WISCONSIN

PANFISH GUIDE

Bluegill, pumpkinseed and sunfish, open water and ice

Your guide to catching panfish all year long in Wisconsin.



WISCONSIN

PANFISH

Guide

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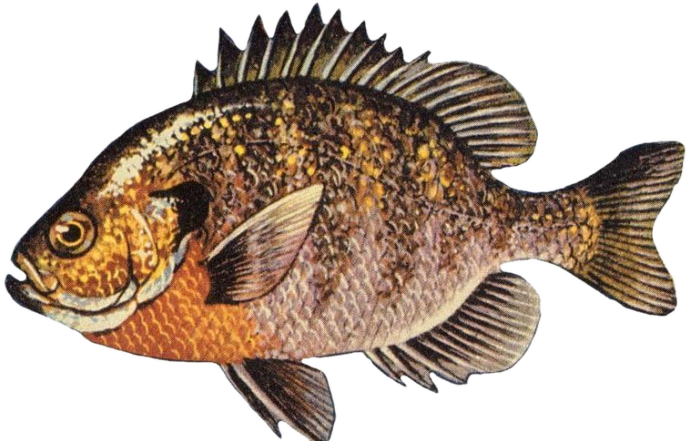

Wisconsin Panfish Guide
First edition, October 2026

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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.

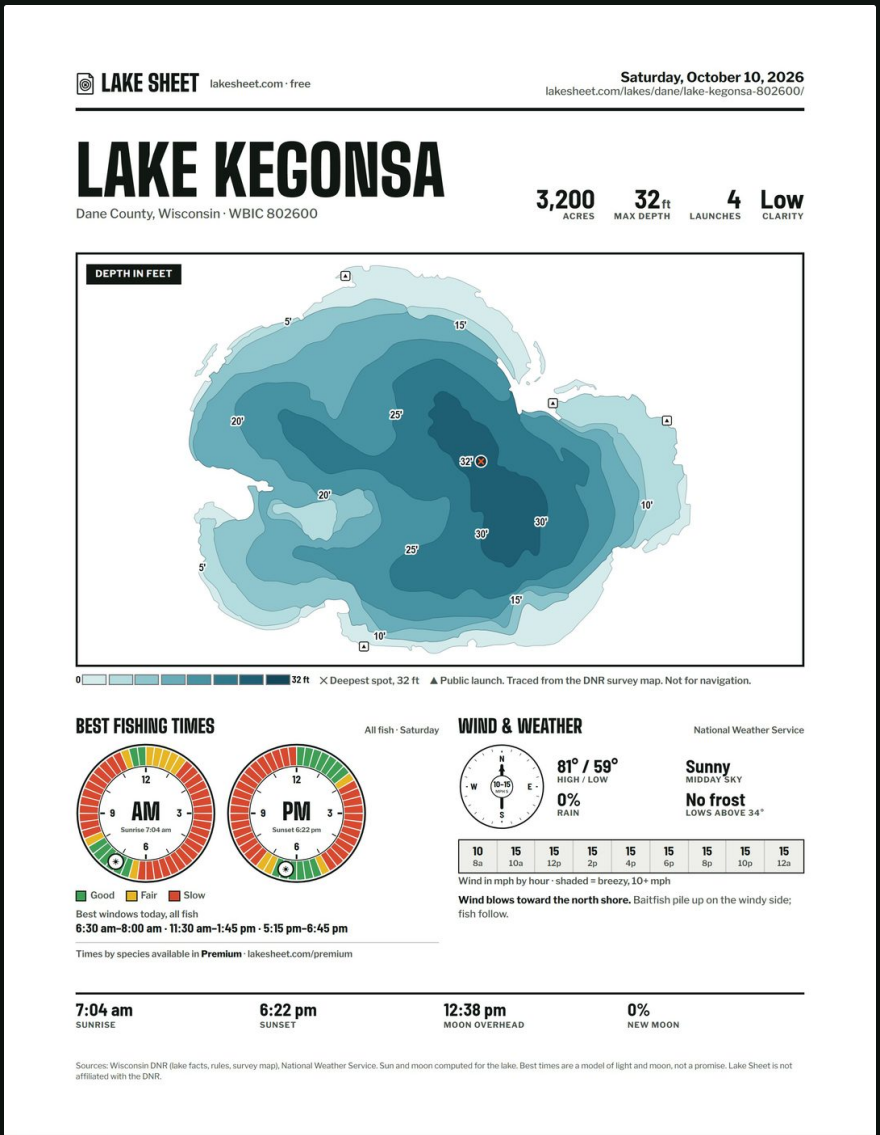
Lake Sheet is not affiliated with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Lake facts come from DNR survey and stocking records as published by Lake Sheet; see the sources at the back of the book.

