

## ***2023 Wild Rice Harvesting Season Outlook***

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**3 August 2023**

### **Northwest Minnesota**

- **Detroit Lakes (western Becker County)**

Wild rice stands in the Detroit Lakes work area are average to slightly above this year. Heavy snows last winter refilled lakes and wetlands this spring and low precipitation during early summer has led to optimum growing conditions. Water levels are currently below average, and if drought conditions continue, low water levels will make access challenging. Some rice patches appear dense but may be too short for harvesting. Flowering started in late July, so maturation timing seems typical. As always, scouting will be vital for successful harvesting.

- **Park Rapids (Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard, Wadena, eastern Becker, & northwestern Cass counties)**

Wild rice stands in area lakes are average this year, while river rice and stands in flowages seem to be above average. Some area wild rice lakes have very good rice stands, however a few larger, traditional lakes are below average. A few moderate and timely rain events have created great growing conditions, but the continuing drought may make access difficult. Deeper lakes or rivers may provide the best access conditions. There is quite a bit of variability in local rice development with some stands having been headed out for some time, however ripening in general will likely be later this year. As always, scouting will be essential to find harvestable rice and also gauge accessibility and ripeness.

## Northeast Minnesota

- **Aitkin (Aitkin County)**

Wild rice stands in the Aitkin area are fair to great. Unusually warm days this spring got young plants off growing quickly, and dry weather throughout most of the summer has resulted in dense rice beds on many waters. But some rice lakes were hit by isolated storms, which wiped out parts of the beds. Ricers will want to do some scouting to find the best stands. And as of July 31<sup>st</sup>, water levels on most lakes were high enough to float a canoe. But if the dry weather continues, water levels will continue to drop, and some sites might not be accessible by late August. Harvesters will also need to scout sites for accessibility shortly before harvest time.

- **Brainerd (Crow Wing & southern Cass counties)**

Report as of August 1<sup>st</sup>: The majority of wild rice stands in the Brainerd lakes area look good to excellent this year. Access on most lakes currently looks decent to poor with water levels slightly below normal to normal. The rainfall we have received this year has been mostly small, low intensity events which has been great for the rice. This trend needs to continue to keep the area's drought index from climbing any further, and to maintain reasonable access on most of the popular rice beds. A large or extreme weather event though could still have a detrimental effect on the rice, like we saw in the area last year just a few weeks before harvest. We still have a ways to go till harvest and a lot can happen before then. As always, scouting will be beneficial to those that put in the time.

- **Cloquet (Carlton, Pine, and southern St. Louis counties)**

Most wild rice waters are in average to good condition this year. The few exceptions observed tend to be basins where vegetation competition is the limiting factor of rice development. It is anticipated that the rice crop will be average to good in most places across southern St Louis, Carlton and Pine Counties. The rice growth stage is seasonally a bit behind this year in some places.

- **Grand Rapids (Itasca, Koochiching, and northeastern Cass counties)**

The deep snows of last winter produced high spring water levels that appeared to suppress rice germination early in the season. The later drier conditions helped to turn things around and current conditions have been very favorable to rice

growth. The result has been good rice coverage this year, but the next month will be critical to final rice development and crop success. This time of year, there is a fear of isolated heavy rain, hail and windstorms that can damage or wipe out a rice crop quickly. These damaging isolated weather events appear to be happening more often in recent years. Pre-scouting of rice bed conditions is always a good idea.

- **Tower (northern St. Louis and northern Lake counties)**

Wild rice across the work area is highly variable. Many rivers are average to above average this year, but recent heavy rains have resulted in rising water levels which may make harvesting rice more difficult, unless water levels recede by harvest. Lakes are ranging from poor to average so scouting will be needed. Most rice is standing and has just begun flowering. Big Rice Lake, north of Virginia, has an ongoing Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council-funded wild rice enhancement project occurring. There is sparse to moderately dense rice located throughout the lake.

- **Two Harbors (Cook and southern Lake counties)**

Rice conditions are spotty along the north shore this summer. Some lakes look poor that are usually pretty good, including some larger bodies of water on more recreational lakes. Some area lakes seem to have fared the drought and mid-summer rains better and have denser patches of rice which will be better for picking. The rice is behind this year though, and potentially sensitive to flooding/swamping out because of this. Most areas have flowering rice, some have seed heads forming, but some areas in the northern parts of Lake County and most of Cook County still have a mix of floating-leaf stage rice with some plants emerging and some flowering. Due to recent heavy rains, some rice waters have short plants; it won't be possible to bend the soon-to-be rice stalks into a canoe unless the water level goes down.

- **aerial wild rice survey and 1854 Treaty Authority monitoring reports**

MN DNR Wildlife, the 1854 Treaty Authority, the Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and the U.S. Forest Service work together to conduct an aerial survey of many wild rice waters in northeast Minnesota. The survey is scheduled for late August. Photos will be posted to the 1854 Treaty Authority's [Wild Rice Condition Updates page](#) shortly after the survey. The 1854 Treaty Authority also

provides wild rice updates as information becomes available. That information is also found on the [Wild Rice Condition Updates page](#).

## Central Minnesota

- **Little Falls (Morrison and Todd counties)**

As of the end of July, we have a strong, above average rice crop throughout our historic rice basins.