



Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan 2018-2023

Summary of Citizen Input and Response to Frequently Asked Questions December 1, 2018

Division of Fish and Wildlife

Section of Fisheries

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Executive Summary

The Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan was updated for 2018-2023 through a series of five meetings December 2017 through April 2018. At these meetings, a group of 14 stakeholders with diverse local and statewide interests provided input to the DNR on proposed 2018-2023 management goals, objectives, and actions. Statewide input on the draft plan was then solicited through an open, on-line comment period from June 8 through July 8, 2018. Additionally an open house, attended by 15 people, was conducted on July 24th, with comments accepted through August 15th. A total of 232 individuals provided comments (217 online and 15 written). Respondents had the opportunity to provide input on all proposed objectives and management actions by expressing their level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction for each. In addition, respondents had the opportunity to provide detailed written comments on all proposed objectives and management actions. Overall, there was a high level of satisfaction with the draft Management Plan. Levels of dissatisfaction were never greater than 25% for any proposed objective or management action. Lower levels of satisfaction corresponded with higher levels of uncertainty or in several cases a desire to see more restrictive regulations.

Summary of Responses Received (n=232)

Goals:

Goal Statements for Walleye, Sauger, Northern Pike, and Lake Sturgeon

- 226 responses: 73% (satisfied), 15% (unsure), 12% (dissatisfied)

Management Actions:

Potential Spring River Regulation Changes

- 195 responses: 65% (satisfied), 10% (unsure), 25% (dissatisfied)

Winter Walleye/Sauger Regulation Change

- 195 responses: 72% (satisfied), 9% (unsure), 19% (dissatisfied)

Maintain current Northern Pike Regulations

- 189 responses: 75% (satisfied), 13% (unsure), 12% (dissatisfied)

Maintain current Lake Sturgeon Regulations

- 188 responses: 71% (satisfied), 20% (unsure), 9% (dissatisfied)

Modification of multi-hook tackle configuration

- 187 responses: 57% (satisfied), 28% (unsure), 15% (dissatisfied)

Habitat protection and enhancement activities.

- 187 responses: 73% (satisfied), 23% (unsure), 4% (dissatisfied)

Other general actions (AIS, tournaments, coordination, access)

- 186 responses: 75% (satisfied), 14% (unsure), 12% (dissatisfied)

Overall extent of satisfaction with Fisheries Management Plan

- 186 responses: 68% (satisfied), 18% (unsure), 14% (dissatisfied)

DNR Response to Frequently Asked Questions and Concerns

Management Planning Process

What is the purpose of the 2018-2023 Fisheries Management Plan for Lake of the Woods?

The 2018-2023 Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan revises and updates the 2013-2018 Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan, building upon the successes and knowledge gained from previous plans. The updated plan recommends specific goals, objectives, and management actions aimed at preserving a high-quality, multi-species fishery in Lake of the Woods. This plan will focus the work of the DNR over the next five years.

How and why did the DNR involve constituents in establishing this plan?

As part of the process of updating the Lake of the Woods Fisheries Management Plan for 2018-2023, the DNR requested 14 stakeholders with diverse local and statewide interests provide input on the proposed management goals, objectives, and actions. The Lake of the Woods Fisheries Input Group (LOWFIG) was formed in November 2017 and is represented by seven organizations: Lake of the Woods Tourism, Lake of the Woods County Board, Roseau County Board, Lake of the Woods Chamber of Commerce, Warroad Chamber of Commerce, Statewide Walleye Work Group, and the Statewide Northern Pike and Muskellunge Work Group. In addition, six members were selected from a statewide web-based application process. These open seats include resort owners from two south-shore area resorts of Lake of the Woods, one local business, one Northwest Angle resort owner, and two statewide anglers. Five meetings were held at the Baudette Ambulance Garage with the LOWFIG from December 2017 through April 2018, and the input from this group was incorporated into the draft management plan. The DNR recognizes the economic base supported by Lake of the Woods and the role fishing quality has on the local quality of life. Communication and cooperation among the DNR and key stakeholders is critically important.

