

## 2023 Fisheries Management DNR Spring Hearing Questions

### STATEWIDE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROPOSED RULE CHANGES

#### Question 10. Muskellunge statewide season structure

The current Southern Zone (inland waters south of Highway 10/Waldo Blvd) Muskellunge season runs from the first Saturday in May to Dec. 31 (ice angling allowed), and the Northern Zone (inland waters north of Highway 10, Waldo Blvd—excluding WI/MN boundary waters) season runs from the Saturday prior to Memorial Day to Dec. 31 (on open water only--ice angling prohibited). The proposed season structure is an open harvest season running from the first Saturday in May to December 31 on open water only.

This proposal would apply a uniform statewide season structure for Muskellunge in Wisconsin. It would not make changes to existing size and bag limit regulations. It would also eliminate the need for Muskellunge zones and would simplify season structure regulations. It would include an “open water only” component which would change the southern zone rule to no longer allow ice angling for Muskellunge prior to the Dec 31 season closure to address concerns about potential delayed mortality of muskies due to exposure to freezing temperatures. However, in the southern zone, open water occurs throughout most of December.

The management goal is to simplify regulations and to provide additional angling opportunity for Muskellunge in northern Wisconsin. Under the current zonal system there are two separate Muskellunge harvest openers. In the Southern Zone, anglers can legally fish Muskellunge beginning the first Saturday in May, while in the Northern Zone they cannot legally target Muskellunge until the Saturday before Memorial Day. This system has been in place for over 50 years. Common reasoning for the current rule includes protection of fish during the spawn and fear of illegal capture via foul hooking. However, there is a lack of sufficient published research available to support these reasons. Furthermore, studies like Flink et. al. 2021 (*Fisheries*) indicate that angling for naturally reproducing spawning pike (a very closely related species) has had no adverse effects at a population level.

Wisconsin also currently has a year-round catch-and-release season for bass. This season allows anglers to target bass statewide all year long. At times anglers may claim to be fishing for bass while attempting to catch and release Muskellunge, Walleye, or Northern Pike during traditionally closed seasons. Opening the Muskellunge season statewide at the same time as other gamefish seasons would lead to simplified regulations and more angling opportunity.

<b>10. Do you favor implementing a standard season structure statewide (including boundary waters and the Great Lakes) for Muskellunge with opening day of the harvest season beginning the first Saturday in May and extending to December 31 in open water only?</b>	10. Yes_____	No_____	No opinion_____
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**Question 11. Walleye inland waters bag limit**

Walleye, Sauger, and their hybrids are managed with a variety of site-specific regulations throughout Wisconsin, but the current standard outside of the Wisconsin Ceded Territory is a 5-fish daily bag limit for Walleye, Sauger, and their hybrids, with a 15-inch minimum length limit. The 5-fish daily bag limit standard has been in place since 1949, with length limits being more commonly adjusted to manage Walleye and Sauger harvest in the intervening years, notably becoming more restrictive after 1989. The distribution of Sauger in Wisconsin is generally restricted to the state’s large river systems; where Walleye and Sauger co-occur in the state the species are typically managed together under the same bag limit.

In 2015, a region-wide 3-fish daily bag limit was established for Walleye in the Wisconsin Ceded Territory (comprising the northern 1/3 of the state), and more recently, the Winnebago system adopted a 3-Walleye/Sauger daily bag limit. Additionally, all waters in six southeastern counties (Kenosha, Racine, Sheboygan, Walworth, Washington, Waukesha) and two east-central counties (Shawano and Waupaca) have 3-Walleye/Sauger daily bag limits. Many other individual waters outside these areas also have a 3-daily bag limit for Walleye and Sauger.

Recent public opinion surveys and other outreach related to an update of Wisconsin’s Walleye Management Plan found that significant public concern exists about increasing angling pressure and harvest of Walleye in regions where bag limits remain at 5 Walleye/Sauger per day.

This proposal would reduce the standard daily bag limit for Walleye, Sauger, and their hybrids on inland waters from 5 per day (combined Walleye/Sauger/hybrids) to 3 per day (combined Walleye/Sauger/hybrids). Great lakes and border waters would not be included in this change and some may continue to have bag limits that are higher than 3.

<b>11. Do you favor a statewide Walleye/Sauger bag limit of 3 per day on all inland waters? Bag limits for Great Lakes (including Green Bay) and Wisconsin-Iowa, Wisconsin-Minnesota, and Wisconsin-Michigan boundary waters would remain unchanged, as would any water with a bag limit currently lower than 3.</b>	11. Yes_____	No_____	No opinion_____
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**Question 12. Data collection on small fishing tournaments**

The department does not currently require registration of small, unpermitted fishing tournaments, but increases in the number of these tournaments in some regions over the past few years has shed light on the need for additional data from these tournaments. Permits are required for tournaments with 20 or more boats, 100 or more participants, off-site weigh-ins, total prize values over \$10,000, those that target trout, those that allow culling of bass, or those that allow an expanded bag limit. Permitted tournaments are capped by maximum numbers of tournament boat days per month by waterbody size (except for Lake Michigan, Green Bay, Lake Superior, and Lake Winnebago which have no limits), but small tournaments fall below these thresholds and are not tracked by DNR or included in calculations toward monthly caps.

