WISCONSIN

LARGEMOUTH BASS GUIDE

Weeds, docks, frogs and the slop

Your guide to catching largemouth bass all year long in Wisconsin.



WISCONSIN

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Guide

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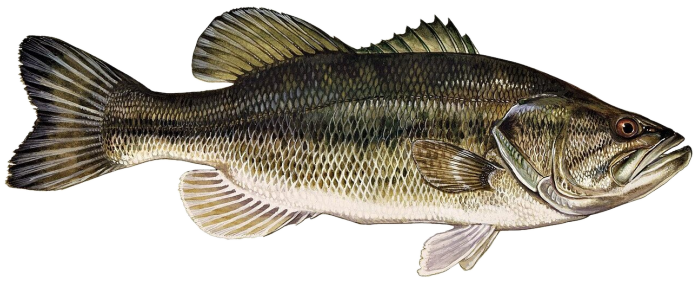

Wisconsin Largemouth Bass Guide
First edition, October 2026

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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 2026-10-10. 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.

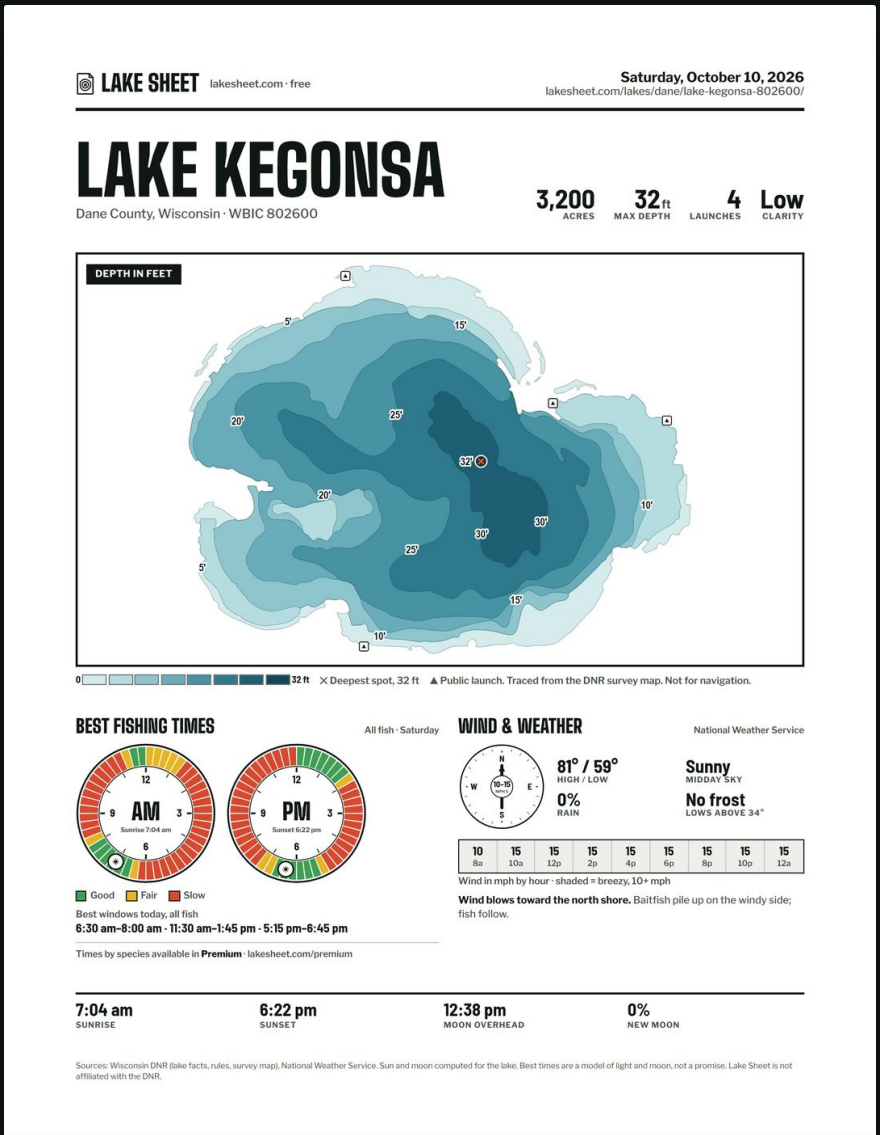
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

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.

