

Lake Profile

Crow Wing's Horseshoe (aka Sandbar) trying to turn it around

By Tim Spielman
Associate Editor

Comparing it to a Dr. Frankenstein experiment gone awry might be a bit extreme, but there's little doubt in the minds of state biologists that, in retrospect, a certain Crow Wing County lake would've been better off without the stocking of northern pike 30 to 40 years ago.

Because when that occurred, the northern pike of Horseshoe (Sandbar) Lake near Crosslake shaved off the yellow perch forage base to a degree that limited the availability of food in the lake for years. Even today, fish managers see residual effects. They point to a lack of forage – especially in the form of perch – as the reason why fish numbers aren't near what one would hope.

It was in 1986 that an investigational report by DNR researchers took an in-depth look, in "Fish Community Responses to Northern Pike Stocking in Horseshoe Lake, Minnesota." The report was compiled by biologists Dennis Anderson and Dennis Schupp of the DNR.

They noted changes in abundance, size distribution, and growth rate of walleyes, northern pike, yellow perch, and centrarchids following pike stocking in 1969, '73, and '79.

They wrote: "Predation by pike on 5- to 6-inch perch, which nearly eliminated recruitment of perch to adult sizes, appeared to be a major factor causing a collapse of the perch population."

Back to present. Walleyes are few, pike are numerous but appear somewhat hungry, and largemouth bass numbers are moderate, according to Mike Knapp, the DNR's assistant area supervisor at the Brainerd Fisheries office.

"The lake itself is a really nice lake, if you're not fishing," he says, adding that the water is clear and the beach is mainly sandy.

Throw in a couple of more modern issues, and it's no won-

der few consider it a "destination" lake for angling, he says.

Similar to other lakes in the area, shoreline development has meant the loss of shoreline habitat for fish and other aquatic species. That loss of habitat limits population expansion of several species, and it doesn't enhance the forage base.

"Especially bulrush," Knapp says. "It's hard to get re-established, and it provides great habitat."

The rapid growth of the yellow bullhead population has meant less forage available to the lake's game species.

Gill nets – the primary measure of fish like northerns and walleyes – set by the DNR last year to survey Horseshoe's fish community, caught a total of about 1,430 fish. Of those, 80 percent – 1,140 – were yellow bullheads. Fewer fish were caught in the trap nets, but yellow bullheads constituted the greatest fish

species poundage.

Having more mouths to feed doesn't help matters in Horseshoe, where just two yellow perch were caught in the 2010 survey.

The DNR has attempted in recent years to try to jump-start the perch population. Knapp says the department stocks some adult yellow perch one year every six; about 1,400 adult perch were stocked last year.

