WISCONSIN

CRAPPIE GUIDE

Spring spawn to first ice

Your guide to catching crappie all year long in Wisconsin.

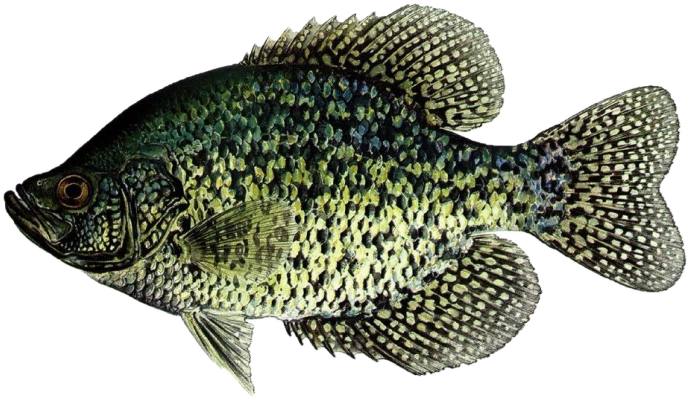


WISCONSIN

CRAPPIE

Guide

Spring spawn to first ice



Wisconsin Crappie Guide
First edition, October 2026

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Read this first. Fishing rules change every year and differ by lake. Everything about seasons, sizes and bag limits in this book is for the 2026–27 season, checked 2026-10-08. Always check the current Wisconsin DNR rules and your lake's own rules before you fish. Depth maps are not for navigation. Ice is never guaranteed safe. You are responsible for your own safety and for following the law.

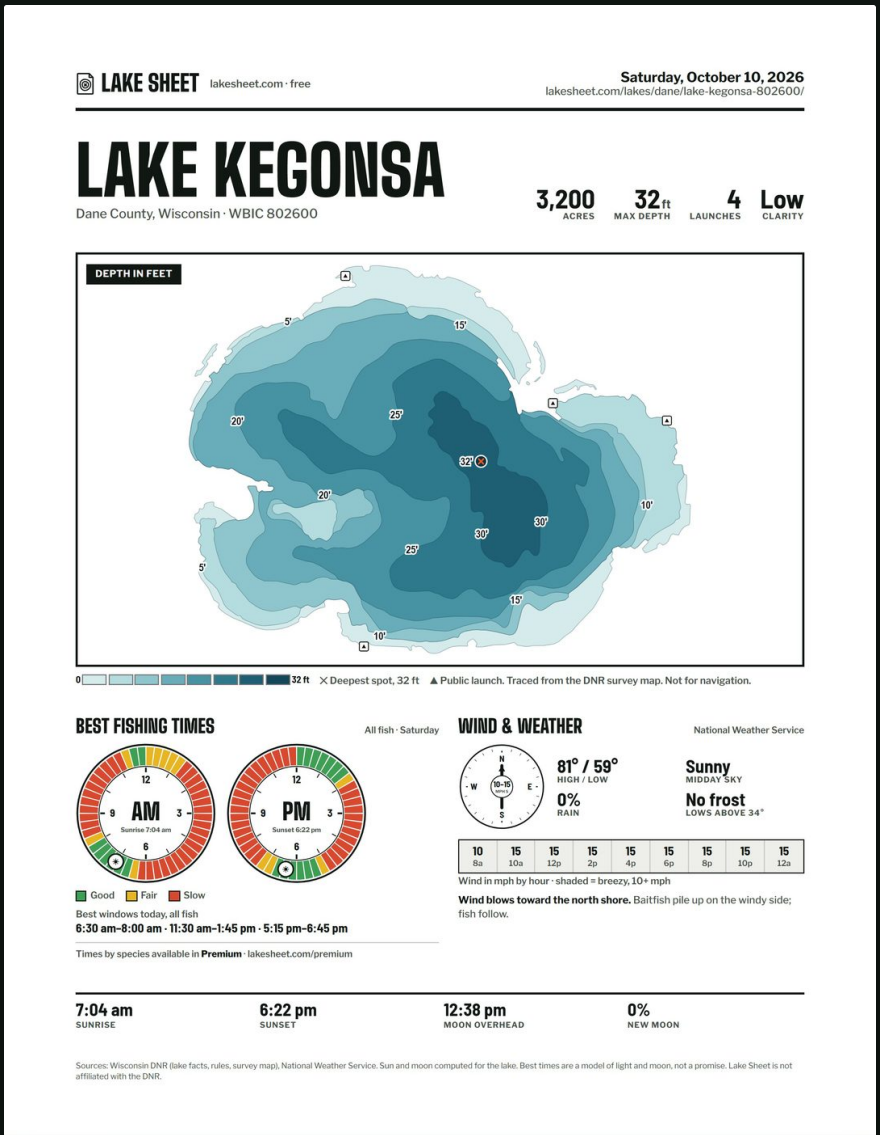
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

