WISCONSIN

MUSKY GUIDE

Find them, hook them, release them right

Your guide to catching musky in Wisconsin, opener to ice-up.



WISCONSIN

MUSKY

Guide

Find them, hook them, release them right



Wisconsin Musky 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.

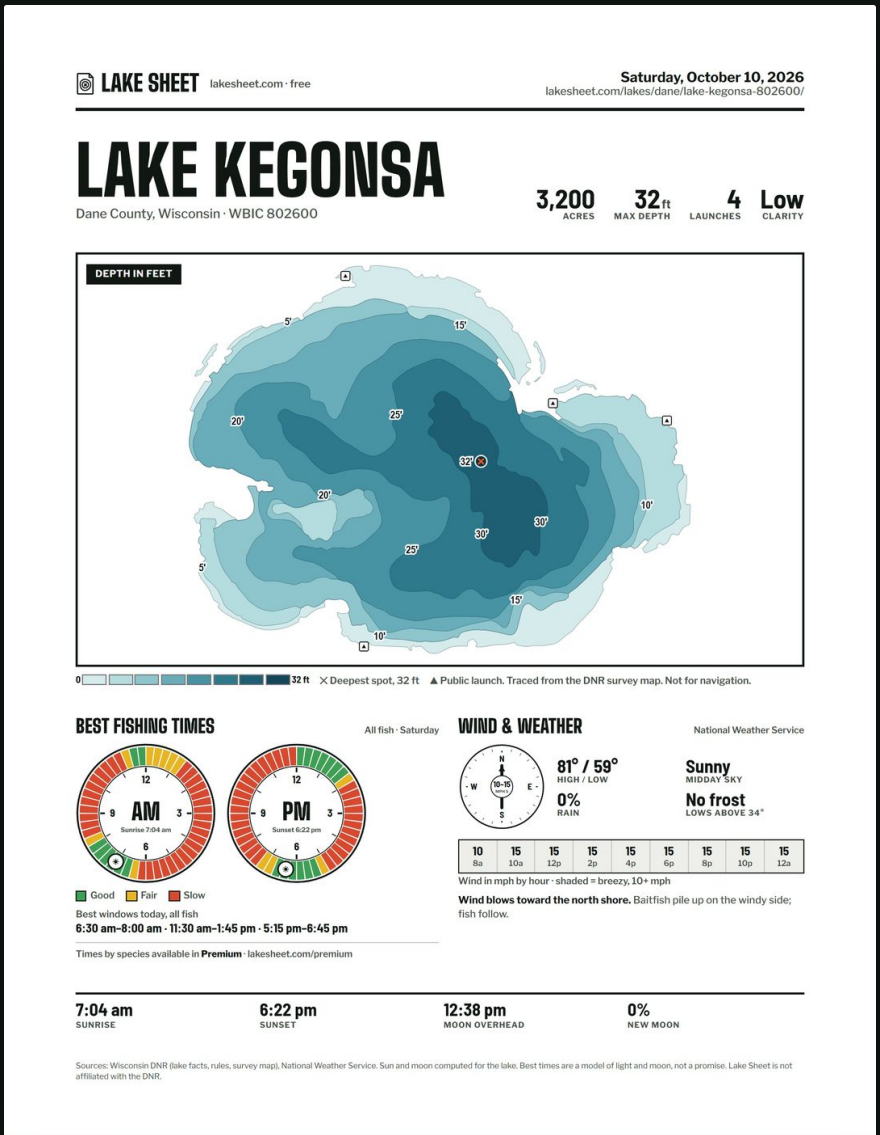
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

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.

