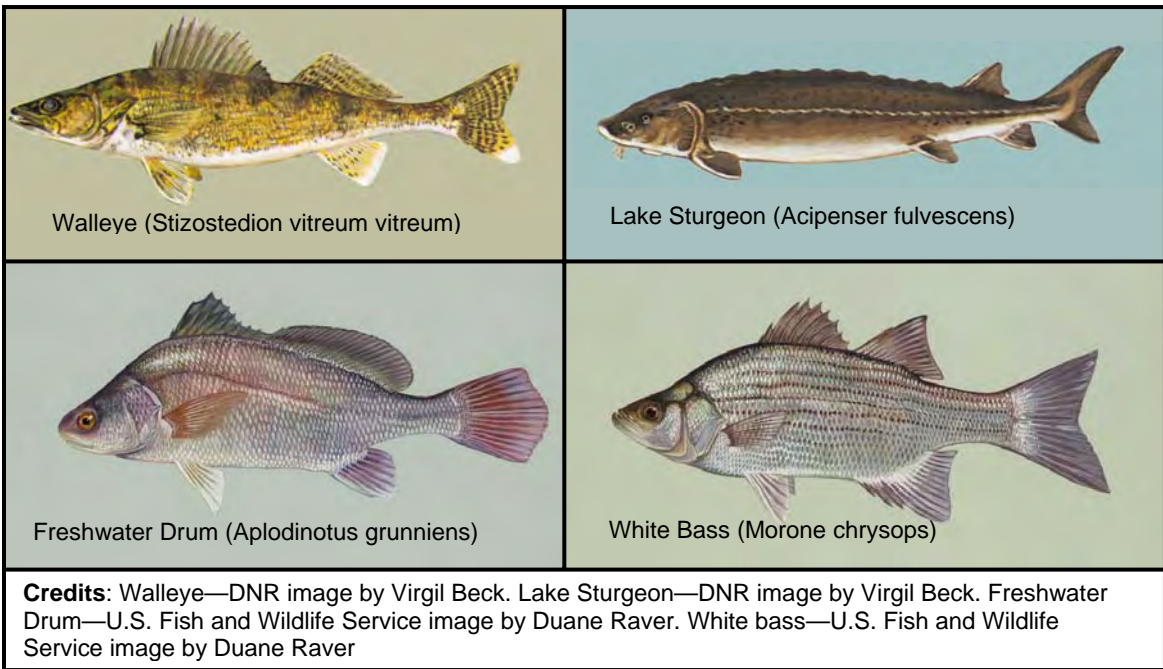


**The** fish community that inhabits the Winnebago Pool is dependent on water quality conditions. The generally eutrophic (turbid, high-nutrient) conditions support a warm water sport fish community. Walleye (*Stizostedion vitreum vitreum*) are one of the most abundant game fish species and the Winnebago Pool is widely recognized as having one of the best walleye fisheries in the United States. Another unique feature of the Pool is the presence of the largest self-sustaining population of lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) in the world. With a population estimated at about 40,000 adults, lake sturgeon are harvested annually through a special spearing season each February.

In terms of sheer numbers, freshwater drum, locally known as sheephead (*Aplodinotus grunniens*) dominate the Pool. The population is conservatively estimated at 30 million fish. The white bass (*Morone chrysops*), the most abundant game fish, is also highly prized by anglers.



The entire Winnebago Pool, including the Upper Fox and Wolf Rivers, is important for the fish community. Many of the fish species that reside in the lakes make their way up the Fox, Wolf, and other tributary rivers for spawning. Extensive spawning areas on or adjacent to the Wolf are extremely important for walleye, sturgeon, and white bass. Much money and effort is directed at protecting and enhancing the spawning grounds for walleye and sturgeon.

The Pool hosts approximately 50 fishing tournaments each year and this number continues to grow. A majority of the tournaments target walleye although the number of bass tournaments is increasing.

Since water quality changes in the Pool occur slowly over time, changes in the fish community will likewise occur slowly. Water quality changes will drive changes in the overall composition of the Pool's fisheries. Species like freshwater drum, carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), and some sucker species prefer more turbid, nutrient-rich water and may decline if water quality improves. Increased water clarity would promote aquatic plant growth which would in turn favor those species, such as panfish, that prefer denser plant growth. Sauger (*Stizostedion canadense*) populations may continue to decline if water quality and clarity improve. The sauger competes with the walleye for food and does better under poorer water clarity conditions. Improved clarity would favor the walleye.

It is important to remember that the Pool is very dynamic and year-to-year variations in conditions play a prominent role in fish populations. For example, Spring water levels in the Fox and Wolf basins are crucial to the spawning success of walleye, northern pike, and sturgeon. Several years of low water levels may do more to impact these populations in the short-term than would long-term water quality changes.

Overall, the fish populations of the Winnebago Pool are healthy but it is important to recognize the impact that water quality and climate changes can and will have for the future. Proactively managing the Pool is crucial to maintaining the long-term health of the fish community.

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For more information on fish in Wisconsin, you can visit one of the following web pages.

Wisconsin Sea Grant Fishes of Wisconsin Database at  
**<http://www.seagrant.wisc.edu/greatlakesfish/becker.html>**

The Fish Identification Database at  
**<http://144.92.62.239/fish/>**

Wisconsin Sea Grant Fish page at  
**<http://www.seagrant.wisc.edu/fish.html>**

The Wisconsin DNR Bureau of Fisheries Management and Habitat Protection page at  
**<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/water/fhp/>**