

# For Fond du Lac Band, walleye take in '17 a tale of two ceded territories

By Javier Serna, Outdoor News, May 12, 2017

Assistant Editor Cloquet, MN. — It wasn't a particularly good spring of fishing for Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa members in 1854 ceded territory.

But the band made up for it in the 1837 ceded territory, particularly on Lake Mille Lacs, this season. The band's total combined harvest of walleyes this year, between the two treaty areas, was 3,866.8 pounds of fish, compared with 3,084.8 pounds of fish last year.

Last year, the band did not take any walleyes from Mille Lacs, despite declaring 3,034 pounds. This year, the band declared 3,227 pounds from the lake, and harvested 2,805.4 pounds, most recently harvesting fish May 1.

But Brian Borkholder, inland fisheries biologist for Fond du Lac Resource Management, said tribal harvest was done for the season.

The 1837 treaty area includes all of Kanabec, Mille Lacs, and Morrison counties, and portions of Aitkin, Anoka, Benton, Chisago, Crow Wing, Isanti, Pine, Sherburne, and Washington counties.

Aside from Lake Mille Lacs, the band harvested walleyes from four other lakes in the territory, despite declaring 16 lakes.

On Green Lake in Chisago County, band members harvested 543 pounds of walleyes out of a declared 1,029 pounds.

"That was the only lake we got any decent harvest from in the 1837 (treaty area)," Borkholder said.

Elsewhere, band members took 58 of 335 pounds from Platte Lake in Crow Wing County, 1

pound of 307 declared pounds from Pokegama Lake in Pine County, 6 pounds of 174 declared from Chisago Lake in Chisago County, and 135 pounds of 263 declared from South Long Lake in Crow Wing County.

The band had even less luck in the 1854 ceded territory, which includes Lake and Cook counties, and portions of Aitkin, Carlton, Pine, and St. Louis counties.

Fond du Lac declared 13 lakes in Cook, Lake, and St. Louis counties this spring, but only harvested fish from Prairie Lake in St. Louis County, where it took 29.8 pounds of 588 declared pounds, and the east side of Lake Vermilion, where it took 288.6 pounds out of 2,500 declared pounds.

Last year, the band harvested 1,757.8 pounds of walleyes from the west side of Lake Vermilion. "It's just the way it is," Borkholder said of this year's Vermilion tally. "That's fishing."

Of the tough year in the 1854 territory, Borkholder blamed the weather.

It warmed up too early on some lakes, and got too cold on others, particularly when a recent ice storm hit Cook County, Borkholder said.

On Vermilion, where harvest was way down from last year, "Our netters just couldn't seem to find the fish," Borkholder said. "We committed to staying out of Pike Bay out of respect for the Bois Forte Band's reservation waters. I suspect that a significant number of the East Basin's walleyes all head there to get their mojo on." The band started harvest on the lake last year as an effort to

spread out harvest in its treaty areas, but that was a year after it pulled back on its plans to start fishing the lake in 2015.

The Bois Forte Band, which has a small reservation on the lake, and conducts a small harvest on its reservation using canoes, had raised concerns over Fond du Lac doing a walleye take on the lake.

The decision to not do a harvest in 2015 also came after there was some political pressure from the state, as the Governor's Fishing Opener was held on the lake — hosted by the Bois Forte Band's own Fortune Bay Casino. That event is put on every year by the state's tourism arm, Explore Minnesota.

The Minnesota DNR has been in discussions with the band regarding its long-term plans for harvest on Lake Vermilion. FdL has declared 2,500 pounds of walleyes from the lake in each of the first two years.

Fond du Lac intends to rotate between the east and west basins every year, to spread out the harvest, and members used spears and nets at night.

The combined safe harvest level for Lake Vermilion, between the state's recreational anglers and tribal anglers, is 64,000 pounds of walleyes.

The Fond du Lac Band harvests game and fish in northeast Minnesota under treaty rights in the 1854 ceded territory. Those rights were upheld in U.S. District Court by Judge Richard Kyle in 1996. That ruling prevents the state from regulating band harvest.