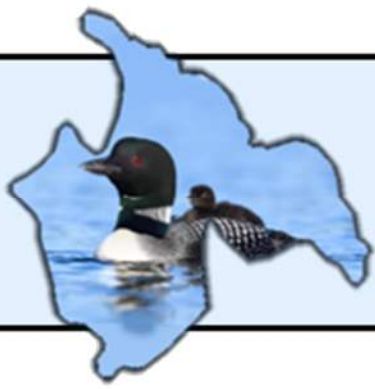




Leech Lake Cottagers' Association NEWSLETTER

Grab your tackle box! This update takes a closer look at what's swimming in Leech Lake, what we know about stocking, and how members can help us keep learning — here's hoping the big one doesn't get away!



Rainbow Trout Stocking in Leech Lake: What We Know

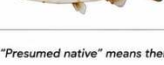
For more than 40 years, the Leech Lake Cottage Association (LLCA) and individual members have supported rainbow trout stocking to enhance recreational fishing on Leech Lake.

In June 2026, oversight of the stocking program was assigned to the Stewardship Committee. The Committee subsequently undertook a review using Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) records, LLCA records, input from subject-matter experts and available scientific information.

The objective was to better understand what fish live in Leech Lake, the history and potential implications of stocking, and what information should guide future decisions.

What Fish Live in Leech Lake?

Available records identify both fish presumed native to Leech Lake and species introduced over time. Their status and role is shown in the chart below.

FISH SPECIES (Scientific name)	STATUS IN LEECH LAKE	HISTORY (Introduced / Stocked)	ECOLOGICAL ROLE IN THE LAKE (Not a value judgment)	NOTES
 Smallmouth Bass (<i>Micropterus dolomieu</i>)	INTRODUCED Not native to the lake.	1922	Predator of fish, crayfish and aquatic invertebrates; now part of the established fish community.	Originally introduced for sport fishing.
 Largemouth Bass (<i>Micropterus salmoides</i>)	INTRODUCED Not native to the lake.	1934	Predator of a variety of fish and aquatic invertebrates; now part of the established fish community.	Originally introduced for sport fishing.
 Rock Bass (<i>Ambloplites rupestris</i>)	INTRODUCED Not native to the lake.	1975	Feeds on insects, zooplankton and small fish; food source for larger predators.	Originally introduced.
 White Sucker (<i>Catostomus commersonii</i>)	PRESUMED NATIVE Likely occurred naturally in the lake.	–	Feeds primarily on bottom-dwelling invertebrates and organic material; in important link between the lake bottom and larger predators.	Occurs in many Ontario lakes and slow-moving waters.
 Brown Bullhead (<i>Ameiurus nebulosus</i>)	PRESUMED NATIVE Likely occurred naturally in the lake.	–	Bottom-feeding omnivore; consumes invertebrates and organic material and is prey for larger predators.	Very common in many Ontario lakes and slow-moving waters.
 Pumpkinseed (<i>Lepomis gibbosus</i>)	PRESUMED NATIVE Likely occurred naturally in the lake.	–	Feeds on insects, small invertebrates and zooplankton; important prey for larger fish and birds.	Commonly called "Sunfish". Often seen around docks and in shallow areas.
 Yellow Perch (<i>Perca flavescens</i>)	PRESUMED NATIVE Likely occurred naturally in the lake.	–	Feeds on zooplankton, insects and small fish; also important prey for larger fish.	Widespread native species in Ontario lakes.
 Slimy Sculpin (<i>Cottus cognatus</i>)	PRESUMED NATIVE Likely occurred naturally in the lake.	–	Cold-water, bottom-dwelling fish; feeds on aquatic invertebrates and is prey for larger fish.	Often found in cold, well-oxygenated waters and along rocky or debris bottoms.
 Rainbow Trout (<i>Oncorhynchus mykiss</i>)	STOCKED Not naturally reproducing.	Stocked	Introduced through stocking to provide recreational angling opportunities; does not naturally reproduce in Leech Lake.	"Put-and-take" fishery.

"Presumed native" means there is no evidence the species was introduced; historical records indicate it most likely occurred naturally in the lake.

Source: Ontario MNR Lake Fact Sheet (2010) and Fish ON-Line (MNR)

These records provide an important baseline, but they do not necessarily tell us the present abundance or distribution of each species.

An MNR fact sheet documents two significant fisheries investigations: one in 1975 and a **Nordic Community Netting assessment in 2005**, which examined fish community composition.

Since the most recent assessment is now more than 20 years old, an important question remains: **What does the fish community of Leech Lake look like today?**

Recent observations provide some additional information. Photos shared by members appear to show brown bullhead, largemouth bass and rainbow trout, while pumpkinseed — commonly called sunfish — can frequently be seen around docks.

Have you spotted other fish species?

Please share photographs and observations on our Facebook page or email

leech.lake.stewardship.committee@gmail.com. If possible, include the date, approximate location and size of the fish.