lakesheet.com

FREE WITH THIS BOOK

YOUR FREE LAKE SHEET

Free for more than 4,600 Wisconsin lakes: two printable pages, made for the boat. This is the real sheet for Lake Kegonsa.



LAKE SHEET lakesheet.com · free

Saturday, October 10, 2026
lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

LAKE KEGONSA

Dane County, Wisconsin · WBIC 802600

3,200	32 ft	4	Low
ACRES	MAX DEPTH	LAUNCHES	CLARITY

DEPTH IN FEET

5' 15' 20' 25' 32' 20' 10' 30' 30' 25' 5' 15' 10'

0 32 ft · ✕ Deepest spot, 32 ft · ▲ Public launch. Traced from the DNR survey map. Not for navigation.

BEST FISHING TIMES

All fish · Saturday

AM — Sunrise 7:04 am

PM — Sunset 6:22 pm

Good · Fair · Slow

Best windows today, all fish
6:30 am–8:00 am · 11:30 am–1:45 pm · 5:15 pm–6:45 pm

Times by species available in **Premium** · lakesheet.com/premium

WIND & WEATHER

National Weather Service

81° / 59°
HIGH / LOW

0%
RAIN

Sunny
MIDDAY SKY

No frost
LOWS ABOVE 34°

10	15	15	15	15	15	15	15	15
8a	10a	12p	2p	4p	6p	8p	10p	12a

Wind in mph by hour · shaded = breezy, 10+ mph

Wind blows toward the north shore. Baitfish pile up on the windy side; fish follow.

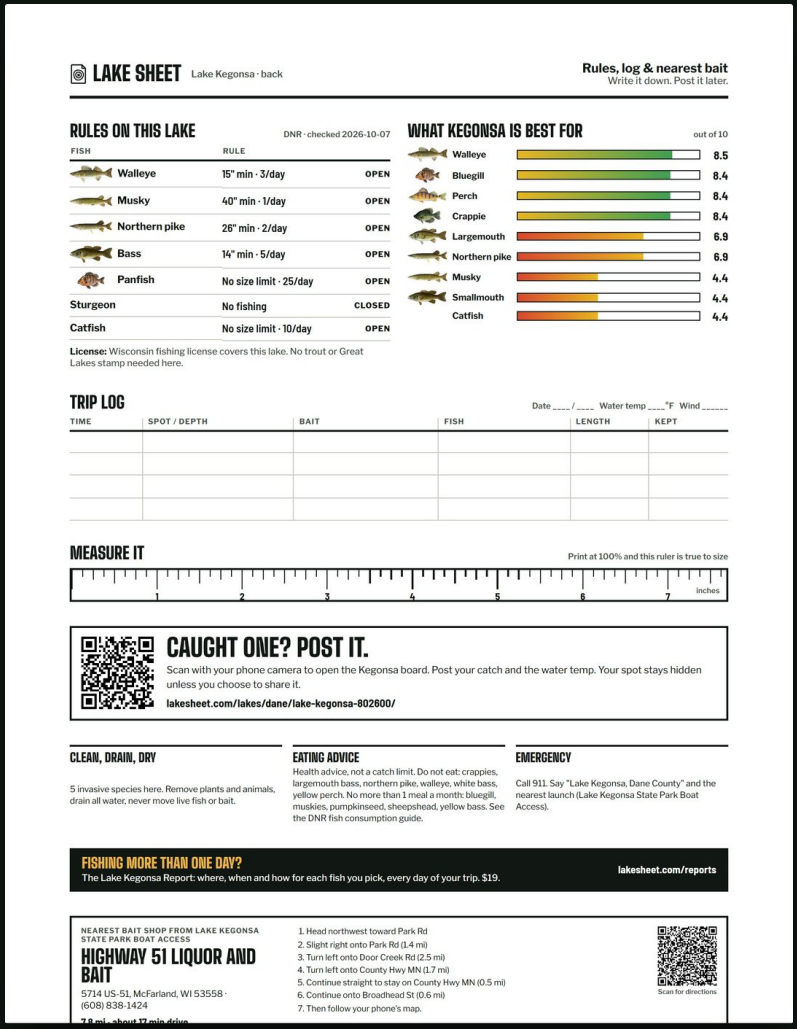
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

