

ABOUT THE EVENT

- This will be the first time in history that Albert Lea will host the Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener.
- The 72nd annual Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener serves as the kickoff to the summer tourism season in Minnesota, and has been a proud Minnesota tradition since 1948.
- The fishing activities for the 2019 Governor's Fishing Opener will take place on Fountain Lake and surrounding area lakes.
- This is Governor Tim Walz and Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan's inaugural Governor's Fishing Opener.
- This non-political event provides the opportunity to showcase fishing and other outdoor recreation—important parts of Minnesota tourism.
- Fishing is a \$2.4 billion business that contributes to a \$15.3 billion tourism industry, one of the largest sectors in the state's economy.
- The Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener will spotlight fishing and the many recreational and travel opportunities in the Albert Lea area.
- The three-day event highlights the Albert Lea area and will reel in great media and travelers alike for a time-honored tradition you'll find #OnlyinMN.
- The **Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener Community Picnic** will be held on Broadway Avenue between Main Street and Fountain Street on Friday, May 10, from 4:30 to 10 p.m. The event is called Hooked on Broadway Community Picnic and Dance and replicates the local summer downtown festival, "Wind Down Wednesday." The picnic is free and open to the public, featuring an array of activities and a free meal for the first 2,500 attendees, with a special performance by the Emerson Avenue Band.
- Governor's Fishing Opener activities kick off on Thursday, May 9, and run through Sunday, May 12, including:
 - Thursday, May 9**
 - DNR Hatchery Open House, 1 to 4 p.m., Waterville (open to the public)
 - Friday, May 10**
 - Various tours and activities for registered guests, 10:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. (registered guests)
 - Kids fishing event with 5th grade students from Halverson Elementary School in Albert Lea, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. (students and registered guests)
 - "Hooked on Broadway - Community Picnic & Dance" on Broadway Avenue between Main Street and Fountain Street, 4:30 to 10 p.m. (open to the public)
 - "Catch a Conversation" casual social for fishing/boat hosts to meet their guests, 4 to 7 p.m., American Legion (boat hosts and registered guests)
 - Saturday, May 11**
 - Opening Ceremony and Official Launch, 8 a.m., South Edgewater Park (open to the public)
 - Blue Zone Walk/Run, 9 a.m. to noon, Fountain Lake (open to the public)
 - Shore Lunch, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., South Edgewater Park (registered guests)
 - Celebration Dinner, 5:30 p.m., Wedgewood Cove Golf Club (registered guests)
- All information relating to this fishing event, story ideas, activities and more can be found at mngovernorsopener.com.

ABOUT ALBERT LEA AREA LAKES

- Welcome to the middle of everywhere. To some, Albert Lea might seem like the middle of nowhere, but to locals, it's the middle of everything we hold sacred. Always in close proximity to nature, there are plenty of places to spend time with family and friends or solo. Whether you're looking to get in a round of golf, scenic bike ride or a nice day hike, the Albert Lea area has a piece of land for all of your favorite activities.
- About 75 minutes south of the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, Albert Lea, known as "The Land Between the Lakes," is nestled between Fountain and Albert Lea lakes.
- The area has 13 lakes, many offering fishing, boating, paddling and more. Nearby, the Blazing Star Bike Trail, Myre-Big Island State Park, Shell Rock River State Water Trail and historic downtown Albert Lea offer additional recreation.
- Albert Lea area lakes offer fisheries where anglers can cast for walleye, northern pike, bluegills, crappies, perch and channel catfish.
- For more information, visit explorealbertlea.com and share your sights on social media using #ExploreAlbertLea.

