



# WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

## 2025 Lake Sturgeon Spearing Season Winnebago System

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### Introduction And Objectives

There was colder weather leading up to the 2025 Winnebago lake sturgeon spearing season compared to previous years. This allowed many spears to once again take to the ice throughout the season hoping for success. Unfortunately, windy days and a lack of snow leading up to the season likely caused water clarity issues throughout Lake Winnebago. While on the Upriver Lakes, strong winds pushed around the ice creating the large cracks that impeded access to many popular areas. Although frustrating, many spears adjusted and were able to find success on both the Upriver Lakes and Lake Winnebago.

The harvest caps for the 2025 spearing season were determined using the most recent 5-year average abundance estimates for the Winnebago System lake sturgeon population (about 24,000 males and 16,099 adult females). The 2025 system-wide harvest caps were 350 juvenile females (<55"), 797 adult females (>55"), and 1,252 males. The Upriver Lakes fishery was allocated 10% (80 fish) of the adult female harvest cap and 20% of the juvenile females (70 fish) and males (250 fish) harvest caps.

The department utilizes all the information collected during the spearing season including number harvested, lengths, weights, and tags to continue to monitor the Winnebago System lake sturgeon population.

### Survey Method

- During the lake sturgeon spearing season, all lake sturgeon harvested are registered at DNR designated registration stations.
- During registration, lake sturgeon are weighed (lbs.) and measured (inches to the nearest tenth). Sex and stage of maturity is also recorded. Any external or internal tags are recorded.

### DNR Contact

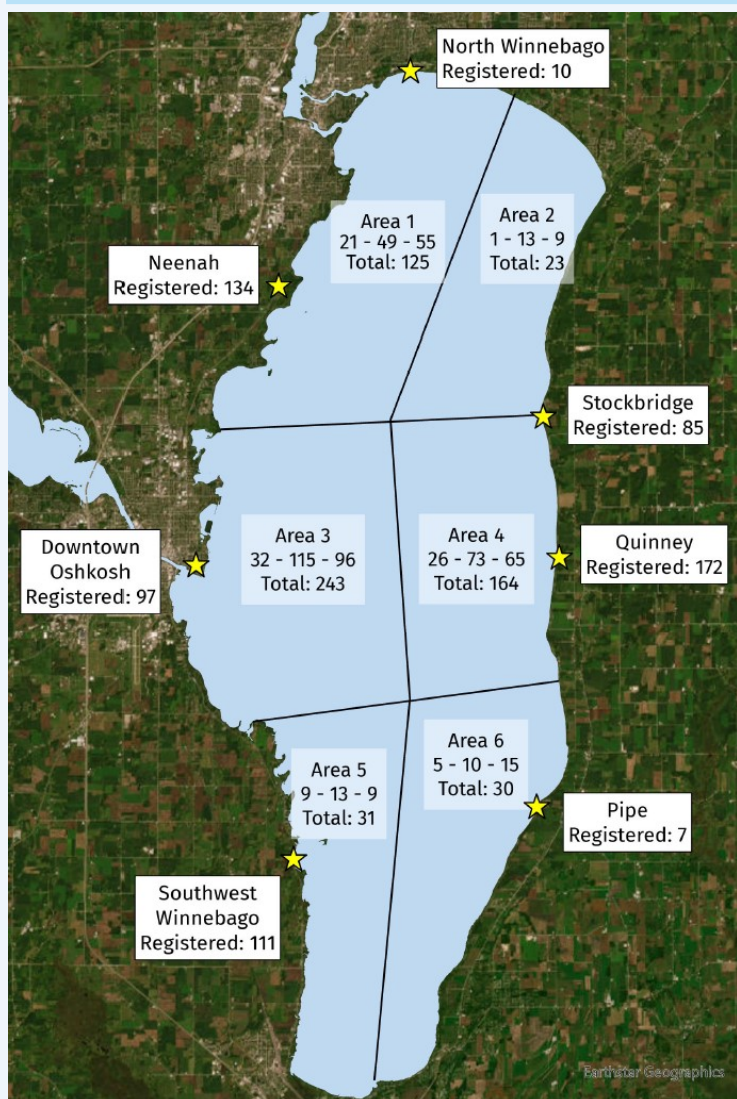
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### Lake Information

Winnebago: 131,939 acres  
Butte des Morts: 8,581 acres  
Poygan: 14,024 acres  
Winneconne: 4,553 acres

### Regulations

Daily Bag and Size Limit:  
Harvest only occurs during the  
February spearing season  
One lake sturgeon per season  
36 inch minimum length



### Metric Descriptions

- Length frequency distribution (LFD)** is a graphical representation of the number or percentage of fish captured by half-inch or one-inch size intervals. Smaller fish (or younger age classes) may not always be represented in the length frequency due to different habitat usage or sampling gear limitations.