Sources: Wisconsin DNR (lake facts, rules, survey map), National Weather Service. Sun and moon computed for the lake. Best times are a model of light and moon, not a promise. Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the DNR.

1. **Depth map** traced from the DNR survey, deepest spot marked (traced lakes)
2. **Lake facts:** acres, max depth, launches, clarity
3. **Best times** from the sun and moon on AM and PM dials
4. **Wind and weather** by the hour, and which shore the wind hits
5. **Sun and moon** times for the lake
6. **Sources and date** on every fact

THE BACK OF THE SHEET

RULES, LOG & NEAREST BAIT



LAKE SHEET Lake Kegonsa · back

Rules, log & nearest bait
Write it down. Post it later.

RULES ON THIS LAKE

DNR · checked 2026-10-07

FISH	RULE	
Walleye	15" min · 3/day	OPEN
Musky	40" min · 1/day	OPEN
Northern pike	26" min · 2/day	OPEN
Bass	14" min · 5/day	OPEN
Panfish	No size limit · 25/day	OPEN
Sturgeon	No fishing	CLOSED
Catfish	No size limit · 10/day	OPEN

License: Wisconsin fishing license covers this lake. No trout or Great Lakes stamp needed here.

WHAT KEGONSA IS BEST FOR

out of 10

Walleye	8.5
Bluegill	8.4
Perch	8.4
Crappie	8.4
Largemouth	6.9
Northern pike	6.9
Musky	4.4
Smallmouth	4.4
Catfish	4.4

TRIP LOG

Date ____ / ____ Water temp ____°F Wind _____

TIME	SPOT / DEPTH	BAIT	FISH	LENGTH	KEPT

MEASURE IT

Print at 100% and this ruler is true to size

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 inches

CAUGHT ONE? POST IT.

Scan with your phone camera to open the Kegonsa board. Post your catch and the water temp. Your spot stays hidden unless you choose to share it.

lakesheet.com/lakes/dane/lake-kegonsa-802600/

CLEAN, DRAIN, DRY

5 invasive species here. Remove plants and animals, drain all water, never move live fish or bait.

EATING ADVICE

Health advice, not a catch limit. Do not eat: crappies, largemouth bass, northern pike, walleye, white bass, yellow perch. No more than 1 meal a month: bluegill, muskies, pumpkinseed, sheepshead, yellow bass. See the DNR fish consumption guide.

EMERGENCY

Call 911. Say "Lake Kegonsa, Dane County" and the nearest launch (Lake Kegonsa State Park Boat Access).

FISHING MORE THAN ONE DAY?
The Lake Kegonsa Report: where, when and how for each fish you pick, every day of your trip. $19.
lakesheet.com/reports

NEAREST BAIT SHOP FROM LAKE KEGONSA STATE PARK BOAT ACCESS

HIGHWAY 51 LIQUOR AND BAIT

5714 US-51, McFarland, WI 53558 · (608) 838-1424

7.8 mi · about 17 min drive

1. Head northwest toward Park Rd
2. Slight right onto Park Rd (1.4 mi)
3. Turn left onto Door Creek Rd (2.5 mi)
4. Turn left onto County Hwy MN (1.7 mi)
5. Continue straight to stay on County Hwy MN (0.5 mi)
6. Continue onto Broadhead St (0.6 mi)
7. Then follow your phone's map.

