

Revisions to NR 20.40 - Fishing Tournaments

Frequently Asked Questions

Why are these rule changes being made?

The growth in fishing tournaments in Wisconsin has led some stakeholders to become concerned about tournament impacts on fish and on other anglers and boaters. Consequently, a law enacted in 2004 (2003 Wisconsin Act 249) required the Wisconsin DNR to write rules to establish a program to authorize and regulate fishing tournaments.

Who are these proposed changes supposed to benefit?

The goal of these rules is to address issues associated with fishing tournaments in Wisconsin and should benefit all users of Wisconsin's waters. Issues include crowding at public access sites and on the water.

Who came up with these rules?

As required by the 2004 law, the DNR created an advisory committee consisting of tournament organizers, and members of fishing organizations, the Wisconsin Conservation Congress, and groups representing other users of the waters of the state. The committee met twelve times beginning in August 2004 to discuss comprehensive changes to fishing tournament regulations in Wisconsin. The committee was not able to agree on all aspects of the proposed rules and by April 2006 members had taken the rules as far as they could and it was time to present draft rules to the public for input. Public hearings were held and results were presented to the Natural Resources Board. The rules were then modified based on input from the public, the Fishing Tournament Advisory Committee, and feedback from the Natural Resources Board.

How were proposed fishing tournament permit fees set?

The general principle used in developing the fees was that the fishing tournament permit program should pay for itself. As such, the fishing tournament permit program components had to be defined and cost estimated. Fees are higher for tournaments that are commercial in nature and for those with formats likely to have higher incidental mortality. In addition, a surcharge that is based on the number of anglers in bass tournaments, will be charged to organizers of bass tournaments for a period of six years to recover the costs associated with the bass fishing tournament pilot program. The actual fee amount was calculated by multiplying the predicted number of tournaments of each type by a fee amount that would result in an overall target dollar amount being collected. A document detailing the [fishing tournament permit fees](#) [PDF, 48KB] is available by clicking on this link.

How do I know if the tournament I organize will need a permit?

A fishing tournament that meets any of the following criteria will need a permit under these proposed rules: 1) The tournament consists of 20 or more boats or 100 or more participants; 2) The tournament targets trout on classified trout streams; 3) The tournament is a "catch-hold-release" tournament with an off-site weigh-in; or 4) The total prize value is \$10,000 or greater.

How do I apply for a fishing tournament permit?

There are multiple opportunities to apply for tournament permits. The program encourages event organizers to get their permits well in advance to improve their odds that their event won't run into limits set on the number of tournaments held on the same water in the same month. Ideally, people apply between April 1 and June 30 for a permit for a tournament to be held during the following calendar year. Fishing tournament permit applications can be submitted and approved by the local DNR fisheries biologist after June 30, as long as they are submitted at least 30 days prior to the tournament and monthly limits are not exceeded. Such permits would be issued first-come, first-serve basis.

I have been conducting a fishing tournament on the same weekend annually for years, how will these rules affect me?

The rules aim to allow longstanding tournaments to continue into the future with few changes. The rules define "traditional fishing tournaments" as those which have received fishing tournament permits four out of the previous five years for the same water or waters and the same time period (e.g. weekend). "Traditional fishing tournaments" are exempt from some of the proposed regulations. For example, "traditional fishing tournaments" are given priority and will not be subject to lottery drawing for waters or time periods where monthly limits are exceeded. Such traditional tournaments are also given an exemption from the 100-acre minimum lake size for open water tournaments. Other new rules, however, would apply to "traditional fishing tournaments" including fish handling specifications.

Why is the daily bag limit for "catch-hold-release" tournaments reduced during parts of the summer?

In response to concerns raised by Natural Resources Board, the DNR has added provisions to the rules that would require all tournaments to have a reduced daily bag limit of 3 from the second Saturday in June to the first Sunday in September for walleye and from the second Saturday in July to the second Sunday in August for bass for all "catch-hold-release" tournaments. Board members were concerned over delayed mortality arising from catch-hold-release tournaments held when the water is warmest, during July and August. As a result, the DNR determined when water temperatures were likely to be high enough in some waters to result in increased delayed mortality resulting from tournament fishing. Immediate-release formats, also known as "paper tournaments", are not subject to the reduced daily bag limit requirement.

Does the DNR realize that regulating tournaments may have a negative impact on small businesses and local communities?

DNR is required by [s. 227.114, Wis. Stats.](#), to determine the effect of new rules on small business. The law applies to rules that directly regulate small business. The proposed fishing tournament rules may have an impact on tournament organizers and local businesses that cater to fishing tournament participants. However, the Department has no data to indicate whether the number of tournaments will increase or decrease as a result of these rules. The number of tournaments will increase if the rules are viewed as more favorable than surrounding states and will decrease if they are viewed as less favorable.

Does DNR know the economic impact of fishing tournaments in Wisconsin?

It's well documented that fishing in general has a tremendous economic impact and data from specific tournaments suggests that such events can generate positive economic impacts. Sport fishing in general in Wisconsin is a 2.3 billion dollar industry that supports more than 26,000 jobs and generates \$100 million in state tax revenue, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service statistics. The DNR contracted with the University of Wisconsin to estimate the economic impacts of the bass fishing tournaments selected to participate in the bass fishing tournament pilot program. The first fishing tournament held as part of the bass fishing tournament pilot program was the ESPN/BASS Elite 50 held on Lake Wissota in Chippewa County during June 2005. It was estimated that this event generated approximately \$2.1 million in economic impact. Other tournaments which were evaluated for their economic impact and which were generally smaller in magnitude, had an economic impact between \$65,000 and \$450,000 to the local community.

Does DNR want to eventually get rid of all fishing tournaments?

Not at all. Fishing tournaments are a legitimate use of Wisconsin's fisheries resources enjoyed by thousands of anglers in Wisconsin. The 2004 law provides clear direction and specific authority to the DNR regarding fishing tournament regulation. It is the intent of the DNR to only write rules that address current issues related to fishing tournaments in Wisconsin.

Where can I obtain a copy of the rules?

A copy of the [draft fishing tournament rules](#) [PDF, 199KB] can be downloaded by clicking on this link, or a copy can be obtained via e-mail request from Andrew.Fayram@wisconsin.gov or a hard copy can be obtained via mail by sending your address to the e-mail address provided or by sending a request to Andrew Fayram, FH/4, PO BOX 7921, Madison, WI 53707-7921.