



Ten Sunfish Bag limit Proposal 2016-2026



Photo credits Garret Svir





Meeting Schedule

- 15-20 Minutes - Information
- 20-40 Minutes – Group Questions/Answers
- Remainder- One on one discussion

A new type of sunfish management?

OUTDOORS

The lunkers are gone: It's time to restore our bluegill fishery

Overharvest of the biggest has led to stunted populations.

By Bill Shogren | FEBRUARY 14, 2015 — 6:22PM



COURTESY OF BILL SHOGREN

I'm more than slightly addicted to the boil in the water caused by a bluegill taking my surface fly or struggling against the line.

Somebody said, "The bluegill is another wild creature we'd love to death." We really haven't finished this noble creature off, but size structures have certainly worsened during the past several decades because of the overharvesting of the bigger bluegills (sunfish). We must take this fish more seriously.

Half-pounders are now the exception. To most of us, the golden days are only a fond memory of being with dads.

Maybe it's time to start thinking a little differently about sunfish management?



What Lakes

- Long (Higgins)
- Moose
- Maple
- Green-Prairie Fish
- Sullivan
- Platte

Bluegill Biology

Parental Males - Bulls

- Nest Defenders
- Grow Fast and Large
- Genetically Superior
- Important To Quality
- Vulnerable
- Release Them!
- **Best To Take Females**

Cuckolder Males

- Small, Grow Slowly
- Sneak Spawners
- Genetically Inferior
- Reduce Quality

Male and Female Bluegill



- Male – Upper Right
- Female Lower Left



Growth and Reproduction

- Good Growth= 8 inches in 5 years
- Average Growth= 8 inches in 7-8 years
- 5 to 8 year “Replacement Time”
- Harvest of large bluegill DOES NOT usually mean small fish grow faster – Opposite is true as reduced harvest has shown to improve growth
- Growth “Bottleneck” at smaller sizes
- Reproduction- seldom a problem except when we get too much! “Stunting”



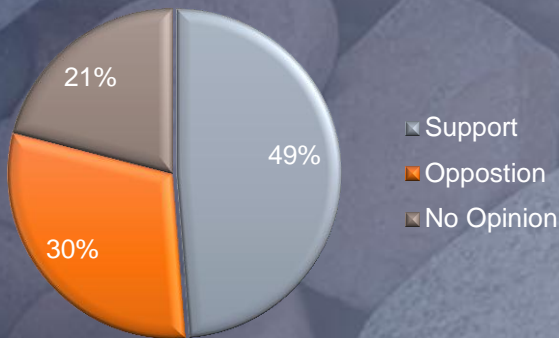
Mail Survey Results

Winter 2012-13

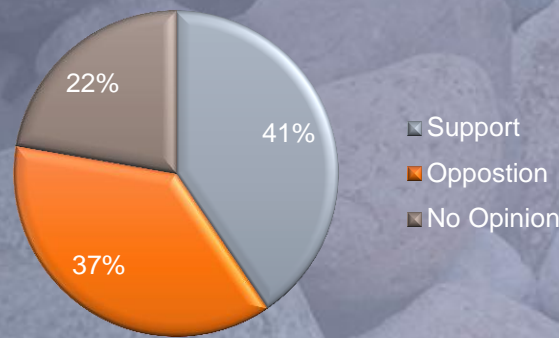
- Scope – Morrison, Todd and Benton Counties and portions of northern Stearns and southern Crow Wing
- 1000 surveys, randomly selected, 554 returned
- 94% had fished for sunfish and 56% fished >10x/year
- 54% felt fishing pressure was impacting sunfish quality
- 2/3 harvested at least 1 limit of sunfish per year, 1/5 harvest more than 5 limits of sunfish per year
- Support for 10 fish bag > than opposition for all levels of participation
- Anglers who targeted sunfish >50% of the time and harvested more than 5 limits per year opposed 10 fish bag

