

Ice Off

Going, Going, Gone !! We can report that the Ice Off date for Boot Lake was Thursday, April 6. That same day we had our first sighting of a Loon back on the lake. (A list of recent freeze up and Ice off dates can be found on the Boot Lake Association website: minnesotawaters.org/bootlake).

The formation and break-up of ice are important milestones for a lake each year. Tracking the dates of their occurrence is important to understanding a lake's seasonal cycles. Ice is a hot topic! From Midwest lakes to arctic glaciers, the presence and absence of ice is helping the world better understand the effects of global climate change. Minnesota's waters and winters are a great combination for gathering ice data needed to track climate change locally.

With spring officially here, warm weather will soon follow - melting away the last bits of what was predicted to be a cold, snowy, harsh winter, but that, for the most part, failed to deliver (winter is a fickle beast!). As winter turns to spring, lake ice slowly begins to melt as the weather warms and days get longer. Temperatures seesawed across the state for a several weeks in February especially, resulting in an active ice-off season for some lakes across the southern half of the state. About 70 lakes lost their ice during the end of the first week of March – some of them record setting. Many of the lakes refroze the following week, surprising many climatologists. One expert observer who has been watching lakes for the past 45 years reported that he has never seen (or heard) of this occurring.

So when can ice-off officially be declared for a lake? Of course when the lake is completely free of ice is the primary measurement, but also when about 90 percent of a lake is ice-free is also considered valid.

Time to Open the Cabin

Another Minnesota winter has come and gone. For the full time lake residents it is just another day and another season. Time maybe to clean up twigs and branches littering the yard, start a brush pile and do some wood chipping, or start scratching the ground to prepare flower and vegetable gardens.

But for our seasonal residents, it is time to get “up to the lake and open the cabin”. Ah yes, the lake cabin. Early mornings on the sleeping porch, lunches on the dock, late-night cleanings in the fish house. But what really is a cabin? How big can it be? How many stories? How elaborate in construction? The American Heritage Dictionary defines a cabin as "a small, roughly built house." The Merriam–Webster Dictionary calls it "a small one-story dwelling usually of simple construction." Further digging suggests that the word *cabin* is derived from the 14th-century Medieval Latin term *capanna*, meaning a hut. On Boot Lake like many lakes they come in many shapes and sizes. But we shouldn't be worrying about the cabin's size or construction or appearance. What matters most is the natural world surrounding the cabin. The focus is on the surrounding environment—the lake, the pond, the trees, the critters—and the simple lifestyle just being here espouses. One idea sums up the philosophy of life at the cabin: "Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?"

While relaxing at the cabin, here is a suggestion for a good “coffee table” book to peruse – *Cabins of Minnesota*. It is described as a charming survey of Minnesota's treasured getaways, with over 120 color photographs of cabins by Doug Ohman and witty prose by well-known writer Bill Holm.

Popular photographer Doug Ohman and renowned writer and poet Bill Holm highlight the state's unique and treasured cabins—a vintage Fredenberg Lake compound near Duluth; the celebrated mom-and-pop Fairyland Cabins of Detroit Lakes; a cabin situated on top of a pontoon in Rose Lake. Holm's eclectic prose combines stories of the ancient and new and illuminates the rewards of the cabin life: “the pleasures of fishing, daydreaming, sunset watching and star counting, the leisure to take stock of one's life without the surround-sound noise of the new wired century. In a cabin retreat,” he writes, “pleasure overcomes duty for a little while.”

Enjoy your time “up norte” at the Cabin !!

(Excerpts from Minnesota Conservation Volunteer article “Cabin Talk” by Mike Lein)

Boot Lake Northern and Sunfish/Bluegill Population

In the last newsletter we reported on the results of the DNR fish survey conducted on Boot Lake last August 2016. In summary the results showed we still have an over abundance of small northerns and sunfish/bluegill. This is not unique to just Boot Lake but a common problem with many lakes in Minnesota. The comparatively small fish often landed – what experienced anglers call hammer-handles – cause problems in that these fish, generally less than 22 inches long, can reduce perch numbers to unhealthy levels, tip the balance toward smaller panfish and reduce the effectiveness of walleye stocking. In an effort to improve the size of northerns in Minnesota lakes the DNR has proposed a rule change for northern pike that sets slots for three different zones in Minnesota. For our zone this would mean only 2 northern pike over 26 inches in length may be in possession; and all northern pike from 22 to 26 inches must be immediately returned to the water.

