

# Lake Conservation Notes

Northeast Glacial Lakes Watershed Project  
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## Pickerel Lake

Pickerel Lake has the distinction of being South Dakota's deepest natural lake, and one of the states ten cleanest water bodies. The lake was formed over 10,000 years ago during the Late Wisconsin Glaciations. The lake began as a large block of ice that broke from the main glacier as it was melting. This ice block was buried in an outwash plain covered by sand and gravel carried by water flowing from the melting glacier. As the ice block melted, a large depression formed filling with water to eventually become Pickerel Lake. The earliest evidence of human inhabitants in this area dates to approximately 8,000 years ago, around the time Pickerel Lake formed. In 1933, a single Paleo-Indian skull and projectile points carbon dated at approximately 8,000 years old were uncovered in a gravel pit near Browns Valley, MN. Paleo-Indians were nomadic big game hunters that hunted the large (now extinct) mammals once found on the Northern Great Plains, like the Woolly mammoth. The first native inhabitants of this area to leave abundant archaeological evidence of their presence were the Woodland Indians. Woodland campsites over a thousand years old have been found along Waubay Lake. Approximately five hundred years ago, the first Dakota Sioux reached the area migrating west from Minnesota. Tipi rings denoting historic campsites have been found on hilltops just north of Pickerel Lake. The Dakota Sioux named this lake "Tam-ahe hatchpe", meaning "Catch-long-fish-with-spear". The name was later shortened to Tam-ahe or Pickerel Lake. Joseph Nicollet, a French cartographer, was one of the first white explorers to map and describe northeast South Dakota. Nicollet described the Couteau des prairies as "a plain bejeweled with lakes and dotted with beautiful stands of trees". The explorer camped near Pickerel Lake's south end in August of 1839. On some early maps Pickerel Lake was called Lake Wilson, named after C.G. Wilson, U.S. Surveyor General. Lars Fiksdal reportedly built the first cabin on Pickerel Lake. In 1949, Alice Fiksdal published "Nature Sings at Pickerel Lake", a series of poems about the lakes cultural and natural history.

### Facts & Figures

**Deepest Natural Lake in  
South Dakota**  
**Maximum Depth: 43 ft.**  
**Mean Depth: 22 ft.**

**Ordinary High Water Mark  
(OHWM): 1845.6 ft. msl**

**Highest recorded lake  
levels:**  
**1928: 1848.2**  
**July 1993: 1848.0**

**Lowest recorded lake  
level:**  
**November 1936: 1838.2**

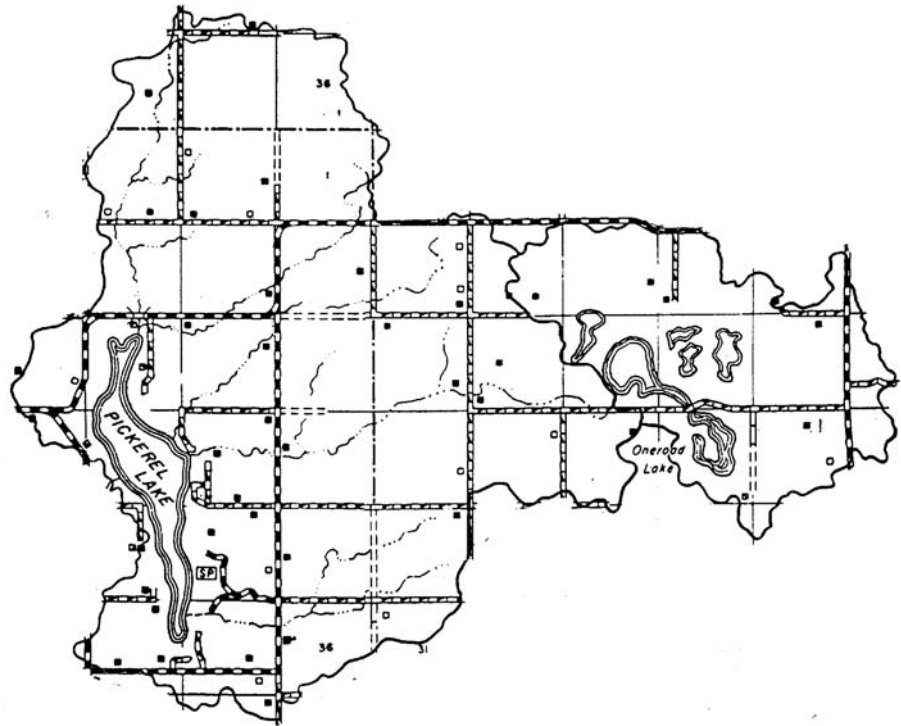
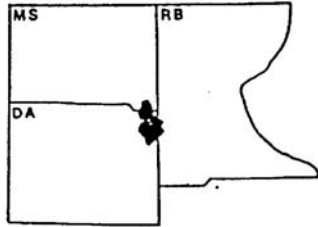
**Average elevation**  
**1928-93: Spring: 1844.8**  
**Fall: 1843.9**

**Outlet elevation: 1844.9**

**Lake Volume:**  
**19,100 acre/ft.**  
**Surface Area: 955 acres**  
**Shoreline: 9.4 miles**

**Watershed: 19,799 acres**

## Pickerel Lake Watershed



## Pickerel Lake Fisheries

Pickerel Lake is classified as a warm-water permanent fisheries lake. Warm-water lakes contain many species of fish whose populations can vary from year to year. Native species of fish probably found their way to Pickerel Lake via tributaries flowing from the large post glacial lakes, Dakota and Agassiz. A survey of Pickerel Lake in 1926 by W. H. Over, of the University of South Dakota, found the following species of game fish; walleye, northern pike, yellow perch, black crappie, black (largemouth) bass, bluegill, silver (white) bass, and black (white) sucker. A complete list of species currently found in Pickerel Lake is provided in the column to the right. In 1927, the South Dakota Dept. of Game, Fish, and Parks opened a fish hatchery on Pickerel Lake. The hatchery first attempted to raise Steelhead trout for release in northeastern South Dakota lakes, but quickly switched to native species when this endeavor failed. The Pickerel Lake State Fish Hatchery provided fry to restock the hundreds of lakes that dried up during the 1930's drought. Pickerel was one of six lakes during the 1930's, which maintained viable fish populations for the hatcheries use. The Pickerel Lake hatchery closed in 1982.

## Current Hook & Line Records from Pickerel Lake

White sucker: 5-lbs. 13 oz, caught by David Green

## Checklist of Fish Found in Pickerel Lake

### Species

Northern Pike  
Common Carp  
Spot-tail Shiner  
Fathead Minnow  
White Sucker  
Black Bullhead  
Brook Stickleback  
White Bass  
Largemouth Bass  
Smallmouth Bass  
Rock Bass  
Bluegill  
Black Crappie  
Walleye  
Yellow Perch  
Logperch  
Johnny Darter  
Iowa Darter