

Commissioner's Order #1 ML 2023: Amend Walleye Limits to Make Adjustments to Manage Fisheries in the 1837 Ceded Territory (Lake Mille Lacs)

Effective Date: August 1, 2023

Statutory authority: *Minnesota Statutes*, section 97C.005, subdivision 3

Amends: Expedited Emergency Game and Fish Rule 6264.0400, subp. 4, item H, referring to the angling possession restrictions for walleye: Mille Lacs Fishing Regulations as published in the 1 May 2023 State Register (47 SR 1039)

BACKGROUND

Each year a harvestable surplus is set for walleye in Lake Mille Lacs by a joint management process between the state and the eight Chippewa Bands that are signatories to the Treaty of 1837. The harvestable surplus is the pounds of fish that can be taken safely from Lake Mille Lacs while ensuring sufficient walleye remain in the lake for a healthy population. The state's allocation of the harvestable surplus for the 2023 season was set at 100,300 pounds. The state then set the walleye harvest and possession limit for the 2023 season by Expedited Emergency Rule on April 14, 2023, such that state angler harvest had a less than 20% probability of exceeding the state's share of the harvestable surplus. The current Lake Mille Lacs walleye daily and possession limit for the period between August 1 and November 30, 2023, is one walleye, which must be either between 21 and 23 inches or over 28 inches in length.

Catch rates and angler hours thus far in the 2023 season have been lower than expected. Actual harvest data gathered to date and modeling for the remainder of the walleye season indicate that, under the current walleye regulation, state anglers will harvest 66,000

pounds, or about 66% of the state's share of the walleye harvest, by the end of the 2023 season on November 30, 2023.

To enhance angler opportunity to harvest walleye on Lake Mille Lacs while remaining within the harvestable surplus allocation, the state is changing walleye angling regulations for the period beginning August 1 and extending to 11:59 p.m. on November 30, 2023.

Commencing at 12:01 a.m., on August 1, 2023, the walleye daily and possession limit for state anglers will be one walleye, which must be either between 20 and 23 inches in length or over 28 inches in length. Modeling indicates this regulation modification will increase the state harvest by 6,000 pounds to about 72,000 pounds, or 72% of the state's share of the harvest.

On December 1, 2023, the daily and possession limit for walleye on Lake Mille Lacs will revert to the daily and possession limit set forth in the Expedited Emergency Rule adopted on April 14, 2023, that is: one walleye, which must be either between 21 and 23 inches in length or over 28 inches.

For all other species, the Expedited Emergency Rule adopted on April 14, 2023, remains the same.

ORDER

NOW, THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, pursuant to authority vested in me by law, including *Minnesota Statutes*, section 97C.005, subdivision 3, that:

1. Beginning at 12:01 a.m. on August 1, 2023, and continuing until 11:59 p.m. on November 30, 2023, while a person is on or fishing in Lake Mille Lacs or its associated tributaries to the posted boundaries, the daily and possession limit for walleye is one, provided:
 - a. the walleye in possession must be either between 20 and 23 inches in length or over 28 inches in length; and

b. all other walleye must be returned immediately to the water.

2. Beginning at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2023 while a person is on or fishing in Lake Mille Lacs or its associated tributaries to the posted boundaries, the daily and possession limit for walleye is one, provided:

a. a walleye in possession must be either between 21 and 23 inches in length or over 28 inches in length; and

b. all other walleye must be returned immediately to the water.

3. All other fishing regulations pertaining to Lake Mille Lacs, including regulations governing harvest for all other species, including northern pike, largemouth and smallmouth bass, muskellunge, cisco, perch and panfish, are unaffected by this order.



Sarah Strommen, Commissioner

Date: July 14, 2023