

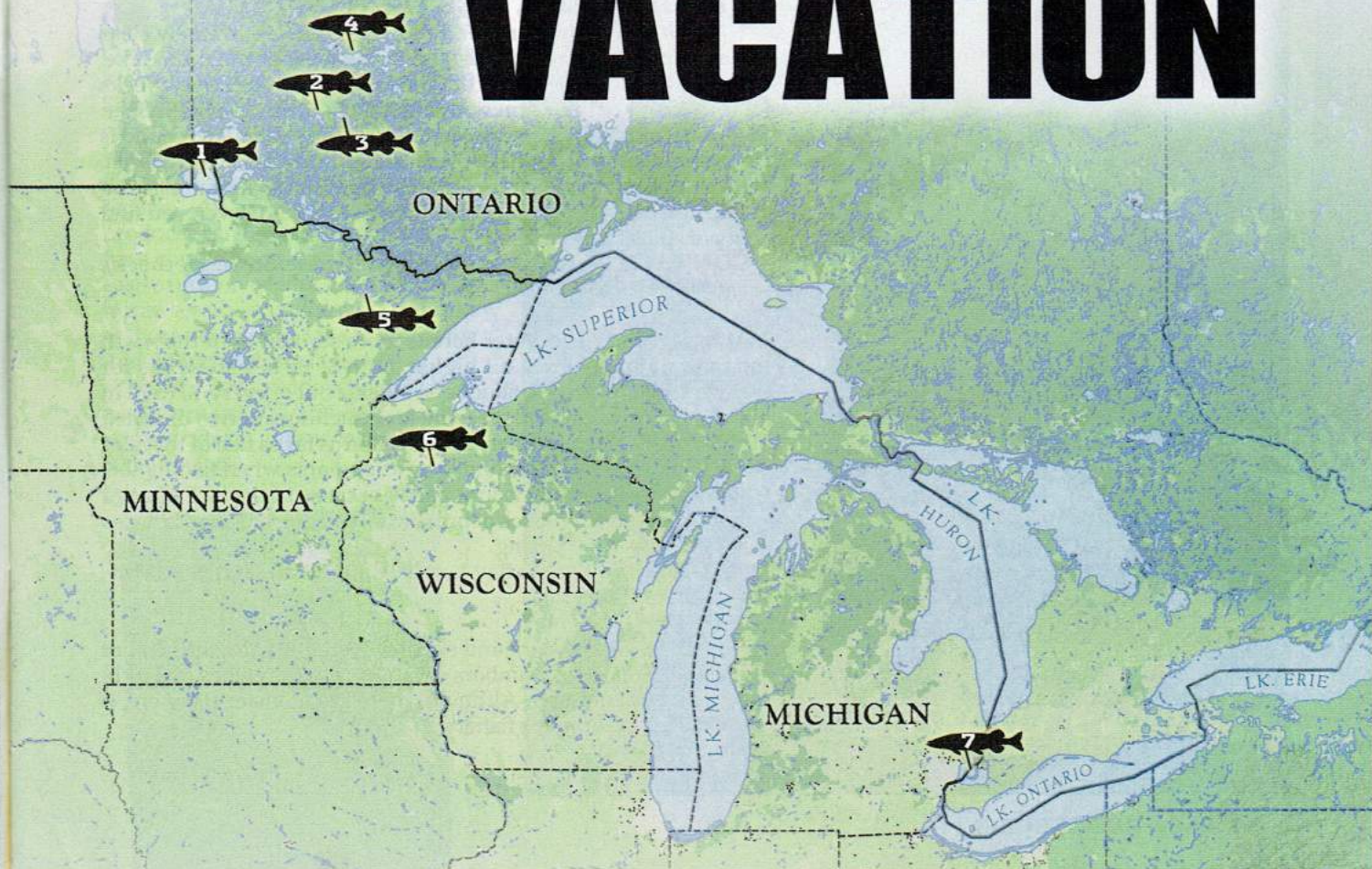
BY SPENCER BERMAN*

AS A FULL-TIME CHARTER CAPTAIN, after speaking with hundreds of clients about their muskie fishing trips, it's become apparent there's a lack of good, credible information about summer vacation destinations for muskie anglers. As a result, many fishermen can spend their trip at a lake that doesn't match their preferred type of fishing. Rookies might end up on trophy water with super low numbers of muskies, or advanced anglers who want a 55-incher might head for a lake where the fish top out at 52 inches.