Public reports have pointed to an observed increase in the number of small tournaments and in user conflicts both at crowded boat landings and on the water. State statute authorizes the DNR to promulgate rules that regulate fishing tournaments to control overcrowding, prevent unsafe conditions, and prevent user conflicts. If DNR were to pursue any changes to these regulations, the first step would be to collect information on the number and frequency of small fishing tournaments on Wisconsin waters. A mandatory self-registration system would enable this data collection. If small tournaments cumulatively account for substantial tournament pressure, the DNR may pursue additional regulations including requiring a free, general permit for small tournaments but restricting the total number of tournaments or participants on a waterbody per month. Future proposed regulations would go through the advisory question process after this initial data collection period.

<p><b>12. Would you support the DNR implementing a mandatory self-registration system for small tournaments that could be used to collect data on the number and types of small tournaments and participants across Wisconsin waters?</b></p>	<p>12. Yes_____</p>	<p>No_____</p>	<p>No opinion_____</p>
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**Question 13. Walleye experimental regulation – Lake Wissota and associated waters**

This proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 3 fish and a minimum length limit on Walleye of 13 inches while all Walleye from 16 to 24 inches must be released and only 1 Walleye greater than 24 inches may be kept. This proposal would apply on the following waters in Chippewa, Eau Claire, Rusk, Sawyer and Taylor counties, including connected tributaries up to the first dam:

- Lake Wissota
- Lake Holcombe
- Cornell Flowage
- Old Abe Flowage
- Chippewa Falls Flowage
- Dells Pond
- Jump River
- Flambeau River to the Thornapple Dam
- Chippewa River to the Arpin Dam

The current regulation is a 3 fish daily bag limit, Walleye from 14 inches to 18 inches must be released and only one over 18 inches may be kept.

The management goal is to increase density and size structure of Walleye while allowing for the harvest of relatively larger fish. It is currently not being met due to slow growth and inadequate protection of Walleye greater than 16 inches. Adult Walleye population estimates in Lake Wissota are low compared to other Ceded Territory populations with natural reproduction (generally 3-4 adults/acre) and haven't improved over time, growth rates are poor and haven't improved over time, and size structure is poor and hasn't improved to desirable levels over time. Anglers and stakeholders have expressed displeasure in the lack of "quality" in the fishery.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because it will increase protection of Walleye from 16 inches to 24 inches while allowing harvest of Walleye from 13 inches to 16 inches and one over 24 inches to allow anglers to keep some quality-sized Walleye.

<p><b>13. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 3 fish and a minimum length limit on Walleye of 13 inches while all Walleye from 16 inches to 24 inches must be released and only one Walleye greater than 24 inches may be kept on the waters listed above in Chippewa, Eau Claire, Rusk, Taylor and Sawyer Counties?</b></p>	<p>13. Yes_____</p>	<p>No_____</p>	<p>No opinion_____</p>
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**FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROPOSED RULE CHANGES – ST. CROIX RIVER BOUNDARY WATERS**

**Questions 14. – 20. St. Croix River (Wisconsin-Minnesota boundary waters) game fish regulation changes**

The Minnesota and Wisconsin Departments of Natural Resources are jointly reviewing fishing regulations on the lower St. Croix River from Taylors Falls, MN/St. Croix Falls, WI, downstream to Prescott, WI. Bag and size limits on the border waters have been largely unchanged since the 1940s and 1950s. The last regulation changes in WI/MN waters were in 1990, when minimum size limits were implemented for Walleye (15 inches) and Bass (14 inches). Prior to 1980, Muskellunge and other species not specifically listed with border waters seasons and limits were regulated by the inland regulations of the state in which taken.

Fishing regulations on the river have generally been more permissive (high bag limits, generous season on all species, etc.) than on inland waters of either state. Even though the fishery has held up well, there is concern among biologists and anglers that the fishery may not be able to withstand current and future stressors and high levels of harvest going into the future. The review of existing regulations is an opportunity to be proactive and potentially make adjustments that will protect the quality of the fishery and the fishing opportunities that currently exist. These regulation changes would also attempt to simplify border water regulations by matching the current regulations on the Mississippi River.

**The following fishing regulation proposals in questions 14. to 19. would apply on the Wisconsin-Minnesota boundary waters of the St. Croix River from the St. Croix Falls dam downstream to Prescott.**

**Question 14. St. Croix River White and Yellow Bass regulation**

This proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 10 White and Yellow Bass in aggregate. The current regulation is a daily bag limit of 25 White and Yellow Bass in aggregate. White Bass have historically been managed with generous bag limits in the upper Midwest, much like panfish species that have relatively short life spans and high turnover. However, recent analysis of age and growth has shown that White Bass live much longer in similar rivers than previously thought (up to 15 years) but reach a large size in only 5-6 years and a harvestable size in only 1-2 years. Reproduction and recruitment are also highly variable from year to year. White Bass catch rates have continuously declined in electrofishing

surveys of Lake St. Croix since 2011 at 18.5 fish/mile to 1.03 fish/mile in 2019. This information suggests that managing this species with a high bag limit is not appropriate in the St. Croix River. The management goal is to maintain high catch rates of larger individual White Bass, reduce overall harvest and distribute harvest among a larger group of anglers and simply regulations by conforming to the current regulation on the Mississippi River.

