4 inches.

**Bluegill** received 693 hours of directed fishing effort. Total catch of Bluegill was 1,488 fish, with 113 harvested. The mean length of Bluegill harvested was 6.3 inches.

**Black Crappie** received 196 hours of directed fishing effort. Anglers caught 76 Black Crappie and harvested 18. The mean length of Black Crappie harvested was 10.5 inches.

**Pumpkinseed** received 206 hours of directed fishing effort. Anglers caught 195 Pumpkinseed and harvested seven. The mean length of Pumpkinseed harvested was 6.2 inches.

**Rock Bass** received only 72 hours of directed fishing effort. However, anglers caught 598 Rock Bass and harvested 13. The mean length of Rock Bass harvested was 7.3 inches.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

The Department would like to thank all the anglers who took the time to offer information about their fishing trip to the survey clerk. Without their cooperation, the survey would not have been possible.

We also thank our cooperators, Paul and Joan Cieslak, who generously allowed the Department to keep a boat and snowmobile on their property during this survey.

Completion of this survey was possible because of the efforts of the following fisheries management and treaty fisheries staff: Lawrence Eslinger, Jeff Blonski, Joelle Underwood, Jason Halverson, John Kubisiak, Bob Consolo, Tim Tobias, and Hadley Boehm. Creel clerks on Oxbow Lake during the survey period were Matt Lorenzoni and Mike Rynski.

This creel report was reviewed by John Kubisiak, Lawrence Eslinger, and Steve Gilbert of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Woodruff, Wisconsin.

Additional copies of this report, and those covering other local lakes, can be obtained from the Woodruff DNR or online at:  
http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Fishing/north/trtycrlsrvys.html
Table 1. Sportfishing effort summary, Oxbow Lake, 2018-19 season; compared with 2008-09 creel results, Vilas County, and Ceded Territory averages.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Number of Angler Party Interviews</th>
<th>Total Angler Hours</th>
<th>Total Angler Hours/Acre</th>
<th>2008-09 Total Angler Hours/Acre</th>
<th>Vilas County Average Hours/Acre</th>
<th>Ceded Territory Average Hours/Acre</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1415</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1280</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1626</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>1811</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1605</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Summer Total</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>8622</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Winter Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>8835</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>26.6</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>32.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*"Summer" is May-October; "Winter" is December-March

**Number of Angler Party Interviews** is the number of groups of anglers interviewed by the creel clerk. A party is considered the members of a group who fish together in the same boat, ice shanty, or from shore. The clerk fills out one interview form for each group of anglers. The number of individual anglers actually contacted by the clerk is usually much greater than the number of groups listed in this table since most groups consist of more than one angler.

**Total Angler Hours** is the estimated total number of hours that anglers spent fishing on Oxbow Lake during each month surveyed.

**Total Angler Hours/Acre** is the total angler hours divided by the area of the lake in acres. This is useful in order to compare effort on Oxbow Lake to other lakes.

**2008-09 Total Angler Hours/Acre** is the total angler hours divided by the area of the lake in acres. This is from the previous creel survey that took place on Oxbow Lake.

**County Average Hours/Acre** is the average angler effort in hours per acre for county lakes that have been surveyed since 1990. This value is useful for fishing pressure comparisons with other waters.

**Ceded Territory Average Hours/Acre** is the average angler effort in hours per acre for inland lakes in the Ceded Territory that have been surveyed since 1990. This value can be used to compare Oxbow Lake to other lakes in northern Wisconsin.
Table 2. Comparison of creel survey synopses, Oxbow Lake, 2018-19 and 2008-09 fishing seasons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPECIES</th>
<th>DIRECTED EFFORT (Hours)</th>
<th>PERCENT OF TOTAL</th>
<th>TOTAL CATCH</th>
<th>SPECIFIC CATCH RATE (Hrs/Fish)</th>
<th>TOTAL HARVEST</th>
<th>SPECIFIC HARVEST RATE (Hrs/Fish)</th>
<th>MEAN LENGTH OF HARVESTED FISH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walleye</td>
<td>3703</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
<td>1163</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Pike</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muskellunge</td>
<td>3693</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>25.6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smallmouth Bass</td>
<td>1360</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>1943</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Largemouth Bass</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow Perch</td>
<td>1230</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
<td>2874</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluegill</td>
<td>693</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>1488</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Crappie</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pumpkinseed</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Bass</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>598</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A blank cell in this column indicates that no fish of a given species were caught by anglers who specifically targeted that species.

** A blank cell in this column indicates that no fish of a given species were harvested by anglers who specifically targeted that species.
Figure 1. Walleye sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 2. Northern Pike sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 3. Muskellunge sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 4. Smallmouth Bass sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 5. Largemouth Bass sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 6. Yellow Perch sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 7. Bluegill sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 8. Black Crappie sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 9. Pumpkinseed sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.
Figure 10. Rock Bass sportfishing effort, catch, harvest, and length distribution, Oxbow Lake during 2018-19.