

South Center Lake Chronology

1848: Initial land survey map shows South Center as part of “Big Lake”, along with North Center, North Lindstrom, South Lindstrom, and Chisago Lakes. Lake level was estimated to have been approximately 900 feet due to some of the heaviest rains of record.

1850's: Area was settled mainly by Scandinavian immigrants. Land cover at the time was primarily hardwood forest, which began to be cleared for farmland. Water levels were decreasing during this period.

1865-?: Period of increasing water levels (Typographical error in report makes end of period unclear).

1880: The Taylors Falls and Lake Superior Railroad was completed, bringing additional development and resort customers to Lindstrom and Center City. Fill for the railroad may have limited connectivity between North and South Center lakes.

1891-1910: Increasing water levels due to years of heavy precipitation. Water level was recorded at 902.6 feet in 1910.

1914: Approximate beginning of decline in lake water levels, which lasted until late 1930's

1925-1945: Stocking of various species including crappies, bass, northern pike, walleye, and sunfish. Many of these stockings were in response to low water levels, in the hopes of keeping tourists coming to local resorts.

1930's: Historical low water levels were recorded. An article in the Chisago County Press (May 4, 1933) stated that “The lakes of southern Chisago County during the last fifteen years have dried so rapidly that today thousands of fish are in peril as a result of low water levels.” Various proposals were made during this time for pumping water from other sources. A low water level of 888.6 feet was recorded in 1936.

1933: Widening and paving of the highway that is now U.S. Highway 8 likely affected connectivity between North and South Center Lakes.

1938-1941: Creel survey reported heavy fishing pressure (200 boats on lake during one busy Sunday). South Center had the reputation of being a good fishing lake, with good catches of all species. Combined catch (harvest) per angler hour for all species was above statewide averages.

1942: Initial lake survey. Water was described as “clear”, with a Secchi depth of 12 feet on May 22. 30 cottages, one resort and 112 boats were counted during the survey. Gill netting indicated heavy populations of northern pike and bowfin, and low numbers of walleye and yellow perch. Recommended management actions included primary management for bass/panfish, secondary for walleye, bullhead removal, fingerling walleye and bass stocking, and posting of five spawning areas. These areas were posted from 1944-1951 and 1956.

1946: Walleye fry (500,000) and fathead minnows (27,000) were stocked. Minnows were again stocked in 1947.

1946-1988: Periodic commercial removal of bullhead and occasionally bowfin

1948: A Chisago County Press article dated July 1 stated that a pump, belonging to the Chisago Lakes Association, would be turned on for the first time the following day. The device would pump 1,200 gallons of water per minute from a 602 foot artesian well. (Source: Hackl 2001) It is unclear from available lake files how long the pump remained in use, but a 1973 lake water level study mentioned an existing well between Chisago and South Lindstrom lakes. Since South Center is upstream from these lakes, it is doubtful that this well contributed significantly to increasing water levels in the Center lakes.

1948: DNR Fisheries survey of all 5 Chisago lakes including South Center. At that time they were considered to be one lake with an area of 3,997 acres. The Secchi depth was 5.4 feet (June 17-18). Crappie catches were above state averages. South Center was said to be the best suited of all the lakes for walleye.

1949-1955: Management for northern pike consisted of closing the lake to darkhouse spearing and improving spawning areas with the help of the local sportsmen's club.

1955: Warden creel survey was attempted but apparently did not provide sufficient data for analysis. "Moderately good" catches were reported on all days the lake was visited. One boat livery reported days when 10 or 15 limits of bluegills and crappies were brought in.

1955: First record of aquatic plant control with sodium arsenite. Aquatic plant management has continued on a fairly regular basis to the present time.

1956: (June 28-July 6) DNR Fisheries lake survey. 2 resorts and 146 houses were counted. Recreational development greatly increased from 1942. The survey mentioned possible pollution from pastured cattle on the shoreline. Aquatic plants grew to 10 feet depth, and were abundant. A gradual decline in fishing over previous 10 years was indicated. The lake was classified (ecological and management) as walleye/bass/panfish with northern pike as "secondary predator". It was determined that, due to natural walleye reproduction, no stocking was needed. Heavy fishing pressure was mentioned.

1956: Original lake sounding map was made.

1958-1984: Northern pike fingerling stocking.

1960's: Walleye fry were stocked in 1960, 1963 and 1966, with a small fingerling stocking in 1962.

