

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

Commissioner's Order #1 ML 2024

Amend Walleye Regulations for Open Water Angling on Lake Mille Lacs

Date: August 16, 2024

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

Amends Expedited Emergency Game and Fish Rule 6264.0400, subd. 4, item F, referring to the angling seasons and possession restrictions for multiple fish species: Mille Lacs Fishing Regulations as published in the 6 May 2024 State Register (48 SR 1014)

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 Ojibwe 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 2024 season was set at 91,550 pounds. The state then set the walleye harvest and possession limit for the 2024 season for state anglers by Expedited Emergency Rule on April 6, 2024. Walleye angling was catch and release-only beginning at 12:01 a.m. on May 11, 2024, until 11:59 pm on August 16, 2024. The rule then authorized the harvest of one walleye between 21 and 23 inches or over 28 inches from 12:01 a.m. August 16, 2024, through 11:59 p.m. February 23, 2025. This set of regulations was predicted to result in anglers taking 11,000 pounds less than the state's allocation.

Angler hours, angler catch rates, and water temperature (correlated with hooking mortality) thus far in the 2024 season have all been lower than expected. Actual harvest data gathered to date and modeling for the remainder of the walleye season indicate that, under the current regulation, state anglers will harvest 34,000 pounds of walleye, or about 37% of the state's allocation, by the end of the 2024 season on November 30, 2024.

To enhance angler opportunity to harvest walleye on Mille Lacs while remaining well within the state's walleye allocation, the state is modifying the walleye angling regulation beginning 12:01 a.m. on August 16, 2024. Beginning at 12:01 a.m. on August 16, 2024, the walleye daily and possession limit will be two, one of which may be over 28 inches in length. All other walleye less than 18 inches in length or greater than 20 inches in length must be immediately returned to the water. Modeling indicates this regulation modification will increase the state harvest by 10,000 pounds to about 44,000 pounds, or 48% of the state's allocation.

This regulation will remain effective until 11:59 p.m. on November 30, 2024. Beginning at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2024, the daily and possession limit for walleye on Lake Mille Lacs will revert to 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 6, 2024, 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 16, 2024, and continuing until 11:59 p.m. on November 30, 2024, 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 two, one of which may be over 28 inches in length. All other walleye less than 18 inches in length or greater than 20 inches in length must be immediately returned to the water.

2. Beginning at 12:01 a.m. on December 1, 2024, 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, which must be either between 21 and 23 inches in length or over 28 inches in length. All other walleye must be returned immediately to the water.

Fishing regulations 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: August 1, 2024

AGENCY CONTACT. For additional information or to receive this document in an alternative format please contact: Jon Hansen, Division of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources, 500 Lafayette Rd, St. Paul, MN 55155, Phone: 651-259-5239, Email: jon.hansen@state.mn.us.