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.

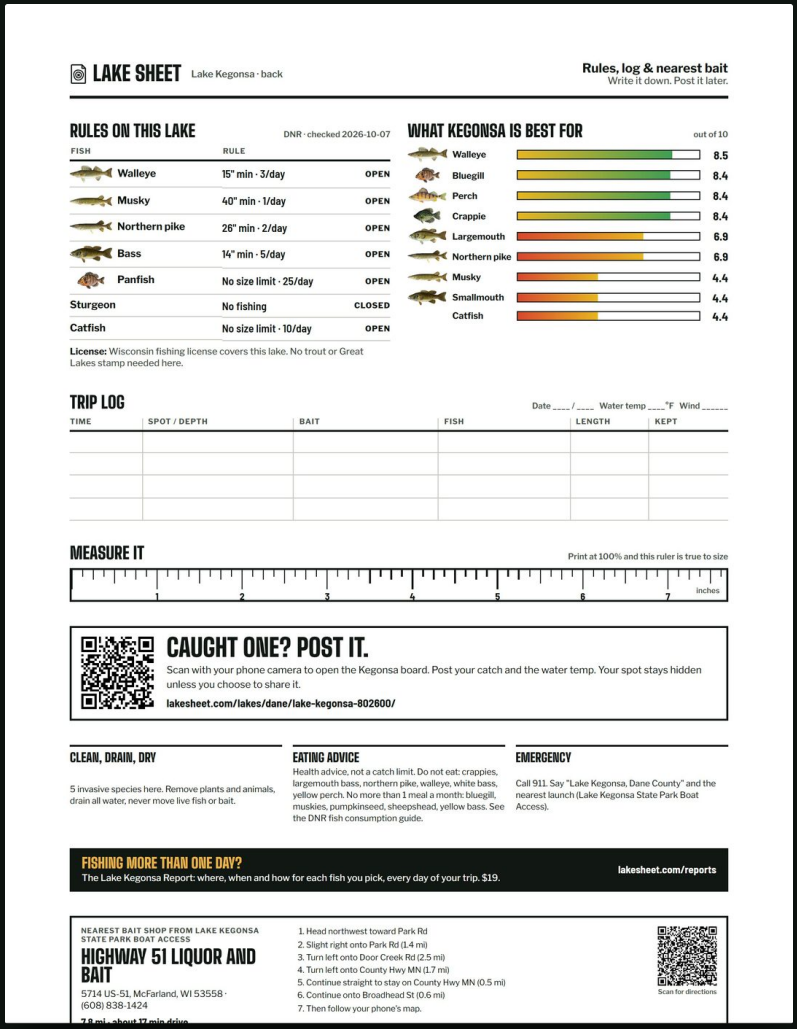
7:04 am	6:22 pm	12:38 pm	0%
SUNRISE	SUNSET	MOON OVERHEAD	NEW MOON

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 on the water, not just read. Read Chapter 1 once so you can tell a bluegill from a pumpkinseed and a green sunfish. After that, jump to the month you're fishing in Chapter 3, find a lake in Chapter 9, and use Chapter 8 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 the bobber rig from 5.1 or the jig from 5.3.
4. Fish the weed edge at dawn or dusk; the sheet's best-times dials help you pick the hour.

