



Walleye Toolbox Summary (12/2003)

What is the walleye toolbox?

The walleye toolbox is a suite of regulations designed to increase the number of quality walleye fishing opportunities in Minnesota without adding additional complexity to the rulebook. There are currently 21 different combinations of length restrictions and bag limits for walleye in Minnesota. This walleye toolbox proposes a standardized set of 3 regulations designed to achieve specific, measurable, and attainable goals. The reduced number of regulations will make it easier for anglers to remember and comply with the regulations while, at the same time, provide adequate replication for scientific evaluation of their effects on the fish communities.

What are the proposed regulations and what are the goals?

Fisheries managers proposed three regulation options beyond the existing statewide walleye regulations. The goal of these three regulation options is to provide specific improvements to some walleye fisheries across the state.

The three special regulations are:

1. **3 walleye possession limit.**

Goal: To disperse walleye harvest among anglers or across the season.

Criteria:

- a. Walleye are the primary species managed in the body of water.
- b. Heavy fishing pressure directed at walleyes for short periods of time within the year, with more than 50% of the openwater fishing pressure occurring in May and June.
- c. Evidence that the lake has a history of producing substantial numbers of walleye with walleye harvest exceeding 2 lbs/acre.
- d. Low natural mortality rate and no winterkill.
- e. Walleye reach 14 inches by age 4.

2. **17 inch minimum size limit.**

Goal: To maximize value per stocked walleye (which includes harvest per stocked fish and total catch per stocked fish).

Criteria:

- a. Walleye are the primary species managed in the body of water.
- b. The walleye population is sustained with stocking and the waterbody does not produce strong year-classes from fry stocking.
- c. The walleye fishery is subject to high exploitation.
- d. Low natural mortality rate and no winterkill.
- e. Walleye reach 15 inches by age 4.

3. 17 to 26 inch protected slot size limit.

Goal: To maximize the trophy potential and catch rate through catch and release of quality-sized walleye.

Criteria:

- a. Walleye are the primary species managed in the body of water.
- b. Evidence that the lake has a history of producing considerable number of large (>26 inch) walleye.
- c. The walleye fishery is subject to high exploitation.
- d. Walleye reach 14 inches by age 4.
- e. Acceptance by anglers of the reduced ability to harvest walleyes.

Why don't you include a lower minimum size limit?

Regulations that require little change in angler behavior often result in little consequence to the fish population or future fishing quality. Already Minnesota anglers generally release small walleyes. Wisconsin DNR reviewed their statewide 15" minimum size limit and concluded that the regulation did not affect angler catch rates or the size of walleye in lakes. Experiences within the state with walleye minimum size limits also suggested that limits about 15" may be insufficient to improve fishing. A 17" minimum size limit was viewed as having a better chance to improve the total value of the walleye fishery. Walleyes less than 17" would be caught multiple times before they could be harvested at a size that produces a larger fillet.

Why don't you include a less restrictive slot for an additional goal—a goal that is a compromise between maximizing harvest and optimizing the catch of large walleye?

Sometimes when you manage more than one thing, you manage for nothing well. In Minnesota, we are fortunate that we have numerous walleye lakes. Why not manage some bodies of water for the goal of maximizing harvest without harm and some for the goal of catching large walleye? Anglers can then choose what they wish to fish most, either by advocating a particular regulation for their lake, or for those mobile anglers by visiting the lakes that most met their fishing goals. The current statewide walleye regulations (6 walleye limit, with only 1 over 20") do a good job of regulating the harvest to maximize harvest of walleye. Due to decreasing vulnerability of walleye larger than about 17", it turns out that our current regulation adequately protects most Minnesota walleye populations from overharvest. The 17 to 26" protected slot size limit would be used where anglers wish to improve their chances of catching larger walleye, where larger walleye are protected and allowed to build up in the population.

How many walleye lakes will receive these special regulations?

Many anglers seek walleyes to catch and harvest. Keeping walleye to harvest and eat will continue to be the primary reason for people fishing for walleye, so it is not expected that many lakes will be managed with the 17-26" protected slot size limit. Interest in the 17" minimum size limit is hard to anticipate, and based on comments received during the bag limit review it is believed that some anglers will suggest the reduced bag limit option.

Where, when and how many of these regulations will be implemented?

That isn't clear at this time, in part, because DNR staff need time to work with citizens to identify where, when and which toolbox options make sense at the local level. What is known, however, is that each of the DNR's 28 area fisheries managers will be asked to consider these options first when selecting regulations to meet the management needs of that water body. The speed at which regulations are implemented will depend upon public support and the assurance that selected lakes meet the appropriate biological criteria.

Are these regulations permanent?

Not necessarily. Fisheries managers will monitor walleye populations while the regulation is in place. Should the population show signs of not responding, managers will have the opportunity to reassess the use of the regulation.