In addition to the LOWFIG, public comments were taken throughout the summer. Respondents were primarily from Minnesota residents, with additional respondents coming from WI, IA, SC, ND, OH and Manitoba. Forty-three percent of the respondents were from Lake of the Woods and Roseau Counties. In all, response came from all over the state including 38 other counties (St. Louis, Anoka, Hennepin, and Pennington being most common).

Walleye

The number of larger Walleyes has had an increasing trend on Lake of the Woods for the past decade. When is the current regulation going to be re-evaluated and what types of data will be used to determine if a regulation change is appropriate?

The abundance of larger Walleyes is influenced by the number of Walleyes from a specific year class surviving to the fishery, fishing pressure and harvest, and the amount of protection afforded to them. Walleye harvest regulations, and in particular protected slot limits, are an important tool for balancing harvest opportunity and protecting the mature fish needed to sustain the population. Adjustments to the existing 19.5 to 28-inch protected slot limit will be considered if the abundance of mature females exceeds management objectives and other key population metrics (Walleye gill net catch rates, the percentage of Walleye within the protected slot, and if signs of density dependence indicate the Walleye population is becoming unbalanced). Signs of density dependence include maturity at longer lengths and older ages, and below average growth and condition. The DNR will review the status of these metrics annually with the Lake of the Woods Fisheries Input Group.

By establishing an angler harvest objective threshold for Walleye of 540,000 pounds in the management plan, does this infer a lake shutdown will occur if the threshold is exceeded?

No. Harvest is critically important to the local economy and angler expectations for Lake of the Woods. This threshold represents a harvest level below which angling quality is protected or enhanced. Exceeding this threshold on an infrequent basis will not result in changes to population characteristics (e.g., abundance, growth, age at maturity). However, sustained annual harvest over this threshold may result in changes to population characteristics and indicate a need for a more restrictive regulation.

With the increasing pressure, should the DNR further reduce Walleye and Sauger harvest below what was recommended in the plan?

The current winter bag reduction proposal is an effort to reduce Sauger harvest and to provide consistency between summer and winter regulations. Currently the Walleye and Sauger populations are indicative of a healthy stock and not showing signs of stress. This proposal is a proactive approach to the long-term sustainability of these popular species.

Would implementing a minimum size limit improve the size structure or abundance of the Walleye fishery in Lake of the Woods?

Implementing a minimum size limit can be an effective tool when dealing with smaller water bodies that are stocked and receive high angling pressure. Minimum length limits allow the limited stock to reach a desired length before harvest is initiated. In a large lake with natural reproduction and good growth rates, small Walleye are the most abundant size of fish out there in any given year. Consequently an angler who keeps a smaller Walleye is actually having less of an impact on the fishery than those keeping larger fish that are nearing the protected slot, as there is far fewer of those sized fish and they have nearly made it to spawning size. Minimum length limits placed on a naturally reproducing population can have severe negative effects on the fishery.

Instead of catch and release, why not just close the spring Rainy River fishing season at the end of February like the rest of the state, as this would let the fish spawn without being harassed?

The MN DNR believes the spring river fishery under catch and release regulations will provide excellent recreational opportunities with minimal impact to the health of the Walleye fishery. Angler surveys suggest the primary motivation for participating in the spring Rainy River fishery include the opportunity to catch big Walleye, catching a lot of Walleye, and getting out there in the spring season. The excessive harvest focus on males during the spring fishery has resulted in a very low abundance of males on the spawning areas during spring assessments. During the spring season, when water temperatures are low and anglers are fishing relatively shallow water, hooking mortality is low. Consequently, anglers can enjoy the fishery with low impact to the Rainy River spawning population.

Northern Pike

Why were no changes proposed for Northern Pike Management on Lake of the Woods?

The current Northern Pike regulations were implemented in 1996. Northern Pike management on Lake of the Woods is geared towards maintaining a trophy Northern Pike fishery. Our Northern Pike population surveys indicate that the regulation has succeeded in protecting large Northern Pike. Angler interest in quality Northern Pike fishing on Lake of the Woods remains high. Consequently, there's no reason to make adjustments to Northern Pike management on Lake of the Woods.

Lake Sturgeon

How are Lake Sturgeon managed on Lake of the Woods and isn't their population impacting Walleye spawning?