Throughout my years as a hardcore muskie enthusiast and guide, I've been lucky to fish nearly every muskie

destination discussed below. I also have talked with most of the guides at these locations. Based on my experience, as well as information I've researched about these fisheries, my goal here is to describe each one from the perspective of a muskie fishing vacation. I highlight 10 destinations and the type of fishing they offer. I mainly address the number-of-fish versus size-of-fish question, as well as the "build" of the fish and lake conditions. There are anglers who have done much better or worse than I describe, but what I offer is my opinion of what an average muskie angler who doesn't have good knowledge of the area can expect at each location.

Picking the Right **MUSKIE** **VACATION**



1 LAKE OF THE WOODS

The Northwest Angle and Sabaskong Bay, Minnesota and Western Ontario—This

area of Lake of the Woods and Sabaskong seem to have the best numbers of muskies, with many boats reporting 20-plus-fish weeks on a regular basis. Fishing pressure is increasing, which in the long run could drive numbers down. For now, there seems to be enough fish to go around. It's a great area if you're looking to just catch numbers of fish or are a beginning muskie angler. You can expect 12- to 20-fish weeks, with some fish in the mid-40s to the 50- to 52-inch range, which is typically the top-end size. Mid-50s are rarely caught.

The tannic-stained water grows fish with medium-skinny builds. The spots are easy enough to fish, with plenty of locations available for more experienced anglers.

CONTACT: *Northwest Angle*—Sandy's Black Hawk Island (Guide Bill Sandy), sandysblackhawkisland.com. *Sabaskong Bay*—Mylie's Place Lodge (Guide Justin Gaudry), myliesplaceresort.com, 866/395-3449; Obabikon Resort, obabikon.com, 618/322-4759.

Kenora Waters down to Whitefish Bay, Ontario—If you're looking for monster fish in Lake of the Woods and don't mind working for them, this is a good area



for you. Clear water makes the fishing tough but provides muskies with abundant deep-water high-fat forage to grow giants. Follows tend to come easy with bites tougher to come by. Six- to 10-fish weeks are common. A hot week might bring 20 fish or more, or fewer than four fish if you hit it wrong. This area appeals to trophy-minded anglers and has a reputation for difficult fishing. This limits fishing pressure, but the girth and top-end size of these muskies are amazing.

CONTACT: Moore Bay Lodge, moorebaylodge.com, 807/543-4084; Totem Lodge, totemresorts.com, 807/226-5275.



2 EAGLE LAKE, WESTERN ONTARIO

North End—The north end of Eagle Lake is extremely clear with a couple deep trout holes just to the west of the main lake. Muskie fishing can be tough, but the rewards can be huge. Weeks of 4 to 10 fish are the norm with a good chance a 50-plus-incher. Numerous mid-50-inchers are caught here every year. Their build is impressive, producing some of the fattest summer fish I've ever seen. The area hosts a couple large camps, so the fishing pressure is a bit on the high end. Once you get to know the area, however, you find plenty of spots all to yourself.

CONTACT: Andy Myer's Lodge (Guide Steve Herbeck), andymyerslodge.com, 888/727-5865.

Mid-section—The water here is more stained than the north end, and numbers are a bit higher, with 8- to 14-fish weeks for average anglers. You see about one muskie out of every 10 to 20 in the 50-plus-inch range. But seeing and catching are two different things. Mid-50-inch fish here are common as far as fish of that size go, so you can definitely claim to be after giants when fishing this water. Fishing pressure is low, partly because of the lack of good maps for this area. The lack of pressure offers great fishing, but also can make for scary boating.

CONTACT: Temple Bay Lodge (Guide Brad Jagr), templebay.com, 800/369-3474.

South End—The dark and shallow water on the south end of Eagle Lake has good numbers of muskies with catches of 8 to 16 fish per week common. Although there are monster fish here, it seems to be more of a numbers fishery.



3 WABIGOON, WESTERN ONTARIO

This dark-water flowage near Dryden, Ontario, houses monster muskies. Due to the super-dark water and the fact that it's a flowage, it tends to play much better to anglers who are used to fishing these sorts of systems. An average week produces 6 to 8 fish with a good chance at one cracking 50 inches, and a legitimate shot at a 55-incher. Their build is good. Wabigoon is generally overlooked for muskies. Dark water and the need to fish a lot of sloop tend to make it a sleeper lake.

CONTACT: Merkel's Resort, merkelscamp.com, 888/521-3872; Indian Point Resort, indianpoint.com, 800/888-1891.