Scan for directions

1. **This lake's rules** for every fish, from the DNR
2. **What the lake is best for,** rated by fish
3. **Trip log** and a true-size **ruler**
4. **Invasive species** and eating advice
5. **Nearest bait shop** we know of, with turn-by-turn directions
6. Scan to post your catch

lakesheet.com

Find your lake, print it, take it in the boat

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is built to be used, not just read. Read Chapter 1 once so you can tell a black crappie from a white crappie and know why crappie act the way they do. After that, jump to the month you're fishing in Chapter 3, find a lake in Chapter 7, and use Chapter 6 to plan where to start on it.

IF YOU HAVE ONE EVENING

1. Look up your lake's free Lake Sheet (see the front of this book).
2. Read your month in Chapter 3.
3. Rig the slip bobber and crappie minnow from Chapter 5.
4. Be on the water for the last hour of light.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO CRAPPIE

1. Chapter 1: what you're after.
2. Chapter 4: buy the budget kit.
3. Chapter 5: learn the small jig and the bobber first.
4. Chapter 10: the questions everyone asks.

The QR codes. Every lake in Chapters 6 and 7 has a code. Scan it with your phone camera and you land on that lake's free Lake Sheet: depth map, best times from the sun and moon, wind, launches, the nearest bait shop and the lake's own rules.

The rules. Seasons, sizes and bag limits change every April 1, and many lakes have their own panfish rules. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season. Before you keep a fish, check the current rules. The fastest way is the rules box on your lake's Lake Sheet.

A word on "crappie." Wisconsin has two kinds, black and white. When this book says "crappie," it means both. Where they act differently, it says so.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE CRAPPIE

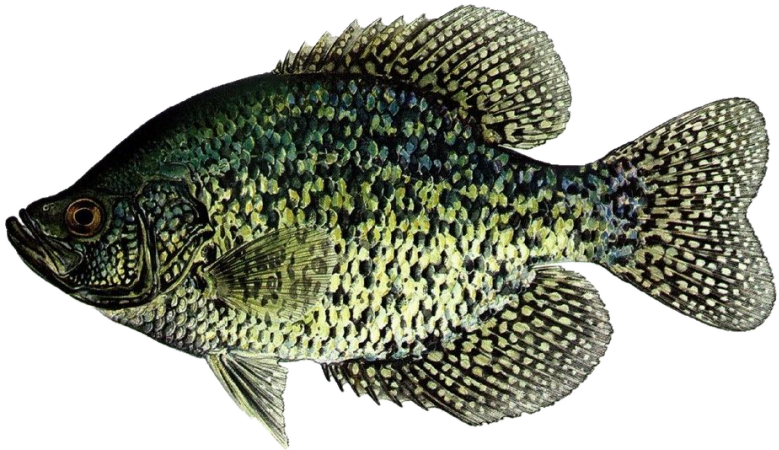
After the bluegill, the crappie may be the panfish Wisconsin anglers want most, in May on the spawning beds and in January through the ice. It is a member of the sunfish family, along with bluegill, pumpkinseed and both basses, but it doesn't act like its cousins. A crappie roams open water in loose schools, hangs at one depth over deep water, feeds hardest at dusk, and has a mouth so thin that a hard hookset tears right through it. Learn those four things and you'll catch more crappie than most people on your lake.

1.1 How to tell a crappie · **1.2** Black or white? · **1.3** Size, growth and records · **1.4** The paper mouth · **1.5** What crappie eat · **1.6** Spawning · **1.7** How crappie live

1.1
HOW TO TELL A CRAPPIE

BLACK CRAPPIE

Pomoxis nigromaculatus



TELL IT BY	A thin, deep, silvery body covered in dark speckles scattered with no pattern, a big upturned mouth, and 7 or 8 spines in the dorsal fin.
LOOKS LIKE	White crappie: paler, with the spots lined up in loose vertical bands, and usually 6 dorsal spines. Bluegill and other sunfish have a smaller mouth and a rounder, thicker body.
COLOR	Olive back, silvery sides with blue, green and black speckles, greenish-yellow belly. Spawning males turn very dark.
SIZE	8 to 10 inches is typical in Wisconsin. Most crappie don't grow past 12–14 inches or a pound. They can reach 18 inches.
WISCONSIN RECORD	Black: 4 lb 8 oz, 19.75 in — Allen A. Dollar, Gile Flowage, Iron County, Aug. 12, 1967. White: 3 lb 13.1 oz — Cranberry Marsh, Monroe County, 2003.
EATS	Zooplankton, insects and insect larvae; bigger crappie eat small fish such as minnows and young bass, sunfish and perch.