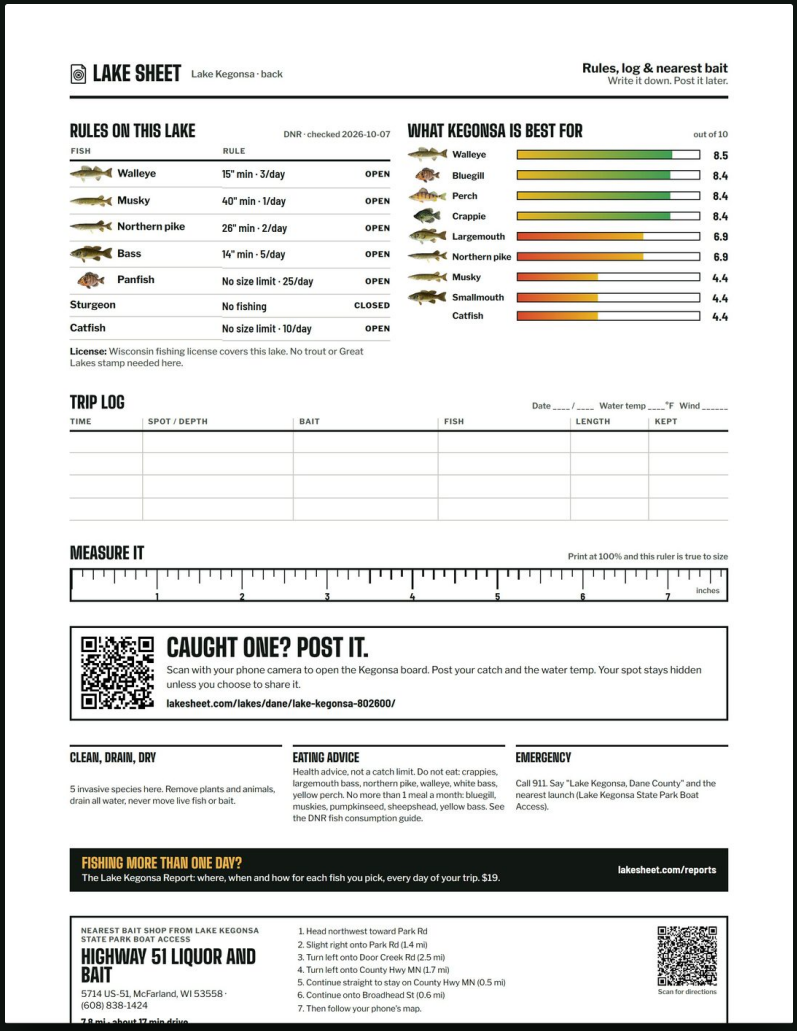
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

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 musky from a northern pike. Read Chapter 9 before your first trip, because the most important musky skill is letting one go alive. 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.
2. Read your month in Chapter 3.
3. Tie on a bucktail and practice the figure-8 from Chapter 5.
4. Pack the release kit from Chapter 9.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO MUSKY

1. Chapter 1: what you're after.
2. Chapter 4: the rod, reel, line and leader that won't break.
3. Chapter 9: how to release a musky.
4. Chapter 10: the questions everyone asks.

The QR codes. Most lakes named in this book have a code. Scan it with your phone camera and you land on that lake's free Lake Sheet: depth map, best times, 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. Rules in this book are for the 2026–27 season. New this year: the inland musky season opens on the same day statewide. 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 keeping musky. Wisconsin lets you keep one legal musky a day, and that is your call. Almost every musky angler lets them all go. This book shows you how to do that well, and a full chapter takes the place of the cooking chapter in our other guides.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE MUSKY

The muskellunge is Wisconsin's state fish and its biggest trophy. It is the largest member of the pike family, it eats fish two-thirds its own length, and the DNR says it takes the average angler more than 50 hours to catch an adult. Musky are not everywhere and they are never easy. But they live in hundreds of Wisconsin lakes, and once you know how they live, you can find them.

1.1 How to tell a musky · **1.2** Musky, northern pike and tiger muskie · **1.3** Size and growth · **1.4** How musky hunt · **1.5** What musky eat · **1.6** Spawning · **1.7** How musky live

1.1

HOW TO TELL A MUSKY

MUSKELLUNGE

Esox masquinongy



TELL IT BY	Dark bars or spots on a light body, pointed tail-fin tips, no scales on the lower half of the cheek and gill cover, and six or more pores under each side of the jaw.
LOOKS LIKE	Northern pike (light spots on a dark body, rounded fins, fully scaled cheek). Tiger muskie is a musky × pike cross and counts as a musky under Wisconsin rules.
COLOR	Green-gold to light brown back and sides, cream or pearly-white belly, rust-colored fins. Markings vary from lake to lake.
SIZE	About 40 inches at age 9 and 50 inches by age 17, on average. A 41-inch musky weighs about 20 lb; a 52-incher, about 40 lb.
WISCONSIN RECORD	69 lb 11 oz, 63.5 in — Louis Spray, Chippewa Flowage, Sawyer County, Oct. 20, 1949
EATS	Mostly soft-finned fish such as suckers and cisco, plus yellow perch and minnows. Can swallow prey two-thirds its own length.

The name comes from the Cree words *mashk* (deformed) and *kinonge* (pike), says the Wisconsin DNR. You'll hear it spelled musky, muskie, maskinonge, or just called a 'lunge. The Wisconsin Legislature made it the official state fish in 1955.

A musky is long and round, about six times as long as it is deep, with its back fin (dorsal) and the fin under it (anal) set far back near the tail. That body is built for one thing: a short, explosive charge from cover.

1.2

MUSKY, NORTHERN PIKE AND TIGER MUSKIE

Musky and northern pike share many of the same lakes, look alike at a glance, and hit the same lures. Their rules are very different: north of Highway 10 you may keep five northern pike of any length, but a musky must be at least 40 inches, and only one a day. Learn the four checks below and you'll never be unsure.