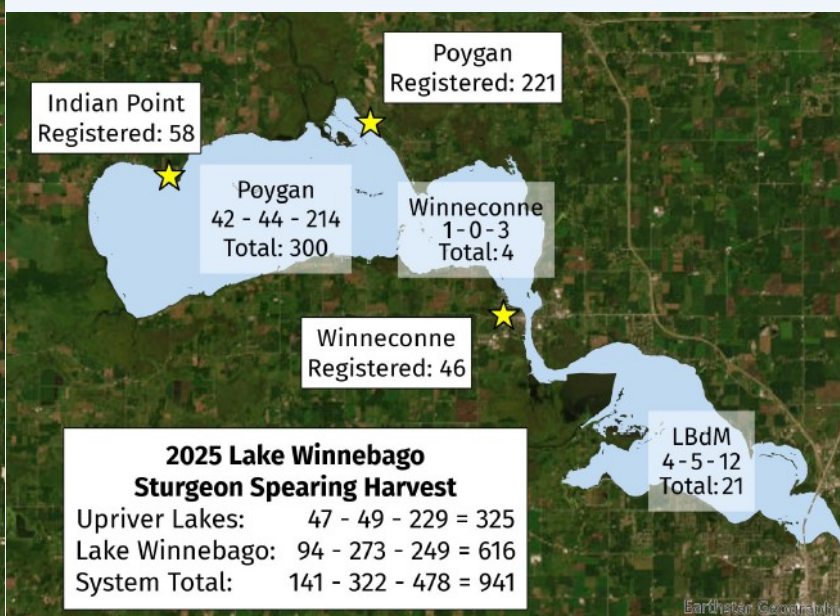


Figure 1. Map of harvest on Lake Winnebago and the Upriver Lakes by area. Values indicate number harvested for juvenile females—adult females—males, respectively, as well as totals within each area of the system. Stars are the different registration stations including the total number of lake sturgeon registered at that station. The Pipe registration station was closed after the first weekend. Other stations were closed sporadically due to harvest rates and staffing needs.



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### 2025 Season Summary

- During the 2025 spearing season, 941 lake sturgeon were harvested between the Upriver Lakes and Lake Winnebago. That is a 7.7% success rate for spearsmen who purchased a license. This is lower than the average success rate and was likely due to the lower harvest on Lake Winnebago.
- The length distribution of both females and males throughout the Winnebago System continues to indicate a healthy population (Figure 2) with a few small individuals and few large individuals and the majority of individuals right around the average length.
- Average weights of lake sturgeon system-wide were 24.1 lbs. for juvenile females, 71.5 lbs. for adult females and 38.3 lbs. for males.
- The proportion of harvested lake sturgeon previously tagged slightly increased in the 2025 spearing season to 23.1% (218 lake sturgeon) from 19.7% tagged in the 2024 season, 20.3% tagged in the 2023 season and 20.4% tagged in the 2022 season.
- 63 lake sturgeon were harvested this year over 100 lbs. throughout the Winnebago System. This includes the 4th largest lake sturgeon harvested since the 1940s. A 180.5 lbs. F4 female speared by Hayley Herzog.