<p><b>14. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 10 and no minimum length limit on White and Yellow Bass combined on the St. Croix River from St. Croix Falls dam downstream to Prescott, WI in Pierce, St. Croix and Polk counties?</b></p>	<p>14. Yes_____</p>	<p>No_____</p>	<p>No opinion_____</p>
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**Question 15. St. Croix River trophy catfish regulations**

This proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 5 Channel Catfish per day and only 1 Channel Catfish may be larger than 24 inches; and a daily bag limit of 2 Flathead Catfish per day and only 1 Flathead Catfish may be larger than 24 inches. The management goal is to increase the abundance of large trophy-sized fish of both species while conforming to the future proposed Minnesota border water and inland catfish regulations which will further simplify regulations. The addition of the 1 over 24-inch size limit will add additional protection to trophy-sized fish (particularly Flathead Catfish) and it may distribute the highly desired “large and trophy-sized fish” among a larger number of anglers.

<p><b>15. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 5 Channel Catfish and only 1 Channel Catfish over 24 inches may be kept, and a daily bag limit of 2 Flathead Catfish per day and only 1 Flathead Catfish over 24 inches may be kept, on the St. Croix River from St. Croix Falls dam downstream to Prescott, WI in Pierce, St. Croix and Polk counties?</b></p>	<p>15. Yes_____</p>	<p>No_____</p>	<p>No opinion_____</p>
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**Question 16. St. Croix River quality Northern Pike regulation**

The proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 3 Northern Pike, however only 1 fish over 30 inches may be kept. This regulation would conform with the current Mississippi River regulations and with proposed Minnesota DNR regulations, thereby simplifying regulations between the states and waterbodies. The management goal is to reduce harvest of larger Northern Pike through the use of a reduced bag or a “1-over” regulation. This may improve available spawning stocks, but the primary effect would be in mitigating the impact of angler harvest on the large/trophy sized population. In particular, it may help to prevent stock depletion during times of the year when fish are concentrated in cool-water refuges during the summer or in overwintering areas.

<b>16. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 3 Northern Pike per day and only 1 over 30 inches may be kept on the St. Croix River from St. Croix Falls dam downstream to Prescott, WI in Pierce, St. Croix and Polk counties?</b>	16. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**Question 17. St. Croix River Walleye and Sauger regulation**

The proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 4 Walleye and Sauger combined with a 15 inch minimum length limit for Walleye and no minimum length limit for Sauger; however, only 1 Walleye or Sauger over 20 inches may be kept. The goal of the reduction in the bag limit is to reduce overall harvest and distribute Walleye and Sauger harvest among a larger number of anglers. The 1 Walleye over 20 inches regulation will allow for increased protection of larger individuals while minimizing the “cropping” effect that can occur with protected slot limits. Decreasing the overall bag limit while using a “1 over” regulation will reduce harvest of larger individuals especially during the pre-spawn period. The regulation will also conform to the current Mississippi River regulations and with the proposed Minnesota DNR regulations, thereby simplifying regulations between the states and waterbodies.

<b>17. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 4 Walleye and Sauger combined per day with a 15 inch minimum length limit for Walleye and no minimum length limit for Sauger, however only 1 Walleye or Sauger over 20 inches may be kept per day on the St. Croix River from St. Croix Falls dam downstream to Prescott, WI in Pierce, St. Croix and Polk counties?</b>	17. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**Question 18. Sustainable St. Croix River panfish regulation**

The proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 15 of each panfish species including 15 Bluegill (sunfish), 15 Crappie and 15 Yellow Perch with no minimum length limit. Sunfish, Crappie and Yellow Perch currently provide good fishing opportunities for anglers that want to harvest fish and those that like to experience high catch rates of quality size fish. These species are important components of the fish community of the St. Croix River. The common goal with the Minnesota DNR is to manage panfish species for sustainable high catch/harvest rates of larger individuals and to distribute overall seasonal harvest among a larger group of anglers. This regulation would conform with the current Mississippi River regulations and with the proposed Minnesota DNR regulations, thereby simplifying regulations between the states and waterbodies.

<b>18. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 15 of each panfish species including Bluegill (sunfish), Crappie and Yellow Perch on the St. Croix River from St. Croix Falls dam</b>	18. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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<b>downstream to Prescott, WI in Pierce, St. Croix and Polk counties?</b>			
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**Question 19. St. Croix River continuous game fish season**

This proposal would apply a continuous open gamefish season for species including Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Northern Pike, Walleye and Sauger, but not including Muskellunge and Lake Sturgeon, on the St. Croix River from the St. Croix Falls dam downstream to Prescott, WI. This would open approximately 50 miles of the St. Croix River to continuous fishing.

The current regulation is a Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass open season beginning on the Saturday preceding Memorial Day through March 1 and an open season for Northern Pike, Walleye and Sauger beginning on the Saturday nearest May 1 through March 1. Currently, no fishing for these species is allowed in March and April on the St. Croix River from the St. Croix Falls Dam downstream to Prescott.

The management goal is to simplify regulations by conforming with the current open gamefish season on the Mississippi River and large tributaries including the Chippewa, Black and Wisconsin rivers and aligning with Minnesota DNR’s implementation of a continuous open season. This would simplify the differing open season dates for different species and would provide additional angling opportunities. However, in light of the increased fishing pressure from surrounding metropolitan areas that may result from a continuous game fish season on the St. Croix River, the Wisconsin and Minnesota DNRs are also proposing to simultaneously reduce the bag limit for walleye and sauger and implement a fish refuge upstream of State Highway 8 in St. Croix Falls, WI (question 20) in order to provide protection to migratory fish during the spring spawning period. The proposed fish refuge from the State Highway 8 crossing in St Croix Falls upstream to the dam in St Croix Falls, a distance of approximately 3/4 mile, would protect fish in key spawning habitat.

