

## **2004 Northern musky season opens May 29**

Research sheds light on musky anglers

MADISON – The muskellunge season opens May 29, 2004 north of U.S. Highway 10, with recent research indicating that anglers who target musky are more experienced, more likely to practice catch and release, and have a higher expectation for what constitutes a trophy than musky anglers a decade ago.

The study, conducted by Department of Natural Resources researchers and published in the 2004 North American Journal of Fisheries Management, involved a mail survey to 1,400 anglers to reveal their opinions about the musky fishery and trophy management in Wisconsin. Anglers mailed surveys included those randomly selected from the membership lists of musky clubs, and anglers who lived in the northern third of the state, where 90 percent of Wisconsin's musky waters lie. State fisheries managers estimate there are 360,000 anglers who pursue musky in Wisconsin, a considerable increase over past decades.

The 23-page survey covered questions ranging from angling behaviors, to regulation options to perceived problems. Scientists Terry Margenau, a longtime DNR musky researcher who is now a DNR fisheries supervisor in Spooner, and Jordan Petchenik, a DNR social scientist, compared responses between musky anglers and general anglers. They also compared responses to a similar mail survey Margenau conducted in 1989.

The researchers found significant changes in angling behavior and attitude among musky anglers:

- 42 percent of musky anglers in 1999 indicated they had been fishing musky for more than 20 years, compared with 30 percent in 1989.
- 35 percent of musky anglers fished musky 21 to 50 days in 1999, up from 33 percent in 1989.
- 62 percent of musky anglers in 1999 felt that a musky needed to be at least 50 inches or longer to be considered a trophy, compared to 44 percent of musky anglers in 1989.
- 98 percent of musky anglers in 1999 said they generally release legal-length musky, compared to 90 percent in 1989.

The research also revealed interesting differences between musky anglers and general anglers, starting with musky anglers' single-minded pursuit of their fish. Seventy percent said they had few or no other substitutes for musky fishing, compared to 10 percent of general anglers.

General anglers were more likely to keep a legal-size musky, although the 90 percent who said they generally release such fish is up from 59 percent in 1989. General anglers also are less supportive of restrictive regulations such as minimum length limits while musky anglers backed regulations based on a water's biological potential, along with increased restrictions such as higher minimum length limits.

Muskellunge, Wisconsin's largest game fish with the exception of lake sturgeon, are managed as a trophy fish so harvests are restricted through relatively high length limits and low daily bag limits to promote the occurrence of more large fish in the population. Only hook and line fishing is allowed for muskellunge and restrictions on trolling (originally developed to reduce muskellunge harvest) exist in many waters throughout the state.

### **2004 northern zone musky season regulations**

In 2004, the statewide minimum length is 34 inches and a daily bag of one, with special regulations on a number of waters, according to Tim Simonson, a DNR warmwater fisheries biologist. Yellowstone Lake in Lafayette County, for instance, has a daily bag limit of zero.

Of the state's 800 musky waters, 72 percent have 34 inch minimums, 24 percent have 40 inch minimums, 10 percent have a 28 inch minimum limit, and 1.9 percent have a 45 or 50 inch minimum length.

Check the [2004-2005 Guide to Wisconsin Hook and Line Fishing Regulations](#) or view the regulations on line to learn about special regulations on specific waters.

For more information on musky, including lists of waters, go to our [musky fishing page](#).

FOR MORE INFORMATION: on the musky study contact Terry Margenau – (715) 635-4162 or on the musky fishing season contact Tim Simonson – (608) 266-5222