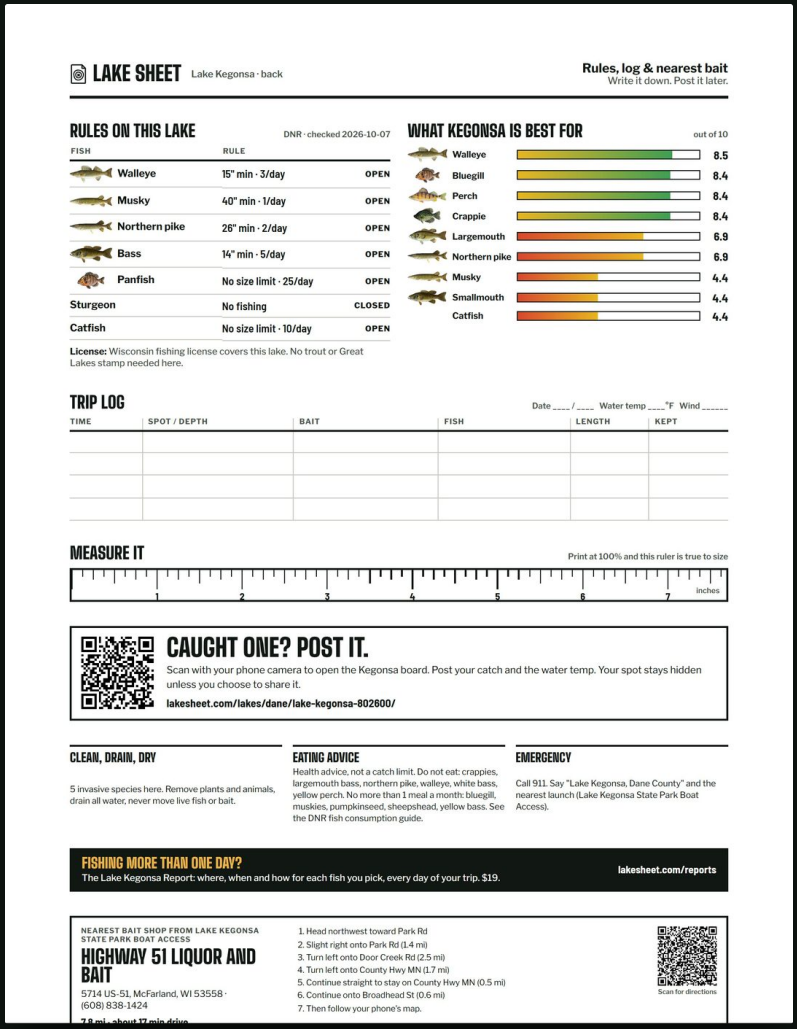
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

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

CONTENTS

1	Meet the largemouth bass	7
2	Where largemouth live in Wisconsin	15
3	Month by month	23
4	Gear that catches largemouth	31
5	Techniques and rigs	43
6	Reading the lake	55
7	Wisconsin lake picks	63
8	Rules and ethics	69
9	Clean and cook	77
10	The questions people ask	83
11	Kids corner	87
12	Fishing log	89
	Sources	93
	More from Lake Sheet	95

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is built to be used on the water, not just read. Read Chapter 1 once so you can tell a largemouth from a smallmouth. After that, jump to your month in Chapter 3, pick 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 (page 2).
2. Read your month in Chapter 3.
3. Rig the Texas-rigged worm or the weightless stick worm from Chapter 5.
4. Fish the weed edge or the docks in the last two hours of light.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO BASS

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

The QR codes. Every lake this book recommends or works through has a code. Scan it with your phone camera and you land on that lake's free Lake Sheet: its depth map (where the lake has one), best-times dials, wind by the hour, launches, the lake's own rules and, when one is in our list, the nearest bait shop.

The rules. Wisconsin has two bass zones, a catch-and-release season every spring, and hundreds of lakes with rules of their own. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season. Before you keep a bass, check the current rules. The fastest way is the rules box on your lake's Lake Sheet.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE LARGEMOUTH BASS

The largemouth bass is one of America's favorite game fish and one of the easiest big fish to find in Wisconsin. It lives in nearly every kind of water in the state, it hits lures on the surface, and it fights hard. It is not really a bass at all: it is the largest member of the sunfish family, a big, hungry cousin of the bluegill. Almost everything about catching one comes from three facts: it hides in cover, it hunts by sight, and it likes warm water.

