

Fishing Big Bluegills in Metro Area Lakes

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Disclosure: I am CEO and Senior Partner of Fisherbeck LLC, a small entity corporation that has trademarked the name Fisherbeck and has patented the bluegill lure, Fisherbeck Easy Thread jig, called the Gillerbeck. In my descriptions of bluegill fishing in Metro area lakes, I have fished exclusively using the Gillerbeck, baited with wax worms, rarely with leeches, or a one inch white plastic twister tail.

East Metro Bluegill Lakes and Rivers

Hunting big bluegills, the furthest east lake I fish from my home in Crystal (north Minneapolis) is CHISAGO LAKE. I like this lake because the narrows, the area between Chisago Lake and Lake Lindstrom, on the NE part of the lake with a nice boat landing and large parking area, is the first lake to support first ice fishing. With first ice depth of 2-4 inches, you can find nice bluegills from 30 to 100 yards in front or just slightly east of the boat landing. Many of the larger fish will be pumpkinseed, also known as red ear or shell cracker sunfish. There is a good population of large hybrid bluegill/pumpkinseed that school in the narrows. Best depths are 9-12 feet. I always catch some nice crappie incidentally when fishing Chisago Lake. Later in the ice season the south end of the main lake in front of the A frame cottage or further south near the eagle nest tree in 7 to 9 feet will harbor some big bluegills (and crappie, northern and LM bass, the bass must be returned). In the summer, try slowly drifting and jiggging the narrows until you find the big bluegills. Then anchor, cast and jig. The bigger fish take the white twister tail better in the summer. With the boat, I always try the area in front of the A frame just off the thick weeds. Sometimes they are on the SW side of the main lake in 10 to 20 feet. Move around jiggging until you find them. The bluegills will average 7 to 8 1/2 inches and the crappie from 10 to 13 inches. This is a fun lake to fish with the Fisherbeck Easy Thread. It has a heavy growth of Eurasian milfoil so thoroughly clean your boat before leaving the boat landing.

SQUARE LAKE, north of Stillwater is known for big trout and northern and is one of clearest water lakes in the Metro. You will need a park sticker and trout stamp in addition to a fishing license to fish this lake. Surprisingly, there are some really nice big bluegills in Square Lake. I first fished this lake with my granddaughter who did a scientific study of bluegill parasites in lakes of different water quality. We found some really nice bluegills in front of the boat landing and just off the weeds and deep water on both the W and E sides of the lake. When reeling in bluegill, often a big northern will follow the fish to the boat. A couple of years ago I went back to Square Lake to fish northern. Trolling in front of the swimming area in 30 feet of water I caught my biggest northern ever (20 pounds). But it is a kind of secret bluegill (8-9") honey hole.

Late last winter I was informed that some great bluegill fishing could be found in Bayport near a warm water culvert east of Anderson Window factory, which is a backwater of the ST CROIX RIVER. It turned out to be a big bluegill hot spot with nice fish and lots of LM bass to return to the water. When I tried this area with a boat in the summer, I found only a few small perch.

Since that bay in the ST CROIX RIVER had big bluegill, I figured the river must be hiding them. A friend said to try the Wisconsin side of the river across from the power plant. In three hours of fishing the Gillerbeck, casting and jigging the lure in 15 feet of water with a white twister tail, 4 pound test line and ultralight rod and reel which is standard gear for me on open water, I caught 20 big bluegills, 5 nice crappie, 4 drum about 3-4 pounds each, and 5 SM bass (which were released), the biggest over 4 pounds. A day to remember and I will be back after I try the warm water outlet from the power plant.

A lot has been written lately about WHITE BEAR LAKE and how the lake has been losing water with homeowner boat docks now on dry land. When I was last on the lake, it appeared to be 5 to 7 feet below normal water levels. Most of the bluegills have been medium in size. When water levels were normal, I could find a few big bluegills drifting in 10 feet of water on the north end, off the park boat landing. I also found big gills in 10 ft. on the south end of Manitou Island and in 8 to 15 feet of water in the SE basin. Here you had to sort for the big keepers and move frequently using the depth finder. For winter ice fishing, because of springs in the other parts of the lake, you get on the ice from Bellaire Beach. Most of ice fishing is done in the basin W of the island. I found some big bluegills in shallow (7-8ft) water between the ice and weeds. Some 11"-12" crappie were in that water column as well.

