



Iowa's Top Multi-Species 5 LAKES

BY ROD WOTEN



HAVE YOU EVER had one of those days fishing where you're never sure what species you'll reel in next? Those days where you catch six or seven different species from one lake are truly special and make all those tough days well worth the effort. Of course, in order to have one of those multi-species days, the lake you're fishing needs to have a lot of different species available in it. Luckily Iowa has a few lakes that fit this bill. Give any of the five lakes below a try and you've got a great shot at one of those kinds of days.

#5 — TWELVE MILE CREEK LAKE

This 635-acre gem is one of the hottest lakes in Southwest Iowa, but it hasn't always been the case. In the mid 2000's it had to be drawn down and renovated due to poor water quality caused by an abundance of carp. Since then the lake has bounced back in a big way. The lake now attracts a lot of attention year around for the quality of its fish and the broad

diversity of species swimming in it. For the panfish enthusiast there are black and white crappie, bluegill, green sunfish and yellow perch swimming in its waters. For those that prefer game fish, large and smallmouth bass, walleye and catfish are available to be caught. Just to round things out, 12-Mile anglers also have a shot at catching yellow bullhead. Nearby 3-Mile Lake until very recently rivaled 12-Mile and added muskie,

blue catfish and wipers to the mix. In 2016, however, like 12-Mile it had to be drawn and renovated due to an overpopulation of yellow bass. Keep your eyes on this southern Iowa sleeper though, because in a year or two it will be in the sweet spot that all newly renovated lakes hit when forage is plentiful and restocked fish really start to thrive.

#4 - BRUSHY CREEK

There are LOTS of great lakes in northwest and north-central Iowa...LOTS of them. Many of them have four or five very catchable species to pick from as well. But only a couple have a huge variety of species available to rise to the top of the stack. Brushy Creek is definitely one of those lakes. A different pair of Northwest Iowa lakes will also appear a little later in this piece (hint, hint...). The 690 surface acres that make up Brushy Creek

Lake contains black crappie, bluegill and yellow perch. It's not enough that each of these species swim in Brushy Creek, but the hardcore panfishers have a shot at a trophy specimen of all three! For those that are after trophy game species, Brushy delivers there as well, with legitimate shots at trophy sized largemouth, muskie, walleye and channel catfish. As the name implies Brushy Creek is loaded with lots of standing timber and I believe this is why so many of the species in this lake can grow to trophy sizes. It can be confusing for the angler at times, however making it hard to "see the forest for the trees". Brushy also has shallow water areas that hold fish and very deep-water areas, some as deep as 70 feet, to fish. The anglers that stay on the move until they find the fish they're looking for and fish many different types of structure, depths and cover to figure out what the fish are wanting on any given day are the ones that do the best at Brushy Creek.

#3 - MISSISSIPPI BACKWATERS

If you live on the eastern side of the state, any of the myriad of Mississippi backwaters are your best shot at a multi-species day. The great thing about these backwaters is that any species that swim the waters of The Mighty Mississippi can be caught in these backwaters. Arguably, this may well

be the most species-diverse fishery available anywhere in the state. If I were more of a river fisherman instead of a lake fisherman, this might even make #1 on my list. For those that prefer river fishing, feel free to slide this one into your #1 slot. For game fish you have large & smallmouth bass, muskie, northern pike, walleye, sauger, channel and flathead catfish. For panfish you can choose from bluegills, green sunfish, black and white crappie, yellow perch, and white bass. As if that wasn't enough, you can also catch drum, carp, buffalo, bowfin and gar just to name a few. Some of these backwater areas have decent shore fishing access, but having a boat will give you the best access to all of them.

#2 - SPIRIT LAKE

There's a reason Spirit Lake is considered one of Iowa's Great Lakes. It and several of its very nearby neighbors are some of the largest natural lakes in the state. Spirit Lake alone is a little over 5600 acres! Spirit Lake has some of the best perch and walleye fishing in the state and are the species most Spirit Lake anglers are chasing. Also available in Spirit are black crappie, bluegill, white bass, yellow bass for the panfish fanatics and large and smallmouth bass, muskie, and walleye for gamefish anglers. Like many glacial lakes,

Spirit Lake is relatively shallow, bottoming out at a modest 24 feet. Access to Spirit Lake is also very good with many public boat ramps around its perimeter and several state parks and state recreation areas to give boat access as well as many good shore fishing opportunities.

