



Detroit Lakes Area Fisheries

Recreation Worth Paying For

Anglers who fish in the Becker, Clay, Mahnomen, Norman, Polk, and Red Lake counties benefit from the management, habitat and oversight work of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' Detroit Lakes area fisheries staff.

Area Fisheries Supervisor Nathan Olson and a staff of six full-time and three part-time employees manage 151 fishing lakes and more than 1,500 miles of rivers and streams, including popular fishing destinations such as the Detroit Lake, the Cormorant Lakes area, White Earth and portions of the Red River.

Virtually all the work of the Detroit Lakes area fisheries staff is funded by money raised through fishing license sales. But reductions in buying power due to increasing costs for products, services and equipment have put this work and the recreational opportunities it creates at risk.

In response, the DNR is seeking a fishing license fee increase in the 2017 legislative session. The increase would raise the price of a resident annual fishing license from \$22 to \$25. Other fishing license types also would increase. The proposed increases should sustain existing fisheries operations until 2021. The increase for an individual license – roughly the price of a scoop of minnows – will not add staff or build programs. Rather, it will simply sustain existing programs and area office budgets, many of which already are reduced.

State taxes, including funds generated by the Minnesota Legacy Amendment and Minnesota State Lottery, do not support area fisheries offices and the core work they do. Fish management is a user-funded, user-benefit system. Many fishing organizations traditionally have supported periodic fee increases because high-quality fishing is recreation worth paying for.

If the State Legislature does approve a fee increase in 2017, revenue would not fully flow into the state's Game and Fish Fund until the spring of 2018. General hunting and fishing license fees were last increased in 2012 at an amount designed to keep the fund solvent for about six years. Prior to 2012, it had been 10 years since the last general fee increase.

In November 2016, the Game and Fish Fund Budget Oversight Committee – a citizen group that monitors the DNR's fisheries, wildlife and enforcement revenues and expenditures – recommended the Legislature increase fishing and hunting license fees during the 2017 legislative session.



Detroit Lakes area staff stocking Lake Sturgeon fingerlings in the Clay County's Buffalo River.

FUNDING THE OUTDOORS

It's been five years since the last hunting and fishing license fee increase. Periodic fee increases – one about every five years since 1970 – are how Minnesota funds routine fisheries management. State income and sales taxes do not fund area fisheries offices and their core work. By law, Outdoor Heritage Fund and Minnesota State Lottery habitat dollars DNR receives cannot be used to pay for standard fisheries operation expenses.

The DNR's fisheries section has a long tradition of belt-tightening. Statewide, staff size is down about 13 percent from roughly a decade ago. Moreover, the section is holding an additional 24 vacancies, most of which will not be filled even with fee increase. This means it is common for field offices to have fewer employees and leaner budgets than they once did.

Detroit Lakes Area Fisheries At Work

- The production and stocking of 200,000 Lake Sturgeon fry from the Detroit Lakes Fish Hatchery has been suspended, which is an integral part of the restoration of Lake Sturgeon in the Red River Basin.
- Fewer fish stocked because staff and resources will not be sufficient to complete operations such as re-stocking lakes that have winter killed, harvest of Walleye from rearing ponds, and stocking kids fishing ponds.
- Anglers will have less information about the lake and stream resources they use, because fewer biological surveys and assessments will be completed.
- Minnow harvest will not be completed as often as needed. This will reduce the number of fingerling Muskellunge produced from the Detroit Lakes rearing pond due to the lack of food.
- Fewer seasonal staff to assist in the operation of the Detroit Lakes Fish Hatchery, which may reduce the amount of Walleye produced from the facility.

WITHOUT A FEE INCREASE

- Various research and management activities will be reduced, delayed or ceased at 5,500 fishing lakes and 18,000 miles of fishable rivers and streams that are the foundation of the state's \$4.2 billion fishing economy.
- The ability to provide high quality fishing will be reduced due to less capacity to detect and react to aquatic invasive species infestations, changes in angling pressure and many other variables such as actions on nearby lands that affect lake and river water quality.
- The ability to collect fish population and other fishing information that citizens seek more than anything else on the DNR website will be reduced.
- The ability to determine if various fishing regulations, such as the new statewide northern pike zones, are actually producing their intended results will be reduced.
- Stocking of walleye, muskellunge and trout – each of which is of high importance to state anglers, visiting anglers and the tourism economy – will be reduced.

WITH A FEE INCREASE

- World-class fisheries and habitats that keep Minnesota's place as one of the nation's top three inland fishing destinations.
- Increased fishing-related information and customer service.
- Successful implementation of the new statewide northern pike regulations aimed at producing more pike for harvest, while reducing the number of small pike.
- Continued stocking of Minnesota's state fish through a cost-effective walleye stocking program.
- Research to assist in the recovery of walleyes on Mille Lacs.
- Effective protection of fish, lakes, rivers and streams statewide.
- Leverage for using Minnesota's Legacy Amendment habitat funding so that special projects can be completed to benefit fish and wildlife species.
- Fish, wildlife and habitats to support 48,000 Minnesota private sector hunting-and fishing-related jobs, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.