

Farm Island Lake Gill Net Update 2020

The DNR performed a gill net survey on Farm Island Lake between July 23 – 24, and below is a recap of DNR Rick Bruesewitz's report. Due to COVID-19 the DNR will not do any stocking of walleye fry this year, but for this season they don't think we need to worry about it based on their gill net findings. They plan again to electro-fish in October. This report is also on your website.

Walleye results

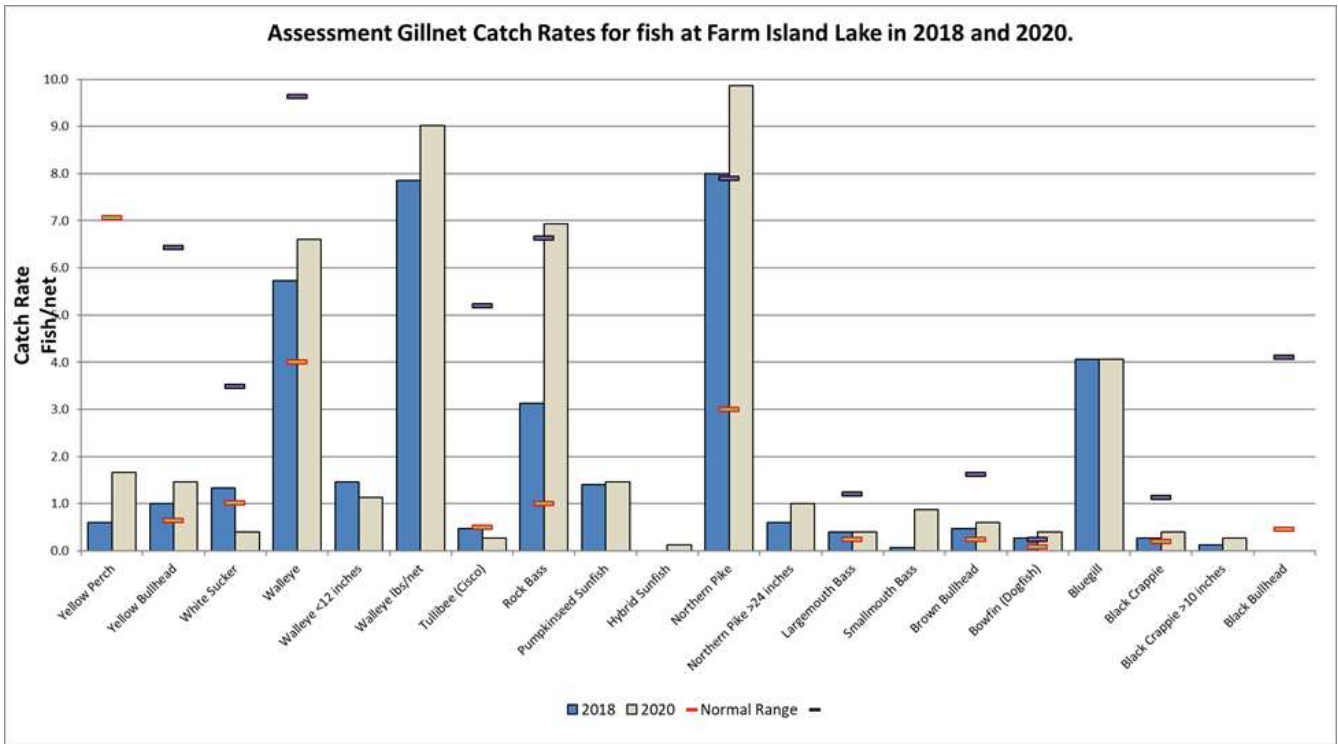
1. Walleye catch was up to 6.6/net (right at median levels) with decent numbers of smaller fish that I would guess to be both age 1 and 2. We'll know more once we complete our age analysis this winter, but at this point I am not too concerned about the lack of stocking in 2020. I have no interest in stocking other species as they are in fine shape. Bluegills actually look really nice, although the gill net survey isn't usually the tool we use to assess them. None-the-less, seeing plenty of fish over 8 inches and one even approaching 10 inches is always a good sign. Typically the only time we stock panfish in the area is in a severe winterkill situation. Farm Island's Bluegill and Crappie populations appear to be just fine and I see no need for any additional stocking.

2. Last fall the DNR found some surplus fingerlings (425 lbs) and stocked them outside our plans since I could see a gap coming in year classes. It appears that either my concerns about the lower fry survival last year were unwarranted, or else the fingerling stocking we did resulted in a boost to the year class strength enough that they now appear to be pretty good (the median age 1 catch is about 0.6/net and we saw 0.9/net in our nets last week). With two juvenile year classes currently in the mix I think it would be best to wait again until such time as we see a large gap coming. At this point, because the 2019 year class is looking pretty good, stocking more fingerlings would likely just increase intraspecific competition and not be all that successful. On top of everything else, we really don't know how successful the 2020 year class of naturally reproduced Walleyes has been. We will know more after our fall electrofishing survey for these juveniles.