ALBERT LEA AREA MUST-SEES

- **Fountain Lake Park:** This park offers gorgeous green spaces, beautifully landscaped gardens, a gazebo for special events and fabulous views of Fountain Lake. Fountain Lake Park has been transformed into the heart of the community and plays host to some of the city's most popular events, including the weekly music showcase, "Thursdays on Fountain."
 - **The Fountains:** Three fountains flow throughout the warmer months of the year and are lit at night, creating a favorite spot for area photographers.
 - **Blue Zones Walkway:** Fountain Lake's running path is a community favorite that showcases Albert Lea's year-round scenery. Enjoy lake views as you run, walk or bike through neighborhoods, parks and downtown.
- **Katherine Island & The Mermaid:** This beautiful island is a favorite Fountain Lake fishing spot. Nearby, don't miss the nod to the city's Danish heritage, a loose replica of Copenhagen's Little Mermaid, made famous by Hans Christian Andersen, and perched on a small rock offshore.
- **Historic Downtown Albert Lea:** Albert Lea has been experiencing a decade-long renaissance, which includes the city's historic downtown district. Bask in the beautiful architecture, take in a local show, or grab a cup of coffee and relax with friends. Downtown Albert Lea is home to charming stores and restaurants, from elegant fine dining to classic dive bars. The city boasts one of the largest intact historic districts in Minnesota.
- **Splash Pad:** Albert Lea's newest addition is conveniently located downtown and near Fountain Lake Park. The splash pad features a variety of button-activated water jets and is a hit with kids of all ages.
- **Myre-Big Island State Park:** Located just outside of Albert Lea, this park spans 1,578 acres with 8 miles of shoreline on Albert Lea Lake. The park draws thousands of waterfowl during migration. Oak savanna and prairie landscapes, including wetlands, dominate most of the park, while the 116-acre Big Island is covered with maple/basswood forest. This park is one of the most visited state parks in southern Minnesota and features camping, hiking, canoeing and biking opportunities.

- **The Blazing Star State Trail:** This paved trail, perfect for running, walking and biking, runs 6 miles from Albert Lea Lake to Myre-Big Island State Park. When completed, the Blazing Star State Trail will be approximately 20-miles long and connect Albert Lea and Austin via Myre-Big Island State Park and Hayward.
- **Freeborn County Historical Museum, Library & Village:** Located in Albert Lea, this museum includes a library and village of professionally designed exhibits that define the history of Freeborn County, including Eddie Cochran and Marion Ross exhibits. The village is home to 18 buildings, including a church, log cabin, train depot and more, for visitors to tour. Researchers and history enthusiasts can spend countless hours tracing family history and other historical subjects in the museum's extensive research library.
- **Marion Ross Performing Arts Center:** This historic venue is home to the Albert Lea Community Theatre (ACT), one of the longest-running community theaters in Minnesota for nearly 55 years. In 2008, the building was named after Albert Lea native Marion Ross, a notable actress from the TV show "Happy Days." The Marion Ross Performing Arts Center features many plays, musicals and concerts throughout the year.
- **Edgewater Park:** The largest of Albert Lea's parks, Edgewater Park has an abundance of green space and overlooks Edgewater Bay of Fountain Lake. It has two pavilions and a cottage available for use, all with fireplaces. It also has a public boat landing, a band shell, horseshoe courts, play apparatus, a baseball/softball diamond and a volleyball net.
- **Brookside Boathouse:** During the spring and summer, you can go to the boathouse during open hours to rent a canoe, kayak or paddleboard.

FISHING ALBERT LEA AREA LAKES

- Albert Lea is located in the center of Freeborn County and is known as "The Land Between the Lakes." This area of Minnesota typically has nutrient-rich shallow lakes.
- Within 20 miles, the Albert Lea area is home to 13 lakes (9,422 total acres) managed for angling by DNR area fisheries. Twelve of those 13 have public access ramps and parking.
- Albert Lea area lakes offer a variety of angling opportunities. Anglers can enjoy fishing for largemouth bass, walleye, and nearly everything in between. One of the more unique species in southern Minnesota is Fountain Lake's channel catfish.
- Lakes in the Albert Lea area that are managed specifically for northern pike and yellow perch are Pickerel, State Line, Geneva, Freeborn and Bear.
- Albert Lea Lake is the largest lake in the area at 2,654 acres. Walleye are the most sought-after species on Albert Lea Lake, with the most popular method of bank angling taking place on the channel between Albert Lea Lake and Fountain Lake. Albert Lea Lake also boasts good surveys of northern pike and crappies.
- Fountain Lake is the area's premier fishery, with excellent surveys of walleye, northern pike, channel catfish, crappies and bluegills. Largemouth bass can also provide excellent angling opportunities. Walleye average size is 21 inches. Average northern pike measures 27 inches.