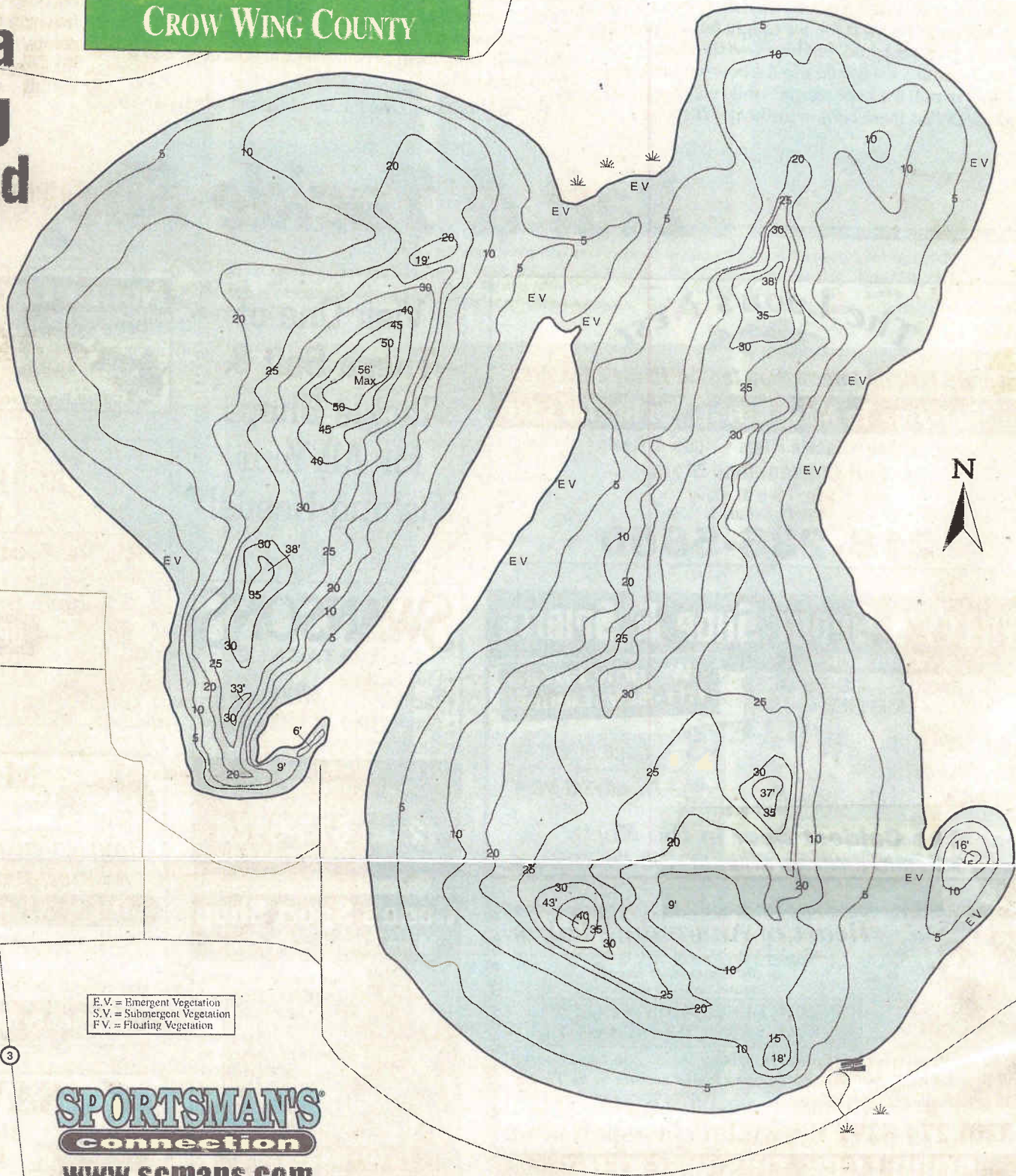
The walleyes caught in 2010 consisted mainly of big fish, continuing a theme common in recent years, and demonstrating little survival of the younger ones.

A few walleye fingerlings continue to be stocked every other year, Knapp says, in hopes of providing a bit of a fishery for anglers who sometimes hop off nearby – and much larger – Pelican Lake when the winds whip up in the Crosslake area.

Bluegill numbers in the lake are still pretty good, but Knapp says a formerly good crappie lake has seen its better days, thanks in part to possible overharvest and habitat (plant) removal.

There are no special fishing regulations for Horseshoe Lake.

HORSESHOE (SANDBAR) LAKE CROW WING COUNTY



E.V. = Emergent Vegetation
S.V. = Submergent Vegetation
F.V. = Floating Vegetation

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Lake Profile

Horseshoe (Sandbar) Lake

Nearest town.....Crosslake
Surface water area.....888 acres
Shore length.....7.6 miles
Maximum depth.....56 feet
Water clarity.....10.7 feet

Fish species present:

Northern pike, largemouth bass, walleye, yellow bullhead, bluegill, black crappie, yellow perch, pumpkinseed sunfish, rock bass.

For information:

DNR area fisheries office (218) 828-2550, the DNR website <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/>

