

Missing Fish Baffle Biologists

A freakish natural disaster or perhaps something more? You decide...

WHITEHORSE, YUKON—The entire northern pike population of what was once a budding trophy fishery, Watson Lake, mysteriously disappeared over winter 2002, and after a two-year investigation, biologists are still clueless.

During summer 2002, anglers reported catching 1,680 pike on Watson, and keeping 158 of an estimated population of 20,000. But summer 2003 was a different story. Not one angler reported catching a pike on Watson, nor did any show up in an intensive search conducted by Yukon ministry officials. Adding to the peculiarity is the fact the lake's remaining game fish—lake trout, grayling, whitefish and burbot—are doing just fine.

Watson Lake conservation officer Ryan Hennings says he received some reports of dead pike on the surface last spring but couldn't recover any for testing. Biologists report no signs of contamination, noting that a chemical or oxygen imbalance would likely affect other species in the lake. Adding to the mystery, pike populations in a lake draining into Watson Lake remain unaffected.

Reprinted from North American Fisherman, 2004

