

Fishing



River Keepers

River Keepers coordinates fishing clinics to teach kids and their families how to fish the Red River.

The Red River of the North provides excellent opportunities for recreational fishing. In this area when recreational fishing is discussed, it usually means a trip to the “lakes” area or a trip to the big waters of North Dakota. However, the Red River has over 70 species of fish and is located right here.

The Red is a “turbid” or muddy river so many people think the Red has poor water quality and therefore is a poor place to fish. But the water quality is actually good. There is room for improvement, as with many of the lakes and rivers in Minnesota and North Dakota. So, with increasing awareness and interest, the future of the Red River and its many fish is bright.

In the United States, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MN DNR) and the North Dakota Game and Fish Department (ND G&F) cooperatively manage the Red River and its tributaries. The two agencies have a long history of working together on its management. Management of river fish focuses on monitoring fish populations, the number of fish harvested, and size of the fish people catch. Various studies are conducted to determine specific aspects of fish population or habitat.

To protect the quality of the Red’s fish population both agencies have cooperatively developed fishing regulations that determine such things as catch limits, season length and license requirements. Both states have these regulations published which can be viewed on the web or by consulting the printed rules books available at area sporting goods stores.

Of the 70 some species of fish in the Red many are familiar to area anglers who fish the area lakes. Familiar species such as northern pike, small mouth bass and walleyes can be found in the Red River. Fast gaining in popularity is the channel catfish. These fish grow slow, live long (24 year old fish have been found) and can

reach weights in excess of 30 pounds. Catfish eat a variety of bottom dwelling insects, crustaceans and forage fish such as minnows and small fish. Catfish spawn in early summer, preferably in root wads and beneath woody debris. Generally the size of “cats” increases as you move down stream.

Referring to cat fishing, the editor of In-Fisherman magazine called the Red a “crown jewel” and a “national treasure”. Fishing for cats in the Red is not only becoming popular locally but nationally and internationally as well. Folks come from all over the world to fish it. As the river flows north it gets wider allowing for better boat use. As a result, the northern part of the valley, including Grand Forks and Winnipeg, are seeing much of that increased fishing pressure. A small industry of cat fish guiding has started to support the interest locally.

Anglers can make a difference in the abundance of fish. Take home a meal or two, but share the resource by releasing other fish you catch. This “selective” harvest helps ensure that others will have the fun of catching fish. Play the fish quickly and remove the hook carefully. Take a camera with you on the next fishing excursion so the large ones can be photographed and released.

Until the early 1900’s lake sturgeon were common in the Red River and several of its tributaries. As the area was settled and developed, rivers were dammed and overfished resulting in a reduction of sturgeon numbers. Red River dams are being retrofitted to make them more fish-friendly. Regulations control the amount of fish removed from the river. So, in the 1990s a stocking program to re-establish the sturgeon in the Red River was started. Since then several thousand sturgeon of various sizes have been stocked. Some of the larger fish have tags. If you catch a fish with a tag, record the number and release the fish. Do not remove the tag. Report the tag number to a MN DNR office. There is no open season for lake sturgeon on the Red River so they must be released.

Some of the material in this sign was obtained from ND G&F and MN DNR’s booklet *Fishing on the Red River of the North*.



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Lake sturgeon being released into the Ottertail River which is a tributary of the Red River.



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Channel catfish is one of the more popular species of fish to try catch in the Red River.