

# Fishing on the Red River



The Red River of the North provides excellent opportunities for recreational fishing. Ask anyone who fishes the Red and you'll hear of the mystique and thrill of never knowing what you might catch. Got a light bite? Could be a small stonecat, a goldeye, or mooneye. Heavy hitter? Could be a 20- plus pound catfish, a 15-pound northern, or a 10-pound walleye.

## Red River Ecosystem

The main stem of the river provides a permanent home for fish and a refuge during winter and dry periods. The network of tributaries provides critical habitats for spawning and rearing young fish. In fact, nearly all fish species in the Red River are self-sustaining and do not require stocking to maintain populations.

The vegetation along the water's edge stabilizes the banks and provides essential habitat for wildlife. Plant materials that fall in the river are important for aquatic insects and other creatures. In addition, large woody debris and snags offer current breaks and structure for fish to ambush prey.

## Water Quality

Although the Red is a turbid river with low water clarity during much of the year, water quality is high. One example of its good water quality can be witnessed when millions of mayflies rise up from the surface in spectacular hatches that look like a summer snowstorm. Such a phenomenon, biologists say, would not happen without high water quality. The water quality is cleaner than about three-fourths of the rivers in the continental United States. However, there is room for improvement, as with many of the lakes and rivers in Minnesota and North Dakota.

## Management and Regulations

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 which forms the border between North Dakota and Minnesota. To protect the quality of the Red's fish population, fishing regulations that determine such things as catch limits, season length and license requirements have been developed. Individuals fishing the Red River in a boat or on the ice who possess a valid fishing license from either North Dakota or Minnesota may fish the river between the banks of the river separating North Dakota and Minnesota. Individuals fishing the Red River on the bank must have a valid fishing license from the state in which they are fishing. An angler is allowed one daily and possession limit regardless of the number of state licenses purchased.

## Fishing Equipment

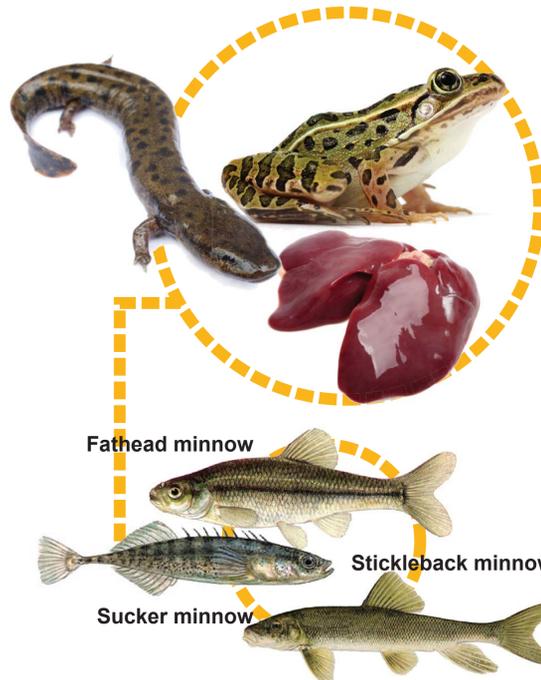
To fish the Red—or one of its many tributaries—you don't need expensive equipment. A hook (barbless hooks back out of human flesh easier) and weight attached to a simple rod and reel with some bait are all that's needed. A good landing net, a tape measure, and a camera round out the equipment needs. Shore anglers might enjoy a comfortable chair and a couple of rod holders while boat anglers need a boat and motor. Skill and patience are usually required to land the big one.

## Bait

Most fishing is done with natural baits such as worms, minnows, leeches, or prepared baits—all fished on or near the bottom.

### Artificial Lures

- Jigs can be used with minnows, worms or leeches, or with any color or pattern of plastic tail and are especially effective for walleye or sauger. Cast and retrieve these jigs, or bounce them near the bottom.