<b>19. Do you favor applying a continuous open gamefish season (not including Muskellunge and Lake Sturgeon) to the St. Croix River from the St. Croix Falls dam downstream to Prescott, WI in Polk, St. Croix and Pierce counties?</b>	19. Yes_____	No_____	No opinion_____
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**Question 20. St. Croix River fish refuge**

This proposal would apply a fish refuge from the State Highway 8 bridge upstream to the St. Croix Falls dam each year from March 1 through June 15 on the St. Croix River in Polk County concurrently with Minnesota. The management goal is to protect migratory spawning fish during the critical spawning period in conjunction with the implementation of the continuous open gamefish season. The refuge would be in effect through the day prior to opening day of the Lake Sturgeon hook and line season.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because this will ensure protection of species including Walleye, Sauger, Northern Pike, Muskellunge and Lake Sturgeon during the spawning period to allow them to replenish these fish populations.

<b>20. Do you favor applying a fish refuge to the St. Croix River from the State Highway 8 bridge upstream to the St. Croix Falls dam in Polk county from March 1 to June 15?</b>	20. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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<b>LOCAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROPOSED RULE CHANGES</b>
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**Question 21. Illinois-Fox River fish refuge (Waukesha County)**

This proposal would apply a fish refuge on the Illinois-Fox River from Madison Street in the city of Waukesha upstream to the Barstow dam each year from March 1 through May 1.

The management goal is to protect migratory spawning fish during high vulnerability during the critical spawning period. The Barstow Dam is located in downtown Waukesha and is a very popular angling destination providing excellent shore fishing opportunities for local anglers. Significant numbers of Walleye, Muskellunge and Northern Pike accumulate below the dam during the spring spawning periods. Law enforcement and the Muskellunge Club of Wisconsin has requested this rule change proposal. Annual complaints are received from the public, stating that anglers are targeting gamefish during closed harvest seasons using heavy gear and lures. Recent changes including the bass continuous catch-and-release season have created further complications for conservation wardens when enforcing closed seasons on Muskellunge, Walleye and Northern Pike. Seasonal closure of all fishing through implementation of this refuge will allow consistency for law enforcement and protect pre-spawn gamefish during the critical spawning period of March 1 through May 1.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because this will ensure protection of gamefish species including Walleye, Northern Pike and Muskellunge during the spawning period.

<b>21. Do you favor applying a fish refuge on the Illinois-Fox River in the city of Waukesha, Waukesha County, from Madison Street upstream to the Barstow dam each year from March 1 through May 1?</b>	21. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**Questions 22. – 24. Multi-species biomanipulation regulations – Wilke Lake (Manitowoc County)**

For Wilke Lake in Manitowoc County, this proposal would apply the following regulations:

- Bass - minimum length limit of 18 inches and a daily bag limit of 1 Largemouth or Smallmouth Bass
- Northern Pike - no minimum length limit, 25 – 35-inch protected slot limit with a daily bag limit of 2
- Walleye - minimum length limit of 18 inches and a daily bag limit of 3



The current regulation for bass is a minimum length limit of 14 inches and a daily bag limit of 5 bass in total, the current regulation for pike is a minimum length limit of 26 inches and a daily bag limit of 2 Northern Pike, and the current regulation for walleye is a minimum length limit of 15 inches and a daily bag limit of 5 Walleyes.

The management goal is to provide a balanced panfish fishery with the opportunity to catch 8+ inch Bluegill and provide a quality Northern Pike fishery while allowing some harvest of smaller, slower growing Northern Pike. This goal is currently not being met because of overabundant, slow growing Bluegills that compete with each other for food and habitat resources. Additionally, consistent recruitment and no harvest of smaller Northern Pike has resulted in a moderate – high density Northern Pike population that is dominated by smaller, slow growing individuals. This regulation proposal is one tool that can help meet this goal because it will increase numbers of bass and Walleyes in the lake which will increase predation pressure on small Bluegills. This regulation proposal will also allow for some harvest of smaller, slower growing Northern Pike which aims to reduce densities of smaller fish and improve growth rates of the population. Inadequate densities of predatory fish could be limiting predation on Bluegill, resulting in the high Bluegill densities in Wilke Lake and resulting in poor growth and size structure. Reduced densities of small Bluegills and pike will hopefully improve growth rates and size structure and thus the quality of the fishery. Furthermore, the fastest growing Northern Pike will be protected once they grow into the slot, improving the overall quality of the Northern Pike population in Wilke Lake. This regulation change may also improve the numbers and sizes of Walleye in Wilke Lake.

<b>22. Do you favor applying an 18 inch minimum length limit and daily bag limit of 1 for bass in Wilke Lake, Manitowoc County?</b>	22. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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<b>23. Do you favor applying a 25-35-inch protected slot and 2 fish daily bag limit for Northern Pike to Wilke Lake, Manitowoc County?</b>	23. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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<b>24. Do you favor applying an 18 inch minimum length limit and daily bag limit of 3 for Walleyes in Wilke Lake, Manitowoc County?</b>	24. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**Question 25. Trout harvest regulation – Dell and Beaver creeks (Sauk County)**

For Dell Creek (South Avenue downstream to Coon Bluff Rd) and Beaver Creek in Sauk County, this proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 5 trout in total and no minimum length limit on Brown and Rainbow Trout, however all Brook Trout must be immediately released and only artificial lures may be used. The current regulation is: All trout caught must be immediately released, only artificial lures may be used.