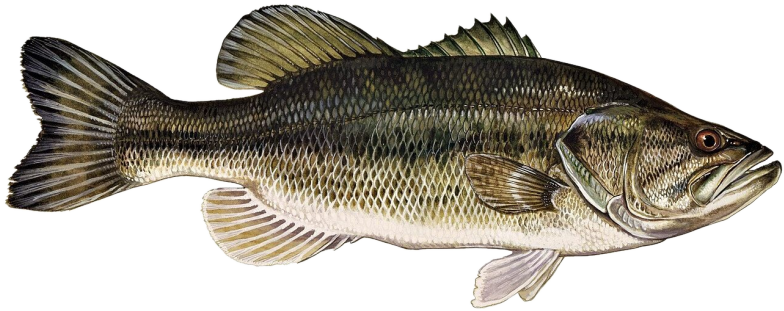
1.1 How to tell a largemouth · **1.2** Largemouth or smallmouth? · **1.3** Size, age and growth · **1.4** The records · **1.5** Senses · **1.6** What largemouth eat · **1.7** Spawning · **1.8** How largemouth live

1.1

HOW TO TELL A LARGEMOUTH

LARGEMOUTH BASS

Micropterus salmoides



TELL IT BY	The upper jaw reaches back past the eye. A dark, blotchy stripe runs from the eye to the tail. A deep notch almost splits the top (dorsal) fin in two.
LOOKS LIKE	Smallmouth bass: jaw ends below the eye, dark vertical bars instead of a side stripe, red eyes, only a slight notch in the dorsal fin. See 1.2.
COLOR	Dark forest green back, lighter green sides, pale belly. Nearly black in murky water; lighter and brighter in clear water.
SIZE	Matures at 3 to 4 years at 10 to 12 inches. A 7-year-old Wisconsin bass averages about 17 inches and 3 lb.
WISCONSIN RECORD	11 lb 3 oz — Robert Milkowski, Lake Ripley, Jefferson County, Oct. 12, 1940
EATS	Crayfish, frogs, large insects and fish, including golden shiners, bluegills and smaller bass. Almost anything that fits in its mouth.

Anglers call it largemouth, bucketmouth, green bass or black bass. The Wisconsin DNR's species leaflet adds "largemouth black bass," and in French it is *achigan à grande bouche*. The scientific name, *Micropterus salmoides*, means "small fin" and "trout-like," the DNR says: trout-like in how hard it fights and what it eats.

Check three things, in this order:

1. **The jaw.** Close the fish's mouth and look at the corner of the upper jaw. On a largemouth it reaches past the back edge of the eye. This one

check is the surest.

2. **The side stripe.** A row of dark blotches runs from the eye to the tail like a smudged line. Young fish show it clearly; big old fish go darker and the line fades.
3. **The top fin.** The spiny front part and the soft back part are nearly separate, with a deep dip between them.

1.2 LARGEMOUTH OR SMALLMOUTH?



FIG 1.1 **Largemouth bass.** Big jaw reaching past the eye, deep notch in the dorsal fin, a long dark side stripe. Sherman Foote Denton, 1896.



FIG 1.2 **Smallmouth bass.** Jaw ends under the eye, dark vertical bars, red eye. Duane Raver, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The smallmouth bass is the only Wisconsin fish people really mix up with a largemouth. Both live in many of the same lakes: of the lakes with a Lake Sheet, the DNR survey lists smallmouth in 651, and 599 of those also have largemouth (October 2026).

	LARGEMOUTH	SMALLMOUTH
Upper jaw	Reaches past the back of the eye	Ends below the middle of the eye
Markings	One dark, blotchy stripe from eye to tail	Dark vertical bars, often faint
Color	Green: dark back, lighter sides, pale belly	Bronze to brown
Eye	Golden brown	Red
Dorsal fin	Deep notch, almost two fins	Slight notch
Favorite home	Warm, shallow, weedy water; docks; lily pads	Rock, gravel and clear water; rivers

Wisconsin record	11 lb 3 oz	9 lb 1 oz

Why it matters. In the Northern Bass Zone you may keep largemouth from the first Saturday in May, but smallmouth not until mid-June (June 20 in 2026; Chapter 8). Before you put a bass in the livewell up north in May, check the jaw.

TWO MORE MIX-UPS

Rock bass are a different fish: smaller, chunkier, with rows of dark spots and no long side stripe. The Wisconsin record is just 2 lb 15 oz. **Young largemouth** in a weed bed look like a pencil with a stripe. Their jaw already reaches past the eye.