The word this past winter was that nice crappie were biting well during the day in BALD EAGLE LAKE just north of the city of White Bear Lake off Hiway 61. I have fished this lake only in summer. After half a day scouting, I finally found some big bluegill and nice crappie on the west side of the lake across from the boat landing in 12 ft. of water casting toward shore and jigging at the end of the cast using the Fisherbeck Easy Thread and a small white twister tail.

Two years ago, one of my favorite lakes for both ice and open water fishing was CENTERVILLE LAKE on Hiway 14 just west of the city of Centerville in the SE corner of Anoka County. Big bluegills were plentiful just off the dense weeds on the north end of the lake. There is a fee for public access from Rice Creek Park off Hiway 14. Ice fishing (free access) was good for really nice bluegills directly E of the boat landing in 15-17 ft. early in the morning. By 9am the bite for big gills was over. Last summer the bluegills were smaller and this winter the fishing was tough with only a few good keepers for a mornings effort.

PELTIER LAKE, directly across the road from Centerville Lake with a large free boat landing is a heavily fished lake that when you find them, has some really bragging size bluegills. Best places to find them is just off the weeds on the W side of the lake and in 10-12 ft. water south of the big island. Last summer, when I could only find a half dozen good keeper bluegills, jigging a white twister tail boated me a nice limit of jumbo perch. Winter ice fishing has always been best for me south of the island and along the NE shore in fairly deep (10-12 ft.) water. Fishing bluegills with a leech, I landed a nice 5# walleye on the Gillerbeck last spring. Peltier is a lake that if you keep at it, eventually you will find the big bluegills and you will be coming back to try it again.

A small lake that is also part of the Rice creek chain of lakes just off Lexington Ave (Hiway 23) in Circle Pines is GOLDEN LAKE. This lake holds both big and medium bluegills. In the summer, the boat launch in the park is shallow and weed choked. I have found it easier to fish from shore near the swimming area

with waders at times (early morning) when no other people are present. A float tube works well to get to the deeper water and to fish the pockets within the weeds. In the winter, sometimes the bigger fish are in the shallow basin off the boat launch and other times you will find them in deeper water N of the point. Be careful on this small lake because there is a powerful aerator that operates all winter. The fun part of fishing bluegills in this lake is that the large and small fish don't seem to mix. If you get into the bigger bluegills, you will likely get a good mess to brag about.

If you are in the mood to travel north in E Anoka County, a good lake to try for big bluegills is LINWOOD LAKE. I have fished this lake only once but had a great time wading along the east shore from the dam and boat landing to the bar covered with rushes. First I went with a fly rod and small poppers and caught a few nice bluegills. Then I waded with an ultralight spinning rod and reel and a Fisherbeck Easy Thread with white twister tail. I went home with more than a dozen 8+ inch bluegills. I'm always thinking of going back sometime with my boat.

Many years ago when I first fished COON LAKE just west of Linwood off Hiway 22 (Viking Blvd), I explored the weedy SW basin and the narrows between the E and W basins. I found only small bluegills. When showing the Fisherbeck Easy Thread to members of Fur, Fin and Feather Club, of which I am an officer, one of the guys suggested I try Coon Lake because he said he caught some nice bluegills off the dock of his home on the NE shore of the lake. So three of us fished the east basin and narrows, but again only small to medium bluegills were caught. The Fisherbeck lure with a white twister tail did produce a basket of 1 to 2 pound LM bass. I'm not convinced Coon Lake is worth your efforts if hunting large bluegills.

SNAIL LAKE in Shoreview was said to have plentiful bluegills by a fellow angler I met while taking my grandson fishing. I have fished this lake only once and I can say there is an abundance of bluegills but very few that would qualify as big. I found a few keepers in the west basin in 8-10 feet of water off the weed lines. I think this lake is worth future exploration.

To get to TURTLE LAKE, take Rice Street further north into Shoreview. This lake is one of the hidden gems for big bluegill and crappie. Turtle lake with its structure and weeds seems to be made for jigging a Fisherbeck lure, either through the ice or off the side of a boat. Most crappie anglers fish the deeper NE part of the lake. I have found very nice bluegills mid-lake off the west shore in 8-10 feet of water where the weeds are just under the surface. Find some holes in the weeds and straight line jig. Sometimes wax worms work best but the crappie can't resist a small white twister tail. Be prepared to catch a lot of LM bass, which must be returned. I generally catch at least one bass for every 3-4 large bluegill. This lake is real tricky to get from the boat launch to the main lake. A large shallow bar is too shallow for even small motors (I have a 4 stroke 9hp motor). I row across these areas. This winter I found the biggest bluegills just under the ice at 9 ft. depth. In the past couple of years, the average size of the bluegills seem to be bigger.