In line with management of these creeks for Brook Trout, the management goal is to increase Brook Trout abundance and size structure, providing a fishery with a mix of ages and sizes where anglers have the opportunity to catch quality and trophy-sized fish. It is currently not being met because harvest of all trout species is currently prohibited in the specified reach of these creeks, including Brown and Rainbow Trout

which compete with Brook Trout for vital resources in the stream. The objectives are to 1) increase total Brook Trout abundance to  $\geq 300$  fish/mile, and 2) increase adult Brook Trout abundance to  $\geq 50$  fish/mile.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because it will protect Brook Trout from harvest while providing anglers with the opportunity to harvest Brown and Rainbow Trout. The “artificial lures only” clause prohibits the use of live bait which can lead to higher incidence of deep hooking and associated mortality, especially in Brook Trout.

<p><b>25. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 5 trout in total and no minimum length limit on Brown and Rainbow Trout, however all Brook Trout must be immediately released, and only artificial lures may be used, to Dell Creek from South Avenue to Coon Bluff Road, and Beaver Creek in Sauk County?</b></p>	<p>25. Yes ____</p>	<p>No ____</p>	<p>No opinion ____</p>
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**Question 26. Trout in native Brook Trout streams – Pine, North Pine and Cady creeks (Dunn, Pierce, St. Croix counties)**

This proposal would apply a regulation of 5 trout in total with no minimum length limit for Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout and all Brook Trout caught shall be immediately released for Pine, North Pine and Cady creeks in Dunn, Pierce, and St. Croix counties. The current regulation is 3 trout in total over 8 inches.

The management goal of these streams is to preserve them as native Brook Trout streams, increase Brook Trout abundance and reduce Brown Trout abundance. Brown Trout have invaded these once exclusive Brook Trout streams and have become the dominant species while Brook Trout populations have declined to historically low levels. The management goal is currently not being met because Brown Trout are overabundant, exhibit a very poor size structure with the majority of fish in the 5-8 inch range, and are in poor condition. The majority of Brown Trout in these streams are protected by the current regulation.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal, as it will allow angler harvest to aid in reducing the abundance of Brown Trout and increase the abundance of Brook Trout. This, in conjunction with the DNR management activities of Brown Trout removal and feral Brook Trout relocation and stocking will aid in restoring the Brook Trout populations within these streams.

<p><b>26. Do you favor applying a regulation of 5 trout in total with no minimum length limit for Brown Trout and Rainbow Trout combined, and all Brook Trout caught shall be immediately released, to Pine, North Pine and Cady creeks in Pierce, St. Croix and Dunn counties?</b></p>	<p>26. Yes ____</p>	<p>No ____</p>	<p>No opinion ____</p>
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**Question 27. Trophy Muskellunge regulation – Wisconsin River (Marathon and Portage counties), waters in the Oconomowoc and Illinois-Fox River watersheds (Waukesha County), Plum Lake (Vilas County), Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and connected waterbodies (Iron and Vilas counties)**

The proposed regulation for Muskellunge is a 50-inch minimum length limit and a daily bag limit of 1 for the following waters where the current regulation is a 40-inch minimum length limit and a daily bag limit of 1:

- The Wisconsin River from Lake DuBay Dam upstream to the first dam in Merrill including Lake Du Bay, Mosinee Flowage, Half Moon Lake, Lake Wausau, Wausau Dam Lake, and all sloughs, bayous, flowages and tributaries upstream to the first dam or highway bridge (Lincoln, Marathon and Portage counties)
- Pewaukee, Okauchee, Oconomowoc, Fowler lakes, Lac LaBelle, and connecting portions of the Oconomowoc River from Lac LaBelle upstream to North Lake (Waukesha County)
- Plum Lake (Vilas County)
- Turtle-Flambeau Flowage, Trude Lake, Bear River, Flambeau River upstream of Turtle-Flambeau Flowage at Murray's Landing, Little Turtle River, Manitowish River upstream of the Flambeau River to the Rest Lake Dam (including Benson, Sturgeon and Vance lakes) (Iron and Vilas counties)

**Wisconsin River and connected waters, Marathon and Portage counties** - Because the Wisconsin River System and all its flowages are large habitats, have a productive forage base, and are classified as A1 Muskellunge water to be managed for trophy fish, the current minimum length regulations should be increased to 50 inches in order to protect Muskellunge from harvest until they reach their full growth potential. A 50-inch minimum length limit would be consistent with downstream trophy musky regulations for the Wisconsin River and would help to simplify regulations for anglers and law enforcement.

**Waukesha County waters** – The management goal is to increase trophy musky angling opportunities in southeastern Wisconsin. This regulation proposal will help meet this management goal by protecting large Muskellunge from harvest on Waukesha County waterbodies with Muskellunge trophy potential. Currently, anglers prefer to go to waters with the potential to catch big Muskellunge rather than waters with the potential to catch many Muskellunge. Additionally, many anglers in this area support catch and release, and very few anglers harvest Muskellunge they catch. All waters in this proposal have excellent trophy potential due to excellent productivity and a diversity of forage species.

**Plum Lake, Vilas County** - The management goal is to provide a trophy musky angling opportunity. This regulation proposal will help meet that management goal by protecting large Muskellunge from harvest. Muskellunge anglers have expressed interest in increasing the number of trophy potential waters in Vilas County.