1.3

SIZE, AGE AND GROWTH

Largemouth grow fast in length for their first two years, then fill out. In Wisconsin they mature at three to four years old, at an average of 10 to 12 inches. Females live about 9 years and males about 6, the DNR says, and bass in northern states live longer than those in the South.

AGE	AVERAGE LENGTH	AVERAGE WEIGHT
1 year	6.7 in	0.18 lb (3 oz)
2 years	8.7 in	0.38 lb (6 oz)
3 years	11.3 in	0.85 lb
4 years	12.6 in	1.2 lb
5 years	13.7 in	1.5 lb
6 years	15.4 in	2.3 lb
7 years	16.8 in	3.0 lb

From the Wisconsin DNR's largemouth bass species leaflet (2008). Growth changes a lot from lake to lake. Rich southern lakes with plenty of bluegills grow fish faster than cold, clear northern lakes.

What the table tells you. The statewide 14-inch minimum protects most bass until they are about five or six years old and have spawned at least

once or twice. A 20-inch Wisconsin largemouth is well past the oldest fish in that table. Southern U.S. research reports northern-strain largemouth reaching about 10 pounds at most, and ages of up to 15 years in the northern United States. A Wisconsin fish over 6 pounds is a fish of a lifetime for most anglers.

1.4 THE RECORDS

The hook-and-line record is 11 lb 3 oz. Robert Milkowski caught it on Lake Ripley in Jefferson County on October 12, 1940. It has stood for more than 85 years.

The live-release record goes by length, so the fish can be measured, photographed and let go. The current record is 23.5 inches, caught by Austin Risser of Mukwonago on Pickerel Lake in Walworth County on June 26, 2026.

Lake Ripley, Jefferson County. Scan for its free Lake Sheet: depth map, launches, rules and best-times dials.

Pickerel Lake, Walworth County. Scan for its Lake Sheet. A small lake: 32 acres, with largemouth listed in the DNR survey.

1.5 SENSES

Sight comes first. Largemouth are sight hunters. The DNR says they can tell shades of color apart in shallow water, and they feed best where they can see: early morning, evening, and in water that isn't muddy.

The lateral line. A line of nerve endings runs down each side of the body. It picks up vibration from anything moving within about 20 feet. Beyond that, the inner ear does the hearing. That's why a spinnerbait's thump or a rattling crankbait finds bass in stained water, and why a bass in thick weeds can find a lure it can't see.

Smell. Adults have a well-developed sense of smell and use it to pick up predators and prey nearby. Scent on a soft plastic won't call a bass from across the lake, but it can make a bass hold a bait a second longer.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR LURE

- **Clear water, bright sun:** natural colors (green pumpkin, watermelon, shad), lighter line, slower lures.
- **Stained or muddy water:** dark or bright colors that show a strong outline (black and blue, chartreuse), and lures that thump or rattle.
- **Thick weeds:** sound and movement: a frog, a spinnerbait, a jig that crashes through the top.

1.6

WHAT LARGEMOUTH EAT

A largemouth swallows its prey whole, so the only real limit on what it eats is the width of its mouth. Young bass eat zooplankton and insects. By about 2 inches long they start eating fish. Adults eat crayfish, frogs, big insects and fish, including golden shiners, bluegills and other bass. The DNR has seen them follow feeding ducks to grab the prey the ducks flush out.

In most Wisconsin lakes, **sunfish and crayfish** are the main course. That's why green pumpkin, brown and bluegill-pattern lures catch so many bass, and why a jig with a crayfish-shaped trailer is a classic.



FIG 1.3 **Crayfish.** A live one held up on the boat. Bass eat them all summer. Live crayfish are not legal bait on inland Wisconsin water; use a soft-plastic one (4.7 and Chapter 8).



FIG 1.4 **Frogs.** A frog on the pads is a bass meal, and the reason frog lures work.

1.7
SPAWNING

Largemouth spawn from late April to early July in Wisconsin. Fish in the north spawn about two weeks later than fish in the south.