IF YOU'RE NEW TO PANFISH

1. Chapter 1: what you're after.
2. Chapter 4: buy the budget kit (about $65–80).
3. Chapter 5: learn the bobber and worm first.
4. Chapter 13: your first trip, with or without kids.

Three chapters to read in season. Chapter 6 covers the spring spawning beds, when bluegill are easiest to find all year, and how to catch the big ones without wrecking the lake. Chapter 7 covers panfish through the ice. Chapter 11 turns your catch into dinner.

What "panfish" means here. Wisconsin rules count bluegill, pumpkinseed, other sunfish, crappie and yellow perch together as "panfish," with one shared daily bag. This book is about bluegill and the sunfish. Crappie and yellow perch get their own Lake Sheet guides, but you'll find them in the rules here, because they count in the same bag.

The QR codes. Every lake we recommend has a code that opens its free Lake Sheet: depth map (where it has one), best-times dials, wind, launches and the lake's own rules. Rivers and lakes named only as examples have no code.

The rules. Rules change every April 1, and many lakes have their own panfish rule. Rules here are for the 2026–27 season; before you keep a fish, check your lake's rules box on its Lake Sheet.



CHAPTER 1

MEET THE BLUEGILL AND ITS COUSINS

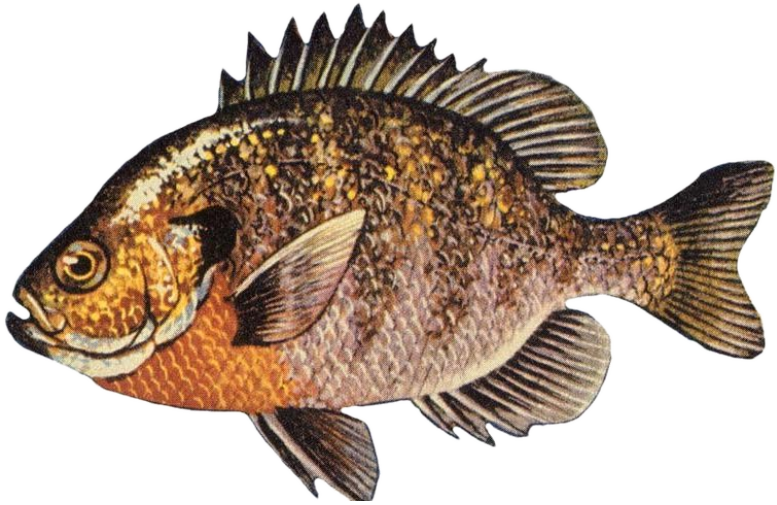
The bluegill is probably Wisconsin's most-caught fish. The DNR calls it one of the state's most popular sport fish and "certainly one of the most abundant," and in many lakes there are more bluegill than any other fish. It lives in almost every pond, lake and slow river in the state, it bites all year, and it fights hard for its size. Learn it well and you can catch fish on any trip.

1.1 How to tell a bluegill · **1.2** Pumpkinseed · **1.3** The other sunfish · **1.4** Quick ID table · **1.5** Size, age and growth · **1.6** The records · **1.7** What they eat and how they feed · **1.8** Spawning and crappie, in brief

1.1
HOW TO TELL A BLUEGILL

BLUEGILL

Lepomis macrochirus



TELL IT BY	A solid black "ear flap" at the back of the gill cover, a dark smudge at the back of the soft dorsal fin, and blue on the lower jaw and gill cover. Five to nine dark bars down the sides.
LOOKS LIKE	Pumpkinseed: same shape, but the black ear flap has a bright red-orange half-moon spot, and the cheeks have wavy blue and orange lines.
COLOR	Changes with the water. Dark lakes make olive-to-black backs and yellow bellies; clear lakes make blue-green backs and white bellies. Spawning males get orange to rusty-red breasts.
SIZE	Most are 5 to 7 inches. In the best lakes they reach 9 inches and 12 ounces to a pound. In stunted lakes they may stop at 4.5 inches.
WISCONSIN RECORD	2 lb 9.8 oz, 12.0 in — Drew Garsow, Green Bay, Brown County, Aug. 2, 1995
EATS	Insect larvae, insects, zooplankton, fish eggs, algae and plants, and now and then a tiny minnow. It sucks food in through a small mouth.