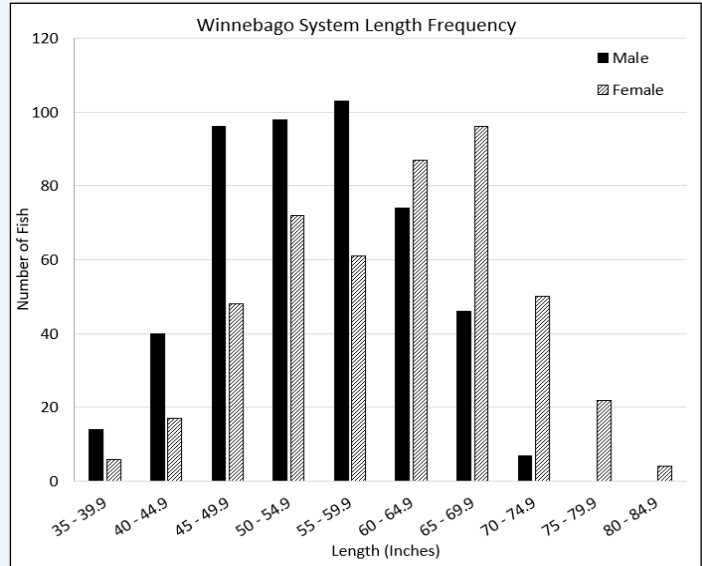


Figure 2. Length Frequency histogram of lake sturgeon harvested on the Lake Winnebago System during the 2025 spearing season

### 2025 SIZE STRUCTURE METRICS

System	Sex	Avg. Weight (lbs.)	Weight Range (lbs.)	Avg. Length (in.)	Length Range (in.)
Lake Winnebago	Juv. Fem	26.2	60.6—11.2	49.9	54.7—38.1
	Adult Fem	72.6	180.5—20.1	65.9	81.9—47.9
	Male	37.6	93.6—7.9	52.7	70.7—36.4
Upriver Lakes	Juv. Fem	19.9	33.9—10.0	47.4	54.5—38.5
	Adult Fem	65.3	152.2—30.8	64.4	80.0—56.0
	Male	39.1	110.3—8.5	54.5	72.5—36.0
System Wide	Juv. Fem	24.1	60.6—10	49.1	54.7—38.1
	Adult Fem	71.5	180.5—20.1	65.7	81.9—47.9
	Male	38.3	110.3—7.9	54.5	72.5—36.0



Kendra Kode (left image) has a lot to smile about with her first successful harvest and a story to boot. Photo Credit: Tanner Kode



Keira (right image) was lucky enough to spear her first sturgeon this past year on Lake Winnebago. Photo Credit: Ken Kohlman.

### Lake Winnebago Summary

- 616 lake sturgeon were harvested on Lake Winnebago (94 juvenile females, 273 adult females, and 249 males). This is a success rate of 5.3% which is lower than the average (8.6%). Since mandatory registration in 1955 (71 seasons), the 2025 harvest ranks 41st in amount of harvest.
- The Lake Winnebago season lasted the full 16 days. This was the 10th consecutive full-length season on Lake Winnebago. Since 2000, there have been 16 spearing seasons that have lasted the full 16-days.
- The length of this year's spearing season was likely less driven by poor ice conditions like the last two years and instead was driven by the poor water clarity. The average water clarity around Lake Winnebago in 2025 was 5.4 feet. This is significantly less than the 12 ft average considered necessary for high amounts of harvest on Lake Winnebago. This is also the worst water clarity seen on Lake Winnebago in the last two decades.
- There were still a good number of large lake sturgeon harvested in 2025 with 55 sturgeon over 100 lbs. speared. This is 8.9% of the harvested fish from Lake Winnebago. This is second highest proportion of fish over 100 pounds since the late 1970s (Figure 3).
- Almost 70% of the lake sturgeon over 100 lbs. were harvested from area 3 on Lake Winnebago (the west central location; Figure 1). Usually the proportion of 100 lbs. fish are distributed throughout the lake.
- The average weight of lake sturgeon harvested on Lake Winnebago was higher in 2025 compared to the last couple of years despite having similar lengths through years, particularly for adult females. The average weight of adult females in 2025 was 72.6 lbs. compared to 58.4 lbs. in 2024 and 61.0 lbs. in 2023. The increase in all the average weights could be due to the increase in chironomids (red worms) throughout Lake Winnebago this past year.

### LAKE WINNEBAGO COUNTS

	2025	2024	2023
Shanty Counts	3,340	468	3,148
License Sales	12,200	13,060	13,246
Upriver Applicants	9,618	9,106	9,474