Other fish species

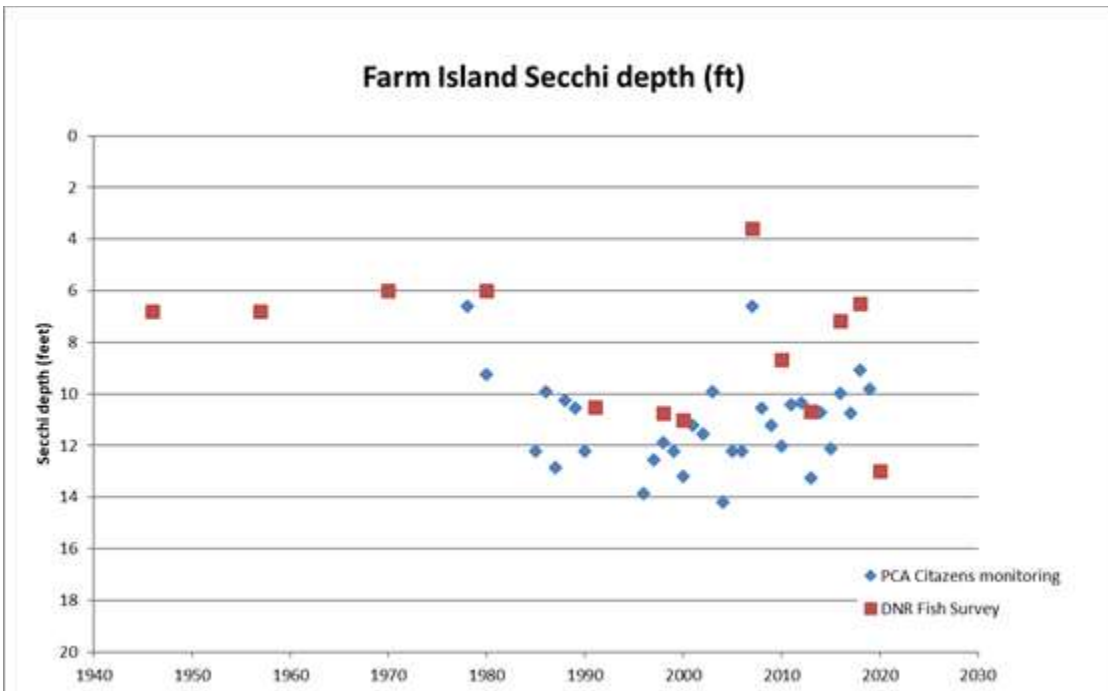
1. Other fish species of interest in the survey were the thirteen Smallmouth Bass we caught and the four Tullibee. I was actually surprised to see any Tullibee since the water quality was pretty poor for their survival, with warm water extending pretty deep into the water column (still 72F at 24ft) and low oxygen from that point to the bottom. They were big too, a couple over 18 inches, which is pretty typical for lakes like this.

2. I was also really surprised to see so many Smallmouth Bass. While we've seen one or two on occasion, this level of abundance is likely a substantial increase in population abundance. I suspect anglers are starting to see more in their catch too. While 1/net is really not that abundant, I would not be surprised to hear concerns coming in regarding Walleye anglers starting to catch them too. While Smallmouth Bass have become a bit controversial, the bottom line is they tend to specialize in eating crayfish and tend not to compete with Walleye or even Largemouth Bass. What has been happening in much of Minnesota is that environmental conditions have become more favorable for Bass. Basically longer summers and shorter winters favor Bass while shorter summers and longer winters favor Walleye and Perch. That being the case, I would not expect much recruitment for Smallmouth in the last couple years simply because we've had some pretty harsh winters the last few years.



Zebra Mussels

Although water was warm and low in oxygen at depth, we did notice relatively clear water. Below is the historical observations we have made with each of our past surveys (red), along with the average of the PCAs citizen's monitoring data. You can see that we usually have a bit lower numbers overall but follow a similar trend. Our values are typically lower since we do our surveys in the end of July or early August when algae blooms are typically heavier. I will be curious to see if the PCA monitoring also sees an increase in water clarity. Interestingly, this is the typical response to an infestation of zebra mussels, however we did not observe a single mussel when we lifted our nets (we usually see them when they're abundant), so I don't think the clearer water we observed could be due to zebra mussels at this time.



Note from FILIA: PCA is acronym for Pollution Control Agency. More than 1,400 Minnesotans track the health of their favorite lake or stream. Volunteers measure the water clarity of lakes and streams, and the MPCA uses that valuable data to make decisions on watershed protection and restoration. For some lakes and streams, volunteer monitoring provides the only data available, making this work indispensable.

Extra pressure on Farm Island due to Mille Lacs

From DNR Rick Bruesewitz. Regarding the extra pressure on Farm Island due to the Mille Lacs situation, I would be happy to examine alternative or additional regulations to augment protection of the Walleye population. The 16-19 inch slot was implemented not to protect the fishery, but to increase angling catch rates, which it has. I do think it has also prevented further losses in recent years of extra high pressure. One additional regulation you may wish to consider is the 3 fish limit. This was just implemented on Lake Minnewawa, and could *possibly* be implemented by spring 2022 if that is something the association would want to pursue. I know the extra effort from Mill Lacs is real; I would have thought it would have subsided by now, but obviously it hasn't. Let me know if this is something you want to pursue. Also let me be clear that this type of regulation doesn't offer that much added protection, but is designed more to spread the harvest out among more anglers. I see that as a good goal for this situation.

Note: When government, local agency and county information is included we are serving as the messenger to keep you informed of their activities concerning Farm Island Lake.