The name *Lepomis macrochirus* means roughly "scaled cheek, large hand": the body is about as big as a hand and almost as flat. Bluegill are a little und-

er half as deep as they are long, and even the largest is under an inch thick. That flat, round shape is why they're called panfish. It is also why they fight so well: a hooked bluegill turns its broad side to you and swims in circles at right angles to the line.

Don't go by color. Bluegill change color with the water, the season, their age and sex. Go by these three marks instead, in this order:

1. **The ear flap.** The soft flap at the back of the gill cover is solid black on a bluegill, all the way to the edge.
2. **The fin spot.** A dark, round smudge sits at the back of the soft (rear) part of the dorsal fin.
3. **The mouth.** Small, and it doesn't reach back as far as the eye.

Old names you'll hear: gill, bream, blue bream, sunny, blue sunfish. In Wisconsin "sunfish" or "sunnies" often means any of the round panfish, bluegill included.

1.2 PUMPKINSEED



FIG 1.1 Pumpkinseed. Look at the ear flap: black, with a red-orange half-moon spot on its back edge. Wavy blue and orange lines run across the cheek.

The pumpkinseed (*Lepomis gibbosus*) is the bluegill's closest cousin and the most colorful fish in most Wisconsin lakes. Its breast and belly are orange to red-orange; its back and sides are brown to olive, speckled with orange, yellow, blue and emerald spots. Wavy blue and orange-brown stripes run back from the snout across the cheek and gill cover.

Pumpkinseeds have big, flat, molar-like teeth in the back of the throat for crushing snails and other small shellfish. They like cooler water than bluegill do and stay closer to cover: you'll rarely find them out over open water. They also feed hardest in the afternoon, which makes them a good mid-day fish for kids. The DNR's pumpkinseed leaflet calls it a "children's fish," because it lives in shallow water within easy reach of a shore angler with a worm.

1.3 THE OTHER SUNFISH

Wisconsin's rules count three more sunfish as panfish: green sunfish, warmouth and orangespotted sunfish. You'll also catch hybrids, and once in a while a fish you must put back.



FIG 1.2 **Green sunfish.** Thick body, big mouth that reaches under the eye, blue-green lines on the cheek, yellow-white edges on the fins.



FIG 1.3 **Warmouth.** Brown and mottled, red eye, dark lines running back from the eye, big mouth.



FIG 1.4 **Orangespotted sunfish.** Orange spots on the sides, orange belly, black ear flap with a pale edge. A river fish that stays tiny: the state record is 3.25 inches.

- **Green sunfish.** Longer and thicker than a bluegill, with a much bigger mouth that reaches back under the eye. The ear flap is black with a pale or reddish edge, and the soft fins have yellow-white edges. Green sunfish do well in small ponds, ditches and muddy water where bluegill struggle. Wisconsin record: 1 lb 9 oz, Wind Lake, Racine County, 1967.
- **Warmouth.** Brown and blotchy, with red eyes and dark red-brown lines that run back from the eye across the cheek. It has a big mouth and, unlike any other sunfish, a patch of tiny teeth on its tongue you can feel with a fingertip. It's uncommon in Wisconsin. Wisconsin record: 1 lb 1 oz, 10.5 in, Eagle Lake, Racine County, 2001.
- **Orangespotted sunfish.** A tiny, painted-looking fish with orange spots on its sides, found mostly in big muddy rivers like the Mississippi and the

lower Wisconsin. It stays tiny: the Wisconsin record weighs less than half an ounce (0.48 oz, 3.25 in, Crawfish River, Dodge County, 2024).