4 LAC SEUL, WESTERN ONTARIO

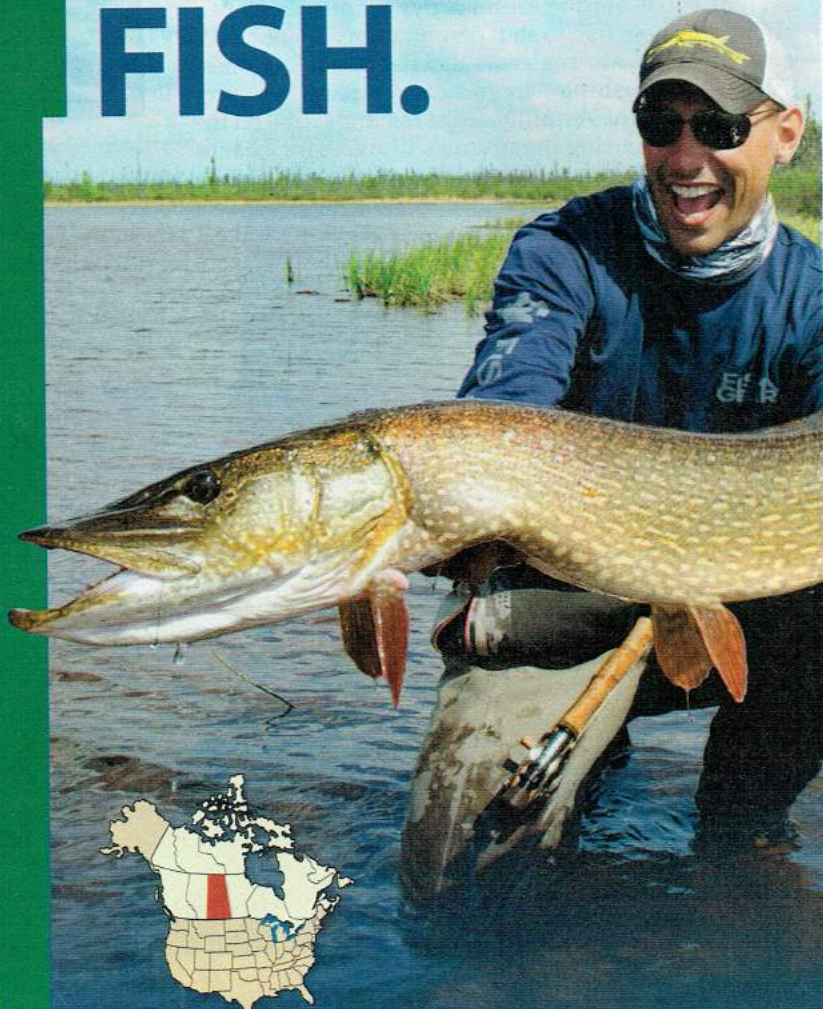
Over the past 30 years, Lac Seul has kicked out the biggest Canadian Shield muskies, with numerous non-official 60-inchers being reported. Water clarity varies but is mostly dark. Fishing is tough, but the rewards can be huge. An average week normally produces catches between 4 to 8 fish for a couple good anglers, but it can easily turn on or shut down depending on weather conditions. The build of these muskies and the potential for mid-50-inch fish are fantastic.

CONTACT: Moosehorn Lodge, moosehorn.net, 977/864-5416; Anderson's Lodge, andersonslodge.com, 800/465-1098.



Huge Lakes.

MONSTER FISH.



Experience Canada's best freshwater fishing.

Find all of our outfitters in Tourism Saskatchewan's 2014 Saskatchewan Fishing & Hunting Guide, available in print or online at FishSask.com/FreeGuides.



FishSask.com/FreeGuides | 1-877-237-2273 | 

Saskatchewan 

5 LAKE VERMILION, NORTHERN MINNESOTA

Vermilion has been the American hot spot for the last couple of years and for good reason. The amount of 50-inch-plus muskies is hard to match, but they are some of the most difficult muskies to catch. Clear water combined with a large amount of fishing pressure has resulted in muskies that are notorious for strong feeding windows with nothing in between. Catch for an average trip is hard to estimate due to the unmatched ability for these fish to shut off and turn on. For a boat of average muskie anglers, 1 to 5 fish a week is a best guess. Night-fishing here is a must during the summer. The build of Vermilion muskies tends to be on the medium side during the summer. Chances for a 54- to 57-incher are good compared to many other destinations.

CONTACT: Spring Bay Resort, springbayresort.com, 800/847-5253; Vermilion Dam Lodge, vdl.com, 800/325-5780; Guide Luke Ronnestrand, Musky Buster Guide Service, 952/807-2947; Guide Bob Benson, Northland Muskie Adventures, northlandmuskieadventures.com, 715/642-2607.