FIG 1.1 **Muskellunge.** Dark bars or spots on a light background. Pointed tail-fin tips.



FIG 1.2 **Northern pike.** Light, bean-shaped spots on a dark background. Rounded fins.



FIG 1.3 **Tiger muskie** (musky × northern pike). Wavy dark "tiger" bars on a light body, like a musky, but rounded fins like a pike.

CHECK	MUSKY	NORTHERN PIKE	TIGER MUSKIE
Markings	Dark bars or spots on a light body; some fish have almost none	Rows of light, bean-shaped spots on a dark green body	Bold, wavy dark bars on a light body
Tail fin	Pointed tips	Rounded tips	Rounded tips
Cheek and gill cover	No scales on the lower half	Cheek fully scaled	Cheek fully or two-thirds scaled
Pores under the jaw	6 or more on each side	5 or fewer on each side	–

Fins	Pointed, usually rust colored	Rounded	Rounded
Wisconsin record	69 lb 11 oz (1949)	38 lb 0 oz (1952)	51 lb 3 oz (1919)

THE PORE COUNT SETTLES IT

Roll the fish gently on its back in the net, still in the water, and look along the underside of the lower jaw. You'll see a row of small holes (sensory pores). Count one side: six or more means musky; five or fewer means northern pike. The Minnesota DNR calls it the foolproof test.

Tiger muskies are a cross between a musky and a northern pike. They are sterile and rare in Wisconsin: the state's tiger muskie record, 51 lb 3 oz, was caught on Lac Vieux Desert in Vilas County in 1919, and the only tiger muskie stockings in the Lake Sheet records since 2011 are a handful of small private-hatchery releases. Wisconsin's musky rules say "includes hybrids," so a tiger muskie follows musky rules: same season, same size limit.

1.3

SIZE AND GROWTH

Musky grow fast for their first five years, then slow down in length while they keep adding weight. Females grow larger than males: a mature female can be 1 to 10 inches or more longer than a male of the same age.

TYPICAL LENGTH BY AGE (STATEWIDE)

AGE	LENGTH
1 year	about 11 in
7 years	about 34 in
9 years	about 40 in
17 years	about 50 in

TYPICAL WEIGHT BY LENGTH

LENGTH	WEIGHT
33 in	about 10 lb
41 in	about 20 lb
47 in	about 30 lb
52 in	about 40 lb

From the Wisconsin DNR's 2012 musky management update, based on 5,043 fish aged from 1947 to 1992. Your lake may differ.

Lake size matters most. The DNR found that lake size alone explains nearly 70% of the difference in how big musky grow from lake to lake. Lakes of

2,000 acres and larger are the ones most likely to grow fish that reach 50 inches. Lakes as small as 100 acres can still grow 40-inch fish. Statewide, the DNR puts the "ultimate length" Wisconsin musky can reach, on average, at about 56 inches.

How long they live. Most musky live to about 18 years. The DNR has documented fish 30 years old. On an average northern lake, a 50-inch musky in your net is likely about as old as a high-school senior; on big, rich water like Green Bay it can be 10 to 12.

The records. Wisconsin's hook-and-line record musky weighed 69 lb 11 oz and measured 63.5 inches. Louis Spray of Hayward caught it on the Chippewa Flowage in Sawyer County on October 20, 1949. The live-release (length) record is 57.25 inches, caught by Brook Bogacz on Green Bay in Brown County on May 25, 2026. That's on the DNR record list as of September 2026.

1.4 HOW MUSKY HUNT

Musky are ambush hunters. A musky holds still beside a weed edge, a rock bar or a fallen tree, waits for a fish to swim by, then strikes in a burst, grabs it crosswise with long, pointed teeth, turns it and swallows it headfirst.

- **They hunt by sight.** The DNR says musky rely heavily on sight and may have a harder time feeding at night or in muddy water. That is why bright days with a little wind, and lures with flash and a big profile, work so well.
- **They feel vibration.** Like all fish, musky sense movement in the water through the lateral line along their sides. A thumping bucktail blade or a wobbling crankbait calls them from cover before they can see it.
- **They follow.** A musky will often trail a lure all the way to the boat, look at it, and sink away. Anglers call this a "follow." It is the most common musky encounter, and Chapter 5 shows how to turn it into a bite.



