

The successful coexistence of muskie and walleye is being debated with the ongoing stocking of muskie into more Minnesota lakes and the recent change to 54 inch minimum keep size for muskie.

Pelican Lake is a 3,963-acre lake in northern Otter Tail County. We are a General Development lake with about 27 miles of shoreline and about 1000 cabins/homes.

When the pro-muskie crowd says walleye and muskie co-exist together, that is like saying that the lamb and lion coexist together. Obviously the 50 plus inch muskie controls the water compared to a 28 inch walleye. Other smaller fish, bluegill, crappie, bass and even pike are no match for the top predator in the water, muskie.

And true, when a muskie is small, a bigger walleye could eat it. But they do not stay small for very long, growing to over 25 inches by end of their 2nd year. With a 54 inch minimum size, the male muskie never grows big enough to be kept. Only the female muskie gets bigger than 54 inches. With this 54 inch "trophy class" status, the only enemy of the muskie is old age, as most muskie fishermen would never keep a muskie. In fact the Minnesota state record for muskie is only 52 inches, because to claim a new record, the fish must be killed and taken in for official measurement and weight.

Lake of the Woods: this lake has over 305,000 acres of surface water, 75 times bigger than Pelican. It has a natural muskie population that is said to "coexist well" with walleye. But the Lake of the Woods walleye have a size slot where you cannot keep a walleye from 19.5 to 28 inches, and you can only keep (and have a total possession limit) of four total walleye. One of the four walleye can be over 28 inches during some time of the year.

People who fish Lake of the Woods report the ability to usually be able to catch the 19.5 to 28 inch fish, but cannot always bring home their limit under 19.5 inches.

The water clarity on Lake of the Woods is said to be a "couple of feet," of gravy-colored murky water - better for walleye, and less favorable to the site-hunting muskie.

Also the muskie population density on Pelican vs. Lake of the Woods is hard to compare, as after 36 years of stocking Pelican, we still do not have a population estimate from the MNDNR Department of Fisheries.

But I did talk to a fishing guide on Lake of the Woods. He has guided 4-5 days a week, 8-10 hours a day for 41 years. During that time he has caught a grand total of 6 muskie (all under 30 inches) on the fishing lures he was casting. He has never had a muskie take a walleye or other fish off his line.

One of our big concerns on Pelican is the "visible and striking" density of muskie on our lake. With our clear water, water users and fishermen report seeing the 4.5 foot predator fish all the time. 10 years ago a fisherman may see one and/or have it strike a caught fish once a year. Today if you spend 10 hours fishing on our lake you will probably have at least one or several visuals and/or muskie strikes, no matter what type of fish you are pursuing.

The Department of Fisheries may not know what the muskie density is, but we know it is way too high. The muskie is sometimes called the “fish of 10,000 casts,” because it takes that many casts to have a “follow” or to catch one. Well 10,000 casts would typically take about 150 hours, and today’s “never satisfied” muskie fisherman is not working that hard on Pelican Lake. We should not have to put Minnesota Lakes and our other sport fishermen behind the selfish wishes of a few fishermen.

Comparing Lake of the Woods to Pelican is ridiculous because of the difference in size, location, and fishery. Making claims about walleye and muskie coexistence in perfect balance is also subject to debate. Look at the data, talk to all fishermen.

Miltona: Miltona is a 5720-acre lake in Douglas County. It is a “non-native” muskie lake that is stocked with muskie and walleye. Again it is claimed to be another lake where muskie and walleye exist in “balance.” But if you look at the Department of Fisheries’ data for stocking for the past 10 years you find some interesting numbers. On a per surface area basis, Miltona is stocked with walleye at a rate **3 (three) times higher** than Pelican, and the muskie stocking rate is **2.5 times lower** than Pelican. If Pelican had 3 times more stocked walleye, and 2.5 times less muskie, we would probably be happier with our walleye fishing. And again, we are as worried about panfish, crappie, bass, pike, and other sport fishing. Our walleye numbers are trending downward, but are not critical yet. We do not want to become another Mille Lacs Lake.

This is typical of the MNDNR Department of Fisheries and the Muskie Inc. information: most of the pertinent details are not reported. The walleye stocking numbers are typically increased to help a muskie stocked lake “continue to look good for walleye,” and we were told the same basic thing by the Department of Fisheries: “That if the walleye numbers drop, they can always increase them.” We need to ask “At what cost?” Is the “food for muskie” walleye being paid for by the muskie fishermen? No, it is paid for by everyone who buys a fishing license.