1964-1967: Winter fish house counts showed an average of 95 fish houses per winter.

1969: DNR Fisheries resurvey (August 18-21). 2 resorts and 216 houses were counted. Walleye fingerling stocking was recommended due to a low gill net catch rate. Fingerlings were stocked periodically from 1969-1974.

1970: State-owned controlled northern pike spawning area began operation.

1972: DNR Fisheries population assessment. First record of golden shiners in the lake.

1973: Lake level recorded at 897.3. A water level study was completed by TKDA Engineers and Architects at the request of the Chisago County Board. The study investigated the feasibility of raising and maintaining water levels in the Chisago chain of lakes through various proposed external water sources. Due to subsequent natural increases in water levels, none of the proposals was ever implemented.

1975: DNR Fisheries resurvey. Water levels were reported to have raised four feet in the spring. 196 houses counted.

1976: DNR Fisheries population assessment, gillnets only. The number of nets used in the final report was only 3 due to problems with bogs and molesting. Water levels reached a peak.

1977-1984 and 1986-1993: Annual walleye fingerling stocking.

1979: DNR Fisheries population assessment, gillnets only.

1979, 1981-1990: Aerial fish house counts, mean 158.

1982: Fisheries population assessment, gillnets only. Noted that anoxic conditions were encountered at shallower depths (17 feet) than in previous surveys. Fishery was described as excellent.

1984: DNR recreational use survey reported 146.8 angler hours/acre of fishing pressure during the summer.

1984: Original Fisheries lake management plan written; called for stocking walleye fingerlings annually at ½ lb/littoral acre, and northern pike 2 out of every 3 years. The plan has been amended and/or rewritten several times to adjust walleye and northern pike stocking plans.

1985: DNR Fisheries resurvey. 276 houses were counted, a 41% increase since 1975. Increased number of cabins (RV's) at resort. Low oxygen levels were noted below 17 feet. First record of curlyleaf pondweed in the lake.

1986: Selected for Governor's bass opener

1986: Historical high water level recorded at 901.7 feet; An outlet ditch was constructed from Chisago Lake to the Sunrise River via Wallmark Lake to set an ordinary high water level of 902.5 feet for the Chisago Chain of Lakes; an additional ditch and drop structure was constructed between Chisago and Green Lakes to allow excess water outflow.

1989: New public access completed.

1990: DNR Fisheries population assessment. Low dissolved oxygen below 13 feet. Highest bluegill catch ever (193.5/trap net).

1994-present: Chisago Lakes Improvement District conducts annual water quality monitoring

1995: DNR Fisheries resurvey. Dissolved oxygen was low below 12 feet. Night electrofishing was used to evaluate the largemouth bass population for the first time. Carp were recorded for the first time in test nets. The area conservation officer noted he had seen carp spawning for the first time in the Chisago Chain of Lakes that spring. The Dew Drop Inn closed, converted to condominiums, leaving only one resort on lake. 298 houses were counted.

1995: Water pump at controlled northern pike spawning area was removed; area allows natural northern pike runs when water is high enough.

1995-2007: Walleye fingerlings stocked in alternate years.

1998-1999 and 2001-2002: Open water and winter creel surveys conducted in conjunction with 1837 Treaty area sampling efforts.

2000: DNR Fisheries population assessment. Oxygen levels were sufficient down to 20 feet in depth, an increase over the previous two surveys.

2003: Northern pike regulation was added on North and South Center Lakes (24-36" slot limit).

2005: U.S. Highway 8 crossing between North and South Center Lakes was modified to allow for better boat navigation between the two lakes.

2005: DNR Fisheries resurvey. 332 houses were counted, up from 298 in 1995. An inlet from Linn Lake had been modified, likely impairing a northern pike spawning run. Walleye spawning conditions reported as poor; gravel shoals were silt laden. Dissolved oxygen was insufficient for fish life below 13 feet in depth.

2008: Designated as a sentinel lake for the Sustaining Lakes in a Changing Environment (SLICE) long term monitoring program.

2009: Eurasian watermilfoil and hybrid watermilfoil first documented in vegetation surveys.

2009: Lowest water level since 1968 recorded on 9/28 at North Center Lake; gauge reading was 894.07.

2009: Walleye fingerling stocking plan changed to annual stocking.

REFERENCES

Hackl, Lloyd, Robert Porter, and Leilani Freeman. *A History of Chisago County, 1851-2001*. Chisago County Historical Society, 2001.

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