Doug Kingsley of the local Park Rapids DNR Fisheries office shared with us his observations on the rule as it might affect Boot Lake:

“ We’re guardedly confident that the northern pike proposal will be implemented for next spring’s fishing opener. It was discussed in the last legislative session and there really wasn’t any opposition, but like everything else in the last session it didn’t get passed. We’re now pursuing it through administrative rule changes. That regulation should help Boot Lake as well as many of our other lakes where northerns are over abundant and/or small sized. It would be even better if anglers would release larger fish. The real purpose of the regulation is to protect northerns until they get large enough to prey on and help reduce numbers of the overabundant smaller sized fish. As you saw, there were very few northerns larger than 26 inches in our Boot Lake survey sample. Releasing fish even larger than 26 inches would just help balance that population even more.”

(Note: We just learned that the new regulation has been postponed until 2018. This was necessary because the rule change conflicted with the current law that allowed 1 northern over 30 inches. This part of the law must be removed before the new rule can take effect.)

Regarding the Sunfish/bluegill population, Doug had these comments:

“ We’ve never seen many bluegills larger than 8 inches in any of our Boot Lake surveys. It’s a good idea to release some of the largest panfish to maintain good genetics and maybe provide an opportunity for someone else to catch a larger sized fish. But I wouldn’t have expectations of a lot more large panfish. Boot just doesn’t have the best habitat for panfish. The lake is relatively deep and steep sided. Only 20% of the lake is less than 15 feet deep, so it just doesn’t have as much of the shallow water habitat for fish like sunfish, largemouth bass or even crappies, as many other lakes. “

Doug also advised us that walleye stocking was done in Boot Lake late last fall.

“ Our Lake Management Plan calls for stocking 165 pounds of walleye fingerlings in Boot Lake in even numbered years. We had a hard time getting fingerlings in our rearing ponds this year because of mild winters and carryover of walleyes from previous stockings. As a result, many of the walleyes that we had to stock this year were older and larger than fingerlings. Although those larger fish will likely have much better survival,

when they are bigger there are fewer per pound. To compensate for that, we actually stocked 257 pounds of walleye in Boot between Oct. 11 and Nov. 3, 2016. That amounted to about 666 fish."

Spring Burning

In 2013 a wildfire burned 7100 acres in Becker, Hubbard and Wadena counties. The fire destroyed 12 homes, 43 outbuildings, and 3 commercial properties. Spring can be one of the worst times of year for wildfires in Minnesota. After the snow melts it exposes all the dead vegetation. Even though the ground may be soggy now, weather conditions can change rapidly throughout Minnesota. Burning permits are required when there is less than 3 inches of snow on the ground. All counties are requiring burning permits at this time due to lack of snow cover.

As of March 30, 2017

Fire Risk

Burning Permits

Becker County is in a “Moderate” zone at present, meaning fires start easily and spread at a moderate rate. The DNR advises anyone doing burning to keep burn piles small, have a water supply nearby, and stay with the fire until it is completely out. If the fire escapes, the homeowner is responsible for the damage and suppression costs. As more homes are built in the woods and fields of Minnesota, the existing firefighting resources are less able to protect everyone's property while trying to control a wildfire. Homes close to evergreens and the tall grasses of prairies or marshes are most at risk.

Making your home able to survive an approaching wildfire is the goal of the Firewise program. For more information on “Firewise”, go to the DNR website at:

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/firewise/index.html>

Mark your Calendar

- ♣ Spring Road Pickup and Potluck — Thurs., May 4, 2017 – 3pm hosted by Cliff and Kathleen Lafreniere
- ♣ 4th of July Boat Parade – TBD
- ♣ Annual Meeting and Potluck — Sunday, Aug. 13, 2017
- ♣ Fall Road Pickup and Potluck – TBD

Association Dues

A reminder, annual dues are \$10. If you haven't already paid you can make check payable to:
Boot Lake Association.

Send your dues to our Treasurer:
Craig Nieman
53199 Sunrise Lane
Park Rapids, MN 56470.

See you on the Lake !!