

## **Inland fishing season opens May 6, 2006**

MADISON – Anglers should be “knocking on wood” that warm weather holds for the opening of Wisconsin’s 2006 regular fishing season on inland waters, state fisheries officials say, because if it does they should enjoy a gangbusters opening day.

Reports from fish biologists and their fish survey results indicate that fish populations are in good shape statewide, thanks to Wisconsin’s incredible naturally sustaining fisheries and to management efforts to conserve and improve habitat. Regional fishing reports can be found in the [2006 Wisconsin Fishing Report](#), available on the DNR Web site.

As always, however, whether anglers land that shore lunch or a bragging size musky depends a lot on weather in the remaining weeks before the May 6 opener, says Steve Hewett, section chief for the Department of Natural Resources fisheries management program.

“We’ve gotten a lot of rain in the last few weeks in parts of the state and water temperatures are warming up nicely, so if all goes well the fish are going to be spawning soon and ready to start feeding heavily by opening day,” Hewett says. “If that happens, anglers will see some good action.”

Fish don’t feed much when they’re spawning – they’re paying attention to other biological needs. Water flows are still low in some parts of the state despite recent rains so there’s some concern that walleye and northern pike, a species which particularly relies on flooded fields for spawning grounds, won’t be done spawning when the season opens, making them more difficult to catch.

Spawning is triggered by a combination of temperature and time; “often the fish are very sensitive to flow levels when it’s close to spawning time.”

People fishing Wisconsin waters catch a lot of fish, Hewett says, citing a 2000-01 University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point survey of Wisconsin anglers that estimated they catch 69 million fish. They keep about one-third of that total, or 31 million, and release the rest of the fish to fight another day. Walleye and bass are the most popular targets, but anglers catch more panfish -- bluegill, yellow perch and crappie – followed by walleye and largemouth bass. That statewide angler survey is being repeated during the 2006-2007 fishing season.

Wisconsin typically sells 1.4 million fishing licenses, and state fisheries officials figure the number of anglers swells significantly higher when children and adults who aren’t required to have a license, including military personnel on active duty or furlough, are figured in. A recent DNR survey of adult recreational participation revealed that 48 percent of Wisconsin adults fished, and that figure climbed to 60 percent for northern Wisconsin residents. The report is available by contacting [Tim Simonson](#) or at (608) 266-5222.

Wisconsin trails only Florida in the number of days non-resident anglers spend fishing here. Altogether, these anglers fish 22 million days in Wisconsin, generate \$1.2 billion in retail sales, a total economic impact of \$2.3 billion, and \$90 million in tax revenue for state and local governments, according to the American Sportfishing Association. A report is available on the association’s Web site at <http://www.asafishing.org/> [exit DNR].

## **Season dates and regulations**

The game fish season opens May 6 on inland waters for walleye, sauger, and northern pike statewide. The 2006-07 Guide to Wisconsin Hook and Line Fishing Regulations are available at all license outlets and on the DNR Web site. The largemouth and smallmouth bass southern zone opens May 6, while the northern zone opens for catch and release only from May 6 through June 16. From June 17 to March 4, 2007, there's a minimum length limit of 14 inches with a daily bag limit of five fish in total. The northern zone is the area north of highways 77, 64 and 29.

The musky season opens May 6 in the southern zone and May 27 in the northern zone, with Highway 10 the dividing line.

The seasons for rock, yellow and white bass, panfish, bullheads and rough fish, catfish, cisco and whitefish are open all year. Check the 2006-2007 Guide To Wisconsin Hook and Line Fishing Regulations for special regulations listed by county, for regulations on the Great Lakes and boundary waters, and for tributary streams to Green Bay and Lake Michigan.

## **Fishing licenses**

Wisconsin residents and nonresidents 16 years old or older need a fishing license to fish in any waters of the state. Residents born before Jan. 1, 1927 do not need a license, nor do people who exhibit proof they are in active service with the U.S. armed forces and are a resident on furlough or leave.

People can buy licenses in three quick and convenient ways:

- Call toll free at 1-877-945-4236
- Go online to [Wisconsin Hunting and Fishing License Sales](#)
- Visit any license agent location or DNR service center

## **Fish consumption advisory**

State health officials urge all people who eat fish more than once a week – regardless of whether it was bought at a grocery store or restaurant or caught by an angler in a lake or stream – to keep track of what they eat and select species low in mercury.

“The benefits of eating fish usually outweigh the potential risk from contaminants that may be in the fish, but recent studies underscore that people need to make sure they follow our advice for the number of meals and species they can safely eat,” says Dr. Henry Anderson, chief medical officer for the state Division of Public Health’s Bureau of Environmental and Occupational Health.

Recent surveys and studies have shown that 83 percent of all Wisconsin adults eat fish, with some people exposing themselves to unsafe amounts of mercury by eating too much of the wrong kind of fish. Panfish, young fish and light tuna have lower amounts of mercury while canned white tuna, swordfish, and game fish like musky and walleye have more.

The fish consumption advisory contains recommendations for how many meals of certain fish people can safely eat from Wisconsin waters to gain the benefits of eating fish while reducing exposure to environmental contaminants. Wisconsin's advisory, which the Department of Natural Resources issues with the Department of Health and Family Services, also contains recommendations regarding consumption of store-bought fish, according to Candy Schrank, a DNR toxicologist who coordinates the advisory.

Wisconsin's fish consumption advisory, "[Choose Wisely - a health guide for eating fish in Wisconsin](#)," is available on the DNR Web site or at DNR service centers.