**Turtle-Flambeau Flowage and connected waters, Iron and Vilas counties** - The management goal is to provide a Muskellunge fishery with a low density and a quality size structure that provides trophy opportunities. Under the present regulation, both adult density and adult size structure are narrowly meeting management goals. However, given the expansive habitats, diverse forage base, and ultimate growth potential in these waters, the current minimum length regulation should be increased to 50 inches to protect Muskellunge from harvest until they reach their full growth potential, thereby maintaining adult density, enhancing size structure, and improving trophy potential. This will also help meet objectives in the 2007 Turtle-Flambeau Fishery Management Plan.

<b>27. Do you favor a minimum length limit of 50 inches and daily bag limit of 1 for Muskellunge in the waters listed above?</b>	27. Yes_____	No_____	No opinion_____
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**28. Bass – Rost and Wescott lakes (Oconto County)**

This proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 5 fish in total and no minimum length limit on Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass on Rost Lake and Wescott Lake, Oconto County. The current regulation is a 14-inch minimum length limit and daily bag of 5 fish in total.

The management goal is to improve bass growth and size structure. It is currently not being met because of a moderately high density of small (less than 14-inch), slow-growing Largemouth Bass.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because increased harvest of small bass is expected to improve growth rates by reducing competition. This proposal would also provide an additional bass harvest opportunity for anglers.

<b>28. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 5 fish and no minimum length limit for Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass on Rost and Wescott lakes, Oconto County?</b>	28. Yes_____	No_____	No opinion_____
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**29. Northern Pike consumptive opportunity – Tiger Cat chain, Spider chain, Lake Chippewa (Chippewa Flowage), and Lac Courte Oreilles chain (Sawyer County)**

This proposal would apply an experimental 10-daily bag limit for Northern Pike to the Tiger Cat Chain, Spider Chain, Lake Chippewa (Chippewa Flowage) and Lac Courte Oreilles Chain in Sawyer County, waters in which Northern Pike are not native and compete with Muskellunge for resources. The current regulation is a 5-fish daily bag limit for Northern Pike. The experimental regulation would sunset in 2034 and would be evaluated prior to the sunset date.

Northern Pike began entering these waters starting with Lac Courte Oreilles Chain in the 1950s, the Chippewa Flowage in the 1970s and the Tiger Cat and Spider chains in the 1990s. Since that time, pike have become an increasingly abundant species while Muskellunge catch rates by anglers and in DNR surveys have declined. Rehabilitation stocking of Muskellunge has been needed to maintain the stability of some of the Muskellunge populations. In recent years, organized pike removal efforts have been conducted on some of these waters via netting removals and encouraging more angler harvest via rewards, with anglers often limiting out on pike. There is some evidence from these past organized removal efforts that pike abundance decreased, their size structure improved, and stocked Muskellunge survival potentially increased.

The management goal is to manage Northern Pike at a low density with good size structure and minimal competitive interactions with Muskellunge. The management goal is currently not being met because Northern Pike abundance is too high or has potential to become too high. In addition, the current 5 daily bag limit reduces the ability of organized efforts on these lake systems to harvest pike at higher levels needed to reach management goals. Angling represents one of the most realistic means to control pike

abundance in these lake systems, based on available creel and other angler data. Increasing the bag limit will allow anglers to be more effective at controlling pike abundance.

<b>29. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 10 for Northern Pike on Tiger Cat Chain, Spider Chain, Lake Chippewa (Chippewa Flowage) and Lac Courte Oreilles Chain in Sawyer County?</b>	29. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**30. Quality Northern Pike regulation – Largon Lake (Polk County)**

This proposal would apply a 26-inch minimum length limit and daily bag limit of 2 to Northern Pike in Largon Lake, Polk County. The current regulation is a 32-inch minimum length limit and daily bag limit of 1.

The management goal is to maintain a Northern Pike population with quality size structure that allows for limited angler harvest. The management goal is currently not being met because there are very few legal-sized Northern Pike available for harvest in Largon Lake under the current regulation.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal by allowing for limited harvest while still protecting size structure.

<b>30. Do you favor applying a 26-inch minimum length limit and daily bag limit of 2 for Northern Pike in Largon Lake, Polk County?</b>	30. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**31. Northern Pike – Pearl Lake (Waushara County) and the White River system (Marquette and Waushara counties)**

This proposal would apply a no minimum size limit and 5-fish daily bag limit for Northern Pike on Pearl Lake (Waushara County) and the White River system from Neshkoro Millpond upstream including the Neshkoro Millpond, Lower White River Flowage, West Branch Millpond, and Wautoma Pond including all tributaries up to the first dam or barrier (Marquette and Waushara counties). The current regulation is a 26-inch minimum size limit and daily bag limit of 2.

The management goal is to provide increased angling opportunities and maintain a consumptive/action fishery. It is currently not being met because current growth potential is limited and few fish are able to reach 26 inches and provide angler harvest opportunities.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because the no minimum length limit and daily bag limit of 5 will provide more angling harvest opportunity, maximize yield, potentially reduce predation and competition, and also allow for evaluating potential changes in population metrics during future surveys.

<b>31. Do you support applying a no minimum size limit and 5 daily bag limit for Northern Pike to Pearl Lake, Waushara County and the</b>	31. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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<b>White River system, Marquette and Waushara counties?</b>			
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**32. Northern Pike protected slot –Silver Lake (Waushara County) and Wood Lake (Marquette County)**

This proposal would apply a 25 – 35-inch protected slot limit with a daily bag limit of 2 Northern Pike on Silver Lake and Wood Lake. The current regulation is a minimum length limit of 26 inches and a daily bag limit of 2 Northern Pike.