- **Hybrids.** Bluegill, pumpkinseed and green sunfish cross with each other often. A hybrid usually looks "in between": a bluegill-shaped fish with a bigger mouth, or a pumpkinseed with a faint ear spot. They count as panfish; keep or release them like any other.

PUT THIS ONE BACK



FIG 1.5 **Longear sunfish.** A very long black ear flap, wavy blue lines on the face, orange belly. A state-threatened fish: it is illegal to keep one without a permit.

The longear sunfish lives in clear, shallow streams and a few lakes in fewer than two dozen Wisconsin counties, and it has been declining for a century. It is on the state's threatened species list, so it may not be kept. If you catch a small, bright sunfish with a very long black ear flap, unhook it in the water and let it go.

Rock bass are not panfish under Wisconsin rules, though you'll catch them in the same places. Look for red eyes, a bigger mouth than a bluegill's, and rows of dark spots along the sides. On inland waters there's no limit on them. The state record is 2 lb 15 oz, from Shadow Lake in Waupaca County in 1990.

1.4 QUICK ID TABLE

FISH	EAR FLAP	MOUTH	BEST MARK
Bluegill	Solid black	Small	Dark spot at the back of the rear dorsal fin

Pumpkinseed	Black with red-orange spot	Small	Wavy blue-orange cheek lines, bright spots
Green sunfish	Black, pale or red edge	Large, under the eye	Thick body, yellow-white fin edges
Warmouth	Dark	Large, to mid-eye or past	Red eye, dark lines back from the eye, teeth on the tongue
Orangespotted	Dark	Small	Orange spots, tiny size
Longear (release)	Very long and black	Small	Wavy blue face lines, orange belly
Rock bass (not a panfish)	Dark spot	Large	Red eye, rows of dark spots

1.5

SIZE, AGE AND GROWTH

Most bluegill you catch will be 5 to 7 inches. In lakes with plenty of food and enough predators, they reach 9 inches and 12 ounces to a pound. In crowded lakes they can stop growing at 4.5 inches and 2.5 ounces: that's a **stunted** lake, and it's the most common bluegill problem in Wisconsin. Bluegill grow the most in their first five years and rarely live past 10.

Growth depends hugely on the lake. Two real Wisconsin DNR survey results show the range:

AGE	LAKE MARY, MARINETTE COUNTY (2023)	LAKE WISCONSIN, COLUMBIA AND SAUK COUNTIES (2017)
3 years	–	over 6 in
6 years	6.2 in	over 8 in
8 years	8.0 in	–

Lake Mary's growth was average for northern Wisconsin; Lake Wisconsin's was ahead of state averages. From DNR fish survey reports.

So an 8-inch bluegill in a northern lake is likely 7 or 8 years old. It took most of a decade to grow, and one trip can take it out. That is the whole reason Chapter 6 asks you to keep the 7-inchers and let the biggest ones go.

Pumpkinseeds grow to about 2 inches in their first year, start spawning in their second or third, and live 8 to 10 years at most.

1.6
THE RECORDS

RECORD	WEIGHT / LENGTH	WHO, WHERE, WHEN
Bluegill, Wisconsin	2 lb 9.8 oz, 12.0 in	Drew Garsow, Green Bay (Brown Co.), Aug. 2, 1995
Bluegill, live release (length)	11.75 in	Bode Guthrie, Lake Tomahawk (Oneida Co.), May 6, 2026
Pumpkinseed, Wisconsin	1 lb 3.4 oz, 11.125 in	Cooper Kasten, Silver Lake (Washington Co.), May 31, 2020
Pumpkinseed, live release	10.38 in	Robert Schurrer, Silver Lake (Washington Co.), July 3, 2025
Green sunfish	1 lb 9 oz	Thomas Tart, Wind Lake (Racine Co.), Aug. 23, 1967
Warmouth	1 lb 1 oz, 10.5 in	Guy Hall, Eagle Lake (Racine Co.), May 26, 2001
Bluegill, world	4 lb 12 oz, 15 in	Ketona Lake, Alabama, 1950

Wisconsin records from the DNR record fish list, revised September 2026. The world record is as given in the DNR's bluegill leaflet.