You'll hear the name said both "CROP-ee" and "CRAP-ee." Old names include calico bass, papermouth and speckled perch. The scientific name of the black crappie, *Pomoxis nigromaculatus*, means "sharp cheek, black-spotted," for the sharp edge of its gill cover and its speckles.

Crappie or bluegill? Kids mix them up all the time. A crappie is thinner (it may be the thinnest of all sunfish), more silvery, and has a much bigger mouth that opens upward like a scoop. A bluegill has a small mouth, a darker, rounder body and a dark flap at the back of the gill cover.

1.2
BLACK OR WHITE?

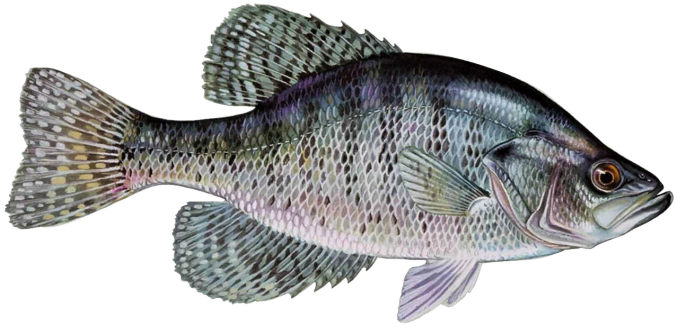


FIG 1.1 **White crappie.** Paler, with dark spots lined up in loose vertical bands, and usually 6 spines in the dorsal fin. Compare it with the black crappie on the fact card above.

Most crappie you'll catch in Wisconsin are black crappie. The white crappie is a southern fish, and Wisconsin is at the northern edge of its range. The DNR says the black crappie "is much more abundant in the state" because its range reaches farther north.

	BLACK CRAPPIE	WHITE CRAPPIE
Dorsal spines	Usually 7 or 8	Usually 6
Markings	Many dark speckles, scattered, no pattern	Spots in loose, narrow vertical bands
Color	Darker overall; greenish-yellow belly	Paler; yellowish-white belly
Body	A little deeper	A little longer and slimmer
Water	Clear, quiet lakes and river backwaters	Warmer, muddier water; slow river channels
Where in Wisconsin	Statewide, including the North Woods	Mostly the south: big rivers and their lakes

Wisconsin record	4 lb 8 oz	3 lb 13.1 oz

COUNT THE SPINES
Color changes with water clarity, season and age, so it's not a sure test. The dorsal spines are better. Raise the fin gently with a wet thumb and count the stiff, sharp spines at the front: 7 or 8 means black, 6 means white. Even this is not perfect, but it's right most of the time.

In southern Wisconsin both kinds can share the same water. They take the same baits, and the rules count both as panfish.

1.3
SIZE, GROWTH AND RECORDS

Crappie grow fast in their first year, reaching 2.5 to 3 inches. A few mature in their second year, but most mature in their third or fourth. The DNR says most Wisconsin crappie don't live much past their fifth year, grow past 12 to 14 inches, or weigh more than a pound. Eight- to ten-inch crappie are the everyday catch. They can reach 18 inches in Wisconsin, but very few do.

AGE	TYPICAL LENGTH
1 year	3.0 in
3 years	7.2 in
5 years	9.6 in
10 years	13.1 in

From the Wisconsin DNR's crappie species leaflet (1997). Growth varies a lot from lake to lake and year to year.

Boom years. Crappie are famous for uneven year classes. One spring's hatch may be tiny; every three or four years a lake may produce a huge one. That's why a lake can be "full of 10-inchers" for two or three seasons and then seem to go quiet. The fish didn't vanish: that big year class grew up and got thinned out, and the next one is still small.

