

How to choose where to fish today?

When choosing to fish in northern Wisconsin it can be overwhelming with over 15,000 lakes to choose from. So many different opportunities are available whether you want scenery, action, big fish potential or want to get away from people, there are a vast amount of choices. The beautiful thing about northern Wisconsin is that it has these options no matter what you're looking for. As a guide, lake choice is crucial to the success of putting fish in the boat for clients. I've spend unlimited hours on many of lakes in the area, but have narrowed my list down to 28 lakes that I choose from when musky fishing with clients. Each lake serves as a specific purpose whether it be time of year, fish size and structure, wind direction, weather, or just as simple as location.

Where to start:

Do your research before! The Wisconsin DNR website is loaded with information on fish stocking and lake surveys. Use this information to determine which lakes have a good population of fish and which ones are likely to produce big fish based on survey information. For more information there's books in bait stores and online that give lots of insights on just about every lake. Use this information to manipulate where you'll plan to fish given the conditions you're presented with each day.

How to use the information gathered:

The simplest way to start choosing lakes is to put lakes into three categories. Based on size and population of fish on each lake: Choose about 20 lakes you'd like to fish or get to know and put each one in a category below:

1. Low density with big fish potential
2. High density with lots of fish, but not many big fish
3. A combination of some decent fish and a good population

Given the conditions each day presented should manipulate how you choose which lakes to fish each day. If given poor conditions like blue bird skies, post-frontal, high pressure, you're best bet is to choose a lake from option two where you're still likely to have some action even though you're presented with poor fishing conditions. The next day some clouds start to move in, but it's still prefrontal weather. This would be a good day to choose option three which allows you to most likely have some pretty good action, but also have a chance at some respectable fish. The next day a storm is supposed to roll in later in the evening with the whole day supposed to be cloudy, a slight chop on the water, top it off with a full moon, which makes a recipe for perfect fishing conditions. This is the time you hit the big fish potential lakes. This is your best shot at a really nice fish and the best days to fish big fish water. So the weather you're presented with should play a big role in how you decide to choose the lakes you fish and the size of fish you're after.

The other most important factor when choosing lakes to fish is time of year. In springtime, when musky season first opens, it's often better fishing on smaller lakes that have had a chance to warm-up and have the fish feeding, when larger lakes muskies may still be spawning and not looking to feed. Time of year can also affect things such as algae blooms, which happen late summer, turnover in fall, and even ice-up.

The biggest takeaway is to not get set on fishing one particular lake, but to have options for the current conditions you're presented with.