More Than 40 Years of Stocking

Publicly available Ontario stocking records and records maintained by the LLCA document **14 stocking events between 1983 and 2024, totalling approximately 6,480 fish**, the majority believed to have been rainbow trout.

Rainbow trout are managed in Leech Lake as a “**put-and-take**”. The fish are stocked to provide recreational angling opportunities but are not expected to reproduce successfully and establish a self-sustaining population in the lake.

What We Learned from MNR

The Stewardship Committee contacted MNR to ask about Leech Lake's fish community, the suitability of stocking and the frequency of lake assessments.

MNR advised that:

- **Leech Lake does not have native salmonids (trout or salmon).**
- **The lake has a warm-water fish community, currently dominated by rock bass and smallmouth bass, both of which were introduced.**
- **Not every fish species would be suitable for stocking in Leech Lake.** Water conditions and the existing presence of bass and yellow perch need to be considered.
- **Rainbow trout have been stocked for many years and are not expected to reproduce in Leech Lake.**
- **MNR does not expect the existing rainbow trout stocking program to negatively affect native species.** The Ministry noted that rainbow trout tend to be less competitive than bass and yellow perch in these conditions.

MNR also explained that fisheries monitoring is generally undertaken through **Broad-scale Monitoring** across Fisheries Management Zones rather than through scheduled assessments of every individual lake.

Leech Lake is located within **Fisheries Management Zone 15**, a very large area of central Ontario. Individual lake assessments may be undertaken when a specific resource-management need arises, rather than on a fixed schedule.

Could We Conduct a New Fish Survey?

Given that the last documented fish-community assessment was conducted in 2005, the Committee investigated the possibility of obtaining an updated professional assessment.

Potential funding through the Watershed Resilience Action Program was considered, and an environmental consulting firm was contacted for an approximate cost.

Unfortunately, the estimated cost substantially exceeded the funding potentially available, making a comprehensive professional assessment impractical at this time.

This does not mean monitoring has to stop. Member observations, fishing records, photographs and future opportunities to work with MNR, researchers or other organizations can continue to improve our understanding of the lake.

What About Spiny Water Flea and Other Invasive Species?

Fish stocking is only one consideration in maintaining a healthy lake ecosystem.

Spiny water flea is an aquatic invasive species that can alter a lake's food web by feeding on native zooplankton — the tiny organisms that provide an important food source for young fish.



Its presence can therefore affect the availability of food at the base of the fish community.

Another concern is the movement of invasive species **between lakes**. Boats, trailers, fishing equipment, bait containers and other wet gear can unintentionally transport aquatic organisms.



For Leech Lake, this means that protecting the existing fish community involves more than deciding what fish to stock. **Preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species is also an important part of lake stewardship.**

Lake users can help by following Ontario's **Clean, Drain, Dry** practices when moving boats and equipment between waterbodies and by reporting suspected aquatic invasive species.

Spiny water fleas have been identified from time to time however do not seem to have thrived in our lake. A homegrown netting exercise will be undertaken in 2027. **If you are interested in helping – we'd love to hear from you.**

Different Perspectives on Stocking

There are understandably different views about fish stocking.

Some members are concerned that stocked fish could compete with existing species or alter the food web. Others place considerable value on the recreational fishing opportunities created by stocking. There are also concerns about anglers and other lake users unintentionally transporting invasive species between lakes.

These are legitimate considerations and reinforce the importance of periodically reviewing the stocking program as new information becomes available.

Decision for 2026

The Ministry's comments did not identify concerns that would preclude continuation of the existing rainbow trout stocking program.

After considering the historical information, MNR's advice and the long-standing support of members who have helped fund the program, the **LLCA Executive has decided to continue rainbow trout stocking in 2026.**

This fall, the Association plans to stock approximately **450–500 rainbow trout**, with the total cost not to exceed the approved **\$2,000 budget**. A license to stock has been submitted to the MNR and we are working with the fish supplier to reduce the delivery cost and bring the stocked number from 450 to 500 fish. Delivery date to be determined based on a number of factors. Earliest will be this fall and latest in the spring.

This decision to stock reflects the information currently available and can be revisited as our understanding of the lake improves.



Building a Better Picture of Our Lake

The Stewardship Committee will continue to maintain the historical stocking record and gather information so future decisions can remain grounded in the best available evidence.

Members can help. If you catch or photograph a fish in Leech Lake, please consider providing:

- a clear photograph;
- the date;
- approximate location;
- approximate length; and
- whether the fish was released or kept.

These observations are not a substitute for a scientific fisheries assessment, but over time they can provide useful information about the species being encountered in the lake.

The more we understand about Leech Lake's native species, introduced species, food web and changing conditions, the better equipped we will be to make thoughtful stewardship decisions for the future.

We plan to continue work on a draft **Leech Lake Fish Identification Guide** for release in the spring. We hope this will be an educational and fun document for our community.

Please contact us at leech.lake.stewardship.committee@gmail.com. With any questions or comments.