The management goal is to maintain or potentially increase density of a self-sustaining Northern Pike population that provides anglers with consumptive and trophy fishing opportunities in Marquette County. Another goal is to protect adult females from potential overharvest and improve overall size structure and trophy potential. The management goals are currently not being met because the 26-inch length limit is not providing consumptive harvest opportunities for smaller fish, particularly males. The protected slot may improve trophy size fishing opportunities and maximize growth potential.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goals because this regulation proposal will help to maintain or potentially increase Northern Pike density at 3-4/acre, comparable to pike densities in similar lakes, and will increase the potential for quality-trophy sized fish by providing adult female protection. It will also allow for evaluating potential changes in population metrics during future surveys.

<b>32. Do you favor applying a 25-35-inch protected slot and 2 fish daily bag limit for Northern Pike to Silver Lake, Waushara County, and Wood Lake, Marquette County?</b>	32. Yes_____	No_____	No opinion_____
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**33. Panfish – Blackhawk Lake (Iowa County) and Turtle Lake (Walworth County)**

This proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 10 in total for panfish in Blackhawk Lake, Iowa County, and Turtle Lake, Walworth County. The current regulation follows the statewide regulation of a 25-fish daily bag limit.

**Blackhawk Lake** - The management goal is to improve size structure of the Bluegill population in Blackhawk Lake. Currently, growth rates are very high, yet size structure remains low with low numbers of 8+ inch Bluegill captured during spring surveys. Currently, catch per effort of Bluegill during spring electrofishing surveys is 4 fish per mile. Given that growth is high and fish reach larger sizes at younger ages, we would expect catch rates of 8+ inch Bluegills to be higher. Therefore, we are proposing to increase these catch rates to 10 fish per mile during spring electrofishing surveys. This represents the 75th percentile for lakes of similar size and fish community in southern Wisconsin.

**Turtle Lake** - The management goal is to maintain or increase the density of moderate to large adult panfish. It is currently not being met because, according to the local lake group, Turtle Lake is subject to periodic, intense pulses of high angler use, particularly during ice season.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because reducing the daily bag limit to 10 in total will aid in compensating for these pulses of high angling pressure. Data collected from

spring electrofishing conducted in 2021 indicates a large proportion of 7 to 8-inch Bluegill, a unique size structure for a lake this size (small) with public access and high public use in southeast Wisconsin. Based on size structure and growth data, maintaining or increasing numbers of large adults with a reduced bag is a reasonable goal.

<b>33. Do you support a daily bag limit of 10 in total for panfish in Blackhawk Lake, Iowa County and Turtle Lake, Walworth County?</b>	33. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**34. Panfish – Lake Mendota (Dane County)**

This proposal would apply a daily bag limit of 10 panfish in total and no minimum length limit on Lake Mendota, Dane County including Sixmile Creek (downstream from Highway 19 in Section 8), Pheasant Branch Creek (downstream from Highway M), Yahara River (downstream from Highway 19), Cherokee Lake, and Warner Park Lagoons downstream to Tenney Locks. The current regulation is a daily bag limit of 25 and no minimum length limit for panfish. A Conservation Congress county resolution to reduce the panfish bag limit on Lake Mendota was supported by Dane County Spring Hearing participants in 2021 and a Conservation Congress advisory question was supported in 2022.

The management goal is to provide consistent quality-sized panfish opportunities and to increase the proportion of larger adult panfish in Lake Mendota. Currently, the Bluegill population shows good size structure but is underperforming compared to other similar lakes in terms of overall abundance. The Yellow Perch population exhibits boom/bust cycles of good fishing and poor fishing and many of the adult fish are rapidly removed from the system once they reach harvestable size. The objective is to increase the abundance of quality-sized Yellow Perch and Bluegill over the next 5 years. This regulation is one tool to help meet the management goal because decreasing angler harvest of panfish is expected to improve survival and improve size structure and abundances as more fish live longer in the system, thereby increasing the number of quality panfish in the lake over time.

<b>34. Do you favor applying a daily bag limit of 10 panfish and no minimum length limit for Lake Mendota in Dane County?</b>	34. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**35. Panfish – Osprey and Island lakes (Sawyer County)**

This proposal would apply a year-round panfish bag limit of no more than 15 per day, with a limit of 5 per species, to Osprey and Island lakes in Sawyer County. The current regulation is a panfish bag limit of 15 with no more than 5 per species in May and June, and 25 panfish combined per day rest of year. Both of these regulations are experimental panfish regulations under current evaluation by the department.

The management goal is improved panfish size and angler acceptance of regulations. Among the experimental panfish regulations being evaluated, the 15 per day, no more than 5 of each species regulation has shown the most promise to increase size structure in panfish populations that receive high angling pressure. Additionally, a year-round 15 per day, no more than 5 of each species regulation has received more public acceptance than the seasonal regulation.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because anglers desire a more consistent and protective regulation. The department expects the proposed regulation to be equally if not more effective at achieving the management goal as the seasonal regulation.

<b>35. Do you favor applying a year-round panfish bag limit of 15 with no more than 5 per species to Osprey and Island lakes in Sawyer County?</b>	35. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**36. Panfish experimental regulation – Moose Lake (Sawyer County)**

This proposal would apply an experimental regulation of a daily bag limit of 5 panfish in total, only one of which may be over 12 inches, to Moose Lake in Sawyer County. The current regulation is a daily bag limit of 10 in total with no size limit. This experimental regulation is slated to sunset in 2034 and would be evaluated for effectiveness prior to the sunset.