LAKE OWASSO, at the junction of 694 and Rice Street is better known for eating size walleye. I have only fished the east basin off the weed flat in the winter and found lots of small bluegill and perch. I did see an angler with some jumbo perch, but this lake is not high on my list for big bluegill.

LAKE COMO in Como Regional Park, St. Paul, is a small lake with no boat access but is easily accessible with canoe, kayak or float tube from the adjacent parking lot. I have fished this lake several times with my granddaughter when she did a fish parasite study as a science project. The SE weedy bay is full of small bluegills and some fair sized northern. If you use plastics rather than live bait on the Fisherbeck jig, you can find a few medium to large bluegills but be prepared to lose a few jigs to northern pike. Drifting in the middle of the lake, I failed to find any big bluegill but did catch a few keeper crappie.

Just north of 694 off Long Lake road in New Brighton is LONG LAKE. I have been unable to find the bluegills in this lake in the winter. When I can explore the W shoreline on open water, I have found some really nice sized bluegill. It is rare to catch more than a few from one area. I like fishing this lake using the Fisherbeck Easy Thread with wax worms because I usually hook into a big carp or two which put up quite a battle with my ultralight equipment and 4# test line. You can have a really fun time on this lake and have a few large bluegills for dinner as a bonus.

A small, beautiful urban lake in S Arden Hills off Snelling Ave is LAKE JOHANNA. Because this lake is close to several grandkids, I have fished this lake for years. I used it as a test lake when I was testing various designs and colors for the Fisherbeck bluegill lure. This lake is lined with bluegills, mostly small. The MN DNR uses this lake to net bluegills for stocking other MN lakes. After I started fishing the patented Fisherbeck Easy Thread, I found that there were certain areas in the lake that harbored bigger bluegills. My best big bluegill spots are off the point of the E peninsula and just off the weeds of the NE weedy bay. If you cruise the shoreline looking for big bluegill, be prepared to battle some nice LM bass which are plentiful. On Johanna, if you get a big bluegill, anchor. The smaller and bigger gills do not seem to hang out together. The times I have fished this lake in the winter, I found only small perch and bluegill. With a nice boat launch and dock, this lake is a great place to take a kid fishing.

Before I retired, on the way to work I often passed by SILVER LAKE located off Silver Lake Road about a mile south of 694 in Columbia Heights. When my son-in-law, who lived nearby, told me he had heard a neighbor tell him about some big bluegill in the lake, I decided I had better investigate. I first fished from the bridge to the island on the NE part of the lake, accessed from the park. I caught a lot of small black crappie so I then took my grandkids fishing off the bridge, catching and releasing oodles of small crappie. Lots of fun. After I had the design for the Gillerbeck, I took kids fishing by launching the boat at the small steep launch site (free) on the west end of the lake. We had to work to find the bluegills but when we did find them in 10 feet of water just SE of the swimming beach, they were plentiful, but like the crappie, small to medium and not worth keeping. In the past couple of years, Three Rivers Park District has taken over the old church camp and completed a very modern park on the NE part of the lake. I'm still not sure if all those small crappie and bluegill have grown up to be big or not.

A very heavily traveled Hiway 65 (Central Ave) just north of 694 splits MOORE LAKE into two parts connected by a big culvert. The west part of the lake is shallow and choked with weeds and Eurasian milfoil. Some summers, the LM bass and bluegills can be found in patches among the weeds and in shallow sandy areas near the island. Frequent winter kill renders W Moore Lake pretty iffy for big bluegills. The much smaller E Moore Lake has a year round aerator and there is a wide variety of fish species available with bluegill, northern pike and crappie most plentiful. There is no boat launch and it is

illegal to fish from a float tube so a small john boat or canoe is your best bet for open water fishing. In summer the big bluegills will be in 6 to 10 feet just in or just off the dense weeds. Most people, including myself, fish this lake after safe ice in the winter. Really nice big bluegills (8 1/2"+) can be found in 12 to 19 feet of water just E of the culvert and later in the season, in 8-9 feet of water just S of the heavy weeds on the north end of the lake. I have a secret love affair with Moore Lake, not just because of the occasional very large bluegill but because it was on this lake, having arrived from Kentucky 12 years ago, that I first learned how to ice fish. I tell the story with a slide show in "about us" on the web site www.fisherbeck.com. This past winter the deep water bluegills have been much smaller and more difficult to catch. Probably from over-fishing such a small lake. Still, when you are in love with a lake, you gotta fish it.