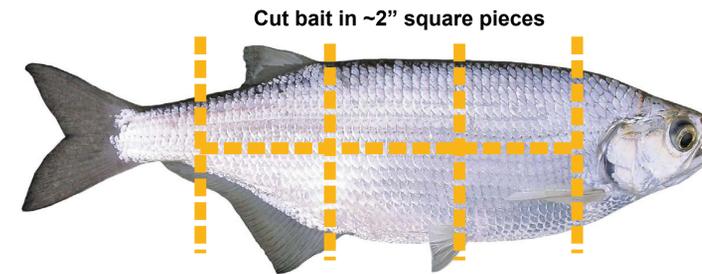


### Live Baits

- Any non-game fish, except carp, may be used as cut bait on the Red River. Only fathead minnows, creek chubs, sticklebacks and white sucker may be used as live bait under ND state regulations.
- Leopard frogs are a hot bait as the water cools in the fall. Toads and salamanders might too. Waterdogs, or mudpuppies, are available in some bait shops and can be used whole or as cut bait.
- Almost any meat/flesh-like substance that smells will work as catfish bait. Chicken liver is a common catfish bait and is readily available. Liver can be wrapped in a piece of nylon stocking or cheesecloth to keep it on the hook and yet allow the scent out.



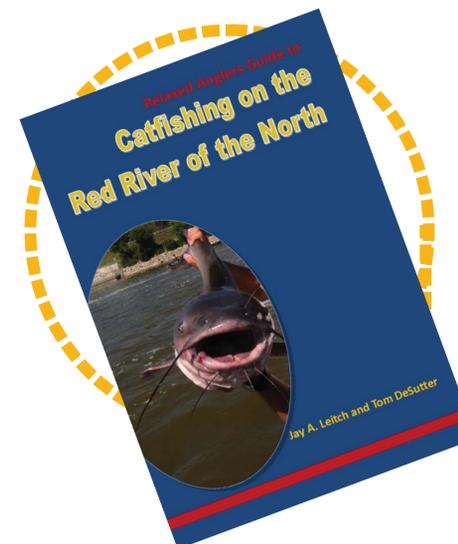
A bent rod and a Red River Channel catfish on the other end.



Cut bait in ~2" square pieces

### Cut Bait

- Whole dead bait fish as well as 'cut bait' are the most common baits used for catching Red River catfish. Goldeye and white sucker are the most common fresh cut bait. Pieces about the size of pickled herring work well, maybe a little larger for the bigger cats. Filet strips four or five inches long also work well. Put fresh bait on about every 20 to 30 minutes, as the river's current washes out the smell.



## Fish Consumption Advisories

Fish, especially large, predatory fish at or near the top of the food chain, can accumulate contaminants in their flesh. As a result, human consumption of wild-caught fish may need to be restricted for health reasons. The principal contaminant in Red River fish is mercury. Mercury in the River comes from both natural and industrial sources. Fish caught in the Red River are safe and nutritious, but be sure to check current fish consumption advisories posted by the Minnesota and North Dakota Departments of Health.

## River Safety

More than one otherwise perfect fishing outing has been spoiled by an unanticipated incident. Perhaps it was just a slight sunburn or twisted ankle, but it could be more serious. Fishing is one of the safest outdoor sports and the Red River is a relatively placid waterway. But, as with any activity, especially one held in the ever-changing outdoors, simple safety precautions can help to ensure that you bring back only good memories.

There are dangerous undertows at lowhead dams, but, all of the lowhead dams in the U.S. portion of the Red, except for Drayton, have been retrofitted with a five percent rock slopeway that has eliminated the hydraulic roller effect that used to occur below the dams.

The banks of the Red River are slippery because of the clay soils. Be extra careful with your steps!

Any moving water body has a current which increases or decreases as more or less water flows through the channel. Areas under bridges, where flow is restricted, may have currents that can move a vessel in unexpected directions. Logs or branches can be just below the surface of the water. Take extra caution not to go over them in your vessel. In addition, if the river is rising, they can be floating down the channel.

## Stewardship

The future of the Red River and its fisheries in your hands.

- Take home a meal or two, but share the resource by practicing CPR (Catch-Photo-Release).
- Use barbless hook or pinch the barbs down with a pliers.
- Promote good land use practices that improve the condition of the river and its tributaries to keep the river healthy.
- Don't let poachers steal your fish and wildlife. If someone is violating a hunting or angling law or hear about a violation, call one of the toll free TIP/RAP (MN Turn in Poachers/ND Report all Poaching) numbers.

## Relaxed Anglers Guide to Catfishing on the Red River of the North

To learn more about the Red River and its fish community, channel catfish, regulations, equipment and bait, bank fishing and boat fishing, tournament fishing, guides and gourmets, and safety buy this book from River Keepers. All of the proceeds from this book go to River Keepers, a nonprofit organization that advocates sustainable use of the Red River primarily in Fargo-Moorhead.



The Red River is home to more than 80 species of fish. Channel catfish can grow to over 30 pounds, walleye as big as 13 pounds and northern pike can grow as long as 45 inches!