LOCAL FISHING FACTS

- The DNR's Waterville Area fisheries crew operates the Waterville State Fish Hatchery, which is the state's largest cool-water hatchery. Over the last 10 years, the facility averaged 43 million walleye fry stocked every spring, and 1.4 million northern pike fry annually.
- Albert Lea area lakes that have walleye or northern pike are beneficiaries of the Waterville area fisheries office's fish stocking program: If you catch a walleye or northern pike in those lakes, it was hatched at the Waterville State Fish Hatchery. Lakes in the area provide limited spawning habitat, which necessitates the stocking program.
- The Waterville State Fish Hatchery stocks walleye in 40 lakes in its nine-county work area. Hatchery workers stock approximately 35 lakes with northern pike.
- The Waterville State Fish Hatchery staff plans to stock 3.1 million walleye fry in Albert Lea and Fountain Lake, and 550,000 northern pike fry in Freeborn, Pickerel and State Line Lake in 2019.
- Northern pike fishing regulations that began in 2018 remain in place for the Albert Lea area, which is located in the southern zone. Licensed anglers can possess two northern pike; however, they must be a minimum of 24 inches.
- No boat? No problem! The Albert Lea area has a strong tradition of shore fishing. Some of the best opportunities to fish from shore are at Albert Lea's Frank Hall Park, which has the channel connecting Fountain and Albert Lea lakes. Other opportunities in the city include Edgewater, Pioneer, Lincoln and Brookside parks.
- Public fishing piers provide excellent opportunities at Albert Lea, Austin Mill Pond, Beaver, East Side, Fountain, Morin, St. Olaf and State Line lakes.
- Myre-Big Island State Park has excellent angling opportunities that include a handicap-accessible fishing pier. While a vehicle permit is required for entry, no fishing license is required for angling at Myre-Big Island State Park.
- St. Olaf Lake has special regulations on northern pike. The minimum size limit is 30 inches with a possession limit of one northern pike.

IMPORTANCE OF TOURISM TO THE MINNESOTA ECONOMY

- Travel and tourism generate \$15.3 billion in leisure and hospitality gross sales in Minnesota.
- Travel and tourism create jobs in virtually every county of the state. There are more than 270,000 leisure and hospitality jobs in Minnesota, representing 11 percent of the state's private sector employment.
- Leisure and hospitality generate \$969 million in state sales tax (18 percent of the state's sales tax total).
- Annual leisure and hospitality gross sales in Freeborn County (where the event is being held) were more than \$44 million in 2017.
- More than 73 million travelers vacationed in Minnesota in 2016.
- The summer travel season in Minnesota accounts for 37% of travel expenditures.
- Outdoor recreation, including fishing, is big business, and is one of the main draws for visitors to Minnesota. Minnesota is known for its lakes and rivers and fishing opportunities.

IMPORTANCE OF FISHING TO MINNESOTA

- Fishing is a treasured tradition in Minnesota, and a key part of one of the largest sectors of our economy: tourism. The annual Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener spotlights Minnesota fishing and our state's "Minnesota Nice" hospitality.
- Fishing is big business in Minnesota, generating an estimated \$2.4 billion in direct retail sales, ranking Minnesota third in the nation for angler expenditures.
- Minnesota's great fishing is also a great source of employment. Fishing supports nearly 35,500 Minnesota jobs.
- About 500,000 anglers will be out on opening day of the 2019 walleye and northern pike season, Saturday, May 11.
- DNR licenses about 1.4 million anglers, and when you add kids to the mix, about 2 million people wet lines in Minnesota every year.
- The Minnesota DNR manages 4,500 fishing lakes plus 3,800 miles of trout streams and 16,000 miles of fishable streams and rivers.
- Minnesota ranks third in the nation as an inland fishing destination and eighth overall in the number of licensed non-resident anglers.
- Minnesota offers world-class fishing, ranking second in the nation for resident angler participation (32 percent), second only to Alaska.

FIND YOUR TRUE NORTH #ONLYINMN (AT #MNGFO2019)

- Earlier this spring, Explore Minnesota launched an all-new state tourism marketing campaign that invites travelers to "Find Your True North #OnlyinMN."
- True North isn't a direction or place on the map; it's a state of mind. Find Your True North was designed to tell the story of what makes Minnesota stand apart as a unique travel destination, and invites people to have real and meaningful experiences around the state.
- Albert Lea is the Southern Minnesota version of 'Up North.'
- You can find everything you love about the lakes Up North in Southern Minnesota. Albert Lea is an ideal location if you're looking to stay a little closer to home but still want to get away to the lake.
- Find Your True North at exploreminnesota.com, and share your sights using the state's popular travel campaign hashtag #OnlyinMN. The hashtag has more than 1 million uses.
- In conjunction with #OnlyinMN, share your unique Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener event experiences on social media using #MNGFO2019.
- If you can't catch a fish, reel in a photo using #MNGFO2019 and #OnlyinMN.

The 2019 Minnesota Governor's Fishing Opener is coordinated by Explore Minnesota, in partnership the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Albert Lea Area Lakes planning committee.