

Development of Best Management Practices for Fishing Tournaments in Minnesota - Vern Wagner, Anglers for Habitat, and Al Stevens, MN DNR Fisheries Program Consultant

In 2009, the MN legislature directed DNR to develop a best management practices (BMP) certification program by March 1, 2011. The goal is to ensure competency in proper handling and release of fish for all permitted tournaments. DNR annually issues over 400 permits to conduct fishing tournaments. The level of experience among tournament organizers varies widely, ranging from highly organized and well-equipped circuits, to first-time, one-and-out contests. Consequently, knowledge of and experience with techniques that enhance fish survival following catch and release tournaments can be limited for some organizers.

Development of the tournament BMP's is progressing thanks to a core group of volunteer organizers. We envision a voluntary certification program consisting of two elements: an online course directed at all organizers, and hands-on workshops for first-time organizers. The course will be developed as a learning tool whereby participants receive instant feedback. Workshops will be conducted at actual fishing tournaments to practice live-release tournament techniques known to enhance fish survival.

The BMP will be framed by tournament activities from the time a fish is caught and put in a live well until it is released by the organizer. Guidelines will be species specific, taking into account differing tolerances and requirements across the range of species commonly targeted by tournaments. We will make use of recent information on fish survival gained from the walleye tournament mortality study completed by the University of Minnesota and others.

DNR will maintain a list of organizers certified to conduct tournaments that may aid sponsors looking for a competent person to run their contest.

In addition to helping tournament organizers increase survival of tournament-caught fish, we expect development of the BMP's will also aid recreational anglers by providing current information on enhancing fish survival.