FIG 1.4 A large predator fish holding in a weed bed, waiting for prey to come by. Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

1.5 WHAT MUSKY EAT

Musky eat what is in front of them, as long as it's big enough to be worth it. The DNR's summary of Wisconsin musky stomachs:

FOOD	SHARE OF THE DIET
Soft-finned fish (suckers, cisco), yellow perch and minnows	over 70%
Other panfish: sunfish, rock bass, crappie, bullheads	about 15%
Game fish: bass, northern pike, other musky, walleye	about 8%
Now and then: muskrats, ducks, frogs, mice	a little

A separate DNR study of 1,092 musky from 34 Wisconsin lakes found that yellow perch made up 30% of what they ate and white suckers 8.4%. Walleye were less than 1% of the food items found. That is worth knowing the next time someone at the landing says musky "eat all the walleye": the

DNR found walleye were actually more common, on average, in lakes that have musky.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR LURE

Match the big, soft-bodied fish: suckers, cisco and perch. Lures of 8 to 12 inches in natural perch, sucker and cisco colors work all season. In fall, when musky feed up for winter, a bigger lure or a live sucker of 10 to 14 inches catches the biggest fish. A musky can swallow prey two-thirds its own length: a 50-inch fish can eat a 33-inch meal.

1.6

SPAWNING

Musky spawn in spring. In Wisconsin that is mid-April to mid-May, at water temperatures of 49 to 60°F, best at about 55°F.

- **Where:** shallow water, 1 to 3 feet deep, over muck, sand or gravel, often near bulrushes or sunken branches.
- **How:** a male and a female swim side by side, releasing eggs and milt every so often over several hundred yards of shoreline. There is no nest and no parental care. Spawning seldom lasts more than a week.
- **The eggs:** a female lays 20,000 to 200,000 eggs, more in bigger fish. They hatch in one to two weeks. The fry eat tiny animals called zooplankton for a few days, then start eating other fish.
- **Coming back:** many adults return to the same spawning area each year.
- **Growing up:** young musky reach 7 to 13 inches by the end of their first summer. Most males mature at age 5 or 6 (28 to 30 inches); some females start at age 6 or 7 (about 33 inches) and nearly all are mature by 40 inches.

Young musky face a hard start: cold snaps, falling water levels, eggs smothered in muck, and northern pike, bass, perch and sunfish all eating them. That is one reason many lakes are stocked (Chapter 2).

1.7

HOW MUSKY LIVE

A musky is a loner with a small home. In summer, most use an area of less than 20 acres. They roam more in spring, when they travel to and from spawning areas, and much less in winter.

There are not many of them. The DNR estimates an average musky lake holds about one adult musky for every three acres of water, and about 200,000 musky in the whole state. A 300-acre lake might have 100 adults. That is why musky fishing takes patience, and why releasing them matters so much.

Musky are most comfortable in water from 33 to 78°F and can stand up to about 90°F for a short time. In the warmest weeks, that comfort range is why handling them carefully matters most (Chapter 9).

REMEMBER

- Musky live near cover: weeds, rock, wood, drop-offs.
- They see your lure first and decide later. Expect follows.
- Bigger lakes grow bigger fish.

COMMON MISTAKES

- Calling every big pike a musky (or every musky a pike). Count the pores.
- Expecting action every hour. Plan on follows, not fish.
- Holding a musky up by the gill plate for a photo.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE MUSKY LIVE IN WISCONSIN

The lakes and rivers of the north are the musky's natural home, and stocking has carried them south to the Madison lakes, the Waukesha County lakes, the Wisconsin River flowages and Green Bay. The DNR counts about 667 lakes and 48 streams in 53 counties with musky populations good enough to fish. This chapter shows you where they are, what kinds of water grow big ones, and how to tell in two minutes whether your lake has them.

2.1 Native waters · **2.2** The northern lakes · **2.3** How the DNR rates musky lakes · **2.4** Rivers and flowages · **2.5** Southern lakes, Green Bay and Winnebago · **2.6** Stocking · **2.7** Does my lake have musky?

2.1
NATIVE WATERS

Before stocking, the DNR believes musky lived in the lakes and rivers of a few drainages: the Chippewa River, the upper Wisconsin River above Wausau, the Black River, the Amnicon River, and the lower Fox River including Green Bay. They are found in all three of the state's big drainage basins: the Mississippi, Lake Michigan and Lake Superior.

Today the heaviest concentration is still in the headwaters of the **Chippewa, Flambeau and Wisconsin river systems**: the lake country of Vilas, Oneida, Sawyer, Iron and Price counties.

2.2
THE NORTHERN LAKES

Of the 4,042 lakes with a Lake Sheet as of October 2026, the DNR fish survey lists musky in 692. Nearly half of them are in two counties.

COUNTY	LAKES WITH MUSKY IN THE DNR SURVEY	LAKES WHERE MUSKY ARE "ABUNDANT"
Vilas	187	1
Oneida	117	–
Sawyer	61	5
Iron	58	–
Price	30	1
Ashland	28	1
Bayfield	26	–
Rusk	19	–
Lincoln	16	–
Waupaca	13	–

Lake Sheet data from DNR fish survey records, October 2026. "–" means none of that county's published lakes carry the DNR's "abundant" label for