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### Upriver Lakes Summary

- Despite cold weather conditions leading up to the season, unseasonably windy days likely caused large cracks to form throughout the Upriver Lakes. This limited access to popular areas of the Upriver Lakes where spearers consistently go to spear.
- Due to access issues, the Upriver Lakes season lasted the full 16-day season. Since 2007, when the lottery system was enacted, only four seasons have lasted the full 16-days (2017, 2020, 2024, and 2025).
- 325 lake sturgeon were speared on the Upriver Lakes.
- On the 16th day, the male 90% harvest cap was hit. Most years, the adult female harvest drives the season. This year, the harvest was driven by the number of male lake sturgeon speared. While this is uncommon, it is not unheard of. This can occur for any number of reasons including spawning cohort year (ie because males spawn every two years, there might be more males preparing to spawn causing more to be upriver). It could be that access limited spearers from the areas where females generally congregate. Either way, years where the male harvest dictates the season do occur.
- The success rate of spearers on the Upriver Lakes was 65.4%. This success rate is fairly average for the Upriver Lakes.
- The average length and weight of lake sturgeon speared on the Upriver was 54.9 inches and 40.2 lbs.
- Eight of the 63 lake sturgeon harvested over 100 pounds came from the Upriver Lakes. There was even one lake sturgeon weighing over 150 lbs. speared on the Upriver Lakes (152.2 lbs., 80.0 inches, F4, speared). While lake sturgeon over 100 lbs. are common, there are usually not that many speared over 150 lbs. This lake sturgeon brings the total number of lake sturgeon harvested on the Upriver Lakes over 150 lbs. to eleven.
- Over 9,000 people continue to apply for an Upriver tag. This year, spearers needed a minimum of 8 preference points to be selected for an Upriver tag. Those spearing in a group required a minimum of 9 preference points to be selected.

# of Preference Points	# of Applicants for Lottery	# of Winners	# Purchased Preference Points Only
14	0	0	2
13	1	1	2
12	6	4	11
11	19	19	35
10	61	54	60
9	435	411	133
8	501	11	300
7	386	0	555
6	293	0	664
5	238	0	703
4	261	0	819
3	272	0	1,026
2	231	0	1,060
1	327	0	1,217
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,031</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>6,587</b>

Lake Winnebago Sturgeon Spearing: % Fish  $\geq 100$  lbs. (1978-2025)

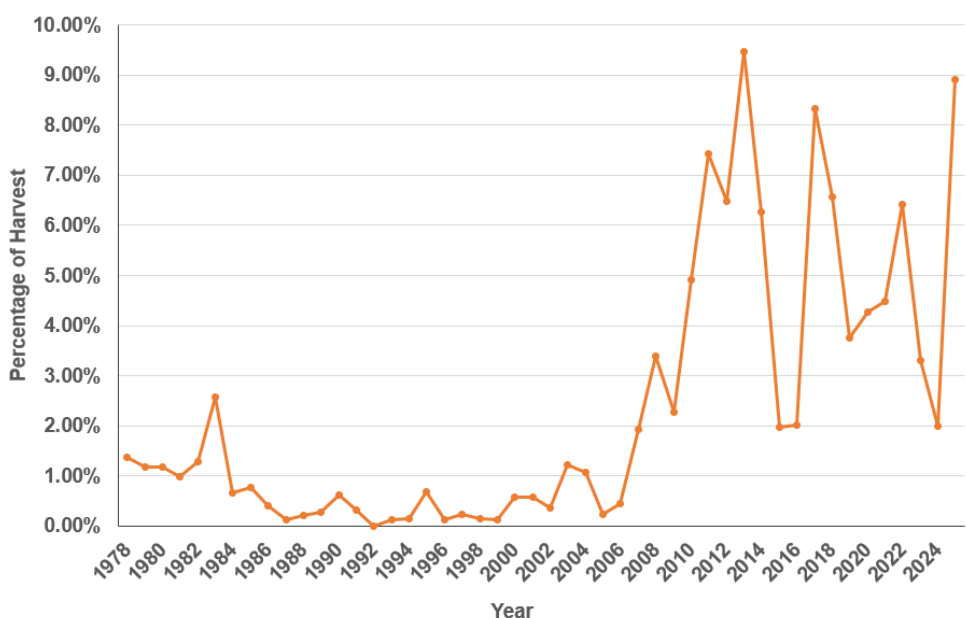


Figure 3. The percent of lake sturgeon harvested over 100 pounds from 1978-2025.

Brian Spanbauer (top photo) successfully speared his first fish and celebrated with his wife Shari. Photo Credit: Brian Spanbauer

Jordan Harrison (bottom photo) also celebrates his first successful sturgeon with his father Brian while out on the Upriver Lakes. Photo Credit: Bruce Harrison