The records. Wisconsin's hook-and-line record black crappie weighed 4 lb 8 oz and measured 19.75 inches. Allen A. Dollar caught it on the Gile Flowage in Iron County on August 12, 1967, and it still stands. The record

white crappie weighed 3 lb 13.1 oz and measured 16.5 inches, caught by Shane Cassel on Cranberry Marsh in Monroe County on May 4, 2003. The live-release (length) records, 16.5 inches (black) and 16.0 inches (white), were both caught in winter.

1.4 THE PAPER MOUTH

A crappie's mouth is ringed by a very thin membrane. That's where the nickname "papermouth" comes from, and it's why so many good crappie come off at the boat. The DNR puts it plainly: many anglers have lost a good-sized crappie "by using too much force setting the hook."

- **Set the hook with a lift, not a jerk.** Raise the rod tip firmly and smoothly, about a foot.
- **Use a soft rod and a loose drag.** A light rod with a soft tip bends instead of tearing the hook free.
- **Don't horse it.** Bring the fish in steadily, and net or swing it in. Lifting a big crappie by the line is how the lip rips.

Crappie also bite softly: they gently suck a bait in. Often the only sign is slack line, a bobber that rises instead of sinking, or a little extra weight.

1.5 WHAT CRAPPIE EAT

Small crappie eat almost nothing but zooplankton (tiny floating animals), aquatic insects and insect larvae. Crappie have many long gill rakers, comb-like strainers inside the gills, that let them filter small food out of the water. As they grow past about 6 inches they add small fish: minnows and young bass, sunfish and perch. Even big crappie go back to eating insects and plankton at times of year when those are everywhere.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR BAIT

Think small. A 1- to 2-inch "crappie minnow," a 1/32 to 1/16 oz jig with a 1.5- to 2-inch plastic, or a tiny ice jig tipped with a wax worm or a few spikes matches what crappie eat. When the bite is tough, go smaller before you go anywhere else.

1.6
SPAWNING

Crappie spawn in spring, after walleye and pike and before bluegill. In Wisconsin, spawning usually peaks in May and June, when the water is about 61 to 68°F, and in a cold year it can run into July.

- **Where:** shallow water near emergent plants (reeds, bulrushes, cattails), over sand, fine gravel or firm bottom, and around wood: fallen trees, stumps and brush. Crappie nest deeper than other sunfish, from about 1.5 to 6 feet and sometimes deeper.
- **How:** males sweep out shallow, round nests with their tails, often in loose colonies of up to 35 nests. The male guards the nest and chases off intruders, including your jig.
- **The eggs:** a female lays several thousand to several hundred thousand eggs. They hatch in one to two days at 65 to 70°F.

This is the easiest time of year to catch crappie, and big ones. The DNR notes that during the spawn, aggressive males "will strike at almost anything" near their nests.

1.7
HOW CRAPPIE LIVE

Crappie travel and feed in loose schools for most of the year, so where you catch one there are usually more. They move with water temperature, oxygen and food:

- **Spring:** shallow, to spawn.
- **Summer:** deeper, often near the thermocline, the layer where the water temperature changes quickly. There the water is cooler but still has oxygen.
- **Winter:** at almost any depth, and active all winter.

Above all, crappie like **open water near cover**: they hang in the open, often suspended, close to a brush pile, a sunken tree, a weed edge, a dock or a drop-off. They feed most in the evening and early morning.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE CRAPPIE LIVE IN WISCONSIN

Crappie live in lakes, flowages, millponds and slow rivers in every corner of Wisconsin. Black crappie are the fish of the glacial lakes and the North Woods; white crappie are the fish of the big southern rivers. This chapter shows you which waters hold the most crappie, what kind of lake suits them, and how to tell in two minutes whether your lake has them.

2.1 Native range and stocking history · **2.2** Lakes, flowages and millponds · **2.3** Rivers and backwaters · **2.4** What the DNR survey tells you · **2.5** Crappie stocking today · **2.6** Does my lake have crappie?