Because Bluegill and Yellow Perch provide very limited opportunities for anglers in Moose Lake, there is a strong interest among stakeholders in maximizing the potential of the crappie fishery. Crappie and Walleye absorb almost all of the harvest attention in Moose Lake because of limited opportunities for other species due to periodic drawdowns, and Walleye are abundant but small. The management goal is to improve Black Crappie size structure, providing a crappie fishery with above-average size and quality fishing opportunities. The specific size structure objectives for this population are to have 20-40% of all crappie appearing in DNR netting surveys to be greater than 10 inches in length and 5-10% to be greater than 12 inches in length. This regulation would be evaluated for its effectiveness at intervals of 2, 6, and 10 years after implementation.

The management goal is currently not being met because angler harvest may be limiting crappie size structure, even under a reduced daily bag limit, in a lake where harvest interest for crappie is high.

This regulation proposal is one tool to help meet the management goal because it would reduce overall harvest of crappie and limit harvest of the largest individuals.

<b>36. Do you support applying a daily bag limit of 5 panfish, only one of which may be over 12 inches, to Moose Lake in Sawyer County?</b>	36. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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**37. Urban fishing pond – Village of Suamico (Brown County)**

This proposal would designate the Unnamed Pond on the Village of Suamico property (44.61710 N, 88.06849 W) as an urban fishing pond. This would include regulations as follows: no closed season, no length limit and a special season from the second Saturday in March up to but not including the last Saturday in April for juveniles 15 years of age and younger and certain disabled anglers. The daily bag limit would be 3 trout, one gamefish, and ten panfish. This regulation would create a unique fishing opportunity for residents and those visiting the greater Green Bay area.



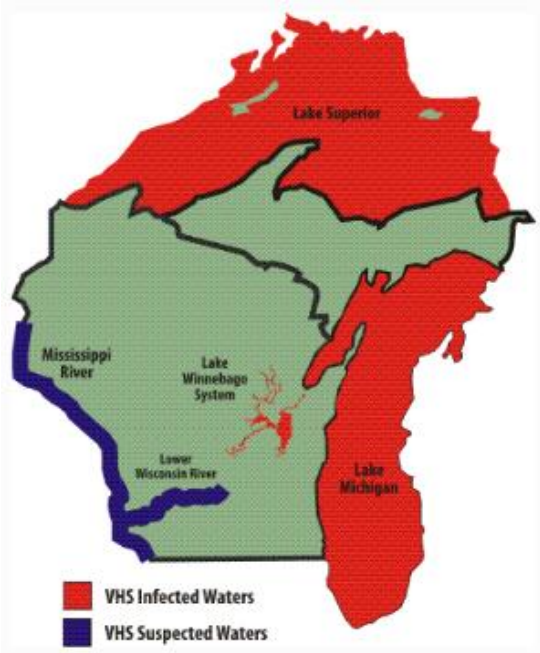
<b>37. Do you favor adding the Unnamed Pond on the Village of Suamico property (44.61710 N, 88.06849 W) in Brown County to the DNR Urban and Community Fishing Program?</b>	37. Yes_____	No_____	No opinion_____
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**FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ADVISORY QUESTION**

**Question 38. Personal bait harvest of minnows on VHS-affected waters**

Since 2008, it has been illegal to use nets or traps to collect minnows in any waters that may be infected with the fish disease Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS). VHS-affected waters include:

- Lake Michigan (VHS-confirmed)
- Lake Superior (VHS-confirmed)
- Lake Winnebago (VHS-confirmed)
- Mississippi River (VHS-suspected)
- Lower Wisconsin River upstream to the Prairie du Sac Dam (VHS-suspected)
- Fox River between Lake Winnebago and Green Bay (VHS-suspected)
- Waters connected to the above up to the first barrier impassable to fish



Rules currently in place prohibit minnow harvest and the movement of live minnows from VHS-affected waterbodies to prevent the spread of VHS through infected fish and water to waterbodies without VHS. The only exception is that minnows that were purchased from a bait dealer (covered under a health certificate) and have not been exposed to any fish or water from that VHS-affected waterbody may be moved away to use elsewhere.

Since 2010, the department has received periodic requests to review these rules and allow more opportunities for personal bait harvest from VHS-affected waters.

Allowing minnow harvest from VHS-affected waters but prohibiting the movement of live minnows away from the VHS-affected waterbody, regardless of the source of the minnows, would allow anglers to harvest their own bait from these waters and use purchased bait while also ensuring that no infected minnows or water will be spread to other waterbodies. Prohibiting the movement of live minnows away from the waterbody also minimizes the risk of spreading aquatic invasive species, such as invasive carp, that negatively affect fish communities and the ecosystem. Small invasive carp in particular are very difficult to distinguish from golden shiners and several other native minnow species. Over 50 invasive carp were captured in the Mississippi River in 2021, spurring ongoing monitoring and mitigation efforts.

This rule change would allow personal collection and use of minnows on all VHS-affected waters, but to be enforceable, no live minnows, including “unused” minnows purchased from a bait dealer, could be

transported away from the VHS-affected water. A new rule would also include requirements to disinfect minnow harvesting gear used on VHS-affected waters before moving the gear to another waterbody.

<b>38. Do you support allowing personal bait harvest of minnows from VHS-affected waters, using legal nets and traps, as long as no live minnows are moved away from the waterbody of harvest regardless of source of the minnows (harvested from the waterbody or purchased from a bait dealer)?</b>	38. Yes____	No____	No opinion____
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