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Title: Re-Open Wisconsin River

The Problem:
The WDNR closed a 22 mile section of the Wisconsin River fishing season that has been open since 1970, based on lake association and some angler perception that fish exploitation during the spawning season has impacted size structure and abundance of bass and walleye. The closure resembles that of general inland lakes, but doesn't resemble seasons on other major river systems in the state of Wisconsin, including over 85% of the Wisconsin River. WDNR lake surveys done within this area the past few years, show strong populations and reproduction of the bass and walleye species. This data did not support a closure, but led DNR to propose a slot size for walleye on this section of water. This slot size proposal was supported by the local and regional DNR fish managers, but it was not supported at the state level. A closed season was not supported by the local and regional fish managers.

The WDNR put an open/close proposal on the 2008 questionnaire, which was not the original intent of the local anglers or lake association. In the two counties where this 22 mile section of waterway is located, Oneida and Lincoln, the counties split on pass/fail.

Current regulations prior to the closure appear to not harm the walleye and bass species based on the available WDNR data. In order to reach a compromise to concerned anglers and associations, and the early spring sportsmen, I suggest reducing the walleye bag limit from 5 to 3 on the 22 mile stretch of the WI River, and have a slot size of 14"-18", with only 1 fish being kept over 18".

Be it resolved that the Conservation Congress at its annual meeting held in Lincoln County on April 13, 2009, recommends the Conservation Congress work with the Department and the NRB to take action to re-open the Wisconsin River to fishing with stipulation on reducing bag limits and introducing slot sizes.

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