2.1

NATIVE RANGE AND STOCKING HISTORY

Crappie are native to the Mississippi River valley and much of the eastern United States. In Wisconsin they lived first in the Mississippi and the big river systems that drain into it. Then, from the 1800s to about 1920, both kinds were spread across the state on purpose. Fisheries crews netted crappie trapped in backwater pools of the Mississippi as the river fell, fish that would otherwise have died, and stocked them into inland lakes and streams. The DNR calls these programs "fish rescues."

The result is the map you fish today:

- **Black crappie** are most common in the glacial lakes left when the glaciers retreated 10,000 years ago, from the kettle lakes of the south to the clear, cool lakes of the North Woods. They also live in rivers.
- **White crappie** are more common in rivers and streams and in warm, silty water. They are at the northern edge of their range here and are not found in North Woods lakes.

2.2

LAKES, FLOWAGES AND MILLPONDS

Crappie do best where there is open water next to cover. These are the four kinds of water that hold them in Wisconsin.

WATER	WHY CRAPPIE LIKE IT	WHERE TO START
Natural lakes with weeds and wood	Open basin to roam, weed edges and fallen trees for cover	Weed edges, fallen trees, docks
Flowages and reservoirs (dammed rivers)	Flooded timber, stumps and old river channels: crappie cover everywhere	Stump fields, the old channel edge, bays
Millponds and small impoundments	Shallow, fertile, warm early; fast-growing fish	Near the dam, the old channel, brush
Dark-water and stained lakes	Light doesn't reach far, so crappie stay shallower and feed longer	Shallow wood and reeds, even at midday

Flowages deserve a special word. When a river is dammed, it floods forests, fields and creek channels. The trees rot away above the water but

stumps, logs and brush stay underwater for decades, and crappie love them. Wisconsin's state-record black crappie came from the Gile Flowage in Iron County, and the record white crappie from Cranberry Marsh in Monroe County.

Carp and crappie. The DNR notes crappie often do well in lakes with lots of carp. Carp root out dense weeds and stir up the water, which leaves the kind of open, murky water crappie tolerate better than other sunfish. Crappie also nest deeper than other sunfish, so carp bother their nests less.



FIG 2.1 Bare trees standing in shallow water. On a flowage, wood like this continues underwater as stumps and fallen logs, and crappie hold in it all year.

2.3 RIVERS AND BACKWATERS

Rivers hold some of Wisconsin's best and least-crowded crappie fishing, and most of its white crappie.

- **The Mississippi River.** Both kinds of crappie live in the backwater lakes and sloughs off the main channel, where the current is slow. Ice fishing in the backwaters is a winter tradition. The Mississippi has its own crappie limits (Chapter 8).

- **The Wisconsin, Fox and Wolf rivers.** Look for slack water: backwaters, bays, marinas, and the lakes and flowages along the river. The Winnebago system lakes are open to panfish all year.
- **Smaller rivers.** Deep holes and river bends with sunken logs hold crappie in summer and fall. The DNR leaflet notes anglers call these "crappie holes."

> **RIVER CRAPPIE IN ONE LINE**
> Find the slowest, deepest water out of the current that has wood in it: a backwater pond, a bay off the main channel, or a log-filled bend. Crappie stack up there, especially in fall and winter.

2.4
WHAT THE DNR SURVEY TELLS YOU

Here is the honest truth about crappie data: **the DNR's lake-page fish list doesn't list crappie on its own.** It lumps bluegill, pumpkinseed, crappie and yellow perch together as "panfish." (The DNR's full fisheries survey reports, where a lake has one, do give crappie catch rates and lengths; search the lake's name on the DNR site.) So when a Lake Sheet says panfish are "abundant," that tells you the lake is full of panfish, but not how many of them are crappie.

Of the 4,042 lakes with a Lake Sheet as of October 2026, the DNR survey lists panfish in 3,837: abundant in 506, common in 1,544 and present in 1,787. The counties with the most lakes where panfish are "abundant":

COUNTY	LAKES WITH PANFISH "ABUNDANT"	LAKES WITH PANFISH IN THE SURVEY
Oneida	71	343
Washburn	42	201
Vilas	31	479
Bayfield	31	233
Forest	30	111
Burnett	21	167
Waushara	16	60