

Orono Lake is a reservoir in southeast Sherburne County, formed by a dam on the Elk River at the City of Elk River. The lake was drawn down in 1999 to allow dredging of accumulated sediment in selected areas. Adult black crappie and bluegill were stocked 1999-2003 to re-establish the populations. Daytime electrofishing was conducted in spring 2000 and 2003 to survey the fish populations; and trap nets were used in spring 2001, 2002 and 2003 to further evaluate the recovery of the fishery. This survey marks nine years since the draw-down.

The most abundant species in gill nets were black bullhead, shorthead redhorse, white sucker, yellow bullhead and perch. All of these were within the range of expected values for lake class 42 except for shorthead redhorse which were above the normal range. All of these species are common in the Elk River and naturally exist in Orono Lake.

Important sport species such as walleye and northern pike were less abundant but still within the range of expected values and anglers can expect to catch the occasional walleye and northern pike.

Electrofishing in 2008 found many smallmouth bass which ranged in size from 5 to nineteen inches. Largemouth are also present but smallmouth prevail as is the case for the Elk River also.

Overall, catches were light in trap nets. Previous trap net assessments sampled few fish and it is unclear why net catches are low. The most abundant species in trap nets were black crappie and silver redhorse. When bluegill were caught in low numbers in 2003, electrofishing showed that bluegill were caught at a rate of 61.9/hour. These fish should still be present and reproducing.

Black crappie were present in modest numbers and ranged from 5 to 13 inches in size. Anglers can expect to catch an occasional large crappie.

The survey marked the first occurrence of channel catfish. Two small fish less than eight inches were taken in trap nets. Previously, catfish were found below the Orono Lake Dam.

It appeared that most species have recovered from the draw down in 1999. Further stocking does not appear to be necessary.