1.7
WHAT THEY EAT AND HOW THEY FEED

Bluegill eat small things: insect larvae, insects, zooplankton, fish eggs, algae and plants, and sometimes a tiny minnow. They don't have big teeth; they have brush-like pads that grip, and they **suck food in** rather than biting it. That's why a bluegill bite feels like a tap or a twitch, and why small hooks catch far more of them than big ones.

- **They feed by sight.** Bluegill cruise and pick at anything that catches their eye. Small baits that move a little, then sit still, get eaten.
- **Dawn and dusk are best**, though they feed all day.

- **They move every day.** Bluegill tend to come closer to shore at night and move out to open water during the day.
- **They eat a lot in summer.** In warm months a bluegill can eat up to 35% of its own weight in a week. In winter that falls to about 1%, so winter bites are small and slow.
- **Bug hatches bring them up.** In late June and early July, when mayflies and other insects hatch, bluegill rise and suck insects off the surface with a "pop" you can hear.

They stay in small schools of 10 to 20 fish, often mixed with pumpkinseeds. Find one, and more are close by.

1.8 SPAWNING AND CRAPPIE, IN BRIEF

Bluegill spawn late: males move onto shallow sand and gravel as the water nears 67°F, usually in late May or June, and build colonies of round nests that they guard. Pumpkinseeds start earlier, at 55 to 63°F. Chapter 6 covers the beds in full.

Black and white crappie and yellow perch are panfish too, and share the same daily bag as your bluegill (Chapter 10). Each has its own Lake Sheet guide; this book covers them only where they share water, rules or a fry pan with your bluegill.



CHAPTER 2

WHERE PANFISH LIVE IN WISCONSIN

Bluegill are at the northern edge of their range in Wisconsin, but they live in every corner of it. They were native to the Mississippi and Lake Michigan basins; stocking carried them north into the Lake Superior basin too, so today you'll find them statewide. The real question is not whether your lake has bluegill. It's whether it has **big** ones, and where in the lake they are.

2.1 Almost every lake · **2.2** The counties with the most · **2.3** What kind of lake grows big bluegill · **2.4** Rivers, backwaters and the Great Lakes · **2.5** Stocking

2.1
ALMOST EVERY LAKE

Of the 4,631 lakes with a Lake Sheet on October 10, 2026, the DNR fish survey lists panfish in 4,260, or 92%. Note that the DNR survey lumps bluegill, sunfish, crappie and perch together as "Panfish" with a single abundance label. In most lakes, though, the bulk of that panfish label is bluegill and pumpkinseed.

DNR SURVEY LABEL FOR PANFISH	LAKES WITH A LAKE SHEET
Abundant	540
Common	1,659
Present	2,061

Lake Sheet data from DNR fish survey records, counted October 10, 2026. More lakes are added each week.

"Abundant" doesn't mean big. Many abundant lakes are crowded with 5-inch fish. Use the label to find lakes with plenty of panfish, then use the clues in 2.3 to pick the ones that might grow them large.

2.2
THE COUNTIES WITH THE MOST

The north has the most lakes, so it has the most panfish lakes. The counties where the DNR labels panfish **abundant** in the most Lake Sheet lakes:

COUNTY	LAKES WITH PANFISH IN THE DNR SURVEY	LAKES WHERE PANFISH ARE "ABUNDANT"
Oneida	367	73
Washburn	208	42
Bayfield	245	34
Vilas	500	31
Forest	116	30
Burnett	171	21
Waushara	72	19