Opinions on Regulation Options

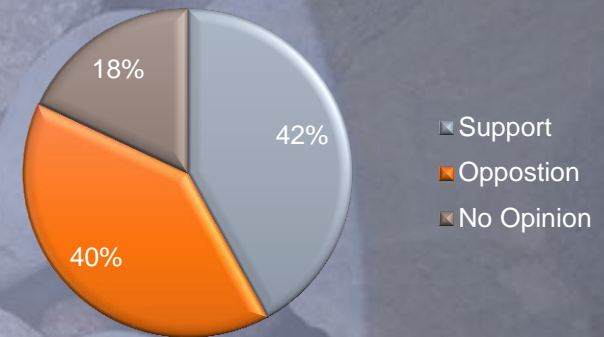
10 Fish Bag Limit



20 Bag, 5 fish >8"



15 Fish Aggregate Limit BLG/BLC



- Support outweighed opposition to all three regulation options
- The 10 fish daily bag limit was the most strongly supported option (49%)
- No option received a clear majority of support (>50%) as 18-22% of responses were “No Opinion”

Effects of Bag Limit Reductions

DNR Research Study (1995-2001)

10 Bluegill bag limit on 4 Lakes in Stearns and Cass Counties

- **Average length increased, more fish over 8 inches, 3 of 4 lakes**
- **Growth rate increased, all lakes**
- **Bluegill matured at a larger size – fewer cuckolders**

Wisconsin Study

- Seven lakes -10 sunfish bag limit, One lake unlimited
- Five of seven had average length **increases** of up to two inches
- “Top ten” average length also increased
- Unlimited bag **decreased** average length by almost two inches
- State will expand reduced bag limits (3 types) to 94 lakes in 2016



Choosing A Regulation Lake - Criteria Used

- Growth – Fast growth is best
- Lake Potential – There should be a history of the lake producing large fish – 9+ inches
- Fishing Pressure – Look for lakes where angler harvest is reducing quality
- Public Acceptance Or Desire – Do the people want us to try to provide larger sunfish?

Suitable Lakes For Quality Sunfish

- Cedar-Todd Co.
 - Long (Higgin's)
 - Maple
 - Moose
 - Lady
 - Lily-Long
 - Fuller-Hennessy
 - Guernsey
 - Little Swan
 - Mary
 - Beauty
 - Coal
 - Pepin
 - Big Sauk
 - Big Birch
 - Long (Burtrum)
 - Big Swan
 - Mons
 - Little Birch
 - Buck
 - Green Prairie Fish
 - Sullivan-Platte
 - Pierz Fish
 - Fish Trap
 - Shakopee
- We chose six lakes from this list to apply a 10 fish bag limit for sunfish.
 - Bag limit regulations would be evaluated for 10 years and maintained or dropped based on results.



What do the six lakes have now?

Lake	Number of Surveys	Average Length	Catch/net >8"	Average Length top 10%	% over 7"	% Over 8"	% over 9"
Maple	4	6.57	2.36	8.06	35.0	5.6	0.5
Moose	5	6.3	7.57	7.9	24.6	6.1	0.8
Long(Higgins)	3	6.11	3.34	8.55	33.4	10.6	1.7
Green Prairie Fish	4	5.88	1.06	7.82	17.2	2.7	0.3
Sullivan	5	6.36	1.68	8.31	38.1	18.0	2.2
Platte	1	6.33	1.81	8.5	41.5	12.3	0.0



What will be the measure of success?

- **More Bluegill over 8" (CPUE)**
- **Increase the Average length of the top 10% of the sample**
- If favorable –Keep 10 fish bag limit
- If not favorable – Drop back to statewide
- Public meetings will be used to gauge public opinion – Fall 2026

2015 Public Comments

September 8th

7-9 PM

**Club of the Pines
Hillman, MN**

September 9th

6-8 PM

**Long Prairie City Hall
Long Prairie, MN**

Comments also accepted via, phone, email, or mailed
through October 5th, 2015



Thanks and questions?

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