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Great Lakes State Muskie Hotspots

From Lake St. Clair in the southeast to Thousand Island Lake in the northwestern Upper Peninsula, Michigan has numerous waters where you can fish for muskies. These nine stand out above the rest.

by Matt Driftman

Muskies are not plentiful anywhere. It's not in their nature. *Esox masquinongy* are top-of-the-line predators. Being at the top of the

pyramid means muskies are few and far between in even the best muskie waters. Whereas a good walleye lake supports one or two legal fish per

acre, there might only be one muskie in 100 acres or more. That's one reason why they are so difficult to catch.

The other reason is that they are moody fish. A big muskie might lie dormant for days biding his time until weather, hunger or sheer orneriness suddenly flips a switch — and then no duck, good-sized walleye or 2-pound sucker is safe. Muskie fanatics learn to recognize the variables that dictate when these potential feeding binges are likely to occur and make the most of their time on the water then.

If variety is the spice of life, Michigan's cadre of muskie anglers must think they've died and gone to heaven. The Great Lakes State boasts just about every kind of muskie water you'd want, from scenic rivers and expansive Great Lakes waters to huge natural lakes and impoundments. The variety gives muskie aficionados plenty of options, and just about every one is capable of producing a trophy muskie that could top 50 inches. And you won't find much competition.

If you're a muskie zealot or your angling goal is just to catch a big muskie to put on the wall, here are some waters you'll want to drag an oversized plug in this year.

CHEBOYGAN RIVER CHAIN

"The Cheboygan River chain has a small but stable population of spotted (Great Lakes) muskies," said





PETE MANIA

Department of Natural Resources Grayling District fisheries biologist Steve Sendek. "There are some very large fish in those bodies of water, too." Top muskie waters in the chain include Mullet, Black and Burt lakes, plus the lower reaches of the Black and Cheboygan rivers.

"It's tough to say which is the best," admitted fisheries technician Harold Miller, who works out of the DNR Gaylord office and regularly samples the fish populations in these bodies of water. "Black and Burt are both good. There's not a lot of fishing pressure on either one for muskies, but there are some really big fish in Burt, up in the 50-inch range."

Miller mentioned two time periods that tend to produce the best muskie fishing on the Cheboygan chain. "The best time is in the fall, in late October

and November, and right after spawning in the spring," he said. He added that the muskies move into the shallows well after the pike spawn when the water temperature reaches 50 degrees.

One thing that these Cheboygan County lakes have in common, besides their muskie populations, are their large sizes. Black Lake is the smallest of the three at just over 10,000 acres, and Mullet and Burt each offer more than 16,000 acres of prime muskie habitat.

With so much water to cover, you'd think that speed-trolling Lake St. Clair-style would be the ultimate way to locate active muskies in these lakes, but few anglers try it. Muskie anglers do troll on the north end of Black Lake where the Black River exits the lake, and in the river itself.

But the truth is that Black Lake muskies can be found just about anywhere suitable forage in the form of perch, walleyes or rough fish can be found, so the best tactic is to cover water. For information on lodging in the area, contact the Black Lake Motel at (231) 625-2625.

Muskies are few and far between on Burt Lake, but the fish that are there are huge. Most are the result of natural reproduction, but the lake does occasionally receive a modest plant of muskies. Like Black Lake, Burt Lake muskies can be widely scattered, but good starting points are off Maple and Bullhead bays between Kings and Colonial points. Another likely muskie hangout is between Cedar and Dagwell points along Wauban Beach. You can soak giant suckers under a float, chuck magnum-sized crankbaits