- **When:** males pick nest sites when the water reaches about 60°F. Females lay eggs at 62 to 65°F.
- **Where:** sheltered bays and quiet water. The male fans out a round nest on sand or gravel, up to 3 feet across. The DNR leaflet says nests are often in about 18 inches of water; the Minnesota DNR reports nests from 2 to 8 feet deep. On a soft bottom he cleans down to roots, twigs or snail shells. Nests are usually at least 30 feet apart.
- **How:** a female may lay eggs in several nests, and a male may spawn with several females. When spawning is done, a nest holds about 5,000 pale yellow eggs.
- **The guard:** the male stays, fans the eggs, and drives off anything that comes near. The eggs hatch in three to seven days. The fry stay on the bottom of the nest for about a week, then rise and swarm, guarded by the male for up to a month.

WHY BED FISH NEED A BREAK

A male bass pulled off his nest leaves the eggs and fry open to bluegills and other sunfish, which eat them fast. Without the male, eggs don't survive. That's the idea behind keeping bass harvest closed in early spring, and why careful anglers release a bed fish right where they caught it, fast. See 8.6.

1.8
HOW LARGEMOUTH LIVE

Warm water. Largemouth prefer water of about 80 to 85°F, the DNR says. That is the water they choose to live in, not the best water to catch them in: the DNR says fishing is best at 55 to 75°F, and bass slow down a lot in cold water. Preferring warm water also doesn't make a long fight in it safe. A bass played hard in water over 80°F tires and stresses fast, which is why 3.5 and 8.6 tell you to land and release summer bass quickly.

Shallow and in cover. The DNR says largemouth are seldom found in water more than 20 feet deep, and seldom deeper than the deepest water where rooted weeds grow. By day they sit under lily pads, in the shade of docks and overhanging trees, and in brush. They ambush prey from behind logs, rocks, docks and the edges of weeds.

Small schools, then loners. Young adults hunt in loose groups of five to ten fish, often cruising the shallows early and late in the day. Big old bass tend to live alone, and they claim the best spot on a piece of cover: the deepest shade, the thickest pads, the end of the longest dock.

Winter. Bass feed less as the water cools in late fall. Through winter they are slow and stay in deeper water until the shallow bays warm in spring. In shallow, weedy lakes, low oxygen in winter can kill them; the DNR lists largemouth as frequent victims of winterkill.

REMEMBER

- Fish water under 20 feet with weeds, wood or docks in it (1.8).
- The best spot on a piece of cover holds the biggest fish.
- Warm water means active bass; cold water means slow lures.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Fishing open water with no weeds, wood or docks nearby.
- Fishing fast in cold water.
- Keeping a smallmouth before the mid-June date in the Northern Bass Zone.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE LARGEMOUTH LIVE IN WISCONSIN

Largemouth bass have lived in Wisconsin since the glaciers left. The state sits near the northern edge of their range, yet the DNR says they are found in nearly all Wisconsin waters. On Lake Sheet, only the DNR's "panfish" group shows up in more lakes: the survey lists largemouth in 3,724 lakes, northern pike in 2,409 and walleye in 1,114. This chapter shows you where the best water is and how to tell in two minutes whether your lake holds them.

2.1 Statewide, almost everywhere · **2.2** The best counties · **2.3** Lake types · **2.4** Rivers and backwaters · **2.5** The Great Lakes · **2.6** Stocking · **2.7** Does my lake have largemouth?

2.1
STATEWIDE, ALMOST EVERYWHERE

Largemouth live in all three of Wisconsin's drainage basins: Lake Michigan, Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. The DNR says they are least common in the Driftless Area of the southwest, where cold, fast trout streams outnumber lakes. Some northern populations may have come from stocking, and stocking has spread them further.

Of the 4,631 lakes with a Lake Sheet in early October 2026 (more are added each week), the DNR fish survey lists largemouth in **3,724**. The survey sorts each species in a lake as abundant, common or present:

DNR SURVEY LABEL	LAKES ON LAKE SHEET	WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU
Abundant	172	Bass are one of the lake's main fish. Expect action.
Common	1,610	Good numbers; find the cover and you'll find fish.
Present	1,942	Bass are there but not a main fish. Fish the best cover hard, or pick another lake.

Lake Sheet data from DNR fish survey records, October 2026.

2.2
THE BEST COUNTIES

The north has the most bass lakes simply because it has the most lakes. But "abundant" bass lakes show up from the Minnesota border to Kenosha.

COUNTY	LAKES WITH LARGEMOUTH	"ABUNDANT" BASS LAKES
Vilas	473	13
Oneida	342	3
Bayfield	218	10
Washburn	181	31
Burnett	161	19
Sawyer	159	8
Iron	151	3