6 HAYWARD, NORTHWESTERN WISCONSIN

This area used to be known as one of the top muskie fishing destinations in the country. With the desire for 50-inch-plus fish being paramount today, however, Hayward has fallen on the back burner for trophy hunters. If you like to fish numbers waters (more abundant and relatively smaller fish), lakes in this area could produce catches of over 20 fish a week. Your chances at 45-inch-plus fish, however, are low. For big fish, this area does have lakes that grow fish to 40 pounds and more, but they are rare. If big muskies are your goal, I suggest hiring a guide because there are few big-fish lakes and they can be difficult to learn, or try elsewhere. But if you want to fish a variety of lakes, easy water to learn on, or are fishing from a small boat, Hayward is a good choice.

CONTACT: Guide Scott Keiper, Keiper's Catch and Release Guide Service, scottkieper.tripod.com, 715/216-0664; Guide Steve Genson, Fish Hunts Guide Service, fishhunts.com, 715/558-3709; Treeland Resort, treelandresorts.com.



Muskie Vacation Quick-Tips

A few things to keep in mind when taking a summer muskie vacation at many of these destinations. First, early in summer target shallower weed areas, and progress toward rock reefs and points as summer wears on and water warms. You can't go wrong packing Musky Mayhem Cowgirls and Musky Innovations Bull Dawgs. Cowgirls cover a lot of water and are efficient baits in shallow weed or rock areas. Another good option by Musky Mayhem is the new Trolling Girl. This lure is a must-have on trolling lakes such as St. Clair, and it's also a great high-speed casting bucktail. The thick blades and the lure's weight pair well with a Shimano Tranx or other high-speed reel.

For non-aggressive fish, the Shallow Bull Dawg oftentimes draws strikes. The standard-weighted Bull Dawg, especially in the Magnum and Pounder sizes, is great for casting deeper edges. If you're looking for a few lures to pick up before your trip, make sure you have these in your box.



7 LAKE ST. CLAIR, MICHIGAN AND CENTRAL ONTARIO

Another body of water on fire right now is Lake St. Clair. This huge, shallow lake pumps out the highest number of muskies anywhere in the muskie world. Either casting or trolling, 5 to 10 fish a day are not only possible but can be the norm under good conditions. My clients and I average around 5.75 fish per day casting and 8 fish per day trolling during the summer. In addition to impressive numbers, this lake also posts very large fish with more 50-inchers being registered by Muskies Inc. of St. Clair than any other lake in the world. In 2012 and 2013, my clients and I boated 125 fish over 50 inches.

The lake does, however, have a few drawbacks. Its huge size and openness can make it rough, with large swells nearly every day. Also, the lack of structure forces anglers to target fish in open water, making fishing difficult for inexperienced anglers or for those who don't have good electronics to locate fish. Although St. Clair has a lot of fish in the 53- to 54-inch range, that's about the top-end size. The lake has never had a 50-pounder registered, and 55-inchers are super rare. The summer build of the muskies here is typically in the medium to medium-skinny range.

CONTACT: Guide Spencer Berman, Spencer's Angling Adventures, spencersanglingadv.com, 419/410-0498; Guide Jason Quintano, Fins and Grins Charters, finsandgrinsmuskiecharters.com, 586/350-0934.



These numbers are what I believe are possible catches for a couple average muskie anglers. Of course, catches vary depending on whether you are new to the sport or if you have in-depth knowledge of the lake and techniques. Hiring a well-qualified guide who has intimate knowledge of these lakes helps put the odds in your favor and cuts down learning time.

Weather and conditions leading up to your trip also play a role. To play it safe, head to one of the higher numbers fisheries. If you want to roll the dice, visit one of more difficult big-fish waters. I've spent a fair amount of time on Lake Vermilion, for example, and have seen an entire tournament field fail to catch a single fish for two straight days. But I've also seen the lake give up a 49-, 51-, and 53-incher in 20 minutes between me and two clients. You never know until you hit the water. ■

*Capt. Spencer Berman, St. Clair Shores, Michigan, runs Spencer's Angling Adventures guide service on Lake St. Clair and the Detroit River. This is his first contribution to In-Fisherman publications.



SOME MOMENTS ARE WORTH HOLDING ON TO.

Fishing Has No Boundaries
June 6-8

Spring Classic Musky Tournament
June 13-15

P.M.T.T. Musky Tournament
June 21-22

Guides/Kids Day
July 10

National Championship Musky Open
August 15-17

Eagle River is a fishing destination like no other. With over 1,300 area lakes, including the world's largest chain of 28 connected lakes, you could fish the Eagle River area every day of the season and never hit the same water twice. Trophy-sized musky, walleye, smallmouth & largemouth bass, northerns and all types of panfish.

EAGLE RIVER
WISCONSIN
Great times come with the territory™

For a free Visitor Guide, including great places to stay, eat and shop, visit EagleRiver.org or call 1-800-359-6315