#1 - EAST/WEST OKOBOJI

The Okobojis are very similar to their next-door-neighbor Spirit Lake in the species available but the similarities end there. East and West fish quite a bit differently than Spirit. Both Okobojis, especially West, are known for their shallow weedy bays. I LOVE this type of fishing and that's why The Okoboji twins edge out Spirit for the #1 slot on my list. There are fish in shallow weedy bay areas on Spirit, but there are so many more of those bays on the Okobojis and they are much better defined. East comes in at just a touch over 1800 acres and West at 3800, so combined they are roughly the same surface acreage as Spirit. Like Spirit, East and West both have very good access for boat and shore fishing with many public ramps, state parks and state recreation areas around their perimeters. West Okoboji also has the distinction of being the deepest lake in the state with a maximum depth over 100 feet. East Okoboji is much more like its neighboring glacial lakes with a maximum depth of 22 feet. For the panfish aficionados, black crappie, bluegill, white bass, yellow bass and perch can be caught. West is very well known for its giant bluegills so it's a great destination if a trophy 'gill is on your bucket list. West is also well known for its "gin-clear" waters that are the result of "West O" being spring fed and the sight fishing opportunities this affords in the winter. For game fish anglers largemouth, smallmouth, muskie, pike, channel cat and walleye are swimming in East and West Okoboji. And for those of you that just can't get enough bullhead fishing, West and East also contain both black AND yellow bullhead.

There are several other lakes in Iowa where you have a good chance of catching three or four species in any given trip, but the lakes I chose for this list go above and beyond that by offering a shot at five, six, seven or even more species on any trip. Don't be afraid to experiment with "alternative" species either. Many of these lakes have species that aren't even officially listed as residing there. Drum, bowfin, carp and suckers are all great examples! A trophy-sized specimen of any of these "undesirable" species will put a bend in your rod as well as any game fish and pull even harder. Besides...you don't have to tell anyone you actually caught any (or all!) of these species. Just tell them that you had a 7-species day on the lake today. You can thank me later. 🎣

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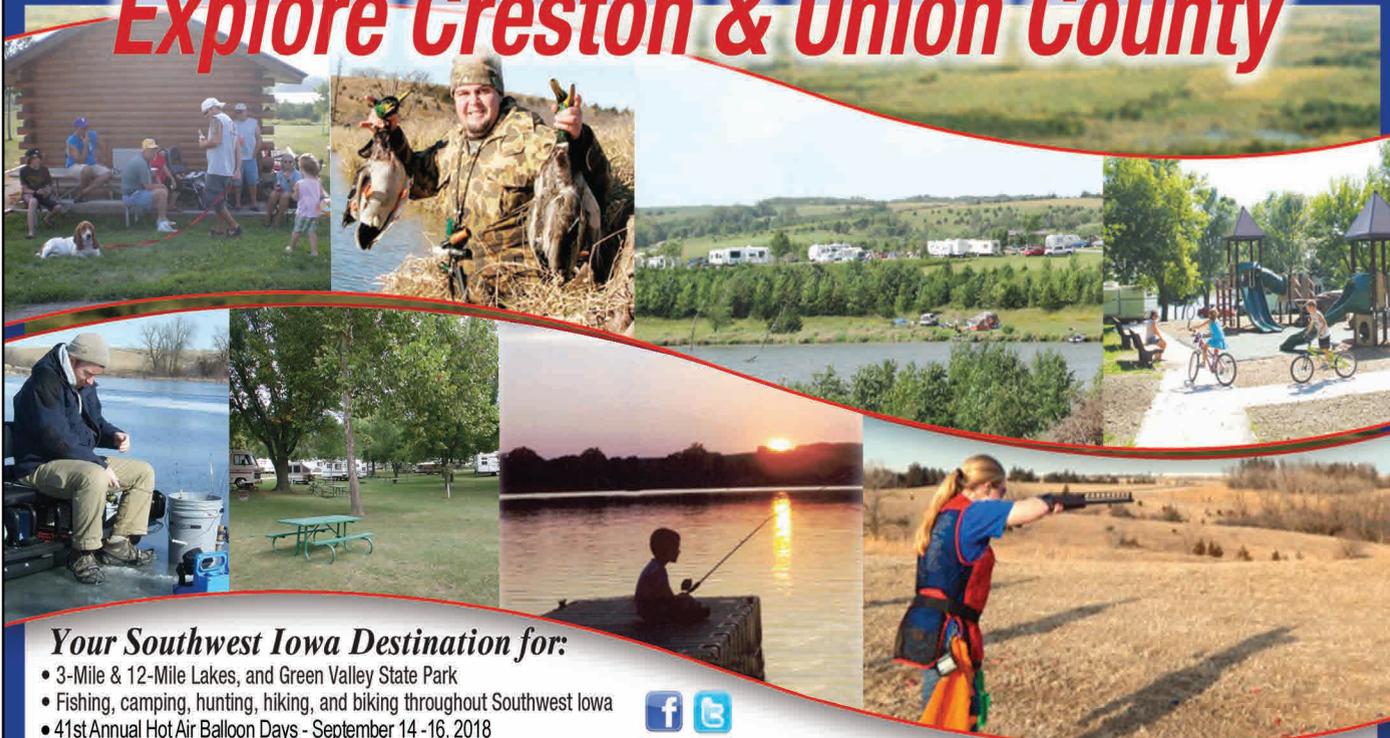
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