MN DNR, in cooperation with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, chairs a committee that has developed goals and objectives for the Lake Sturgeon population in Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River. Through monitoring we have documented benchmarks reached and continue working towards a complete species recovery in the system.

With increased abundance of Lake Sturgeon in the system we are often asked about sturgeon predation on Walleye eggs. Lake Sturgeon are a bottom dwelling species, and undoubtedly end up with a few Walleye eggs in their diet. That said, both Walleye and Lake Sturgeon have recovered to a high level of abundance during the same time. We currently see excellent natural reproduction of Walleye in Lake of the Woods. So the few eggs the Lake Sturgeon may eat are not having a population level impact on Walleye.

Aquatic Invasive Species

How is the number of decontamination units and inspectors determined and how are locations prioritized?

Statewide, the DNR has 23 decontamination units and will continue to use them at high-use, zebra mussel infested waters. The Level II Inspectors and decontamination units will be placed primarily at zebra mussel infested waters, and less time will be spent at destination lakes where boaters travel to following trips to zebra mussel waters. In the Baudette area, one DNR decontamination unit and a Level II Inspector are available when we are able to staff the area. At the county level, Lake of the Woods, Koochiching and Roseau Counties have hired several Level I inspectors to educate and inspect boats at accesses to Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River.

Are decontamination locations and schedules available to the public online and who does one call to find a station?

Yes. Statewide DNR decontamination unit locations and schedules are available online at:

[Decontamination Unit Locations](#)

Click on the yellow "View map" button to see scheduled decontaminations and times. Contact phone numbers are available for each location and can be viewed by clicking on the location. Due to break downs or other unforeseen circumstances we recommend calling ahead to ensure the decontamination unit is on location.

Habitat

What programs are available for private lake shore owners to protect their shoreline habitat and reduce property taxes while maintaining private ownership? What programs are available for private lake shore owners to sell property so it remains protected?

Numerous agencies provide both short-term and long-term programs to protect shoreline habitat. Locally, information on DNR shoreline protection program options within the Lake of the Woods watershed is available by contacting the DNR Ecological and Water Resources Shoreline Habitat Specialist in Brainerd at (218) 203-4300. Additionally, the Lake of the Woods Soil and Water Conservation District has conservation programs available, and can be contacted at 218-634-1842.

Other

How will climate change effects impact fish populations in northern Minnesota?

Climate change could cause substantial changes to the types of fish in north-central Minnesota lakes. Populations of coldwater fish such as Cisco (Tullibee), Lake Whitefish, and Burbot could be reduced. Evidence currently indicates that these species are already declining throughout parts of Minnesota. Warmwater fish such as Bluegill, Black Crappie, Rock Bass, and Largemouth Bass are expected to increase. The future for coolwater fish such as Walleye, Yellow Perch, Northern Pike, and Muskellunge is less clear. It is possible that these species could decline in the central part of the state, but maintain current abundances in more northern latitudes and north-central lakes with thermal refuge (deep, cold water) such as Lake of the Woods.

How does the DNR monitor zooplankton, nutrients, temperature, and oxygen levels in Lake of the Woods?

The number and biomass of zooplankton are determined from annual sampling at two locations on Lake of the Woods monthly from mid-May through August. Temperature and oxygen profiles are taken at 3-foot intervals on each sample date and location. Water-quality samples are annually collected in mid-July at standard locations in the main lake. Samples are analyzed for total phosphorus concentration, conductivity, chlorophyll a, pH, total alkalinity, and total dissolved solids. All survey results are summarized in the annual Lake of the Woods Large Lake Report.

Rusty crayfish numbers appear high. How is relative abundance monitored and what impact do rusty crayfish have on Lake of the Woods?

Rusty crayfish are native to the Ohio River drainage basin and were first sampled by the DNR in Lake of the Woods in the late 1980s. Presence and absence of native and rusty crayfish are recorded annually in both gill net and bottom trawling assessments. Areas of highest perch catches is often in areas of lowest rusty crayfish abundance (i.e., Muskeg Bay Research conducted by Bemidji State University concluded that the potential impact of rusty crayfish on Walleye reproductive success is negligible. In Lake of the Woods and the Rainy River, predation on rusty crayfish has also been observed in both Smallmouth Bass and Lake Sturgeon.